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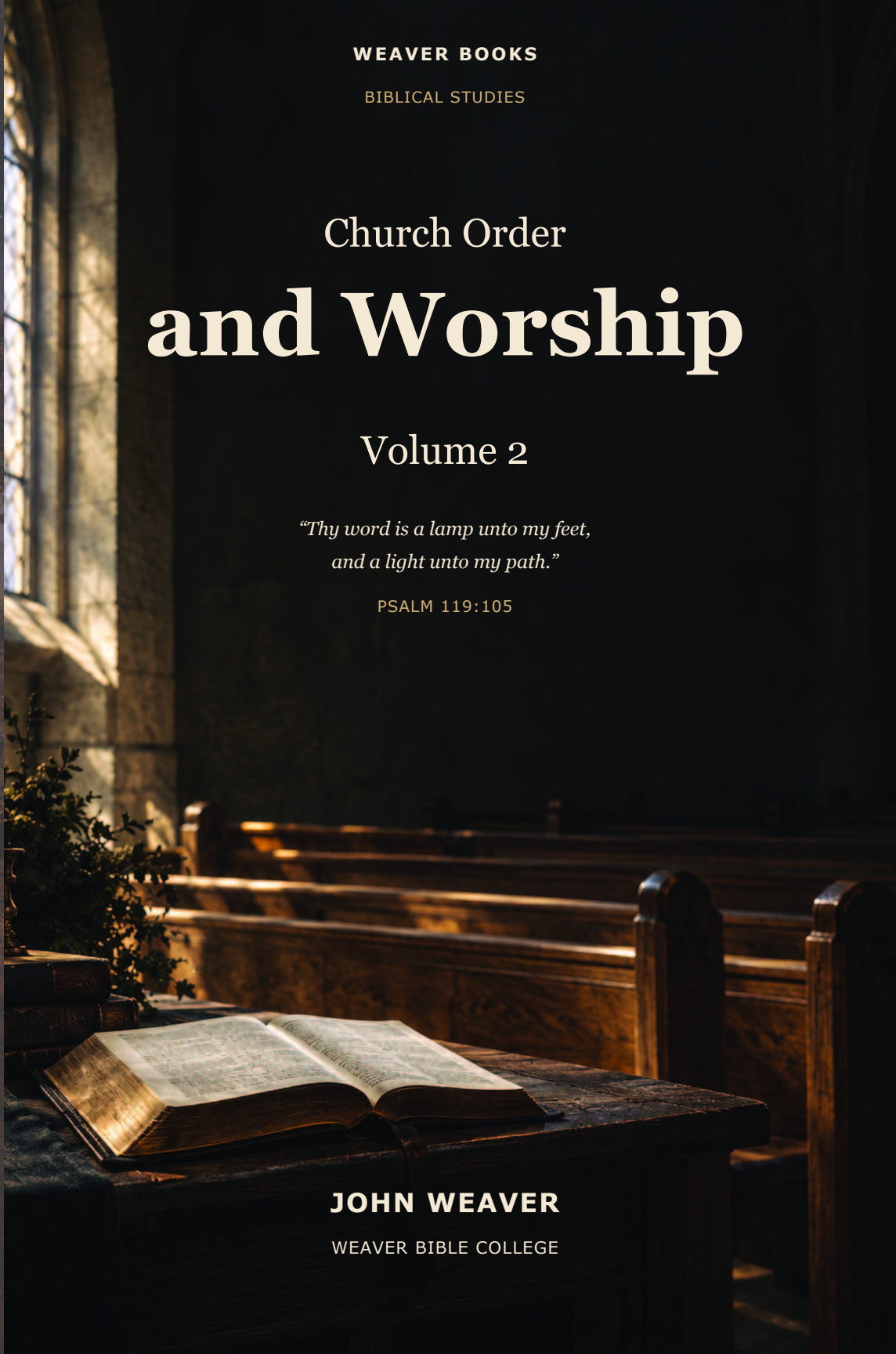
BIBLICAL STUDIES

Church Order and Worship

Volume 2

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

PSALM 119:105



JOHN WEAVER

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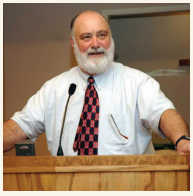
Let all things be done decently and in order.

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 2 is one of two volumes; the complete chapter sequence is preserved across the set. This volume contains original chapters 26–50.

“Duty is based upon doctrine. It is so important that we know the Word of God so that we will know how to live.”

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 2

Original chapters 26–50

John Weaver

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Church Order and Worship

Volume 2

John Weaver

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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 2 of two, containing original chapters 26–50. 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 26

Great Revival in the Confederate Armies

Introduction and Scripture Reading

This message is on the great revival in the Confederate Army. Let us look in Psalm 44, verse 1:

"Scripture says, 'We've 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; and 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.'"

The Uniqueness and Spiritual Decline of the War Era

When one considers the war of northern aggression, we must conclude that there is just about no parallel in history concerning this war. The amount of land mass involved, the number of troops,

the devastation, the battles, the sieges, the marches, the contending armies, and even the soldiers themselves, with their enthusiasm, make this period extremely unique. The conquests and the men themselves also contribute to its distinct character.

Many have studied this war from every conceivable angle, except mainly the spiritual angle. Certainly, economics were involved, states' rights were involved, and so many other things as well. But America was in a great period of decline, spiritually speaking, from the 1830s through the 1850s. Churches were dissolving their bands, denominations were breaking up, and, generally speaking, it did not look good for the nation. Many statesmen understood that if the churches could not hold together, the nation would not hold together. There is a book, I think entitled Broken Churches, Broken Nation, in which much information may be found.

It may surprise people to learn that, basically prior to the war, most denominations were national. In other words, there was no basic division between the North and the South. They usually cooperated simply along the lines of Christianity, even though there might also be denominational differences.

But the reason they could cooperate was that, at that time, each church at least believed that the Bible was the Word of God, and they at least confessed faith in the Lord Jesus Christ alone. However, after abolitionism, transcendentalism, modernism, and liberalism slipped into the churches and their denominations, there was no longer any basis of cooperation between the North and the South, particularly. In fact, the rift became so great that many did indeed say that it was a theological war. This quote from John Henry Thornwell, prominent Presbyterian, points out the theological aspect:

Theological Roots of the Conflict

"The parties in this conflict are not merely abolitionists and slaveholders. They are atheists, socialists, communists, Red Republicans, and Jacobins on the one side—that's the North—and the Friends of Order and Regulated Freedom on the other. In one word, the world is the battleground, Christianity and atheism the combatants, and the progress of humanity is at stake."

Here the line was drawn, saying that the North was atheistic and the South was Christian.

The truth of the matter is that the war was sparked by a theological revolution in the North. I mentioned this yesterday because they turned to rationalism, they turned to transcendentalism, and they turned to universalism. I think the spiritual aspect of the war is just as valid as the economic aspect and the States' rights aspect as well. Many still have not perceived, as I mentioned yesterday, that there is always a theological shift before a cultural shift. Since the theology in the North changed, its culture and way of thinking changed; consequently, the North wanted to impose that change upon the South as well. That is basically what happened during the war.

Even after the war, Reconstruction was nothing less than a military enforcement of that culture upon the South. By the way, back in, I think it was in the 1960s in Georgia, one more Reconstruction law was finally done away with because the South could not even send goods north without a tax. That was finally eliminated in the 1960s. Even today, there is still reconstruction in the South because the South cannot redistrict its voting districts without approval from the Justice Department. Let that sink in. Northern states do not have to have approval, but the South does. So, in order to grasp the state of the churches at the time of this war, one must consider the fact that all the churches were splitting.

Church Splits and Warnings of National Division

The Presbyterian Church split first in 1837, and then there was a second split in 1857. While there were other issues involved, abolitionism certainly was an issue. The Methodist Episcopal Church split in 1844; again, abolitionism was the issue. Then the Baptists split in 1845, and abolitionism was an issue there as well. It may surprise many people to discover that there were no Southern Baptists until after 1845. So the churches were basically splitting over abolitionism.

Charles Hodge, the eminent Presbyterian theologian, observed that 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." Hodge was saying that it would not be long before the nation split.

One of the greatest warnings ever given to the nation was by William S. Plumer on the eve of the first split in the Presbyterian Church. He said, "Should the assembly legislate and decide that slaveholding is a sin"—which it is not—"the southern churches would feel themselves instructed by the Apostle Paul to withdraw from such, 1 Timothy 6:5." Thus, our church would be rent asunder, "then nothing 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 was just twenty-four years before the war. Notice what he said: our church would be rent asunder, nothing left except to rend the star-spangled banner in twain, and soon the Potomac would be dyed with blood. In 1845, when the Baptist split occurred and the Southern Baptist Convention was formed, a correspondent of the Charleston Mercury, Charleston, South Carolina, wrote, "From all appearance, the separation of the church is inevitable."

"We could hope for 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." That was 1845. They said that, since they had been forced out of the church, they would next be forced out of the Union. I could multiply quotations, but I think you can see that America was not in a great spiritual revival during this period. In fact, it was a spiritual decline.

The Miracle of Southern Endurance

One amazing truth to me is the fact that the South, during the war, held out for four years. Stop and think about this. The war went on for four years. Abraham Lincoln called for 75,000 volunteers for only three months because it was going to be a piece of cake to whip the Southern people and bring them back in line. At the Battle of First Manassas, people from Washington, D.C., came out in their

carriages and wagons with picnic lunches to sit around and watch the North whip the South.

Of course, it did not turn out that way. The Yankees threw down their weaponry and ran back as fast as they could to Washington, D.C., and the picnic baskets were strewn all the way back as they fled. People thought it was going to be a piece of cake.

When you realize there were over 20 million people in the North and 5 million in the South, some of whom were slaves, you have to understand that we were outnumbered four or five to one. All the manufacturing was in the North, and economically the North was far superior. The money was in the North, so to speak. The North had the Army and the Navy. The South had absolutely nothing and had to start from scratch. To me, it is absolutely a miracle that the South held out for four years as long as it did.

So we have to ask: Why in the world did the South hold out for four years? You may answer, "We had better generals than the North." That is certainly true. You could also say, "We had better fighters. We had better men, better soldiers." That is certainly true as well. But there are other answers. It was not just that we had better generals or better men fighting; it was also that we were in a defensive position, fighting for our hearth and our homes. That is the truth.

Another reason was that during this horrible time of war, God sent at least two great revivals through the Confederate armies, and multitudes were literally swept into the kingdom of God. We have to understand that it is God who gives us strength and courage, enables us to stand, and enables us to withstand wickedness while remaining determined to stand for truth, righteousness, holiness, and godliness. Once those convictions are in your heart and mind, they solidify you and enable you to stand.

Christian Courage and Readiness to Die

That is why many Southern men took the attitude, "Bring it on." They did not want the war, but they knew they would not compromise, give up, or quit. When Nehemiah was threatened with an attack, he said to his people: "Be not ye afraid of them. Remember

the Lord who is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your houses." Remember the Lord: he is the one who gives us courage and strength. Fight for your houses, your wives, and your children.

Then 1 Corinthians 16:13 commands us, "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit ye like men, be strong." Historically, Christians have always made the better fighters because they fought upon principles and were willing to die for those principles. Moreover, they knew they were ready to die. Those unafraid to die always make the better fighter and the better soldier.

Oliver Cromwell gathered Christian men who marched into battle singing psalms and hymns. Their watchword was the Lord of Hosts, and their determination was to conquer or die. Cromwell said, "Truly, I think he that prays and preaches best will fight the best." Hedley Vicars, also an excellent Christian soldier, wrote: "I have often heard it said, the worse the man, the better the soldier." However, he continued, "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. For who should fight so fearlessly and bravely as those to whom death presents no after terrors?" Certainly, the South understood this, because God sent this great awakening during that time.

Even the North recognized the fierceness, bravery, and fearlessness of Southern troops. It has been said that nothing is more ferocious than a band of brigands led by vicious cutthroats, except a company 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.

Captain Dabney Carr Harrison—a pastor, professor, chaplain, and soldier—was told by some of his men that he should be braver than they were. He had already exhibited that bravery, and asked, "Why should I be more brave than anyone else?" They answered, "Because you have everything settled for eternity and you're not afraid to die." Captain Harrison said, "You're right, gentlemen, everything is settled for eternity and I have nothing to fear."

He proved that at the Battle of Fort Donelson, because three balls went through his hat without harming him. A fourth ball cut his temple, and the fifth entered his right lung, which later proved fatal. Before he died on February 16, 1862, he said, "I die content and happy, trusting in the merits of my Savior Jesus, committing my wife and children to their father and mine." After a while, he lay back and went to sleep.

All of a sudden, he sat erect in bed and cried with a loud voice, "Company K, you have no captain now. Never surrender. Never give up." They lowered him back into bed, and a few minutes later he passed away in the arms of the Lord. What in the world can an enemy do with someone who will not give up even when he is dying? Here was a man concerned about his men, even though he was, basically speaking, dying.

It was Colonel Lewis Coleman who was fatally wounded at Fredericksburg. He lingered ninety-eight days before he died. He gave charges to those around him, thanked his loving wife and children, and gave orders. He said, "Tell General Jackson and General Lee, they know how Christian soldiers can fight. I wish that they were here now, so that they could see how a Christian soldier can die." With that, he died trusting in the merits of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Someone who does not know the power and conviction of the converting grace of God does not think this truth is significant. But once you have been saved by the grace of God, and the principles of God are sunk deeply into your heart, you understand the truth of 2 Corinthians 5:8: once we die, we are with the Lord. What fear is there in the mind of a real, genuine child of God who understands that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord?

Remember Philippians 1, when the apostle Paul was in prison, facing the axman. He wrote, "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, the Lord lets me live, 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 be with Christ, which is far better"—for me. "Nevertheless, to abide in the flesh is more needful

for you." Paul said it was far better for him to die, because he would be with the Lord. But if the Lord did not allow him to die, he would live, do that which was right, and serve Him still. Understandably, the Apostle Paul was not afraid to die.

At First Manassas, Jackson received a very painful wound in his hand, yet remained calm and deliberate while directing his troops. A few days later, Captain John Imboden asked Major Jackson, "How is it that you remained so calm and so collected and so utterly insensitive to danger in such a storm of shell and bullets as rained about you when your hand was hit?" Jackson replied, "Captain, my religious belief teaches me to be as safe in battle as in bed. God has ordained the time of my death. I'm not to be concerned with that. I'm to be concerned that I should always be ready whenever it may happen." Then he said, "Captain, if all men believed this, then all men would be equally brave."

Evidence of Genuine Revival Conversions

God in His grace sent great revivals during that time of horrible devastation, and many were converted. Some have said, "Well, Pastor, if I was facing death on a daily basis, I'd make a decision for Jesus Christ, too." First, these were not decisions; they were genuine conversions. Secondly, you do face death on a daily basis. You do not know when you are going to die, and neither do I. We simply face death every day.

Thirdly, consider the genuineness of these conversions. J. William Jones, who wrote Christ in the Camp and served as a pastor and chaplain during the Confederacy, baptized 410 men. After the war, he followed up on them and visited with them. Of all those he baptized who survived the war, he found only three who were not living for the Lord. There is no pastor and no church today that has that kind of persevering converts, none whatsoever. These were real, genuine converts. I want to give you some quotes to show what was happening.

A writer from the Second Palmetto Regiment in the Southern Christian Advocate says, “God’s hand was in the 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 an

improvement has since taken place in the morals of our troops. At least I can say as much for this regiment. While during the campaign we have occupied the advance 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."

"Our religious services have gone on. Even while interrupted by the booming cannon and bursting shell, lying in our trenches, expecting every moment that the storm would break in all of its fury upon us, we worship God." Can you imagine worshipping the Lord with bombs bursting all around you? I remember reading in one of the books—I do not remember if it was J. William Jones' book or W. W. Bennett's book—that during a church service, cannon was booming in the distance. The men sat on stumps and logs while the preacher preached.

He stopped in the middle of his sermon and said, "Gentlemen, I think we need to move over here." They all got up and moved. Just as he began preaching again, a cannonball hit the place where they had been. These people worshipped God in such a devastating environment.

The writer continues: "In another instance, it is reported that during a skirmish, some of our men were ordered to the front as sharpshooters and directed to lie on the ground and load and fire as rapidly as possible. After a short time, the ammunition of one of these men was expended. And though his position was very dangerous, as it was, it would have been certain death for him to try to procure a fresh supply. In this condition," says an eyewitness, "this soldier drew from his pocket his Bible, and while the balls were whizzing about him and cutting the grass at his side, he quietly read the precious pages for a few minutes and then closed his eyes in prayer." He read the Bible and prayed while bullets whizzed all around him. Such composure and contentment cannot be explained except by the grace of God.

The Role of Chaplains and Interdenominational Cooperation

There were numerous helps during these revivals. Colporteurs sold and gave away books. There was hospital work, missionary work,

and the labor of godly officers. Everyone knows about Lee, Jackson, Stuart, and Ewell. Many godly chaplains labored under strenuous loads. Some not only preached, prayed, counseled, and healed, but also fought. They were absolutely despised by the Yankees because the Yankees thought that the preachers were the instruments of the rebellion.

In fact, one Yankee critic said, "The most unmitigated set of villains that they have in the South are the Methodists, the Baptists, the Presbyterian and Episcopalian preachers all talking secession, drinking mean liquor, and advocating the cause of Jeff Davis and the devil." Can you imagine? These were considered the worst villains: the Methodists, the Baptists, the Presbyterians, and the Episcopalians.

When Chaplain T. D. Witherspoon of the 42nd Mississippi Regiment was captured at Gettysburg, it was because he refused to leave the dying and the wounded. He could have escaped, but he said, "No, I'm here to minister to the dying and to the wounded." Yankee Colonel Fish demanded that this preacher be thrown into a dungeon where there were drunks and deserters. When the lieutenant was given the order, he looked at the officer and said, "But this man is a minister of the gospel. Surely you won't send him there."

Colonel Fish shot back, "Why not? The preachers are more to blame for this war than any other. The best thing that we could do would be to hang a few of them when we capture them." That was the idea. But regardless of all the dangers, these chaplains persevered. They preached, prayed, and even fought.

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'd 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 preached them a sermon."

“I reminded them it was Sunday, that at that hour, 11:30, all their home folks were praying for them. And 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 the Lord's name, in his name, over the 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 and die." Significantly, Chaplain Tichenor added, "The regiment had 13 killed, 117 wounded or missing, but the dead of the enemy in front was 352." The chaplain did not add what appeared in the newspaper account: that he himself fought with the coolness of a veteran, killing with his own rifle a colonel, a major, and four privates.

Many of these chaplains did indeed fight. 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.'" These chaplains understood that civil tyranny was just as wicked as spiritual tyranny. They wanted to deliver men from sin and Satan, but they also wanted to deliver them from civil tyranny. Tyranny is tyranny.

The pastors understood the absolute necessity of standing together on key issues. It is almost impossible to have today what these pastors and chaplains had during that time. They not only worked together; they were thankful and glad to see others prosper, even if they were not prospering themselves.

Someone has asked me, "Would you like to be used by God to begin and start a great revival in this land?" Most definitely. But I do not care whether God uses me, Brother Lacey, or anyone else, just so He does it. I am more than willing for someone else to prosper in that area. Yet many preachers today are jealous: if they cannot benefit, get something out of it, or see their church prosper, they do not want to become involved. It is like little children saying, "If I can't have my way, I'll take my marbles and go home." It was not like that during the war. Dr. William J. Hoge wrote of his visit to Fredericksburg during the spring of 1863, during the revival in the Barksdale Mississippi Brigade.

The Reverend Dr. Burrows of the First Baptist Church, Richmond, was to preach 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. I don't think that ever happened today, but I have to say that the camaraderie that existed then could not possibly exist today because of the fractured nature of the church and the abysmal ignorance of most people concerning Bible doctrine.

These men worked together and helped each other, even in the placement of new converts. When Presbyterian pastor Beverly Tucker Lacy had converts who insisted that immersion was the proper way to be baptized, the Presbyterian pastor contacted Baptist pastor and chaplain Webb and brought the converts to him to baptize. He very quickly and thankfully baptized those converts who were converted under Presbyterian preaching. 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 is standing on the bank clucking." Brother Lacy responded, "Yes. I cannot follow them in."

"But I go with them to the water's edge. And I receive them with open arms when they come out, and I'm 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 heavenly Father above." These men worked together. Pastor Lacy wrote to the Central Presbyterian from the Army of Northern Virginia: "Since my arrival at the present location, about a thousand have professed faith in Christ and more than two thousand are earnestly inquiring the way of salvation."

The Need for Godly Preachers and Revival Today

Another chaplain reported that in the Second and Third Corps alone, men were being converted at the rate of 200 per week, and that the work was widening and deepening so far as men could judge. The chaplain was corrected in his judgment in order to illustrate his sentiments. 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 their sins of extortion and speculation, and that all may be brought to humble themselves before God."

W. W. Bennett, in his book, "The Great Revival of the Southern Armies," based upon chaplains' reports and first-hand knowledge, said that a minimum of 150,000 soldiers were converted during this time. Have you ever wondered what type of man could be qualified to preach to soldiers? I can assure you one thing: it would not be a lazy man, a wimpy man, or an effeminate man. J. William Jones sent word to churches to get men for chaplains: "Send us 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 anyone 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 the soldier 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 footsore 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, and, in a word, share with his regiment whatsoever hardships they may be called on to endure."

"Now, if a brother is physically unable to endure these hardships, he'd 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."

Do not suppose that just anybody can preach to a soldier—or to people generally. Some men are not physically able to do so; some are not mentally stable enough; and some are not emotionally stable enough. But it was straight gospel preaching that God used to awaken these men to their need of Jesus Christ. It was the preaching of the law that awakened them to their sins, and the preaching of the gospel that showed them the remedy for their sins. The preaching of

justification by faith and the atonement of shed blood answered the question, "What must I do to be saved?"

Those old Puritans had it right when they said the sharp needle of the law must precede the scarlet thread of the gospel. If a man does not recognize that he is a sinner, he is in no position to be saved. Jesus Christ said He came to seek and to save that which was lost. If you are not lost, you do not qualify for salvation.

I want to submit something to you. We are in a desperate state in this nation, and I believe one of our greatest needs is godly preachers. I would even say that the problems we face in this country are the result of a compromising pulpit. Preachers are not crying out against sin and wickedness; they are not crying out against corruption in Washington or in the state capitals.

Everybody today wants to go along simply to get along. Everybody wants his share of the pie, and if you rock the boat, you cannot get your share. It is an interesting thing that in the 1860s, as well as in the 1700s, those revolutionary preachers knew the Word of God, knew how to preach it, knew how to stand, and knew how to apply it. We have lost all of that today.

Folks are ashamed of Jesus Christ; they are ashamed of the gospel. I preached a message last week entitled “The Afflictions of the Gospel.” The gospel is not afflicted, but it is interesting that the Apostle Paul said in 2 Timothy, chapter one, verse seven, “But God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.” We quote that verse all the time. In the next verse, Paul told Timothy, “Be not thou ashamed of the gospel, nor of me his prisoner.” The word “fear” in the Greek means timidity, cowardice. God has not given us a spirit of timidity or cowardice. If you are ashamed of Christ and the gospel, something is wrong, said the Apostle Paul. You need to be a partaker of the afflictions of the gospel. What are the afflictions of the gospel? Being hated, despised, looked down upon, and frowned upon. You say, “Well, I’m just ashamed of that.” I have news for you. What is going to happen in Mark, chapter 8 and verse 38, when our Lord said, “Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed when he cometh

with the glory of his Father and all of his angels"? Our Lord said, if you are ashamed of Him, He is going to be ashamed of you.

What we need today is what they had in the 1860s: men who will preach and teach the Word of God and seek God for a real, genuine revival.

I do not suppose that there could be any greater compliment to Southern soldiers than that which came from a Yankee chaplain. The Yankee chaplain was trying to inform his people about their enemies, and he said, "You may call this fanaticism, enthusiasm, or what you will, but remember, you're fighting an enemy that comes from its closet to the battlefield, that comes from its knees in prayer to engage in deadly strife, that comes in the belief that the 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 man, if needed, be a martyr."

He said, "You do not understand the people you are facing. These people pray. They trust God. These people understand what it means to fight." I have often said this, and I want you to look back in your Bible at Psalm 44. But I want you to understand this.

We will never regain our history, culture, or heritage until we come back to the foundation on which this country was built and to the foundation of our Confederate ancestors. I am serious. You just heard about Jeb Stuart; Jeb's favorite hymn was "Rock of Ages." General Ewell's was "What a Firm Foundation." These men understood truth.

I have shared with you what God did during the Confederacy, during that horrible war. Now consider the application. The psalmist said in verse one of Psalm 44, "We've heard with our ears, O God. Our fathers have told us what work thou didst in their days and times of old." We have been informed; we know what God has done. In verse two he explains, "How thou didst drive out the heathen with thine hand"—God gave the victory—"and plantedst them," that is, Israel. "How thou didst afflict the people," the heathen, "and cast them out. For they," Israel, "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."

Notice what he is saying: God was the one who gave the victory. Yes, they fought, but God made their fighting effectual. He gave the grace, mercy, and strength. He gave everything.

Now look at verse four: "Thou art my king, O God, command deliverances for Jacob." In summary, he says, "Thou art my king, O God, do it again. You have done it in times past. Do it again." We need men who will preach and pray, "Do it again, O Lord. You have done it in times past." Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards—the great revival in the Confederacy. Do it again, O Lord. Command deliverances for thy people.

Father, help us, we pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Give us your grace, mercy, and kindness. Help us to love thee, live for thee, honor thee, glorify thee, and stand; and, having done all, to stand. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 27

What Moves You?

“And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church. And when they were come to him, he said unto them, You know from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons.

“Serving the Lord with all humility of mind and with many tears and temptations which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews. How I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you and have taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. And now, behold, I go bound in the Spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there.

“Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God. And now, behold, I know that you all among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God shall see my face no more. Wherefore, I take you to record

this day that I am pure from the blood of all men, for I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. Take heed, therefore, unto yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.

Introduction: The Question of What Moves Us

"Therefore watch and remember that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn everyone, night and day, with tears."

What moves you? Does anything move you? If you are moved, in what direction are you being moved? What does it take to stop you? What do you fear? Or really and truly, the correct question would be, Whom do you fear?

The Importance for All Christians, Especially Ministers

These questions are extremely important for every Christian, but they are particularly important for anyone in the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ, regardless of position or capacity. It is always bad when a Christian falls and fails, but it is even worse when a pastor or someone with greater responsibility falls and fails. God holds pastors, preachers, and those involved in the ministry to a higher standard than everyone else. James said in James chapter 3 and verse 1, "My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation." And in Luke chapter 12 and verse 48, our Lord said, "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required, and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more." These truths apply to every Christian, and they also apply to everyone in the ministry.

In the context of our message in Acts chapter 20, the Apostle Paul is on his way to Jerusalem, trying to arrive for the Feast of Pentecost. Although he is trying to get there, he still wants to see the Ephesian elders. He sends for them, and they meet him at Miletus. When they

arrive, Paul gives them a summary of his ministry and how he ministered, concluding with some very serious warnings.

Paul's Manner of Life and Ministry (Acts 20:18-19)

Look in verse 18 to begin with. He said that when they were come to him, "You know from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I've been with you at all seasons." The word "manner" is very important. It is the little Greek word "pos," which literally means "how," "by what means," and "after what manner."

Paul is declaring unto them how he lived, how he worked, and how he ministered among them. There are different Greek words that express the same English word "manner," but let us notice the impact of each one of them. In 2 Timothy 3, the apostle Paul gives us the impact of this one little word. He writes, "But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience, persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra, what persecutions I endured, but out of them all the Lord delivered me." Notice what he said in verse 10: "But thou hast fully known my doctrine, my manner of life."

The same truth is given to us in James 1, where James speaks of someone who looks into a mirror and then "forgetteth what manner of man he was." In other words, you look in the mirror and say, "Oh, I got dirt right there on my cheek." Then you turn around and forget it and leave the dirt on your cheek. That is what he said: He forgot what manner of man he was.

The same word is used in 1 Peter 3 and verse 5, where God said, "After this manner in the old time, holy women also who trusted in God adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands." After this manner. Then, in 2 Peter 3 and verse 11, he is talking about the dissolution, or the loosing, of all things here on this earth. He says, "Seeing that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought we to be in all godliness and holiness?"

When Paul talks about, "You know what manner of life I lived among you," he is teaching them not only how he lived, but how he ministered and what he ministered. He is saying, "I'm not a hypocrite. I did not live one thing or preach one thing and then turn

around and do something entirely different." The lesson we need to learn simply from verse 18 is this: A godly life must back up a biblical testimony and witness. If our lives are not true, our witness is worthless. No one believes a hypocrite. No one believes a dishonest person. The Apostle Paul says, "You know what manner of man I am. You know what I taught. You know exactly how I live."

He says, "Serving the Lord with all humility of mind and with many tears and temptations which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews." Paul was testifying that he served the Lord with all humility of mind.

The Greek word is very expressive. It means having a humble opinion of oneself, a deep sense of one's smallness, an attitude of modesty, and a lowliness of mind. When the Apostle Paul said, "Serving the Lord with all humility of mind," he meant the opposite of being proud, arrogant, haughty, heady, or high-minded. This word indicates that Paul did not think he was God's gift to the world. He understood that he was not indispensable.

Years ago, I heard a preacher say, "If you want a long life and a long ministry, make yourself indispensable to God." That is impossible. God does not need any of us. When the apostle Paul said, "With all humility of mind," he was saying, "I need God. He does not need me." Paul was not arrogant, demanding, or a tyrant. He served the Lord with all humility of mind.

Notice something else he said in the same verse: "Serving the Lord with all humility of mind and with many tears." The word "many" in the Greek means many, much, and large. The Apostle Paul was not only a humble man; he was also very compassionate. He had many tears. He was much like Jeremiah, who was known as the weeping prophet. When Jeremiah saw the destruction of Jerusalem, he said, "O that my head were waters and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people." He wished his head were a fountain so he could weep constantly and continually.

Now look at verse 19 again: "Serving the Lord with all humility of mind and with many tears and temptations." It was not just tears;

there were also temptations. The Jews tried to murder the Apostle Paul on many occasions.

Thankfully, they failed on many occasions. One such occasion is found in Acts chapter 23, verses 12 through 22. The Sanhedrin had agreed with some men to require the Apostle Paul to come, and over forty men had bound themselves with a curse that they would neither eat nor drink until they killed the Apostle Paul. Of course, the plot was discovered. The captain Lysias called the guards and the soldiers and sent Paul away.

I get tickled every time I think about this. I wonder if that curse fell upon them, because after a day or two, when they realized Paul was gone, they had to get hungry and thirsty. They had bound themselves with a great oath that they were not going to eat or drink until they killed Paul. Well, Paul was gone. So much for the curse upon them.

The interesting thing is this: in 1 Thessalonians, chapter 2, notice what the Apostle Paul said concerning the Jews. He is talking about all the temptations he fell into in relationship to the Jews. Beginning in verse 14, he says, “For you, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judea are in Christ Jesus. For you also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews.”

Today, if you say something like what Paul says next, you are labeled an anti-Semite. But here is what the Apostle Paul said: “Who both killed the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us, and they please not God, and are contrary to all men, forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles, that they might be saved, to fill up their sins always. For the wrath has come upon them to the uttermost.” Wow.

He was very pointed in what he was saying. I would remind you of something: the term “the Jews” is used several different ways in the New Testament. Sometimes it refers to the ruling clique or ruling elite. Sometimes it refers to the nation. Sometimes it refers to the religion of the Jews, and sometimes it refers to the territory. If you are unclear about that, go back and listen to the five messages I have preached in times past on Jews, Judaism, and Christianity. I show

you how the word “Ioudaios” is used over and over in the New Testament.

Paul's Preaching: The Whole Counsel of God (Acts 20:20-21, 26-27)

He talks about the tears and the temptations. In verses 20 and 21, he said, “...how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you and have taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” Paul said, “I have kept back nothing that was profitable unto you.” So you have to ask, “Exactly what did the Apostle Paul preach?” We know that he preached repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ because he said so.

But first of all, notice verse 27: “For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.” That means he preached the totality of the Word of God.

When he said he kept back nothing that was profitable, you have to ask yourself, “How much of the Word of God is profitable?” What does the Scripture say? “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable.” Clearly, the Apostle Paul taught the whole counsel of God. He taught the whole Word of God.

Consider verse 26: “Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men.” How did Paul get pure from the blood of all men? I heard innumerable preachers say that if you did not witness to everyone you saw, their blood was on your head and hands.

While such a statement sounds pietistic, it is, first, unscriptural and, second, humanly impossible. If Alice asked me to go to the store and buy a gallon of milk, and I agreed, how many people would I see on the way? Must I stop and witness to everyone? When I get into the store, there may be two hundred people there. If I witnessed to every one of them, I would turn around to come home and find more people standing there. If that were true, I would leave for the store and never come back home. No. That is not what the Scripture said.

When Paul said, “Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men,” how did he get pure from the blood of all men? Look at verse 27: “For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.” The only way we can be pure from the blood of all men is to preach the totality of the Word of God. Period. If we do not preach everything in the Scripture as God gives us the opportunity, their blood is on our hands.

I like to be liked just like everyone else. But when it comes to preaching and teaching, if it is in the Scripture, I am required to preach and teach it—whether you like it or receive it or not. That is immaterial. The proclamation is mine; the results are God’s. The apostle Paul said, “I just preach the whole counsel of God.”

When you read Acts chapter 13, you find that some folks got glad and some got mad. That is still the way it is.

The Dual Effect of Preaching: Reconciliation or Condemnation

When you preach and teach the whole counsel of God, you have no idea what kind of ministry the Lord is going to give you. He may either give you a ministry of reconciliation, or He may give you a ministry of condemnation. The Word of God is not always for reconciliation.

Did Noah have a ministry of reconciliation or a ministry of condemnation? He preached 120 years and never had one convert. What about Jeremiah? Did Jeremiah save the nation? No. In fact, God told him, "Pray not for this people." He told him that twice. Finally, in Jeremiah 14, He said, "If you're going to pray, pray that I'll destroy them because that's exactly what I'm going to do." What about Isaiah? Did he save his nation? No.

Sometimes God sends the word for reconciliation. Sometimes He sends the word for condemnation. Look in 2 Corinthians chapter 2, verse 14: "Now thanks be unto God who always causes us to triumph in Christ and maketh manifest the savor of his knowledge by us in every place. For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: to the one we are the savor of death unto death, and to the other the savor of life unto life. And

who is sufficient for these things? For we are not as many which corrupt the word of God, but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ."

Notice what he said: "For we are a sweet savor of Christ in them that are saved and in them that perish. To the one we are the savor of death unto death, and to the other the savor of life unto life." If I have a room with 100 men and women who are all lost, and I stand up and preach Jesus Christ, and every one of them are convicted and converted by the grace of God, you know what God does? He does this.

“My Son is preached and I’m satisfied.” But if I preach Jesus Christ and Him crucified, and these people gnash their teeth, clench their fists, and say, “We don’t want to have this man to reign over us,” here is what God does in the sweet savor: “My Son is preached, I’m satisfied.” That is what Paul is saying. We are the savor of death unto death and life unto life. One is a ministry of reconciliation; the other is a ministry of condemnation.

The Word of God tells us plainly that it will not return void. Isaiah 55:8 begins, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. 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 send it.” God said, “My word’s not going to return to me void.”

If He sends it for reconciliation, there will be reconciliation. If He sends it for condemnation, there will be condemnation. The apostle Paul understood the power of the Word of God. That is why he said he did not shun to declare all the counsel of God.

Paul Bound in the Spirit to Jerusalem (Acts 20:22-23)

Now go back to verse 22. He says, “Now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me

there. Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me." He says, "Behold, I go bound in the Spirit unto Jerusalem." If you read commentaries, you will find a diversity of opinion concerning this phrase, "I go bound in the Spirit." Is Paul saying that he is going bound in the Holy Spirit, or is he going bound in his own spirit?

Now, let me tell you how the controversy arises. When you look at the Greek word for spirit, it is "pneuma." The same word is also translated as "wind" and "breath." If you read Romans chapter 8, you would find a phrase like this: "the Spirit itself." Why would a Greek translator translate the Holy Spirit as "it" when we know He is the third person of the Godhead? He is a "He."

He is not an "it." The answer is that the word "pneuma" is a neuter word. It is neither masculine nor feminine. It is like the word "rock." You would not say "the rock she" or "the rock he"; it would be "the rock it." It is like the word "limb." It is a neuter word. It might be good Greek grammar to say "the Spirit is," but it is bad theology as far as I am concerned, because the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Godhead.

The controversy basically comes around because the word is neuter, and if it is just "pneuma," without "hagios," or without "to" in front of it, does it refer to Paul's spirit, or does it refer to the Holy Spirit?

Let me give you two very quick commentaries. The first is by Matthew Poole: "Bound in the spirit, as powerfully persuaded by a divine instinct to undertake this journey, as if I were led or drawn to it by forcible means, being bound to obey God in all things, whom I take to be my God, my guide, my sun, my shield, and I do not desire so much to act as to be acted by him." This Paul says, as if he were drawn into this journey against his will, but lest any should attempt to dissuade him from it, or that he should seem to have slighted the prediction of the prophets mentioned in Acts 21, he might say this as being certain of his bonds, as if he felt them already. Such things are foretold, and to those who know the veracity of God, they are present.

Paul was content to be bound, to suffer, and even to die for Christ. Matthew Poole says these words speak of his firm resolution to take the journey upon him. Poole thus speaks of both God and Paul in relation to this determination. Adam Clarke explains, “I go bound in the Spirit” as either the strong influence of the divine Spirit upon his mind or the strong propensity of his own will to visit Jerusalem. Clarke notes that the word “bound” is sometimes used in that sense. Yet he says it appears more consistent with the mind of the apostle and the affluent influence under which he acted to refer it to the influence of the Holy Ghost, being under the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul could have said, “I have no choice. God has not left me either to the advice of friends or to my own prudence, but the Spirit of God obliges me to go to Jerusalem.” Thus, either way, both interpreters are essentially saying that Paul’s determination was based upon the Holy Spirit of God.

Paul was going to Jerusalem without knowing what would befall him. What he did know was this: Whatever happened to him was in the hands of God, and he was willing to submit to that.

In Acts 9, verses 15 and 16, when God sent Ananias to Saul of Tarsus, the Lord said unto him, “Go thy way, for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel.” Then God added, “For I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name’s sake.” The apostle Paul undoubtedly knew from the very beginning that he was going to have a ministry of suffering.

None of These Things Move Me (Acts 20:24)

Now look again at Acts 20:22 in its context: “And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there. Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me.” Then he says, “But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify of the gospel of the grace of God.” Notice what he said: “None of these things move me.”

The word "move" is from the Greek word "poieo," which occurs 579 times in the New Testament and is usually translated as "I do" or

"I make." In our text, however, it has the force of "to make a thing out of something." "None of these things move me." Every one of us has heard the old expression: when someone gets excited and worked up over nothing, we say he or she is making a mountain out of a molehill.

The Apostle Paul reverses that. He says, "My mountains are all molehills." What do you do to a molehill? You just step on it and keep going. He said, "None of these things move me." He is not going to be moved, shaken, fearful, or distraught.

Now consider the word "count." Verse 24 says, "But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself." The word "count" is "echo," which means to have, to hold, or to count. Paul is not counting his sufferings, afflictions, or temptations as anything. The word "dear" is the Greek word "timios," which literally means precious, of great value, of great price, something to be held in honor and esteem, and something especially dear. What did he say? "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear." He would not count it precious to himself. You and I think our lives are precious. And they are, in one sense, the Word.

But I want you to note the context. I want you to look at this. He said, "But none of these things move me," that is, no affliction, no suffering, no temptation, "none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself." Why? Why would he not count his life dear? Why would he not count his life precious? Here's why: "So that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus to testify the gospel of the grace of God." Wow! He said, "Here's why nothing moves me. All I want to do is to finish my course, to finish my ministry for God's honor and God's glory." Now, I want you to consider the word "finish." He said, "I might finish my course." The word "finish" is the word "teleo," or "teleios" would be the noun.

It means to make complete. It means to make perfect. It means to accomplish. It means to carry through completely and successfully. So he said, "This is what I want to do. I want to finish my course. I want to successfully complete my course." Now, wait a minute. What is his course? When you look at the word "course," it is the Greek

word "dromos," and it refers to a course, to a life, to an office, to a ministry.

So he says, "Here's why nothing moves me. Here's why I don't count these sufferings and afflictions and temptations as anything. Neither do I count my life as precious. Why? So that I might finish my course, my life, my office, my ministry with joy and the ministry which I've received of the Lord to testify of the gospel of the grace of God."

Paul's Concern to Not Be a Castaway (1 Corinthians 9:24-27)

Now, here is what Paul was concerned about. Paul was concerned about one thing, and that is that he would not be a castaway. What do I mean? Look in your Bibles, 1 Corinthians chapter 9. 1 Corinthians chapter 9. And look, if you would, beginning there with verse 24. 1 Corinthians 9, verse 24. He says, "Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain."

"And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: I am not a shadow-boxer. But I keep under my body and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." The word for "castaway" is the word "adokimos," which literally means disapproved, spurious, rejected, reprobate, or one that does not stand the test. Paul said, "The thing that I want is to stand the test. I want to finish my course. I want to run the race. I'm not interested in being disapproved. I'm not interested in being shelved, not by any stretch of the imagination."

The Tragedy of Walking Away from Ministry or Faith

I'm not the Apostle Paul by any stretch of the imagination. I'm not even a runner-up to the Apostle Paul. In fact, I'm not even in the running. But what I cannot understand is how some men have preached for years and then just walk away from it. They say that God called them to preach, but they leave it as if it was no big deal. I

know of one man who was pastoring and had done so for a number of years.

He had a heart attack. I certainly understand that when you have a heart attack, you can't function the way you normally do, and I realize there has to be a time of recovery. But this man recovered. Did he go back in the ministry? No. He opened a business and operated it, and the business is still going today. The thing that gets me is this: If I have strength to open and run a business, I ought to have strength to study and to preach.

This is what Paul is saying: "I can't just walk away from this. All I want to do is finish my course. None of these things move me. I'm not going to be pushed aside by some little suffering or some little affliction or some little temptation. No, no, I'm just not going to do that." At the same time, I know professing Christians who simply walk away from the church, the ministry, the preaching of the Word of God, and even the reading of their Bibles.

Which to me is a scary situation. Why? Because of 1 John chapter 2 and verse 19: "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." I am simply pointing out the fact that I do not understand how any man who has ever been called to preach could walk away from it. I do not understand how any Christian who professes to be a godly person or professes to be saved can turn around and simply walk away from the church. I do not care how mad or upset you get. What moves you? What does it take to move you away from Christ and the gospel? Unhappily, today, it does not take much.

Alice and I have been married going on sixty-two years. I cannot imagine living without her. By the same token, I have been preaching for fifty-nine years. I cannot imagine not preaching. It does not fit in my brain. I certainly could not live without Jesus Christ, and I certainly do not want to die without Jesus Christ.

The point I am trying to make is this: all of these afflictions, sufferings, and temptations—none of these things move me. You know the three things that get most men? Pride, money, and women. That is true. When you look at the apostle Paul, he said, "No, I am

not going to be moved by any of those things." Why? Because all of those things are exceedingly temporary. Nothing is permanent—not in this life. You are not taking your money with you. If you are talking about women, that will be your downfall. If you are talking about pride, you will find out at the judgment seat that it did not help you at all.

In Romans 8, verses 18 and 19, Paul said, "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared to the glory which will be revealed in us." It is not even worthy. Then, in 2 Corinthians chapter 4, verses 17 and 18, he said, "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."

Look back at verse 24 of Acts chapter 20: "But none of these things move me." None of these things move me.

Paul's Readiness to Die and Final Exhortation

"Neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God." Nothing moved him from his course. He finished it as unto the Lord and was ready to be offered on the scaffold as a martyr.

In 2 Timothy, chapter 4, beginning with verse 6, he said, "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith." He said, "I am now ready to be offered."

If I was in prison, he was about to get his head chopped off. And what did he say? "I am now ready to be offered. The time of my departure is at hand." Then he says, "I fought a good fight. I finished my course." You remember he said, "None of these things moved me that I might finish my course." Well, he did finish his course. Persecutions did not move Paul. Pride did not move Paul. Money did not move Paul. Women did not move Paul. Death could not move Paul. He was ready.

And he said, "If I live, I'll preach. If I die, I'll just go and be with Christ, which is far better."

In Acts chapter 21, a prophet came and said this to the Apostle Paul. "And as we tarried there many days, there came down from Judea a certain prophet named Agabus."

"And when he was come near unto us, he took Paul's girdle and bound his own hands and feet and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him unto the hands of the Gentiles. And when we heard these things, both we and they of that place besought him not to go up to Jerusalem."

"Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break my heart? For I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done." Paul said, "What mean ye to weep and to break my heart? I'm not only willing to be bound, I'm willing to die for the Lord Jesus Christ." Paul says, "Nothing moves me. I'm not going to get all out of shape, distraught, discouraged, heated up, or tempted. Nothing is going to move me, that I might finish my course with joy.

I've always said that no man is really and truly ready to live until he's ready to die. Death should not move us from our course. We must all die. Why should we fear that which we know is going to happen and, number two, is going to issue us into glory? You must prepare and make sure that in your death you glorify God just like you glorify Him in your life.

The Apostle Paul was in a position where he said, "I am unmoved. Death does not even move me." Even the most gruesome death did not move him, because he had his head chopped off. I would not look forward to having my head chopped off, but Paul said it doesn't move me. His attitude was, "I got to die some way. That's smooth, that's quick, it's over with. That's fine. I'm not going to get bent out of shape over the way that I die."

Here is the impact, implication, and application for you: What moves you? What would it take to move you away from the Word of God or away from faith in Jesus Christ? What would it take to make

you stop praying, stop reading your Bible, and stop attending the preaching of the Word of God? What would move you away from truth?

I'm afraid that, if you look around at a modern church member, all it takes is for someone to hurt their feelings, and they're not coming back. When I ask what moves you, I hope and pray the answer would be nothing: Nothing's going to move me away from the worship, praise, and truth of Jesus Christ. I'm not going to be moved. You remember, the Bible says our Lord set His face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem.

That is the way we must be. The Apostle Paul said, “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.” Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable.

What will it take to move you? I pray the answer will be absolutely nothing. The Apostle Paul says, “Nothing moves me. I want to finish my course with joy and the ministry which the Lord has given to me.” We shall not be moved. We cannot be moved if we are in the Lord Jesus Christ, who is our rock and our salvation.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to thee. We thank you for your word and your truth. We pray, Lord, that you would help us to be immovable, steadfast, always abounding in the work of the Lord. May we not count our sufferings, afflictions, temptations, or earthly pleasures as anything, that we may finish our course with joy. Give us your grace and your mercy. In the name of Jesus Christ we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 28

Intimidation, Manipulation and Repentance

Introduction: Defining Intimidation, Manipulation, and Repentance

The title of today's message is “Intimidation, Manipulation, and Repentance.” In Mark 1:15, our Lord begins His ministry, and the Bible says, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.” He said, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.”

We are certainly living in a day of confusion, turmoil, and sometimes even outright tyranny. Do you actually know the difference between intimidation, manipulation, and repentance? Intimidation and manipulation are the acts of men that seek to control your thoughts, your positions, and your actions. Repentance is that which is demanded by God, owed to God, and is our responsibility to give to God and to man whenever it is necessary.

Dictionary Definitions and Biblical Meaning of Repentance

I went to the Oxford Dictionary and looked up the words intimidate and manipulate. The definition for intimidate is “to frighten or overawe someone, especially in order to make them do what one wants.” It went on to say that our English word is derived from a seventeenth-century Latin word meaning “to make timid.” So if I intimidate Steve, I am browbeating him or doing something in such a way that makes him timid and more malleable to what I want him to do and how I want him to act.

The word manipulate means “the action of manipulating someone in a clever or unscrupulous way.” Manipulation can be something as simple as controlling what one hears and what one sees, or it can be something even more devious and more unscrupulous. It does not matter whether you use the word intimidate or manipulate. Both are actions of men in which they try to force you into a mold and get you to think and act the way they want you to think and act.

The word repent, or repentance, is from the Greek word metanoia, which literally means “to change one's mind.” When the mind is changed, the course of direction is changed, and therefore there is a change in one's conduct. If I am heading north and repent, I turn 180 degrees and go south. I have changed directions. When you come south, you are supposed to change your conduct too, Ron; you are not supposed to stay in bed and be sick all the time. Repentance is a change in one's thinking that results in a change of conduct. The word repent occurs thirty-four times in the New Testament and is used both generally and specifically.

General and Specific Calls to Repentance

The text from Mark 1:15 is a general call to repentance. Our Lord came preaching, saying, "The time is fulfilled, the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent ye and believe the Gospel." Messiah is present; since the Messiah is present, the Kingdom is present. Therefore, in light of these facts, you must repent and believe the Gospel.

Repentance involves a change of mind toward God, toward Jesus Christ, toward sin, toward salvation, and toward a host of other

truths. Repentance is actually two parts. It is a turning from and turning to. This is like the passage in 1 Thessalonians 1:9, where the Bible says those Thessalonians "turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God."

There is a negative aspect, in that they turned from their idols, and a positive aspect, in that they turned to God. Repentance is made up of both aspects: turning from and turning to. Someone may turn from that which is wicked, wrong, and ungodly, and yet never turn to God. That is not true repentance. It may be self-reformation, but it is not true repentance. You must have both parts to have true repentance.

In Matthew 12, our Lord speaks of this self-reformation and gives a vivid illustration, beginning with verse 43: "When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and finding none. Then he saith, 'I will return into my house, for whence I am come out.' And when he is come, he findeth it empty, and swept, and garnished." The man simply reformed himself. "Then goeth he, and taketh with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself. And they enter in and dwell there, and the last state of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation."

Self-reformation is not repentance. Repentance may be general or it may be specific. It was a general call to repentance that was given to us in Mark 1:15 when our Lord says, “Repent ye and believe the Gospel,” because He, the Messiah, was at hand and the Kingdom of God therefore was at hand.

In Luke 13, there is also a general call to repentance in light of certain death. Death can come suddenly, quickly, or slowly, but our Lord speaks of repentance in view of death. “There were present at that season some that told him of the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.” He had murdered them while they were sacrificing. “And Jesus answering said to them, ‘Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, nay: but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwell in Jerusalem? I tell you, nay: but except ye repent, ye

shall all likewise perish.'" In other words, you are going to perish. It may be suddenly, quickly, or slowly, but you are going to perish. Therefore, you must repent.

Repentance, in one sense, can be very general; in another sense, it can be very specific. Every individual has his own peculiar and particular sins. There are also certain sins peculiar to certain groups, organizations, and occupations. For instance, Luke 3 gives a good biblical illustration. John the Baptist came preaching the doctrine of the baptism of repentance. Luke 3:3 says, "And he came into the country of Jordan preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins." John was preaching repentance. The interesting thing is that this passage shows repentance in a specific way, as it addresses different people and their particular sins. Matthew 3:7–8 gives basically the same thing: John addresses particular people and calls them to repentance. The passage in Luke 3 will show this in just a moment.

The Bible says in Matthew that when John saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance." Note particularly that he saw the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

Luke records the same thing: "Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, 'O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance. And begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father. For I say unto you that God is able of these stones to raise up children to Abraham.'"

You have to ask yourself this question: why in the world did John the Baptist single out the Pharisees and the Sadducees particularly and call them a generation of vipers? Why did he do so? The answer would have to be not only because of their pride and arrogance, but also because of their intimidation and manipulation. The Pharisees always sought to control the populace. The Sadducees controlled the Temple.

Many times the Bible tells us that certain people did not confess Christ for fear of the Jews, lest they should be cast out of the

synagogue. Here is intimidation. Here is manipulation. Unhappily, things really have not changed in Christendom today in that sense of the word. There are still people who try to manipulate and intimidate and force you into thinking the way they think, and thus get you to act the way they want you to act. The same exact methods are used: intimidation and manipulation.

John is dealing with specific sins. In his day, the specific sins of the general populace, that is, people in general, happened to be covetousness and selfishness. He is preaching repentance: "And now also the axe is laid into the root of the trees. Every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast in the fire." The people asked him, "What shall we do then?" That is, what shall we do in light of the fact that you are demanding repentance? How do we bring forth the fruits of repentance?

How do we show that we are genuinely repentant? Look in verse 11: "He answered and saith unto them, 'He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise.'" In other words, selfishness and covetousness were the two main particular sins of the general populace in that day. If you really are repentant, then you will turn and will no longer be selfish or covetous. You will be willing to share, willing to sacrifice, and willing to do that which is right and biblical. Overcome your covetousness and selfishness.

But there was another group: the publicans, or tax collectors. The Bible says, "Then came also the publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, 'Master, what shall we do?'" Notice that he does not give the publicans the same answer he gave the people. He said in verse 13, "Exact no more than that which is appointed unto you." Their particular sin was theft. They were thieves.

These publicans worked for the Roman government. If the Roman government said, "James owes 50 denarii," the publican would come to James and say, "You owe 60 denarii." Thus he was paid by the Roman government to collect the taxes, while stealing an extra ten from James. If you want to prove that you have genuinely repented, you turn into an honest individual. You quit your stealing. It is just that simple.

Now notice something else. He is dealing with specific sins, and now he deals with the soldiers. Look at verse 14: “And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, ‘And what shall we do?’” How are we going to evidence repentance?

He does not give the same answer that he gave to the publicans or to the people. Verse 14: “And he said unto them, ‘Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely, and be content with your wages.’” The specific sins of the soldiers were violence and false accusation, usually through fraud and extortion. In other words, if we do not get what we want, we are going to rebel and cause problems. If you are going to demonstrate that you have genuinely repented, you will be content with your wages, you will not do violence unnecessarily, and you will certainly not accuse any individual falsely.

There are specific sins that have to be dealt with and repented of, just as there are sins in general. As Christians, we have to understand that our lives are actually a life of repentance and faith. We may repent of sins in general when we are converted, and perhaps one or two sins specifically. But the more you study Scripture and read the Word, the more you realize that you have far more sins to turn from than you ever thought you did when you were first converted.

Repentance as a Gift from God

Our lives are actually a life filled with repentance as well. Our responsibility to repent comes from God's absolute sovereignty. God has the absolute right to tell us how to live, how to act, what to do, and what not to do. Scripture tells us that He is our Judge, our Lawgiver, and our King. Isaiah 33:22 says, "For the Lord is our Judge, the Lord is our Lawgiver, the Lord is our King; He will save us."

As Lawgiver, He makes the law. As Judge, He judges whether or not that law has been violated. As King, He rules over people and His domain, makes sure that His law is there, and His judgeship is intact.

Our responsibility to repent is based upon God's absolute sovereignty. He also gives us other reasons why we must repent. Acts

17:30 says, "In the times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent." Why does God command us to repent? First of all, He is sovereign; He can do what He pleases. But He gives us another reason: "...because He hath appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained, whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He raised Him from the dead."

God says, I am commanding you to repent because I have appointed a day in which I am going to judge the world in righteousness. I am going to judge the world in righteousness by my Son Jesus Christ. Just as surely as God raised Jesus Christ from the dead, just that surely there is going to be a judgment day. In that light we must repent: God is sovereign, God commands it, God has set a judgment day, and we will be judged. We have a responsibility to repent.

Moreover, as His creatures, we owe Him, are accountable to Him, and are responsible to Him. As sinners, we owe Him repentance because of our sins and our rebellion against our Creator and our Lord.

I have established one fact so far: we are responsible to repent. There is a difference between responsibility and ability. While we have the responsibility to repent, we do not have the ability to repent in and of ourselves. Repentance is the gift of God. It cannot be worked up; it does not arise on demand; and it is not in the power of man to initiate or originate repentance. Repentance is demanded, that is true. We are responsible to repent, but responsibility does not equate with ability.

If I owed Gary $10,000, having borrowed 10,000 Federal Reserve notes from him and promised to return them in thirty days, and thirty days came with only $1,000 in my possession, I would have a responsibility to pay him what I owed, but I would not have the ability. There is a difference between responsibility and ability. I may be responsible for a debt without being able to pay it.

So God holds us responsible to repent, but we do not have that ability in and of ourselves. Look in Acts chapter five, verses 30 and 31, and let me show you the ability, or the gift, of repentance. The

Bible is speaking of the resurrection of Jesus Christ: "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins." Note that God exalted Him and raised Him up to be a Prince and a Savior to give repentance. The word give is the Greek word didomi, which literally means to give, to grant, or to bestow a gift. God specifically exalted Jesus Christ at His right hand and made Him a Prince and a Savior, that He might give the gift of repentance.

In Acts chapter 10, Peter is preached to the house of Cornelius. They have been converted, and he baptized them. When you get to Acts chapter 11, the brethren in Jerusalem hear about this and accuse Peter of going into one who is unclean and doing what he should not do. He therefore related the entire incident unto them and showed how God saved them exactly the way that He had saved them.

Acts 11:18 says, "When they heard these things, they held their peace and glorified God saying, 'Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.'" The word granted there is exactly the same as it is in Acts chapter 5. They are saying, "Then hath God also to the Gentiles given the gift of repentance unto life."

Now turn to 2 Timothy chapter 2, beginning with verse 24. This demonstrates that repentance is the gift of God; it is not something that you can work up on your own: "And the servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves, if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth, and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will."

When do men recover themselves out of the snare of the Devil? According to verse 25, when they acknowledge the truth. When do men acknowledge the truth? According to verse 25, it is when God gives them repentance.

In verse 25, "in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves, if God peradventure will give," is the exact same word found in Acts 11:18. In Acts 5:31 it is the word didomi, which means

to bestow a gift. Then is God bestowed this gift of repentance. Repentance is a gift. God must give it. It cannot be worked up or be something that you do spontaneously or on your own. You have a responsibility, but you do not have the ability in and of yourself.

Sin, Law, and the Limits of Rebuke

Repentance involves sin. What is sin? We could come up with some type of fancy definition or some kind of confessional statement and say something like, sin is doing that which is contrary to the will of God, the Word of God. We could go a whole paragraph on this, or several paragraphs.

But 1 John 3:4 pretty well sums it up very plainly: "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law, for sin is the transgression of the law." Repentance, then, revolves around and involves sin. Sin is a transgression of the law. It is not the transgression of anything else; it is a transgression of the law.

If Bob and I disagree on something, and I say, "Well, you're wrong," and he says, "You've got to believe what I believe," no, I do not have to believe what he believes. If I transgress God's law, it is a sin. But if I do not believe quite what you believe, that does not mean that I am a sinner. If I do not hold your position, that does not mean that I am a sinner. If I do not act the way you want me to act, that does not mean that I am a sinner and must repent. If I do not see what you see, that does not mean that I am a sinner and need to repent. Why? Because repentance deals with sin, and sin specifically is a violation of the law of God. I have no obligation to repent unless I violate God's law.

There is such confusion and turmoil today in Christianity, and it seems like Christian liberty, charity, and common sense are totally lost. There are Christians and pastors absolutely demanding that you see what they see and believe what they believe. If you do not, then you are going to be ostracized, defamed, excoriated, verbally chastised, called upon to repent, rebuked, and even referred to as heretical.

There is such a thing in the Bible as Christian liberty. Christian liberty does not involve the right to sin. No one has the right to sin.

Sin is not a right; sin is rebellion. I showed Alice an article that I was reading the other day in which a man said that adultery is a personal choice. No, it is not a personal choice; it is a violation of God's law. You may do it, but you are still violating God's law.

Christian liberty involves things that are indifferent. The Apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians chapter 9, "I have a right to lead around a wife, a sister as others do." He did not, but he said he had a right to do so. Is it a sin to marry? No. Is it a sin to remain single? No. That is what you and I would call something indifferent.

Christian Liberty and Charity in Non-Essentials

You have to understand that God does not give the same light to the same people, or the same amount of light to different people at the same time. God is just as sovereign in illumination as He is in salvation. Consequently, there will be differing opinions upon certain passages and different interpretations. For instance, while I am a Baptist, I am not forever arguing with Presbyterians over paedo-baptism.

I believe they are wrong in their position, and they believe that I am wrong in mine. Yet we do not argue, fight, fuss, or tear each other apart. I am quite willing to wait until eternity to find out that I am right. Of course, they are quite willing to wait until eternity to find out that they are right and I am wrong. I am simply saying that I am not going to call upon someone and rebuke him because he believes in paedo-baptism and I do not. I think he is wrong, and he thinks I am wrong.

There was a camaraderie and an understanding of Christian liberty and Christian charity during the War of Northern Aggression that we have totally, completely lost today. Chaplain Beverly Tucker Lacy was a Presbyterian. Chaplain Webb was a Baptist preacher. Beverly Tucker Lacy was one of the well-known chaplains during the war, closely associated with Stonewall Jackson. In fact, he was the man who went in and prayed with Jackson before Jackson's arm was amputated.

When Presbyterian pastor Dr. Beverly Tucker Lacy had some converts who insisted upon immersion as the correct form of

baptism, he never hesitated for a moment, but contacted a Baptist chaplain, Brother Webb, who eagerly baptized the new converts. As Brother Webb finished baptizing them, he 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 group 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'm ever ready to hail them as my spiritual children and to do all in my power to help them serve our common Master and to reach the home of our common Father above."

These were men who worked together while disagreeing and holding different positions. Today, all we can do is fuss and fight. We have forgotten Augustine's dictum: in essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity. There has to be liberty and charity in those areas where good men differ.

We cannot use our Christian liberty as a cloak of sin, nor use it to cause a weaker brother to stumble. The Apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 8 and verse 9, "But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours becomes a stumbling block to the weak." And in Galatians 5 and verse 13 he says, "For brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion of the flesh, but by love serve one another."

The Danger of Cannibal Christians and Diotrephes Syndrome

Paul says in Galatians 5:14–15, “For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another.” If I start nipping at Gary and biting at Francis, saying things and doing things, pretty soon it is going to be an all-out fuss and fight. We had better take heed that we be not consumed one of another.

It amazes me that, with as many enemies as we have to resist and fight against, most Christians end up fighting each other. Preachers are often preeminent in all this grappling with one another. I have known preachers who would not even speak to other preachers because they held a different eschatological view. It is insane. I do not care whether you are a historic pre-mill, a dispensational pre-mill, an amill, or a post-mill—the four main positions. Every one of those positions believes that Jesus Christ is returning literally, visibly, and bodily. They disagree only on when and how.

Yet one will refuse to speak to another because he does not believe what he believes about that matter, ostracize him, and call him a heretic. That is absolutely insane and ridiculous. I think Arthur W. Pink was right when he wrote that one reason we do not like the Pope is because we want to be the Pope ourselves. We want to be the one who says, "This is it; you do it." We speak ex cathedra, as though we are infallible: "You have got to believe the way I believe. You have got to see things the way I see things."

Go back to repentance for a moment. Repentance is a turning from sin to unto obedience to God and God's law. It is not a turning from the tyrannical demands of others. I may have a responsibility to repent, but unless God gives me the gift of repentance, I cannot repent. Moreover, unless God opens my eyes and allows me to see light, I will never see my sin. You will never see your sin.

Sovereign Illumination and Patient Rebuke

I thought about this coming down here. What about professional thieves? There are people who make a living stealing. They are professional thieves. I wonder how they get around "thou shalt not steal." I said to myself, it is probably that they say to themselves, "I'm just making a living. I'm just existing." And so you excuse your sins when you do not see those sins as sins, and you do not see the enormity of those particular sins.

I have to be given light to see my sin. God is just as sovereign in illumination as He is in salvation. If He does not open my eyes, if He does not instruct me, I will never see my sin. That is why the psalmist said in Psalm 36 and verse 9, "With thee is the fountain of life, in thy light we shall see light." Unless we are in God's light, we

are not going to see light. Let me point this out, because these two are connected. The same truth that involves repentance also involves rebukes.

There are so many Christians who are quick to condemn and rebuke their brother in Christ. “I believe in serious error; just rebuke him.” Really? Let me ask you a question: What if it is you who is wrong? I never will forget a good pastor friend, now dead, who would always tease me, and I would tease him back. He was older than I was. I heard him preaching one time, and he used the word “he apostatized.” I thought, “I’m going to nail him. The word is ‘apostatized.’” I got to thinking, that brother is pretty smart and intelligent. Before I jumped on him, I decided to look the word up. When I looked it up, guess what? He was right. I was wrong. It is “apostatized” with a T, not with a C. So I am just saying, there is the possibility that when you start to rebuke someone, you could be the one who is wrong.

Let me show you about rebukes. Look in your Bibles at 1 Timothy chapter 5 and verse 20. I am going to show you that this is vitally connected to the doctrine of repentance. Notice what the Apostle says: “Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear.” Let me read that again: “Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear.” One more time: “Them that sin rebuke before all.” Rebuke is connected with sin. What is sin?

I quoted 1 John 3:4 earlier: “Whosoever transgresseth also the law commits sin, for sin is the transgression of the law.” So, who is it that deserves a rebuke? Those that sin, those who violate God’s law—not just because I disagree with brother Bob or Ron. I do not come up and say, “Ron, or look at Steve. Steve, you have on a multicolored shirt. You ought to have a solid shirt on like me. You are wrong. You are wicked. I am going to rebuke you next Sunday. You come and wear a plain shirt.” How ridiculous. I have no right to rebuke him unless there is sin involved. “Them that sin, rebuke before all that others may fear.” I have no right to rebuke someone who does not see things the way I see them, or believe the way I believe, particularly in things that are indifferent. No. I have the authority to rebuke someone who has sinned, who has violated God’s Law.

Look in your Bibles to 2 Timothy chapter 4, verses 1 and 2: “I charge thee therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at His appearing in His Kingdom, preach the Word, be instant in season, out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.” We are to preach the Word, be instant in season and out of season, reprove, rebuke, and exhort, but notice: “with all longsuffering and doctrine.” If we are going to rebuke someone, listen carefully, it has to be first attended with longsuffering. The word for longsuffering is makrothumia. It literally means to suffer long, or to be patient with. It includes forbearance and slowness in avenging something that you believe is wrong.

“Preach the Word, be instant in season, out of season. Reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering.” Why am I to rebuke with all longsuffering? Why cannot I simply say, “Gary, straighten up. Do this right now”? Why can I not do that? Because God may not give him light instantly. God may not open his eyes to his sin. Do you follow that? A rebuke does not necessarily mean a once-time incident. It must be something in which you are patient and longsuffering, perhaps continuing. Rebuking must be associated not only with longsuffering, but also with doctrine.

What am I going to do? It is not that I can come to Gary and demand, “Gary, I demand you do this, and I demand you do it right now. You’re wrong. You’re wicked. Do it right now.” No. I have to be longsuffering. I have to say, “Gary, let me show you from the Scripture. Here is what God says.” Then I still have to be patient, because he may not yet see or understand it. How long did it take you to come to the positions you hold? You did not see truth instantaneously or understand everything immediately. Aren’t you thankful the Holy Spirit was patient with you and taught you? Aren’t you thankful other men were patient with you, showed you, and taught you?

This is what Scripture is talking about: we are to rebuke, yes, but with all longsuffering and doctrine. There should be no rebuking anyone unless there is sin; and if there is sin, there must also be longsuffering and doctrine. In 2 Timothy 2:24–25, Paul says, “And the servant of the Lord must not strive,” that is, he is not to be a

brawler or fighter, “but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient; in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves.”

Suppose Gary has sinned and I am going to rebuke him. I have to show longsuffering and doctrine. But what if I come to him and say, “You dumb bunny, why can’t you see this? I’m so tired of putting up with this”? How am I going to teach him anything? What if I say, “I just know this is right, and I know more than you do, so you are going to have to take my word for it”? Is there any meekness there? No. There is pride, arrogance, and a domineering spirit. If we are going to help and teach one another, it has to be with patience.

It has to be with doctrine. And it has to be with meekness. It has to be with humility. Obviously we cannot live in the light that God gives someone else. We have to live in the light that God gives us. We have in our church a retired OBGYN doctor, and I ask our ladies, and I'll ask you today too, suppose one of you ladies came up and you were going to have a baby.

Living in Our Own Light and Avoiding Tyranny

Wow, you say, that's not possible. Well, we had a good friend, I thought about it while I was preaching earlier, she started having stomach problems, she was 44, and she was sick as she could be, and she went to the doctor and wanted to know if she had the flu, what was wrong with her, and he checked her, and he said, you know, you don't have the flu, and you don't have stomach problems, you're just pregnant. She said, what?

I'm 44 years old, my baby's 21. He said, I don't care, you're still pregnant. I mean, it's that simple. Suppose you're gonna have a baby and here you have Dr. Bowen who's a retired OBGYN who's delivered hundreds of babies and done so successfully, and you have a choice: you can either have Dr. Bowen attend your delivery or you can have me, and I've never delivered a baby in my life. I've never been around a baby being delivered. Now would you choose me or would you choose Dr. Bowen? Obviously, you should choose Dr. Bowen. Why?

Because I can't walk in his light. I can't walk in his knowledge. I can't do what he does. You follow that? I can only do what I know

and live in the light that I have. And it's the same thing if your dog or your horse needed surgery. Well, Dr. Holmes is a trained veterinarian and he's been practicing successfully for 40 years. Had you rather have him do the surgery or me? And I've never done surgery on a dog or a horse, but you know, obviously I can't walk in his light. I can't perform the way he performs. I can't do what he does. And if you were to ask him, well, had you rather do surgery or preach a sermon, he'd probably say I'd rather do surgery because he could do surgery.

Understand this: I don't care how much you know, how intelligent or brilliant you are, or whether you are 100% right on every subject. I still can't walk in your light or do what you are demanding because I do not have the knowledge that you have. I can only see that which God allows me to see, and I am responsible for the light that God has given me, not for the light that God has given you. When you understand this, it should make us patient with each other.

Why can I not say, “Steve, I think you're wrong. Let me sit down with you, take the Bible, and show you where I believe that you're wrong”? If you don't understand it or see it the first time, I'll do it a second, third, or fourth time, until God is pleased, open your eyes. The problem is that we don't want to do this. We want to demand that people see what we see and understand what we understand immediately and instantly. If they don't, we simply want to wash our hands of them and have nothing else to do with them.

Let me tell you something about myself, and I can probably tell you this about yourself. Each of us happens to be a sinner, and each of us happens to be depraved. We may be saved, but we are still sinners, and depravity still exists in us. You may teach me, lead me, guide me, and love me in the truth, but I am depraved just enough that if you try to intimidate me, manipulate me, and force me to see what you see and believe what you believe, you are going to push me the opposite way. I am going to show you that you are not going to do that to me. We have never come to this realization: you cannot force-feed truth to people. You cannot make people see it. When you act domineeringly, tyrannically, and demandingly, the only thing I can assume is that you are trying to be so forceful, intimidate me, and manipulate me because you are wrong and do not have truth on

your side; therefore, you are trying to subdue me and make me do what you want me to do.

I have never in my entire life been able to win a man to Jesus Christ by cussing him, excoriating him, ridiculing him, and mocking him. Never. Moreover, I have never been able to teach any Christian by coming to him with the attitude, "This is it; you just do what I say or else." No, you cannot do that. That is not teaching. That is tyranny. If you are going to teach, you have to understand that we cannot take the place of God, nor can we do the work of the Holy Spirit. We have to learn to be loving, kind, gentle, patient, and meekly teaching and helping each other.

Applications: Winning the War, Not Just the Battle

It is possible to win the battle and lose the war. You may be able to out-shout me, outwit me, out-debate me, and argue me. You may win the debate. However, if you have not patiently, kindly, and lovingly sought to teach me and implored the Father to open my eyes, you may win the argument, but you will lose the disciple. No one wants to be intimidated or manipulated.

Tyranny in the church is just as wicked as tyranny in the state. In 3 John, verses 9 and 10, we see what we do not want to be. John says, "I wrote unto the church, but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not." He would not receive the apostle John and his associates. "Wherefore if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words, and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church."

Here is a man saying, "I'm running this show. No, John, you're not coming here. Neither are any of the people that you send coming here. I'm not going to receive you or count you as a brother. Moreover, if anybody in this church receives you, I'm going to cast you out as well. I'm going to ostracize you. I'm going to excommunicate you. You're not going to be around. This is my church." That is Diotrephes.

What we have done is developed a Diotrephes complex, a Diotrephes syndrome. We want to excoriate people, manipulate people, and intimidate people. If they do not do what we think they should or believe what we think they should believe, we will simply write them off. That is what Diotrephes did.

Look again at verse 9: “I wrote unto the church, but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence.” The word preeminence occurs only three times in the Bible, and only twice in the New Testament. The other New Testament occurrence is Colossians 1:18: “And He,” that is Jesus Christ, “is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He might have the preeminence.”

Diotrephes would love to have the preeminence. If he could, he would take the honor, glory, praise, power, and place that belong to Jesus Christ alone. Who is it that adds to the church?

Jesus Christ. Who is it that takes from the church? Jesus Christ. So here's a man who's trying to rule and run things according to his understanding and not according to the Word of God. I don't want to be a Diotrephes. I don't want you to be a Diotrephes. I don't want to be associated with a Diotrephes. I'm willing to be taught. No one has all truth. No one understands everything.

There are no perfect pastors, preachers, or Christians. All of us are students, and all of us need to be taught. I'm willing to be taught, but I'm not willing to be manipulated or intimidated. When you try to drive someone into truth, usually you'll find out they're going the opposite way. Trying to drive someone into truth is like herding cats. It's just impossible.

And if God is not pleased to give the gift of repentance and the gift of illumination, we're wasting our time. There's a difference between intimidation, manipulation, and repentance. We need to learn what true repentance is, what true rebukes are, and how to help, love, and teach each other without being a Diotrephes.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee this day. We thank You for Your Word and Your truth. We ask, Father, that You would be pleased to teach us and build us up in the most holy faith.

Give us Your grace, mercy, and love. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 29

Theology Does Matter

Introduction: The Question 'What Think Ye of God?'

The subtitle is “What Think Ye of God?” You will understand why shortly. Ezekiel 8:12 says, “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.”

I trust that you know theology is the study or science of God. Theos is the Greek word for God, and theology refers to the study or science of that subject. We use the same ending in many words. Anthropos is the Greek word for man, so anthropology is the study of man. Christology comes from Christos—Christ, the Anointed One, the Messiah—and is the study of Christ the Messiah.

Theology is important. One of the biggest problems is that we have not realized how important theology truly is. I will say this: the average Christian and the average pastor are defective in the knowledge of God. When you stop and think about God, we could discuss His person, His power, His position, and His attributes. Yet many people are absolutely and totally ignorant of who God really is.

I understand that no matter how much one studies or how much one prays for wisdom and insight, there is no way in the world that we will acquire a perfect knowledge of God in this life.

However, simply because we cannot acquire a perfect knowledge does not mean that we should be kept from seeking to obtain a more accurate, extensive, and fuller knowledge of God. I want to come back to the book of Ezekiel, chapter 8, particularly verse 12 and, in fact, the entire chapter, and share with you what it teaches. But before I do, I want to turn to the New Testament so I can set the stage for what I am going to show you in Ezekiel chapter 8.

The subtitle is “What Think Ye of God?” Here is a question our Lord asked the Pharisees: “What think ye of Christ?” Notice Matthew chapter 22, beginning with verse 41. Matthew 22:41–42 says, “While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, saying, What think ye of Christ? Whose son is he? They say unto him, The son of David.”

The Pharisees' View of Christ

Interestingly, that is a good answer. Jesus Christ is indeed the Son of David. Matthew chapter 1, verse 1, says, “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham.” But the problem was that they did not really understand the significance or the implication of the Messiah being the Son of David, although they answered correctly.

So our Lord then asked them further. In verses 43 and 44, He said, “He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool?” Our Lord clearly indicates the implication of the fact and reality that the Messiah is indeed the Son of David. He is the Promised One, and David recognized that fact by simply calling Him Lord.

The word “Lord” in the Greek is kurios, which means boss, owner, master, sovereign. So David is acknowledging Him as sovereign. Once they say that the Messiah is the Son of David, our Lord asks further, “How in the world is it that David called him Lord?” Since they still did not quite get the issue, He asks, “If David then call him

Lord, how is he his son?" No earthly father is going to call his earthly son "Lord," because the father is the superior, the head, the teacher, and the instructor. When David called Christ, his son, the Messiah, "Lord," he was recognizing Him as deity, as God. They were willing to admit that Jesus Christ was the Son of David, but they were not willing to admit the implications: that the Son of David was indeed the true and the living God.

After our Lord asks this question, "And no man was able to answer him a word"—they could not answer without acknowledging that the Messiah is God in the flesh—"neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions." Our Lord begins by asking, "What think ye of Christ?" Does it matter what you think of Christ? The answer is yes. So many people are willing to say that He is a moral teacher, a good example, or a good man. But they have failed to acknowledge and confess that He is far more than that: He is God incarnate, indeed the Son of God. Then you would have to ask: Has He accomplished salvation? Is He really King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, and God of Gods? It is a very legitimate question that our Lord asks these Pharisees: "What think ye of Christ?" Why did the Pharisees badger Him?

Christ's Claim to Deity and Its Rejection

Why persecute Him, deny Him, despise Him, and crucify Him? The answer comes back: because they did not believe that He was God in the flesh. They did not believe that He was the Son of God. In fact, when He said that very plainly, they tried to kill Him.

Our Lord makes this wonderful statement: "I and my Father are one." When He made that statement, He was indeed claiming to be God, and the Jews recognized that fact. They took up stones again to stone Him. Jesus answered them, "Many good works have I showed you from my Father; for which of these works do ye stone me?" The Jews answered Him, saying, "For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God." They understood exactly what He meant when He said, "I and my Father are one."

I got tickled when I read this because they got it backwards. They said, "because thou, being a man, makest thyself God." No, Him

being God, He made Himself a man. That is what it amounts to. But the truth of the matter is that they did not confess or acknowledge that He was God in the flesh.

Let me make a modern-day application. Why then do our political and religious leaders not trust Him, believe Him, and obey Him? The answer is exactly the same reason that the Pharisees did not believe Him and trust Him: they did not understand, see, or grasp the fact that He is God in the flesh. They did not see that He was God incarnate.

They did not recognize Him as sovereign. Likewise today, many people are willing to admit that He is a good example, a moral man, and an excellent teacher. But they are not willing to go so far as to say that He is God in the flesh, God incarnate, the sovereign God of Heaven and Earth. Obviously, what you think of Christ determines whether or not you love Him, serve Him, believe Him, and trust Him. Just as your view of Christ matters, so your view of God matters. What think ye of God? Is He the sovereign, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, eternal, immutable, infinite, and transcendent God?

SCRIPTURE READING - Luke 19:12-27 (KJV)

The Parable of the Pounds: Theology Determines Conduct

Is He loving, kind, merciful, and gracious? Is He the one true and the living God? In other words, what think ye of God?

Look in Luke chapter 19, beginning with verse 12:

"Therefore a certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come. But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us. And it came to pass, that when he was returned, having received the kingdom, then he commanded these servants to be called unto him, to whom he had given the money, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading. Then came the first, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds.

> And he said unto him, Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities. And the second came, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained five pounds. And he said likewise to him, Be thou also over five cities. And another came, saying, Lord, behold, here is thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin: For I feared thee, because thou art an austere man: thou takest up that thou layedst not down, and reapest that thou didst not sow."
>
> "And he saith unto him, Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant. Thou knewest that I was an austere man, taking up that I laid not down, and reaping that I did not sow: Wherefore then gavest not thou my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have required mine own with usury?"
>
> "And he said unto them that stood by, Take from him the pound, and give it to him that hath ten pounds. (And they said unto him, Lord, he hath ten pounds.) For I say unto you, That unto every one which hath shall be given; and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from him. But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me."

First of all, this certainly is a parable. Our Lord is giving a good illustration here. In this passage, He delineates between His enemies and His servants. His enemies openly expressed their disdain and hatred for Him. He went to receive a kingdom, and they said, "We will not have this man to reign over us."

But their hatred, distrust, and wickedness did not hinder Him or stop Him from receiving His kingdom. If every demon out of hell and every wicked man who has lived, is living, and shall ever live joined hands in revolt and rebellion against Jesus Christ, it would occasion Him no uneasiness, because He is in control. He is King of Kings, Lord of Lords, God of Gods, and He has the kingdom whether they acknowledge it or not.

Now He calls His servants. The Bible says that He gives them money and tells them to "occupy till I come." The word "occupy" literally means to do business, to carry on a trade, or even to do business as a banker or trader. Moreover, it is an imperative in the

Greek, which means it is a command. He gives them the money and commands them, "Do business till I come."

Of course, He did not mention all of the servants, but the first two came: one had gained ten pounds, another had gained five pounds, and He commended them. But another came, saying, "Lord, behold, here is thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin." The other servants obeyed and prospered; they increased the money they had been given. This one did not. He kept the money laid up in a napkin.

Interestingly, the Greek word for "napkin" is soudarion, literally a handkerchief or sweat cloth—a rag used to wipe sweat from your brow while working. This servant did not use his sweat cloth. He put the pound in it, buried it, and hid it. He should have been using that sweat cloth, wiping his brow as he worked, but he did not.

Why did this man lay the money up in a napkin and hide it? Why did he not work, obey, or increase? The answer is that the servant's conduct was determined by his perception—his view, or theology, concerning his master.

The servant said, “Lord, behold, here is thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin: For I feared thee, because thou art an austere man: thou takest up that thou layedst not down, and reapest that thou didst not sow.” The master answered, “Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant. Thou knewest that I was an austere man, taking up that I laid not down, and reaping that I did not sow: Wherefore then gavest not thou my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have required mine own with usury?”

The word “austere” is the Greek word austeros, meaning hard, rough, severe, or rigid in manner. In effect, the servant said, “I knew you were a rough and tough man. I knew that you would pick up what you had not laid down and reap what you had not sown, and I was afraid of you. So I buried it in this sweat cloth; here is what you gave me, and I am giving it back.”

This story can raise questions. In the eclectic notes, we read: “For I feared thee is the word of a naughty and unfaithful heart and of a bad conscience. The Lord judges on the conduct due on the estimate formed by the heart itself. Its own showing the responsibility existed,

the talent was there, where was the consequent conduct? All the acquisition of spiritual competency remains and even is added to those who have been faithful. In the unfaithful the boon or the blessing bestowed is taken away."

The wicked servant had a wrong view concerning his master. Consequently, his conduct, life, and service were fashioned by that view, or theology. Bad theology will produce a wicked life, wicked conduct, and a wicked rule.

Theology Does Matter

Calvin said it like this: "I knew thee that thou art a harsh man. This harshness has nothing to do with the substance of the parable, and it is an idle speculation in which those indulge who reason from this passage how severely and rigorously God deals with His own people."

"For Christ did not intend to describe such rigor any more than to applaud or to praise usury, when he represents the master of the house as saying that the money ought to have been deposited with a banker that it might at least gain interest. Christ only means—listen carefully—Christ only means that there will be no excuse for the indolence of those who both conceal the gifts of God and waste their time in idleness. Hence also we infer that no manner of life is more praiseworthy in the sight of God than that which yields some advantage to human society."

It was his view of his master, then, that determined his life, his conduct, and his service. Theology does matter. Your view of God does indeed matter. It determines how you live. Someone may say, "Well, I'm not a theologian." You may not be a theologian, but you have a view of God. You understand something about God. You may not understand much, and you may scarcely understand any of it correctly, but you still have a view about God. That view basically determines how you are going to live.

Ezekiel's Vision of Idolatry in the Temple

This is why I could ask, "What think ye of Christ?" or, "What think ye of God?" Go back in your Bibles to the book of Ezekiel, chapter 8. In

Ezekiel 8, we see the wickedness of Judah and Jerusalem. Remember that Judah and Jerusalem were supposedly a covenant people. Yet they fell into the grossest idolatry and the grossest of sins. Why did they do that? Why do others forsake God? The Apostle Paul said, “Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world.” Not everybody who makes a profession of faith is indeed a Christian.

Because John said in 1 John 2:19, "They went out from us, that it might be made manifest that they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us." In other words, the proof that one is really a saved individual is that he continues in the faith. But you have to ask yourself this question: Why did a covenant people as a whole forsake God?

Let me make it more pertinent. Why in our country have we generally forsaken God? Why has the biblical foundation upon which our country was built, and which you and I know to have been biblical, been forsaken?

Before we look in Ezekiel chapter 8, let me tell you this: Ezekiel was a priest in Babylon, and God called him to be a prophet. He was prophesying to the people already in Babylon, whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken captive. But God brought him back in a vision to see what was actually happening in Judah and Jerusalem, so that he could tell the people in Babylon what was going to happen as well. Look at Ezekiel 8, verse 3, where he tells how he came to see these things. He is talking about God: "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; where was the seat of the image of jealousy, which provoketh to jealousy."

The very first thing Ezekiel sees near this gate is an image of jealousy. In other words, it was an idol. An idol was sitting or standing right there. At this gate leading from the outer court to the inner court, called the court of the priest, or the gate of the altar, there stood this idol—in broad daylight, in everybody's eyesight. It was called the image of jealousy, which provoked God to jealousy.

That is bad enough in itself. Scripture does not tell us what kind of idol it was, so it would be guessing to identify it. It could be an Asherah, an image of Baal, or anything else. It was simply an idol, but it was an idol that provoked God to jealousy.

In verses 5 and 6, God said to Ezekiel, "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 northward at the gate of the altar this image of jealousy in the entry. He said furthermore 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."

Here is what God is saying: the idol that they have set there is sufficient for Him to leave His house. It is sufficient for Him to leave His temple. It is sufficient for Him to leave these people. They have turned their backs upon God. But God said, "I'll tell you what, you hang with me and I'm going to show you greater abomination." It gets even worse. In fact, let us go back to verse 7.

"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."

Now he sees something more than just an image, something more than just an idol. He sees all these abominable creatures and creeping things on the wall. Here are the seventy men offering incense and worshiping. Matthew Henry said about these seventy men: "They were seventy men, the number of the great Sanhedrin, or chief council of the nation, and we have reason to fear the same men. For they were the ancients of the house of Israel, not only in age, but in office, who were bound by the duty of their place to

restrain and punish idolatry, and to destroy and abolish all superstitious images, wherever they were found."

Yet these were those that did themselves worship them in private, so undermining that religion which in public they professed to own and promote only because they had their preferments or their livelihood. In other words, here were the men who were supposed to be protecting the people of God and the Temple of God, and yet they were engaged in all of this idolatry, wicked ungodly idolatry.

Now, look in verse 13. That is bad enough: “He said also unto me, Turn thee yet again, and thou shalt see greater abominations that they do.” It just continues to get worse and worse. Look in verse 14: “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.” Tammuz is known by different names throughout history. He is also called Adonis and Osiris. A lot of these false gods were worshipped by several different countries or nations; they had different names but referred to exactly the same god.

So here were these women weeping for Tammuz. Albert Barnes says, “This solemnity was of a two-fold character. First that of mourning in which the death of Adonis was bewailed with extravagant sorrow. And then after a few days, the mourning gave place to wild rejoicings for His restoration to life.” This was a revival of nature worship under another form. The death of Adonis symbolized the suspension of nature’s productive powers, which were in due time revived. Accordingly, the festival occurred at the summer solstice, when in the east nature seemed to wither and die under the scorching heat of the sun, only to burst forth again into life in due season. There was also a connection with sun worship: the decline of the sun and the decline of nature might alike be represented by the death of Adonis.

The excitement attending these extravagances of alternate wailing and exaltation was 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 consequence to unbridled license, excess, and lust. So, this worship of Tammuz is indeed a type of nature worship. It is a type of environmentalism, which we have today. For instance, “save the whales, kill the babies.”

When you stop and think about it, when you hear your meteorologist talk about “mother nature,” or hear someone talk about “mother earth,” the earth is not our mother, and nature is not our mother. And when you stop and think about the green people—and of course I believe in preserving nature, obviously. The Bible teaches that. But you do not place these things before God, nor do you place them before people.

Out in the Northwest, where a lot of these people are against logging, they will drive spikes into the trees. So when the loggers cut them down with a chainsaw, it bounces back and cuts or kills them. I mean, I love trees, but this is insane when you look at it. It is a type of sun worship. Look, if you would, in verse 16. It even gets worse. Verse 15 says, “Then said he unto me, Hast thou seen this, O son of man? turn thee yet again, and thou shalt see greater abominations than these.”

We go from the idol to the seventy men, and then to the women weeping for Tammuz. Now, 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." Their backs were to the temple, and their faces were toward the sun, symbolical of the fact that they had turned their backs upon God and His covenant.

The Root Cause: A Faulty Theology

What pushed these people into this wicked idolatry and into the conduct that accompanied it? Look in verse 12: "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?" Now watch: "for they say"—here is what they say—"The Lord seeth us not; the Lord hath forsaken the earth."

Here is a wicked, faulty, bad theology. They were denying God's omniscience, His all-knowing; His omnipresence; His providence; His justice; and His judgment. In other words, "God doesn't see us, and God has forsaken the earth. So it really doesn't matter who we

worship, what we worship, how we live, or what we do, because God is not here."

Your theology determines how you live. Your theology determines how you serve. Your theology determines how you worship—or whether or not you worship.

Turn to Psalm 10, while holding Ezekiel chapter 8. Beginning with verse 3, we are talking about the wicked: "For the wicked boasteth of his heart's desire, and blesseth the covetous, whom the Lord abhorreth." Why does the wicked boast of his heart's desire and bless the covetous whom the Lord hates? Verse 4 explains: "The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts."

In other words, he has no theology, or if he does, it is certainly faulty. If you have a faulty theology, what is going to be the result?

"His ways are always grievous; thy judgments are far above out of his sight: as for all his enemies, he puffeth at them. He hath said in his heart, I shall not be moved: for I shall never be in adversity. His mouth is full of cursing and deceit and fraud: under his tongue is mischief and vanity. He sitteth in the lurking places of the villages: in the secret places doth he murder the innocent: his eyes are privily set against the poor. He lieth in wait secretly as a lion in his den: he lieth in wait to catch the poor: he doth catch the poor, when he draweth him into his net. He croucheth, and humbleth himself, that the poor may fall by his strong ones. He hath said in his heart, God hath forgotten: he hideth his face; he will never see it."

Your theology determines how you live. The reason these people were so wicked and so vile is because they had a faulty theology. They did not know God. They did not understand His person or His character.

In Ezekiel 8:12 we read: "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." And in chapter 9, verse 9: "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." Now, if God is not omniscient, if God is not omnipresent, and if God has forsaken the earth, does it really matter how you live or what you do? The answer is no.

Wrong views of God always lead to idolatry. They also lead to every form of violence and perverseness imaginable. Abortion on demand may be legal in our land, but the only reason it is legal is because we have lost our fear of God. We have lost our theology; we do not honor or worship Him. You look at all the perversions that are legal in this land today, and it is because we have lost our theology. We do not know who God is, His character, or His person, and we do not believe that He is going to judge us.

Matthew Henry said this: "Atheism was at the bottom of their idolatry. They worship images in the dark, the images of the gods of other nations, and they say, 'Jehovah, the God of Israel, whom we should serve, seeth us not. Jehovah hath forsaken the earth, and we may worship what god we will. He regards us not.'"

The Practical Impact of Theology on Life

If you have a biblical theology, it will determine how you live. It will make you live right and do what is right. When you were a boy on the farm and wanted to do something wrong, you would go behind the barn because Mom and Dad could not see there. You did not think about God seeing behind the barn. But if you understood that God is omniscient, all-knowing, and omnipresent, that you cannot escape His presence, it would mean something totally different.

I thought about the significance of theology this morning. Mel Trotter was a drunk who once stole the shoes off his sleeping baby and took them to the pawn shop for another mouthful of whiskey. On the way, he passed a building where Christians were singing and holding a worship service. It was cold in Chicago, so he went in to warm up and listen to the singing and preaching, and God saved him. Mel Trotter then began the rescue mission there, reaching drunks, prostitutes, and others.

He had a tremendous testimony. But he became concerned about an area in the city known as Lover's Lane. When cars would go there to park, Mel Trotter would go there to preach. He walked up and down preaching. Some became upset and left; some laughed at him and paid no attention. He kept doing that, but it made no progress. Finally, Mel Trotter came up with an idea. He obtained some property there and had a neon flashing sign made. All it was was a giant eyeball, and in the middle it had this verse: “Thou God seest me.” Within a week, Lover's Lane was desolate. Would you just stop and think?

Your theology does matter. It matters how you live, and it makes you either live right or live wrong. It is just that simple. Let me make a couple of applications. First, remember this: They turned their backs to the temple and worshipped the sun. Idolatry is turning your back upon God, rejecting Him, rejecting His law, and rejecting His governance. One may deny and disbelieve His judgment and justice, but that will not deter or alter them; they will come.

Applications: God's Response to Idolatry and the Call to Right Belief

Turn in your Bibles to Jeremiah chapter 18, beginning at verse 13. These people turned their backs upon God. Let me show you what He is going to do in justice. “Therefore thus saith the Lord; Ask ye now among the heathen, who hath heard such things: the virgin of Israel hath done a very horrible thing. Will a man leave the snow of Lebanon which cometh from the rock of the field? Or shall the cold flowing waters that come from another place be forsaken? Because my people hath forgotten me, they have burned incense to vanity”—that is, they forgot God and turned into idolaters—“and they have caused them to stumble in their ways from the ancient paths, to walk in paths, in a way not cast up; To make their land desolate, and a perpetual hissing; every one that passeth thereby shall be astonished, and wag his head.” Look what God says: “I will scatter them as with an east wind before the enemy;

“I will shew them the back, and not the face, in the day of their calamity.” God said, “You turn your back on me, I’ll turn my back on you, and you can scream and cry and plead and beg, but I’ll not hear

you." And of course that is exactly what He did to Judah and Jerusalem in 586, when Nebuchadnezzar literally tore it to the ground.

The second application is this: our ignorance, our idolatry, our sins, our rebellion, our wickedness—everything stems from a faulty theology. If we believe right, we will live right. "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." If we believe wrongly, we will live wrongly. It is just that simple.

So here is the whole point of Ezekiel chapter 8: your theology does matter. Your theology determines how you live, how you serve, and how you worship. These people refused to worship the one true and living God and refused to give Him the worship that was His due because they said, "He doesn't see us. He's forsaken the earth. We can do as we please."

You may not ever be a theologian, and I may not ever be a theologian, but we can read the Scripture and find out who God is, learn His attributes, and govern our lives accordingly. What we believe should be biblical and right, and it will affect our lives. Your theology determines how you live.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to You this day. We thank You for Your love, Your grace, Your mercy, and Your truth. Help us, Lord, to honor Thee, to love Thee, to live for Thee, and to glorify Thy name. Help us to have a correct theology. May we grasp, in some degree, Thy person, Thy power, Thy position, and Thy attributes. May we glorify Thee through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 30

Casting God Behind Your Back

SCRIPTURE READING - 1 Kings 14:1-12 (KJV)

At that time Abijah the son of Jeroboam fell sick. And Jeroboam said to his wife, "Arise, I pray thee, and disguise thyself, that thou be not known to be the wife of Jeroboam. And get thee to Shiloh. Behold, there is Ahijah the prophet, which told me that I should be king over this people. And take with thee ten loaves, and cracknels, and a cruse of honey, and go to him: he shall tell thee what shall become of the child."

And Jeroboam's wife did so, and arose and went to Shiloh, and came to the house of Ahijah. But Ahijah could not see, for his eyes were set by reason of his age. And the Lord said unto Ahijah, "Behold, the wife of Jeroboam cometh to ask a thing of thee for her son, for he is sick. Thus and thus shalt thou say unto her, for it shall be when she cometh in, that she shall feign herself to be another woman." And it was so when Ahijah heard the sound of her feet, as she came in at the door, he said, "Come in, thou wife of Jeroboam. Why feignest thou thyself to be another? For I am sent to thee with heavy tidings. Go, tell

> Jeroboam, 'Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Forasmuch as I exalted thee from among the people, and made thee prince over my people Israel, and rent the kingdom away from the house of David, and gave it thee, and yet thou hast not been as my servant David, who kept my commandments, and who followed me with all of his heart, to do only that which was right in mine eyes. But thou hast done evil above all that were before thee: for thou hast gone and made thee other gods and molten images, to provoke me to anger, and hast cast me behind thy back. Therefore will I bring evil upon the house of Jeroboam, and I will cut off from Jeroboam him that pisseth against the wall, and him that is shut up and left in Israel, and will take away the remnant of the house of Jeroboam, as a man taketh away dung till it be all gone. Him that dieth of Jeroboam in the city shall the dogs eat, and him that dieth in the field shall the fowls of the air eat, for the Lord hath spoken it. Arise thou therefore and get thee to thine own house, and when thy feet enter into the city, the child shall die.'"

Introduction: The Meaning of Turning One's Back

Have you ever thrown away something that was absolutely useless and worthless to you? And I'm sure each of you have. But have you ever walked away from something that others consider valuable, but then again, you consider it worthless and something of no value? Someone would say, "How can you turn your back on such an object or such a good deal or such a good price?"

The truth of the matter is, we use this phrase, "turning one's back," to indicate someone who is careless, thoughtless, uncaring, unloving, and unconcerned. Usually, when a husband or a wife forsakes the other, we say that he or she turned their back upon their spouse. When a man simply forsakes his family, we would say, "He just turned his back upon his family." We have had individuals who forsook their friends, and we would say, "Well, he just turned his back upon his friends," or someone who has left the church: "He turned his back upon his church."

Well, actually the truth is, David, there are many who have turned their back upon God and literally cast God behind their backs,

because obviously they are not serving and worshiping the one true and living God who has revealed himself in the Lord Jesus Christ. The thing that I want to emphasize today is this: it is not just individuals who cast God behind their backs. It is also families, churches, magistrates, rulers, governments, and even nations. I believe that the fruit of having cast God behind our backs is evident on every hand.

We've turned our back upon the Lord Jesus Christ when you consider governmental corruption, judicial wickedness and stupidity, the dumbing effects of government education, the destruction of the family, and the deterioration and breakdown of society, as well as that of the church, and an uncontrollable debt because of our own stupid and unbiblical economic policies. Just recently in Cleveland, Ohio, one judge sentenced a seventy-nine-year-old woman to ten days in jail for feeding stray cats.

Jeroboam's Wickedness and Stupidity

The only thing that you can say is that we are in deep trouble, and it looks as if God has left us to ourselves because we have basically cast Him behind our backs, and now we are reaping that which we have sown.

In our text in 1 Kings chapter 14, God is condemning King Jeroboam. Jeroboam is known for his wickedness, his idolatry, and what I am going to call absolute stupidity. He was given an absolutely wonderful and gracious promise by God, and he refused either to believe or act upon that promise.

God rent the kingdom apart under Rehoboam, the son of Solomon. He actually gave ten of the tribes to Jeroboam and left two for Rehoboam. One commentator said this: Solomon, out of all the wives and concubines that he had, only had one son, Rehoboam. Solomon had only one son, and he was a fool, and that is the truth. If you read 1 Kings chapter 12, you will find out exactly where he was considered a fool, for he refused the counsel and wisdom of the old men and chose to follow the younger men, in their arrogance, pride, and stupidity, with whom he had grown up.

Jeroboam was basically made king because Rehoboam refused to listen to the people when they asked him to lighten the burdens Solomon had placed upon them. In 1 Kings chapter 11, beginning with verse 29, we see where God gave ten of the tribes to Jeroboam: “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. 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.” Here’s why.

SCRIPTURE READING - 1 Kings 11:33-38 (KJV)

> "Because 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 hands, and will give it unto thee, even ten tribes. And to 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 to put my name there. And I will take thee, and thou shalt reign according to all that thy soul desireth, and thou shalt be king over Israel."
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> Now watch verse 38: "And it shall be, if thou wilt hearken unto all that I command thee, and wilt walk in my ways, and do that which is right in my sight, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as David my servant did, then I will be with thee, and build thee a sure house, as I built for David, and will give Israel unto thee."

> Now you talk about an absolute promise! God says, "If you will just simply obey me, I will build you an absolutely sure house." All Jeroboam had to do was obey. All he had to do was to honor the Lord, worship the Lord, and walk in accordance to that which God demanded. So this great and gracious promise only basically had obedience attached to it for a condition. Now one of the very first things that Jeroboam did when he was king of Israel is he turned his back upon God who gave him his kingdom and turned his back upon this promise.

Jeroboam's Selfish Concern and Idolatry

Jeroboam demonstrated his ungratefulness, his unthankfulness, and actually his unbelief in God's promise as well. Jeroboam's concern when he became king was not God. His concern was not the people or the nation. The only concern that Jeroboam had when he became king was that his kingdom should continue. In other words, it was an absolutely, totally selfish concern. Disregarding the word of God and disbelieving the promise of God, Jeroboam then turned to what he believed would extend and lengthen his kingdom, and that is idolatry.

In 1 Kings chapter 12, beginning with verse 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 in Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, even to Rehoboam king of Judah. They shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam king of Judah.'" "Wherefore the king took counsel." So this is no accident. This is purposeful. It was deliberate. It was premeditated.

"Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold, and said unto them, '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."

Jeroboam said, "Look, if this people continue to go down to Jerusalem and worship in the house that God demanded that he be worshiped in, then they're going to turn back to Rehoboam and they'll kill me. So in order to preserve my life, in order to preserve my kingdom, I'm not going to do that. I'm going to make two golden calves and I'm going to tell them it's too much for you to go down there. You just worship God right here."

Now, listen carefully: ignorance, stupidity, and rebellion are always the foundation for idolatry and tyranny. Jeroboam turned his back upon the promise of God. He turned his back upon God himself, and what he did in 1 Kings chapter 12 is he stupidly, wickedly, and rebelliously instituted what is known as a state religion. As king, he was pushing his state religion upon the people. This state religion was not for the benefit of the people, the nation, or the worship and honor of God. It was only for the benefit of Jeroboam and his kingdom. That was it.

State Religion and Its Consequences

Whenever you find a state religion, you always find it is for the benefit of the state. It is for the benefit of the government. If there is a state religion, there are state priests and state preachers as well.

Amos was from Judah, from the southern kingdom, and God sent him to preach in the northern kingdom. But notice what the state priests told Amos. In Amos chapter 7, beginning with verse 10: "Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel"—remember that is where one of the golden calves was placed, Dan and Bethel—"Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent to Jeroboam the king."

Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, said, “Amos hath conspired against thee in the midst of the house of Israel. The land is not able to bear

all his words. He's preaching against you. He's preaching against your kingdom. For thus Amos saith, Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel shall surely be led away captive out of their own land."

Look what else Amaziah said unto Amos: "O thou seer, go, flee thee away into the land of Judah, and there eat bread, and prophesy there." In effect, he was saying, "If you want to live, get out of here. Go home. If you want to preach, preach to somebody down there. Don't come up here preaching to us. You go down there and eat your bread and drink your water. If you stay around here, we'll kill you."

Watch carefully now, verse 12: "Also Amaziah said unto Amos, 'O thou seer, go, flee thee away into the land of Judah, 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.'" The chapel and the court have become one. It is indeed the state religion, and there is no such thing as religious freedom under a state religion.

Have you considered all the attacks being waged against preachers who are politically incorrect? What about denominations and churches that take a stand for the Scripture, refusing to bow the knee to humanism and political correctness? They are lied about, slandered, persecuted, and some are even prosecuted.

The state has its state religion. Years ago I preached a message on the religion of political correctness, and it is a religion—the religion of humanism sweeping this country at this particular time. The state religion has combined the chapel and the court. Here is the truth: the state religion must be upheld at all costs, because when it falls, so does the empire; so does the state.

Historical and Modern Persecution

Let me give you an illustration. Everyone in this room knows that Christians were put to death during the Roman Empire. They were slain by lions, swords, fire, and all kinds of means. But Christians in the Roman Empire were not put to death just simply because they were Christians. You see, in the Roman Empire you could believe whatever you wanted to believe. If you wanted to worship Jesus

Christ, Caesar could care less. If you wanted to worship Aphrodite, go for it. If you wanted to worship Baal, bow to him. Caesar did not care. Just so once a year you swore by the genius of Caesar and said, "Caesar is Lord"—that is, he gives me the right to worship and believe like I believe.

Christians refused to do that, because they would say, "Jesus Christ is Lord, not Caesar." Thus, Christians were put to death not simply because they were Christians, but because they were considered traitors and treasonous to the Roman cult and the Roman state religion. That is what it amounted to. Basically, that is what you are seeing even in the persecution of Christians and churches today. Those who will not conform are being persecuted.

What It Means to Cast God Behind Your Back

If you look back in 1 Kings chapter 14, notice verse 9. God says to Jeroboam, "But thou hast done evil above all that were before thee: for thou hast gone and made thee other gods and molten images, to provoke me to anger, and hast cast me behind thy back." This expression, "cast me behind thy back," is a very strong and rare expression. It occurs only one other time in Scripture exactly like this. In Ezekiel 23:35, we read: "Therefore thus saith the Lord God; Because thou hast forgotten me, and cast me behind thy back, therefore bear thou also thy lewdness and thy whoredoms." This is the second time that God has said, "Thou hast cast me behind thy back."

What does it mean to cast God behind your back? Four Puritan expositors explain it. John Trapp said, "Hast laid me aside and set light by me, as if I were nobody with thee, nor had power to punish thee. Thou hast both despised and despised me." Matthew Poole wrote, "Cast me behind thy back—despised and disregarded and forsaken me and my commands and my worship, as we do things which we cast behind our backs." Then John Gill said, "And hast cast me behind thy back, as unworthy of thy regard, of my worship which he neglected and showed no concern for." Matthew Henry said, "Thou hast cast me behind my back. My law, my fear, thou hast neglected me, forgotten me, and preferred thy policies over my precepts."

In other words, you preferred your policy over God's word. You preferred what you thought over what God commanded. Turning one's back upon God and casting God behind one's back is not merely an insult; it is also a provocation. He said in verse 9, “But hast done evil above all that were before thee: for thou hast gone and made thee other gods and molten images, to provoke me to anger, and hast cast me behind thy back.”

If you were speaking to me passionately, explaining and beseeching me with great fervor, and I simply turned my back to you and walked away, would you be insulted? Of course. You would say, “He doesn't care anything about me. He doesn't care what I'm thinking. He doesn't care what I'm saying.” It would not only be an insult; you would get angry. If something like that would bother you—and it would—what do you think it will do to the thrice holy God? The Hebrew word here literally means to excite to indignation, to provoke to anger and wrath. Casting God behind your back is like slapping God in the face or spitting in his face, turning your back to him, and walking away.

The Bible tells you in Numbers 14:22 that Israel, while God was leading them through the wilderness, provoked God ten different times. You can read in the Old Testament how God judged them and how His wrath fell upon them. So provoking the eternal, infinite, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, sovereign God of heaven and earth is not a wise choice for a mere mortal, I can assure you. All you have to do is read biblical history and world history. You will find that the wisest, the strongest, and the most influential men have suffered defeat at the hands of the sovereign God of heaven and earth.

Just witness the testimonies of Ahab, Jeroboam, Herod, Pilate, and all the Caesars. You will find that they were absolutely, totally defeated and destroyed. Jeroboam made himself two golden calves, and he literally forced the people into idolatry. In fact, over and over in Scripture, usually when the name Jeroboam is mentioned, it always has reference or there is something added: “He made Israel to sin.” For instance, 1 Kings 14:16 says, “And he shall give Israel up because of all the sins of Jeroboam, who did sin and who made Israel to sin.”

However, there is a very pivotal passage in 2 Kings 17:21: “For he rent Israel from the house of David; and they made Jeroboam the son of Nebat king: and Jeroboam drave Israel from following the Lord, and made them sin a great sin.” Now the word “drave” here is a very strong word. It means to thrust forward, to thrust into, and to impel. Here Jeroboam the king impelled—he drove—the people into idolatry.

How do you drive a people into idolatry? Just stop and think. This man is king. He is the one who issues his laws, his edicts, and threats. He is the one who prosecutes, persecutes, propagandizes, and executes. Moreover, you can drive someone into idolatry with either royal or governmental benefits. When someone gets on the dole, on the take, on the welfare system, and finds out that he can live off the labor of others without lifting a finger, usually what he is going to do is whatever is necessary to keep being blessed and benefited by the king or by the government. That is exactly it. So he drove these people into idolatry.

It has to be understood that a government can not only become idolatrous; it can also become an idol in and of itself. This was certainly true in relationship to Jeroboam and his kingdom.

He instituted his own religion. Now, let me speak very pointedly in this matter. Any government that rejects God and His law is idolatrous. Any government that rejects God and His law is idolatrous, and that government becomes a god to itself. I want you to turn in your Bibles to Psalm 94. Psalm 94, and I want you to look at verses 20 and 21. Hold 2 Kings now, but look in Psalm 94 and let's begin reading there with verse 20, verse 21. Verse 20 is what I want. Psalm 94, look at what the scripture says. Psalm 94 and verse 20: "Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with thee, which frameth mischief by a law?" So we're talking about a throne, which is a governmental power, and it is a throne of iniquity. It is a wicked governmental power. "Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with thee?"—that is, with God—"when that wicked throne of iniquity frameth mischief by a law?" Now the word "mischief" is another word for sin in the Bible.

So literally here's the question: shall a wicked government have fellowship with God when that wicked government makes sin legal?

And the answer is no, because what they have done, they have rejected God. They rejected God's law. They're now instituting their own law. And verse 21 gives you the result: "They gather themselves together against the soul of the righteous, and condemn the innocent blood." Wow. So a government can become an idol and idolatrous, just like anything else.

Active, Passive, and Ignorant Idolatry

Now when most Christians and even non-Christians, when they hear a message like this, they're going to say something in their mind like, "Well, I'm not an idolater. I don't bow down before idols. I know better than that." I suppose because we have such a limited concept of idolatry, we also have a limited concept of casting God behind our backs. We don't really understand it. When you think about idolatry, there is an active idolatry, there is a passive idolatry, and there is even an ignorant idolatry. Now, an active idolatry is very easy to discern in one sense of the word. An active idolatry is easily seen and identified because someone is worshiping and bowing down before and serving and believing in a pagan idol or a pagan god. Let me say this again: any worship that is not given to the one true and the living God through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, is idolatry. Now, let me show you another aspect of active idolatry.

This is exactly where all of this leads. Look in 2 Kings 17, beginning with verse 7: “For so it was that the children of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God, which had brought them up out of the land of Egypt from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and had feared other gods.” If you are fearing other gods, you are an idolater. How, then, did they become idolaters? They rejected God’s law and walked in “the statutes”—or the laws—“of the heathen, whom the Lord cast out from before the children of Israel, and of the kings of Israel, which they had made.” They followed the laws of the heathen whom God had driven out, or the laws of the kings of Israel. There was not one godly king in all of the northern kingdom. Every one of them was an idolater and a pervert, every one of them.

They rejected God’s law and followed man’s law. Look what happened. Verse 9 says, “And the children of Israel did secretly”—that is, at first—“those things that were not right against

the Lord their God, and they built them high places in all their cities, from the tower of the watchmen to the fenced city." They set up images and groves. This was open now, in public: "They set them up images and groves in every high hill, and under every green tree. And there they burnt incense in all the high places, as did the heathen whom the Lord carried away before them; and wrought wicked things to provoke the Lord to anger: for they served idols. Wherefore the Lord"

The Lord testified against Israel, and against Judah, by all the prophets, and by all the seers, saying, "Turn ye from your evil ways, and keep my commandments and my statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by my servants the prophets." Notwithstanding they would not hear, but hardened their necks, like to the neck of their fathers, that did not believe in the Lord their God. And they rejected his statutes, and his covenant that he made with their fathers, and his testimonies which he testified against them; and they followed vanity—that is, idolatry and idols—and became vain, and went after the heathen that were round about them, concerning whom the Lord had charged them that they should not do like them. And they left all the commandments of the Lord their God, and made them molten images, even two calves, and made a grove, and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served Baal.

That is an active idolatry. But it all began by rejecting God's word and God's law and following man's law.

If you're not worshiping the one true and the living God through the Lord Jesus Christ, then you are an idolater. The Apostle Paul makes it very plain in 1 Corinthians chapter 10, beginning with verse 20: "But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice"—that is, the unsaved—"the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils. Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils."

Obviously, someone who's trying to worship God, but is not worshiping Him through the Lord Jesus Christ, is an idolater.

That would be active idolatry. There is also passive idolatry. Passive idolatry does not involve active worship of idols. In fact, it remains silent in the presence of active idolatry. It does not seek to rebuke, reprove, reprimand, or even remove idolatry.

A good example is Elijah's challenge to the people on Mount Carmel. You remember that showdown, when he actually beheaded 400 prophets of Baal. Before that, in 1 Kings 18:21, Elijah told Ahab the king to gather all the people and all the prophets of Baal, and he did. Elijah said, "How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him." And the people answered him not a word.

They were not going to speak out for God, but neither were they going to speak out against Baal. Passive idolatry is tolerating and putting up with idolatry without ever trying to rebuke or renounce it. These people in 1 Kings 18 were not ready, willing, or able to declare with absolute certainty who God was.

Passive idolatry always seeks to equalize all religions. It produces some foolish statement like this: "Well, it really doesn't matter what you believe, or who you believe in, just so you're genuine and sincere." But I will tell you something: if you really believe that it does not matter what you believe, just so you're genuine and sincere,

Let me give you a dose of strychnine, and you genuinely and sincerely believe that it is cough syrup. You will soon be genuinely and sincerely dead. Genuineness and sincerity do not mean diddly-squat. They do not. But that is what passive idolatry is going for.

Ignorant idolatry is very simple. You have heard me quote Colossians 3:5 so many times, where God says, "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry." Anytime you try to place your desires, your will, or your way above God, what you are doing, in essence, is dethroning God and enthroning yourself. You are saying, "I'm God. I can do what I want to do. It doesn't matter what God commands."

Now go back to 1 Kings 14. This is what it means to cast God behind your back. Verse 8 says, "And rent the kingdom away from

the house of David, and gave it thee." God took the kingdom away from the house of David and gave it to Jeroboam. Yet He said, "Yet thou hast not been as my servant David, who kept my commandments, and who followed me with all his heart, to do that only which was right in mine eyes."

David's Obedience vs. Jeroboam's Rebellion

How did David please God? How was Jeroboam unlike David? The answer is clear: David kept God's commandments, followed God with all his heart, and was obedient.

I know what you are thinking: "But David committed adultery with Bathsheba, and he killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword of the children of Ammon." That is true. But 1 Kings 15:5 says, "Because David did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, and turned not aside from any thing that he commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite." David's life was one of obedience, generally speaking. Obedience, honor, and worship of God were the rule. What happened with Bathsheba and Uriah was the exception. God was saying, "Here's my servant, David. He obeyed me. He kept my law. He kept my commandments."

“Jeroboam, you didn’t believe me. You didn’t listen to me. You didn’t keep my commandments. And the evidence of that is that you made two golden calves. You are an idolater, and in making those golden calves and in refusing my word and refusing my promise, in refusing my worship, you’ve cast me behind your back.”

Now let me ask you: if I were to ask you, if I were to ask Christians, if I were to ask those religious people who are not real Christians but are very religious, “Would you ever cast God behind your back?” Most would be horrified and they would say, “Absolutely not.” Well, let me ask you some questions, and I want you to answer them in your mind. Here they are: Do you read your Bible? Do you study your Bible? Do you meditate upon the Word of God? Do you understand the principles and the precepts of the Word of God? Do you apply the scriptures to your life? Do you obey the Word of God? Do you listen to your pastor? Do you respect and honor your pastor? Do you take his preaching and teaching and counsel seriously? Are you willing to listen to others as they expound and explain and apply

the word of God so that you might be instructed and edified and become more obedient?

Casting God's Word Behind Your Back

Now what you're going to say is this: "What in the world do those questions have to do with casting God behind your back?" Well, let's let the scriptures answer that. I want you to turn, first of all, to Nehemiah chapter 9 and then Psalm 50. So you're going to have to turn over a few books. Right after First and Second Kings, you have First and Second Chronicles. Then you have the book of Esther and Ezra. Esther is after Nehemiah. It's Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther. So look at Nehemiah chapter 9. Then we'll go to Psalm 50. I want to show you exactly what all those questions have to do with casting God behind your back. Watch very carefully. Here it is. Nehemiah 9, and let's begin reading there with verse 24. Nehemiah 9 verse 24. Nehemiah is talking about how God gave Israel the promised land. "So the children went in and possessed the land, and thou subduedst before them the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, and gavest them into their hands, with their kings, and the people of the land, that they might do with them as they would." God enabled them to conquer. He gave them all the land and all the people. Look what else he gave them: "And they took strong cities, and a fat land, and possessed houses full of all goods, wells digged, vineyards and oliveyards, and fruit trees in abundance: so they did eat, and were filled, and became fat, and delighted themselves in thy great goodness."

God has given them everything. Nevertheless, Nehemiah 9:26 says, "Nevertheless they were disobedient, and rebelled against thee, and cast thy law behind their backs, and slew thy prophets which testified against them to turn them to thee, and they wrought great provocations."

How did they cast God behind their backs? They were unthankful, ungrateful, and unappreciative. They said, "We don't want his law. We don't want to obey him. We don't want to listen to what he says. We don't even want to listen to those preachers who are telling us that we're sinning against him. No, no, no. We'll deal with those preachers as well."

Psalm 50:16-17 says, “But unto the wicked God saith, ‘What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth? Seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee.’” When we refuse to hear God's instructions, we are acting as the wicked. We are casting God's word behind our backs.

Just as they did in Nehemiah chapter 9, we cast God behind our backs by refusing to hear, heed, and apply the word of God; by refusing his instruction and refusing to listen to him. You cast God behind your back by refusing his instruction. You cast God behind your back by refusing to listen to him. We not only insult him; the Bible says that we provoke him. When we consider the multitude of his blessings that God has given us, just as he did those people in Nehemiah chapter 9, and remain ungrateful, unthankful, unappreciative, and ignore him, it is an insult to God. You cast God behind your back by being ungrateful, unthankful, and unappreciative.

The Judgment of Being Left Alone

The average professing Christian is no better than the heathen and pagan in this regard. The average professing Christian is no better than wicked Jeroboam. You are doing exactly what Jeroboam did. You may not be building or bowing down to a golden calf, but you are casting His Word behind your back, and in doing so you are casting God behind your back. Casting God behind your back brings destruction and devastation.

Go back to 1 Kings chapter 14. God is condemning Jeroboam: “But hast done evil above all that were before thee: for thou hast gone and made thee other gods and molten images, to provoke me to anger, and hast cast me behind thy back. Therefore, behold, I will bring evil upon the house of Jeroboam, and will cut off from Jeroboam him that pisseth against the wall”—an expression meaning that He would kill every male. “And him that is shut up and left in Israel, and will take away the remnant of the house of Jeroboam, as a man taketh away dung, till it be all gone. And him that dieth of Jeroboam in the city shall the dogs eat; and him that dieth in the field shall the fowls of the air eat: for the Lord hath spoken it.”

When God says He will cut off all the males, that means the end of the lineage. There will be no more descendants of Jeroboam. God says, “I’m going to destroy you. I’ll destroy your rule. You won’t have any descendants. No, it’s over for you.” All who die in the city, the dogs will eat, and those who die in the field, the fowls of the air will eat. Why? Because they provoked God and cast Him behind their backs.

Ezekiel chapter 23 contains the second passage that speaks of casting God behind your back. Look carefully at what God says in verse 35: "Therefore thus saith the Lord God; Because thou hast forgotten me, and cast me behind thy back, therefore bear thou also thy lewdness and thy whoredoms."

What does God say? When you cast Me behind your back, I am going to leave you alone. I am going to let you reap what you sow. Do you realize that one of the greatest and most severe judgments that can fall on a man, a family, a church, a society, or a nation is when God leaves us alone?

Remember Matthew 15. Our Lord was preaching, and when He got through, the disciples came and said to Him, "Knowest thou not that the Pharisees were offended at this saying?" You remember what our Lord said? "Let them alone. They be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead

“The blind, both shall fall into the ditch.” Let them alone. One of the most severe judgments is when God says, “All right. You want it. You got it. I will let you alone. And you will reap everything that you have sown.”

If you are wondering why there are so many drug addictions, why so many families are falling apart—divorce—why so many churches are breaking up and closing their doors, why there is so much corruption in government, and why everything is going wrong in our society and nation, wonder no more. People are turning their backs upon truth, righteousness, and principle because we have cast God behind our backs and are reaping that which we have sown.

Call to Repentance and Obedience

I was reading through 1st and 2nd Kings this past week, and it said that when such-and-such king of Israel died, he was buried with the kings of Israel. I thought, “I do not want to be buried with Israel’s kings or the ungodly.” What we need is to listen to God’s call to repentance, faith, and obedience. When we cast God behind our backs, He leaves us to suffer our choice, and that choice always brings death and destruction.

Do not cast God behind your back. Honor His word: read it, study it, apply it, use it, follow it, and obey it.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to You. We thank You for Your word and Your truth. We ask that You help us honor You, glorify You, and do that which is right, as David, Your servant, did. Lord, protect us from sinning against You and help us to be obedient and holy. In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 31

Teaching The Word Of God

Isaiah 28:7–14 says: “But they also have erred through wine, and through strong drink are out of the way; the priest and the prophet have erred through strong drink, they are swallowed up of wine, they are out of the way through strong drink. They err in vision, they stumble in judgment. For all tables are full of vomit and filthiness, so that there is no place clean. Whom shall he teach knowledge? And whom shall he make to 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, and there a little. For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people.

“To whom he said, This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing: yet they would not hear. But the word of the Lord was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken. Wherefore hear the word of the Lord, ye scornful men, that rule this people which is in Jerusalem.”

Introduction: The Problem of Shallow Listening

I've often said that everyone wants their money's worth and the most for their money, with the exceptions of two circumstances: preaching and education. When it comes to those two things, everybody seemingly wants to get out. A lot of people, I believe, actually come to church in order to get out. They do not like, nor are they willing, to listen to sermons that would challenge them and make them think. They do not want expository sermons or expositions from the Word of God. Rather, they want feel-good and emotional sermons and sob stories that get them moving emotionally, but not intellectually.

Moreover, due to the condition of television today, most people cannot pay attention to anything more than five minutes anyhow. The same is true when it comes to education. Most people desire a piece of paper proving that they have gone through college and graduated. Whether they can function or not is immaterial; whether they have been educated or not is immaterial. They've got this piece of paper that says they have gone through college.

But the truth of the matter is this: the paper means nothing as long as you remain ignorant and cannot function. That is exactly where we are today. Going to college, for a lot of people, is now nothing more than a waste of time. Actually, going to most churches is nothing more than a waste of time, especially when the individual is not willing to listen, learn, pay attention, and apply the Word of God to his own life. I suppose one of the main reasons we are so devoid of real worship today is because of our ignorance.

Worship Cannot Be Separated from Instruction

Let me show you what I am talking about. In Amos chapter 5, beginning with verse 21, the Scripture says, God is speaking: "I hate and 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."

The interesting thing is this: God appointed the feast days, the sacrifices, and the music, and yet God is saying here, "I hate, I despise." The reason is that there was no judgment and no righteousness. Therefore, their worship was totally and completely unacceptable unto Him. How in the world can you worship God in righteousness, and how can you worship God in that which is just, if you are ignorant of what is righteous and what is just? How can you give God that which He demands?

In other words, you really and truly cannot separate instruction and worship. If judgment is to run down like a mighty stream and righteousness is to flow down like a river, obviously we must understand what is righteous and what is just. Let me put it to you very bluntly: teaching is very important. I would say teaching is extremely important. I am not simply saying that because teaching has been my life; I have taught basically all of my adult life.

The Importance of Teaching and Two Commands of Christ

But do you realize that our learning, our education actually begins by the time we are born, and it does not even stop until the time that we die? In fact, we are basically forever students all of our lives. We're always learning. We're always being taught. We may not always be learning that which is right and accurate and correct and true and righteous and biblical, but the truth of the matter is we're always learning.

Consequently, in light of that, our Lord gives us two very blunt commands. The first one is found in Mark chapter 4 in verse 24 when he said this: “Take heed what you hear.” Take heed what you hear. In other words, you're responsible to make sure that whatever you hear is indeed the Word of God, it's the truth of God. And then when you get to Luke chapter 8 in verse 18, he says this: “Take heed how you hear.” So it's not just what you hear, but how you hear that is important as well. I'll refer to these probably just a little bit later.

Now, I want to lay out this simple truth: there are basic fundamentals, there are basic requirements for teaching the Word of God, and there are basic requirements for even learning the Word of God. Isaiah lays these out for us very clearly in this passage. I'm

going to give you three principles today. Without these three principles, there is not going to be any biblical education, and consequently there would not be any biblical worship.

First Requirement: An Apt Shepherd

There are three things that are absolutely foundational and fundamental. What are they? Number one, you must have an apt shepherd. I'm going to point out in Isaiah that Isaiah was indeed an apt shepherd. I use shepherd because it happens to be the Greek word for pastor. So you have to have an apt shepherd or an apt teacher. Pastors have been commanded in Acts 20:28. The Apostle Paul, when he called the elders together, said: “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.” So here the pastors are required to feed the Church of God.

Peter, in 1 Peter chapter 5, verses 2 and 3, said exactly the same thing. He added a little bit more, but he said: “Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not of constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; not as being lords over God's heritage, but by being examples.” Notice that he began, “Feed the flock of God.” So it should be an established fact from Scripture that feeding the sheep and teaching the Word of God is absolutely fundamental. Sheep are fed as they are simply taught the Word of God.

There must then be what you and I would call an apt shepherd. In Ephesians chapter 4, verse 11, we are considering the gifts that Jesus Christ has given unto his church: “And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers.” I want to call your attention to the little word “some.” The little word “some” is in front of each category that he gave to the church. There were some apostles. Not all were apostles. There were some prophets. Not all were prophets. There were some evangelists. Not all were evangelists. Then he said there were some pastors and teachers. Actually, the pastor-teacher is one individual, or it is one group. It is prefaced by the word “some,” just as all the other categories are as well.

The important thing to note is this: it is absolutely necessary for a pastor to teach. The way we communicate truth is simply by teaching.

There are more subjects in the Bible than simply sin, salvation, separation, and soul winning. When Alice and I were young, after we were first converted, we would go to a church, and it did not matter which church we attended: we would hear a message on one of those four subjects. It seemed there was nothing else in the Bible. Some pastors believe they have to preach an evangelistic message every time they preach.

I believe that preaching salvation is very important. The doctrine of soteriology is clearly taught in the Bible. But you cannot give God's people a steady diet of salvation over and over. If they are God's people, they are already saved and should already know that information; therefore, you should be teaching something else. What we fail to realize, even as preachers, is that God honors His Word, and it does not matter what is being taught as long as it is the Word of God.

Let me give you an illustration. Many years ago, I was preaching one Sunday morning to a large congregation that included five university professors from a state school. I had a message on the biblical doctrine of hell, and I was itching to preach it because I wanted to scorch those college professors. But I had no liberty to preach that message. The only liberty I had was to preach on the place of women in the church, and that is what I preached that Sunday morning. Four of those five college professors made a profession of faith, several of them weeping and broken. It dawned on me: God honors His Word. It does not matter what is being taught as long as it is the Word of God, and God will honor that.

Paul pointed this out in 2 Timothy 3: “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for correction, for reproof, for instruction in righteousness.” Note what he said: “All scripture.” When you read about some of the greats who were converted, the Scripture God used to open their eyes was sometimes seemingly innocuous, a passage that hardly anyone ever hears. Yet God used it to open their eyes. The Apostle Paul stated in Acts

chapter 20 and verse 27 to those elders, “For I have not shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God.”

Preaching the whole counsel of God requires time and work and study. When you begin to try to expound a passage, explain that passage, and make sure that you understand every word in that passage, as well as the theme and the context of that passage, that is just plain hard work. Expository preaching is far more difficult than topical preaching. I suppose that is why the average pastor does not preach expositorily. He does not exegete the Scripture; he simply preaches topically.

In order for the Word of God to be communicated, you must have an apt shepherd. In 1 Timothy 3, verses 1 and 2, we read: "This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach."

There are other requirements there as well for a pastor, or bishop, an overseer. But I could take the time to show you where God requires from this chapter exactly the same things in the lives of every Christian, with one exception: apt to teach. The pastor must be apt to teach.

In 2 Timothy 2:24, he says this again: "And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient." Apt to teach. Patient. Twice now, the Bible tells us that the pastor has to be a man apt to teach. So the question has to be asked, What does that mean? Let me give you two Old Testament passages, and I think you are going to see it very quickly.

Consider 2 Kings 24:16: "And all the men of might, even seven thousand, and craftsmen and smiths a thousand, all that were strong and apt for war, even them the king of Babylon brought captive to Babylon." Here were men of might, men that were strong and apt for war. The pastor, likewise, must be apt to teach: fitted, capable, and prepared for the work before him.

In 1 Chronicles 7:40, the Bible says, “All these were the children of Asher, heads of their father's house, choice, and mighty men of valour, chief of the princes, and the number throughout the genealogy that were apt to the war and to battle were twenty and six

thousand men." We read about men being apt to war. What does that mean?

It means that they were fitted, young, strong, ready, and able. I have a young friend in the Air Force who wants to be a SERE specialist and is in SERE training. He recently texted me that, one day, he did 1,000 pushups. He is twenty years old. Have you ever wondered why, when there is a war, they do not try to call seventy-five- and seventy-eight-year-old men? The answer is because we are not apt for war. We are not fit; we are not strong anymore.

When the Bible speaks of being apt for war or apt to teach, it means someone who is fitted, ready, and able. The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia defines apt as "fitted, applied to one distinguished for readiness in meeting demands of some special situation or emergency." When someone is apt for war, he is ready, fit, and able to fight.

When someone is apt to teach, he is fitted to teach. He has the ability to teach and to communicate. This is like Ezra 7:6, which says that Ezra "went up from Babylon; and he was a ready scribe in the law of Moses, which the LORD God of Israel had given." He was a ready scribe in the law of Moses. In other words, he was ready, able, and equipped to teach.

So, if truth is going to be communicated, you have to have, number one, an apt shepherd. Number two, you not only have to have an apt shepherd; you also have to have an apt subject. We all know that any subject suitable to be taught should be taught. But in the context of Isaiah 28, particularly, we are talking about biblical truth. Here is the question: How is biblical truth to be taught?

Second Requirement: An Apt Subject

The larger question is, how is any truth going to be taught, or how should it be taught? There are principles being laid out. In Isaiah 28:10, we see this principle: "For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little." Then, in verse 13: "But the word of the Lord was unto

them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little."

Let me illustrate this. If you can remember your kindergarten days or the days of your first-grade class, how many of you began your education by reading Homer's Iliad and the Odyssey? No one began his first education by reading those books.

You learned your ABCs. Once you learned your ABCs, many of us learned to sight-read; the rest were taught phonics. I still remember those silly books with Dick, Jane, Sally, and Spot: "See Spot run. Look, Jane, look." You start out line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little, until finally, when you are able to read, you can read the Iliad and the Odyssey. In other words, you start out very small, at the very beginning. So biblical truth, Isaiah is saying, has to be taught foundationally.

A foundation is absolutely necessary for every part of life. Most of us live in houses. No house is built that began with the structure; every house begins with the foundation. Once the foundation is laid and poured, the structure can be built upon it.

The point about foundations is this: If you have not read through the Bible a number of times, then you have no idea concerning its themes, subjects, promises, warnings, and admonitions. You have to have a foundation in order simply to begin grasping the Word of God. I find much humor in the fact that when many people are converted, one of the first things they want to do is run to the book of Revelation and try to read and understand it, though they have never even read through the Bible one time.

They know nothing about Ezekiel or Daniel, and if you do not know Ezekiel and Daniel, you certainly do not know anything about the Book of Revelation. Moreover, they know nothing about symbolism, similes, metaphors, personifications, hyperboles, anthropomorphisms, and other figures of speech used in Revelation. How in the world can you understand something if you do not have a foundation? Understand it: you cannot do it.

Matthew Henry said, "Those that will not understand what is plain and level to their capacity, but despise it as mean and trifling, are justly amused with that which is above them." You will not learn

what you are capable of learning, but you are amused at what you cannot learn. It is absolutely ridiculous. Doctrine has to be taught line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little, and there a little. No one is capable of grasping, comprehending, and understanding everything at one time.

You can pick up any book of systematic theology. I recommend Berkhof's; I also like Hodge and Augustus Strong's book on systematic theology. But it does not matter which book you choose: they begin with one doctrine at a time. You may have the doctrine of God, the doctrine of man, or the doctrine of Christ, but they simply take one doctrine at a time.

Look at verse 9 of Isaiah 28. "Whom shall he teach knowledge? And whom shall he make to understand doctrine?" Then he answers, "Them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts." If you wish to have biblical knowledge and really understand doctrine, you must first be fed on milk. After you have been fed on milk, you can outgrow it and go for meat, something solid; but you have to start with milk.

The apostle argues this same principle in Hebrews 5:12–14: "For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." If you have need of milk, you are nothing more than a babe.

There is an old adage that everyone understands: we must learn to walk before we can run. That applies here. We have to have the milk before we can ever get to the meat. That is why Peter in 1 Peter 2:2 says, "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." Babies want milk. They need milk. Milk is absolutely necessary until they reach a certain stage in life. Then the milk is insufficient; it no longer satisfies them, and that is when the meat comes in.

The Necessity of Moving from Milk to Meat

This is why he asked, "Whom shall he teach knowledge? And whom shall he make to understand doctrine?" He says, "Them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breast." So unless you have gotten weaned from the milk of the word, you are never going to have the meat of the word. God did not intend for us to live our lives on milk. We have to be there until we reach the stage where we need the meat.

If you have not developed the habit of reading and studying the Scriptures daily, you will never leave babyhood. If you have not developed the habit of reading through the Bible, and, once you have read entirely through it, starting right back over and reading it over and over, you will never leave babyhood. It is just that simple.

When God saved me, I had an insatiable desire to learn the Scripture. I put myself on a reading schedule. I read through the Old Testament every month and the New Testament every week, and I did it over and over. I do not read it like that now, but I read from Genesis to Revelation, and when I get through, I start back. How many times I have read the Bible, I have no idea; I have never kept count. But I am simply saying that if you do not have a habit of reading through the Bible over and over, you will never leave babyhood. Moreover, if you have not developed the habit of listening to expositional sermons, learning the truth, and applying the truth, you are never going to leave babyhood.

Our Lord taught in parables. Mark 4:33 says, “And with many such parables spake he the word unto them, as they were able to hear it.” There are some people who are not able to hear certain truths from the Word of God. That is why the apostle said in Hebrews chapter five, “I fed you with milk.” You should have been teachers, but I had to go back to the milk because you regressed instead of progressing. You reversed instead of going forward.

The truth of the matter is this: most of us are not able to take the meat of the word. If we are unable to hear the basics and the fundamentals and understand them, how can we grasp that which is complicated and complex?

Let me give you another illustration. Look in your Bibles to Jeremiah chapter 12, verse 5. Here is the same argument presented just a little differently. He asked, “If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? And if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?”

He is asking two simple questions. Number one, if you cannot keep up with the footmen running, what makes you think you can run with horses? And if you cannot do things and prosper and get along and do what you should do in a land of peace, what are you going to do when the Jordan overflows and floods, and there is catastrophe after catastrophe and problem after problem? If you cannot function when it is easy, you are not going to function when it is difficult.

This is what the Bible means: our Lord taught them as they were able to hear it. In other words, some had to hear milk, and some had to hear meat. In order to communicate truth, you need an apt shepherd. You need an apt subject. We have the Word of God, which is an apt subject. The third thing you need is apt students. It does not matter how intellectual the shepherd is, how well he can communicate, or how glorious and marvelous the subject is. If the students are not ready, the class fails.

Third Requirement: Apt Students

Before I show you this from Isaiah, turn to the book of Acts and look at chapter 10 and verse 33. You remember how Peter was sent to the house of Cornelius? Cornelius was a Roman centurion. Verse 33. Look what he said. Look at what this Roman centurion said to Peter as Peter came to preach to them: “Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.”

Note what he said: “We’re all here present.” We came. We’re not only present; we understand that we’re in the presence of God. Thirdly, we’re ready to hear all things that God has commanded you to tell us. So here were some students who were ready.

Now go back to Isaiah chapter 28, because you have to have apt students. It does not matter if you have an apt shepherd and an apt subject; you must have an apt student as well.

Isaiah says, “But they also have erred through wine, and through strong drink are out of the way; the priest and the prophet have erred through strong drink, they are swallowed up of wine, they are out of the way through strong drink; they err in vision, they stumble in judgment. For all tables are full of vomit and filthiness, so that there is no place clean.”

Who can teach a bunch of drunks? The answer is, no one. Isaiah was an apt teacher, and he certainly had an apt subject, but neither the priests, nor the prophets, nor the people would listen to him. They were unteachable. They were incapable of hearing the Word of God.

I realize that in verses 7 and 8 we are talking about strong drink and wine, but look at verse 1 and then verse 3: “Woe to the crown of pride, to the drunkards of Ephraim.” Then in verse 3, “The crown of pride, the drunkards of Ephraim.” You can be drunk on pride just as you can be drunk on wine or strong drink.

In other words, these people were so puffed up and arrogant that they would not listen. You cannot teach someone who does not want to learn. You cannot teach someone with an insolent, arrogant, impudent, know-it-all attitude. It is impossible. I have often said there is no way in the world that I could ever teach today in a public school or a government school, especially since many teachers now have to defend themselves just to get into the classroom.

When you read about incidents in our public schools and hear some of the stories teachers tell, it is absolutely mind-boggling. I remember when I was a boy: if you talked back to a teacher, you were sent to the principal, and the principal did not merely sit there and counsel you. He bent you over and wore your little hiney out. Usually a note was sent home, and then you got it again from Mom and Daddy.

You cannot teach someone who will not listen, or someone who is impudent and has a know-it-all attitude. The Bible says in Proverbs 12:1, "Whoso loveth instruction loveth knowledge: but he that hateth

reproof is brutish." In other words, he is a dumb animal. You hate reproof; you hate instruction. God says you are nothing but an animal. In fact, when you get to Isaiah 1, some animals are a lot smarter than people.

The Bible says in Proverbs 15:32, "He that refuseth instruction despiseth his own soul: but he that heareth reproof getteth understanding." It is impossible to teach someone who is hot-headed, argumentative, and disrespectful. How can you communicate anything when people are unwilling to listen?

In 2 Timothy 2:2, the Apostle Paul tells Timothy, "And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also." He said, "The same commit thou to faithful men." It is not my responsibility to chase you down and try to teach you. Faithful men: if you want to learn, you are to be faithful to the teaching and preaching of the Word of God.

Many times I have known of trials, afflictions, and temptations that certain brethren and their families were facing. I was grieved for them, and I prayed for them and about the situation. In my study, I saw answers to their problems, so I developed a message that would answer those problems without identifying the individuals. I had a heart full of information and was ready to preach, but when I went to church, they were not there. So I preached to somebody else.

You cannot teach an unfaithful man. You cannot help someone who is unfaithful. The Bible says in Proverbs 20:6, "Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness: but a faithful man who can find?" David knew that for which he was praying in Psalm 12:1: "Help, Lord; for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men."

In order to be taught, you have to be consistent, continual, and faithful. It is impossible to teach someone in just two or three sessions. I tell people, “I’ve studied the Bible and read the Bible for fifty-five years, and I still don’t know it. And I never will know it, at least not like I should.” Yet there are people who want to teach Scripture who have never even read it all the way through one time.

I never will forget preaching in a church on the doctrine of election. The word elect and its equivalent occurs seventy-three times just in the New Testament. When I finished preaching, one man ran up to me angry and upset, telling me I should not preach or teach that. I said, “Wait. Let me ask you a question. Have you ever read the Bible all the way through one time?” He said, “No.” I replied, “How do you know what I’m preaching is not in some of what you have not read yet? Go home and read your Bible, and then come back and talk to me.” This is what we run up against. Isaiah had the knowledge.

He was an apt shepherd. He had an apt subject: the Word of God. He simply did not have any apt students. The problem is not always with the shepherd, nor is it always with the subject. Sometimes the problem is with the students. You remember 2 Timothy chapter 4, verses 3 and 4: “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.” These are people with itching ears who want someone merely to scratch them. They turn themselves away from the truth and turn to fables.

The Consequences of Rejecting Truth

Go back to Isaiah 28. You have to have an apt shepherd, an apt subject, and apt students. Look at verse 12. Isaiah was teaching and preaching: “To whom he said, This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing: yet they would not hear.” God was saying to the people, “This is what you need. This will give you rest. This will refresh you.”

This will be a blessing. This will help you. But they would not hear. I came to a realization a number of years back. It is a sad realization, but it is a true one: most Christians really do not want truth. They do not want to be made uncomfortable. They do not want to be rebuked, reproved, or condemned. They do not want to change. Hence, they remain ignorant and uninvolved.

I tell everybody, if ignorance is bliss, we should be the happiest people on earth, because we are abysmally ignorant, especially when it comes to the Word of God. So many people think erroneously,

“Well, if I don't know, then it doesn't bother me, and I'm not responsible for that which I do not know.” Really? What you are thinking is totally and completely untrue.

In Isaiah 28:11, God says, “For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people.” You will not listen to Isaiah, who is speaking to you in your own language? Fine. God will let you hear some stammering lips and a language that you do not understand: the Assyrians and the Babylonians.

Isaiah 10:1 says, “Woe unto them that decree unrighteous decrees, and that write grievousness which they have prescribed; to turn aside the needy from judgment, and to take away the right from the poor of my people, that widows may be their prey, and that they may rob the fatherless.” This is what they were doing. They were wicked and vile. They would not listen to Isaiah.

Then comes the question in verse 3: “And what will ye do in the day of visitation, and in the day of desolation which shall come from far? To whom will ye flee for help? And where will ye leave your glory? Without me they shall bow down under the prisoners, and they shall fall under the slain. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still.”

God says, “O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation. I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath. Will I give him a charge to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets? Howbeit he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so; but it is in his heart to destroy and cut off nations not a few.” The Assyrian is nothing more than the rod in God's hand, and the staff in his hand is God's indignation.

He does not know that he is serving me; it is simply in his heart to destroy and cut off. But God said, “I am sending him.” Do you realize that truth refused, rejected, and resisted only brings judgment? God said in Isaiah 28, “This is for your refreshing. This is for your rest.” But they would not hear. So God says, “You will not listen to someone speaking your own language. I will send you someone you do not understand, with stammering lips, and you will find my judgment.”

The sword of the Lord is a sharp two-edged sword, which means it cuts both ways. Truth rejected, resisted, and refused always brings judgment. In 2 Corinthians 2, beginning with verse 14, Scripture 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. 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?” When we preach and teach the Word of God and preach the Lord Jesus Christ, people repent and believe; Christians listen, hear, change their lives, and apply the truth to their lives. God says that when this happens, it is a sweet smell: His Son is preached. But when the Word of God is preached, Jesus Christ is magnified, and people gnash with their teeth, hate, despise, and reject Him, Christians may say, “I do not want that. I do not believe that. That is his private opinion.” No, no, no. What does God say? It is a sweet smell: His Son is preached. We are “the savour, a sweet savour to God in Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish. To the one we’re the savour of life unto life, to the other the savour of death unto death.”

Applications and Conclusion

The word of grace rejected becomes the word of condemnation. God’s Word never returns void. The simple exposition, explanation, and application of the Word of God is unhappily offensive to most modern-day professing Christians. They deem themselves above it, beyond it, or too proud to bow to it. They will not heed its teaching or its application.

They will evade its proclamation.

The second thing is this: if you and I are to really increase our knowledge, we have to go beyond the milk of the word. Look in your Bibles to Hebrews chapter six, beginning with verse one. The apostle says:

“Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of

baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this will we do, if God permit."

Now, he is not saying apostatizing; he is saying we are going forward. What is he saying?

These are basic doctrines, fundamentals. You should already know the doctrine of Jesus Christ, the doctrine of resurrection, baptism, and laying on of hands. If you are ever going on to perfection or maturity, you must be able to take the meat of the word and not simply the milk of the word.

Once the foundation has been laid, as he is talking about in verse one, you do not have to relay it. You start building the superstructure on that foundation. The third application is this: Truth will either reconcile us or condemn us. It will not lie dormant. It will not be ineffectual. It will not return void. The sun that melts the wax hardens the clay.

That sword cuts both ways. It will either reconcile or condemn. If we are going to communicate the Word of God, we need three things: an apt shepherd, an apt subject, and apt students. We need a shepherd willing, ready, able, and fitted to teach; subjects fitted and suitable to be taught; and students fitted, able, willing, ready, eager to learn and apply the Word of God.

Truth must be communicated, but it also must be received and applied to be made effectual.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to thee this day. We thank you for your word and for the opportunity to share. Lord, we pray that you would indeed make us faithful students of your word. Give us grace that we may serve thee acceptably with reverence and godly fear, that we may glorify thy name and honor thee by studying your word and applying it. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 32

Bridging the Gap

Introduction and Text

In Ezekiel 22:30–31, the Word of God says, “And I sought for a man among them that should make up the hedge and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it. But I found none. Therefore have I poured out my indignation upon them. I've consumed them with the fire of my wrath. Their own way have I recompensed upon their heads, saith the Lord.”

Some of you, I hope all of you, will remember that I recently preached a message entitled “This Would Solve Most Problems.” That message dealt with submission to God and to His divine providence. I gave one illustration from the life of Daniel, but mostly the message concerned the life of Joseph and his submission to the providential acts of God, even those acts that you and I would call bad, tragic, and even catastrophic events in his life. I also pointed out that these two men are the only two men in Scripture of whom absolutely nothing bad or evil is stated. Yes, they were sinners, but each one was basically submissive and obedient to God in His providential dealings in their lives.

The Question: Submission vs. Fighting Evil

The reason for this message is that a good brother in the faith asked me a simple question. He was present when I preached “This Would Solve Most Problems,” dealing with submission to God's divine providence. In light of that truth, how, where, and when are the faithful to rise up and fight against evil?

I want to answer that today and try to give illustrations as well. The truth of the matter is, we should always be fighting against evil and wickedness. We're commanded to hate evil, and therefore it must be dealt with in a very biblical manner. It must first be dealt with in our lives. If we're not going to deal with evil and wickedness in our own lives, we certainly have no right to complain about others who refuse to deal with evil in their lives. Moreover, we would not have any right to complain against those who refuse to fight against evil in society. We are always commanded to hate evil and to fight against evil. For instance, let me give you a couple of scriptures.

Biblical Command to Hate Evil

Psalm 97:10 says, “Ye that love the Lord hate evil: he preserveth the souls of his saints; he delivereth them out of the hand of the wicked.” Notice what he said: “Ye that love the Lord hate evil.” In Amos 5:14–15, God said, “Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live: and so the Lord, the God of hosts, shall be with you, as ye have spoken. Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate: it may be that the Lord God of hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph.”

Twice, then, we are told to hate evil and love good. It is impossible to love the good without hating the evil. Moreover, it is impossible to love God without at the same time hating everything contrary to God.

Years ago, I preached a message entitled “The Biblical Doctrine of Hatred.” The truth is that there is a biblical doctrine of hatred in the Bible. I had three points in that message: the Sovereign’s hatred, the Savior’s hatred, and the Saint’s hatred. That message probably needs to be preached again today, because there is still so much confusion on this subject.

Biblical hatred is not wicked or wrong, because it has been commanded by God. God, who is infinitely holy and infinitely righteous, has said, “Hate the evil, and love the good.” Therefore, it is neither wrong nor wicked to hate God’s enemies.

The Nature of Biblical Hatred

When I say that, let me point out that, in one sense of the word—the widest sense—all the unsaved would be God’s enemies. Yet when Scripture speaks of God’s enemies, it is not referring merely to those who are unsaved. It specifically refers to those who are in open rebellion and defiance against Him, seeking to dethrone Him, who hate Him and preeminently despise Him.

Look in your Bibles and hold Ezekiel 22; we are coming back there. But first look in Psalm 139, beginning with verse 19. We are still talking about bridging the gap. David says this.

David speaks of the wicked and bloody men: “Surely that will 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.” These men are truly vile. Then David asks, “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.” He concludes, “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.”

David says again, “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.” This is a hatred that is biblical and right. David asks God to search him, know him, and lead him in the right way. He says, in effect, “Lord, if this is wrong, you search me, you know me, and you lead me in the right way.” If this hatred were wrong, he would ask the Lord to correct him; but clearly it was not wrong at all.

Now, let me make this very clear. You may lawfully hate God’s enemies, but you may not lawfully hate your own enemies, because God has said, “Love your enemies,” your own enemies. Most of our enemies are enemies of our own making, because we have been

discourteous, ugly, hateful, and so forth. God clearly says that we are to love our enemies; we can hate His. Thankfully, and as it should be, His enemies turn out to be our enemies as well.

Turn now to the book of Ecclesiastes, chapter 3. This is a passage that most people know. Watch this passage: “A time to weep, and a time to laugh. A time to mourn, and a time to dance. A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together. A time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing. A time to get, and a time to lose. A time to keep, and a time to cast away. A time to rend, and a time to sew. A time to keep silence, and a time to speak. A time to love, and a time to hate. A time of war, and a time of peace.”

It is interesting that in our Bibles we have five books of wisdom literature. These five books are Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon. Someone has rightly pointed out that the book of Psalms teaches us how to worship, and the book of Proverbs teaches us how to behave. The book of Job teaches us how to suffer. The Song of Solomon teaches us how to love. And the book of Ecclesiastes teaches us how to behave. The truth is that each of these wisdom-literature books also teaches about fighting and also teaches about hatred, as does the rest of the entirety of the Word of God.

It is not in the nature of a true Christian to hate others. There may be many individuals whom we dislike. There may be individuals with whom we disagree. There may be individuals we simply do not wish to be around. But hatred does not grow in the soil of regeneration. Hatred is always in the soil of depravity and of fallen nature. The truth of the matter is this: our Lord classifies hatred of the brethren, or hatred of our non-enemies, literally as murder.

Let me explain a couple of passages. In Matthew chapter 5, verses 21 and 22, our Lord says, "You have heard it was said by them of old times, Thou shalt not kill. And whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment." Now look what He says: "But I say unto you that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whosoever shall say to his brother Raca shall be in danger of the council, but whosoever shall say thou fool shall be in danger of hell fire."

We understand probably every word there except the word Raca. The word Raca was a term of reproach in the time of our Lord. It was similar to what we would use when we call someone senseless, empty-headed, stupid, or an idiot. In other words, it is mocking and making fun of them.

In 1 John chapter 3, notice what is said specifically concerning hatred. Let us begin with verse 14. Our Lord says, "We know that we pass from death unto life." How do we know that?

"Because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer. And you know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him." So the Word of God tells us that we are not to be hating simply by nature, and hatred of our brethren is indeed murder.

A Time to Hate

Now, since we are told in Ecclesiastes 3:8 that there is a time to love and there is also a time to hate, consider the Hebrew word for hate, sone. It is translated in our Bibles 146 times. One hundred thirty-six of those times it is translated as hate. The other times it is translated as enemy, enemies, foes, and hateful.

Matthew Poole, commenting on Ecclesiastes 3:8, where it says there is a time to love and a time to hate, writes: "A time to love when God shall stir up the affection of love or give occasion for the exercise or discovery of it to others." And that is all he says. He does not make a comment on a time to hate. But think about this. If it is God who stirs up love in our hearts and gives us the occasion to exercise it and to demonstrate it to others, the opposite truth is also true. It is God who stirs up hatred and gives us the opportunity to discover it and to exercise it.

Here is something that most people have never thought about: God is absolutely sovereign. God is not the infuser of sin. He is not the instigator of sin. But God is certainly the controller of sin. God does use sin, ultimately, for His honor and His glory. That is what the Bible says: "The wrath of man shall praise the Lord, and the remainder of wrath shall he restrain." The wrath that will not ultimately redound to His honor and glory, He will restrain.

And so it is God who oftentimes turns our enemies to hate us and stirs up our hearts to hate them. Let me explain. I want you to turn in your Bibles to Psalm 105 and look at verses 23 through 25. This may shock you, but here it is.

Psalm 105:23 says, “Israel also came into Egypt, and Jacob sojourned in the land of Ham. And he increased his people greatly, and made them stronger than their enemies. He, that is God, turned their heart to hate his people, to deal subtly with his servants.” Note what God did: God turned their heart to hate his people, and He used that hatred for judgment. It is true that Pharaoh turned his own heart, and so did the Egyptians. But it is also true that here God turned their heart to hate his people. Clearly, then, God is sovereign even over hatred.

Bridging the Gap

Matthew Henry says, “A time to love and to show ourselves friendly, to be free and cheerful, and it is a pleasant time that there may come a time to hate, when we shall see cause to break off all familiarity with some that we've been fond of, and to be upon the reserve, as having found reason for our suspicion, which love is loath to admit.” In other words, love does not want to do that; it is loath to admit it, but we have to do it at times.

This is what I mean by bridging the gap. Remember, I told you about the message I preached, “This Would Solve Most Problems,” dealing with absolute and total submission to God in all of His providential acts toward us. Warren Luke asked me, if that is the case, how do we bridge the gap, or how do we go to fighting the enemies when we need to be fighting? This is what I am trying to show you.

There is a poem by Rudyard Kipling, who was in India, by the way, who understood what was going on. He wrote this poem, “The Wrath of the Awakened Saxon.” The poem pretty well summarizes everything that I have just told you: wrath and hatred is not in the root of regeneration by nature. It is in the root of depravity by nature.

"It was not part of their blood. It came to them very late with long arrears to make good when the Saxon began to hate. They were not easily moved. They were icy willing to wait till every count should be proved ere the Saxon began to hate. Their voices were even and low. Their eyes were level and straight. There was neither sign nor show when the Saxon began to hate.

"It was not preached to the crowd. It was not taught by the state. No man spake it aloud when the Saxon began to hate. It was not suddenly bred, it will not swiftly abate through the chilled years ahead when time shall count from the date that the Saxon began to hate." Basically, what he is saying is that there is a time to hate, just like Ecclesiastes chapter 3.

What has all this to do with our text in Ezekiel chapter 22? Turn back to Ezekiel 22, and note again verses 30 and 31. God said, "And I sought for a man among them that should make up the hedge and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it, but I found none." God sought for a man to make up the hedge and stand in the gap before Him for the land, but found none. "Therefore have I poured out my indignation upon them, I've consumed them with the fire of my wrath, their own way have I recompensed upon their heads, saith the Lord."

The Context of Ezekiel 22

The entire context of Ezekiel chapter 22 deals with God's judgment upon the nation of Israel. If we look at the latter part of this chapter before verses 30 and 31, we see the absolute alienation, treason, and defection of the people against God and against His law. Beginning with verse 23, the Lord says, "And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, say unto her, that is to Israel, Thou art the land that is not cleansed, nor rained upon in the day of indignation."

"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." The prophets were totally, absolutely corrupt, selfish, and covetous.

Verse 26 says, “Her priests have violated my law, and have profaned my holy things, and have put no difference between the holy and profane, neither have they showed difference between the unclean and the clean, and have hid their eyes from my sabbaths, and I am profaned among them.” There were the prophets, and there were the priests. Verse 27 says, “Her princes in the midst thereof are like wolves ravening the prey to shed blood and destroy souls to get dishonest gain.” There was the civil government.

He hits the prophets again: “And her prophets have daubed them with untempered mortar, seeing vanity and divining lies unto them, saying, Thus saith the Lord God, when the Lord had not spoken.” And now he hits the people: “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.”

In light of the total treason, alienation, and defection of the prophets, the priests, the princes, and the people, God says, “And I sought for a man among them that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it. But I found none.” He looked for a man to stand in the gap and make up the hedge—to rebuild the wall, bridge up the broken wall, and close the hole through which the enemy could infiltrate the city and gain a victory.

The word stand is the Hebrew word Amad. It means to stand, to remain, to endure, to take a stand, to stand upright, and remain standing. God was saying, “I’m looking for someone who is going to bridge up this hole and stand in this hedge.” In other words, “I want someone who is going to execute judgment. I want someone who is going to intercede for the land. I want someone who is going to vindicate my holy cause and my righteous law.”

It did not matter whether it was a prophet, a priest, a prince, or a common, ordinary person of the people. God was looking for someone to interpose himself between His judgment and the city, to execute His judgment, and to intercede for those who were righteous and innocent. In this instance, the enemy coming in at the gate was the Lord God Himself, coming as a man of war to destroy the people because of their sin and wickedness. God was looking for someone to

bridge the gap, prevent the righteous judgment coming upon the land and nation, and stand up to execute His judgments.

The point should be clear: there is a time when righteous men—men of faith, submission, and obedience—must stand and avert the righteous judgment of God, defend the innocent, and deal with the evil condemned by God.

Since I titled this message "Bridging the Gap," I must ask some questions. Have you ever wondered how David, the sweet psalmist of Israel, became the slayer of giants and the ultimate warrior king? Have you ever asked yourself how Samuel the prophet, the man of God, became the slayer and executioner of King Agag? How did Moses, the meekest man on earth, become the one who exercised the justice of God against those who rebelled against God and saw them executed?

Let us consider David as an illustration of one who bridged the gap, doing exactly what God has asked for in Ezekiel chapter 22 and verse 30. David went from being a poet, the sweet psalmist of Israel, to being a warrior. There was a preparation in his life.

Illustration: David Bridging the Gap

Young men and young ladies, listen carefully: God will always use a prepared person. You need to be prepared. Whatever area or field God calls you into, you need preparation. God only uses prepared people. David was being prepared to fight Goliath and never knew it. He was being prepared to become a warrior king and did not understand it. When the providence of God brought about the time and opportunity to fight Goliath, David was prepared.

I have often thought about this. Jesse, his father, called David and said, "Look, I want you to come. I want you to take these cheeses to the captains of your brothers, check on them, get their pledge, and bring it back." In other words, "I want proof that they are still alive. Bring it back." That was all David was going to do. He was sent by Jesse to check on his brothers, and I am sure he had absolutely no idea that he was going to face Goliath or what was about to come down.

Where did David derive his skill, his experience, and his combat preparedness? Psalm 144, verse 1, gives the answer: “Blessed be the Lord, my God, who teaches my hands to war and my fingers to fight.” It was God who taught him how to fight and to war.

But he did so through preparation. In 1 Samuel 17, notice what Goliath said: “And the Philistine said, I defy the armies of Israel this day. Give me a man that we may fight together.” Goliath was not simply defying the armies of Israel; he was also defying the God of the armies of Israel. When David went out to meet Goliath, he said, “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.” You cannot defy God’s armies or God’s people without defying God at the same time.

David had to fight Goliath. Most scholars will tell you that David was from the age of fifteen to seventeen when he faced Goliath. That is pointed out very clearly by what Saul said to David. How in the world did God prepare David? Notice what is recorded beginning in verse 32: “And David said to Saul, Let no man’s heart fail because of him. Thy servant will go and fight with this Philistine. And Saul said to David, Thou art not able to go against this Philistine, to fight with him, for thou art but a youth, a teenager, and he a man of war from his youth. And David said unto Saul, Thy servant kept his father’s sheep, and there came a lion and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock.”

“And I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth. And when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him. Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear. And this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing as he hath defied the armies of the living God. David said, Moreover, The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of the Philistine. And Saul said unto David, Go, and the Lord be with thee.” Certainly the Lord had to be with him, because Saul was not bound to go out there and fight with him himself, that is for sure.

Now, some observations on this passage are very relevant today. First of all, I want you to know that when David destroyed the lion

and the bear, he did not know that he was being prepared to fight Goliath. God was training him.

If you will note what the Scripture says, David actually went after the lion and the bear. He said in verse 35, “And I went out after him and smote him.” He said, “I smote him and delivered it out of his mouth.” In other words, he didn’t kill him at first.

He just hit him hard enough to retrieve the lamb. “But when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard and I smote him and I slew him.” So David then purposely went after the animal.

Why would David do that? Here’s a bear, and the bear takes the lamb and runs off, and David chases the bear and smites the bear, delivers the lamb, and when the bear turns around and rises up against David, David slays him. Why would David not say, “Well,

Let him have the lion. Let him have the lamb. I’m not running after that big brute, and I’m not going to fight the lion either. Why would David go after them and try to redeem the lamb? The answer is that David was a shepherd. Remember, the sheep did not belong to David; they belonged to David’s father. A shepherd’s responsibility is not only to feed the flock but also to protect it. Some animal had stolen a lamb from the flock, and David said, “No, this is not going to happen. I’m going to retrieve that lamb and bring it back, because it does not belong to me.”

Most people today would say, “The bear is hungry, too. Let him have something. I’d rather him eat the lamb than me.” Or, concerning the lion, “I’d rather him eat the lamb than me. I’m not running after that lion.” Why would we not do something like that? Because we are not shepherds.

In John chapter 10, our Lord says, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth; and the wolf catcheth him, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep.” David was willing to die for the little lamb. We are not shepherds in that sense of the word. We are not willing to protect the flock, our families, or do that which God requires of us. David was simply faithful to his duty and

obligation as a shepherd, defending the flock his father owned. A shepherd protects the flock; a father protects his wife and family.

A hireling runs away because he is a hireling. How do you expect God to use you to protect your family or your flock if you will not train or be trained by Him and be willing to be used by Him when His providential act brings it to pass in your life?

David used these opportunities for training. God's providence will always give us opportunities to train. He will always prepare us for whatever we are going to face. We do not know what we are going to face. Therefore, whatever God puts in our way, whatever He allows to befall us, is for our training and for our admonition. When David destroyed the bear and the lion, he had no idea that God was preparing him to fight a giant or to become a warrior king. David realized not only that God had prepared him for the hour, but also that there was a cause involved.

In 1 Samuel chapter 17 and verse 29, David's brothers were there, and Eliab happened to be his older brother. Eliab made fun of David and said that he knew the naughtiness of David's heart, claiming that David had come out merely to see the battle. That was not true, because the only reason David was there was that his father had sent him. David said, "What have I now done? Is there not a cause?"

After Eliab, his eldest brother, had berated him, David was asking, "What have I now done? Is there not a cause?" What he was asking was, "Is there not a cause to fight?" Yes, there was a cause to fight. Consider the insolence of Goliath. He was insulting everyone. He was insulting the army of God. He was insulting God. Think about his defiance of the army of Israel, the danger of defeat, Israel's subjection to its enemy, the tyranny of the enemy, and, above all, the blasphemy of God. There was quite a cause to fight.

The problem with Americans and American Christians is that we have lost our martial spirit. I do not know when I was last in a church and heard songs such as, “Am I a Soldier of the Cross?” “Onward, Christian Soldiers!” “Oh, the Fort Rhyme coming!” We do not even like to sing those songs. We do not like to read what the Apostle Paul told Timothy: “Fight the good fight of faith.” We do not like to read Ephesians chapter 6, where God gives us all this armor.

Why would He give us armor if He did not intend for us to fight? We have lost our martial spirits. We do not wish to prepare or engage the enemy; we wish to be comfortable and at ease.

We totally forget that there is a cause, and that is the cause of God and the cause of truth. If you have not signed up for ChristianWarriorTraining.com, from Keith Graves, it is absolutely free. He will tell you everything happening in all the churches in this country, including pastors being killed and churches being set on fire. Every week he puts it out. It is absolutely astounding what is going on, and our media is not reporting it.

I believe that as time passes, we are going to see more and more that there is a cause for which to be prepared. Because if we are not, I believe we are going to die. It is just that simple. Consider what is happening. Even in the last week, a woman was raped to death on the church house steps in Nashville, Tennessee, by a Muslim man. We are in for it up to our eyeballs and do not even realize it.

So, number three, here is the third observation: You have to consider the truth that David was not only prepared and understood the cause, but that his trust was in God alone.

In 1 Samuel chapter 17, look at what happens in verse 38: "And Saul armed David with his armor and he put a helmet of brass upon his head and he armed him with a coat of mail. And David girded his sword about his armor, and he assayed to go, but he had not proved it. And David said unto Saul, I cannot go with these, for I have not proved them. And David put them off."

You have to remember that Saul was head and shoulders above the normal, average Israelite. David was fifteen to seventeen years of age, and you can imagine how this armor covered him. David said, "I can't fight this. I haven't proved this. I can't use this."

That is like somebody handing Dinah a bazooka and telling her to blow a tank up. She has never held a bazooka or shot a bazooka; she could not use one. David knew that he did not need the world's armor and that since the word what he needed was God and God alone. David had already proved God in the bear and in the lion.

Here is a truth that we need to grasp, and it is very simple: If God does not protect us, we are not protected. I do not care what we have or what we are. If God does not protect us, we are not protected.

I have a friend who sends me military episodes of a war that is going on in Ukraine. The little videos are actual combat videos, very brief—some eight, nine, or ten minutes long, usually not longer than that. What amazes me is that every now and then you will see people shooting with rifles, and every now and then you will see tanks and all kinds of other things going.

Most of all, it is drones. Here you see enemy soldiers going into a building through one little opening. It does not matter; the drone goes right in. It is astounding how drones find them on the battlefield and in buildings. It is almost impossible to hide from them. How could anyone survive that? If God protects them, they will survive. If He does not, they will not. It is just that simple.

David bridged the gap from poet to warrior by being prepared, recognizing God's providence, understanding faith, and refusing to see the name of God blasphemed. David said, "Yes, there's a cause. I'm going to fight." That is how he bridged the gap.

The second illustration is from the life of Samuel. I have always been inspired by Samuel's life. When Samuel was a little boy, he was given to Eli and raised in the house of God. I do not suppose there was anyone more loving, kind, compassionate, or understanding than Samuel.

Illustration: Samuel Bridging the Gap

In 1 Samuel chapter 3, beginning with verse 20, we read: "And all Israel, from Dan, even to Beersheba, knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord. And the Lord appeared again in Shiloh, for the Lord revealed Himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the Lord." Everyone from Dan to Beersheba, from the northernmost to the southernmost point, knew that Samuel was the prophet of God.

Through Samuel, God sent King Saul on a journey. In 1 Samuel 15, beginning with verse 1, Samuel said unto Saul, "The Lord sent me to anoint thee to be king over his people, over Israel. Now therefore

hearken thou unto the voice of the words of the Lord. 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. Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not. But slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass." God had sent Saul to slay the Amalekites.

Nothing was to be spared; everything was to be killed. Saul started out correctly, because in verse 4, “And Saul gathered the people together and numbered them in Telaim, 200,000 footmen and 10,000 men of Judah.” Obviously, that would probably be a good army, capable of doing what God had demanded. But Saul did not obey God. In fact, he defied God. Verses 7 through 9 say, “And Saul smote the Amalekites from Havilah until thou comest to Shur, that is over against Egypt, and he took Agag, the king of the Amalekites, alive and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword. But Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and of the lambs, and of all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them, but everything that was vile and refuse that they destroyed utterly.”

Saul spared Agag, the king, and the best of the oxen and sheep. He spared all of that. He certainly knew what God commanded. Samuel knew what God commanded, but Saul did not do it. Saul had already claimed to be obedient to God, so Samuel confronted him: “If you've obeyed God, what meaneth the bleating of the sheep and the lowing of the cattle in my ear?” If he had obeyed God, everything would be dead. Then Samuel said, “When thou wast little in thine own sight, wast thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel? And the Lord anointed thee king over Israel. And the Lord sent thee on a journey, and said, Go and utterly destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them till they be consumed. Wherefore then didst thou not obey the voice of the Lord, but didst fly upon the spoil, and didst evil in the sight of the Lord?”

He flew upon the spoil. Saul was covetous and selfish; he wanted it for himself. So God basically rejected Saul from being king. The amazing thing that happens in this chapter now comes upon little Samuel. It is an amazing illustration of

SCRIPTURE READING - 1 Samuel 15:32-33 (KJV)

> Bridging the gap from preacher to warrior. We read in 1 Samuel chapter 15, verse 32: “Then said Samuel, Bring hither to me Agag, the king of the Amalekites. And Agag came unto him delicately. And Agag said, Surely the bitterness of death is past. And Samuel said unto him, As thy sword hath made women childless, so shall thy mother be childless among women. And Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord in Gilgal.” Now look at verse 32: “Then said Samuel, Bring ye hither to me Agag, the king of the Amalekites. And Agag came unto him delicately.”

The Hebrew word is also daintily. In my mind, I can just see Agag pressing up to Samuel, saying, “Who’s afraid of this little preacher? Surely the bitterness of death is over. This little preacher is not going to do anything to me.” But the Bible says, “And Samuel took the sword, and hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord in Israel.” The word before is the Hebrew word panim, and it means literally in the presence of or in the face of. In other words, it was just as if God was standing right there. Samuel took the edge of the sword and hewed Agag to pieces, doing to Agag exactly that which God ordained and exactly that which God wanted to be done. He did it as unto the Lord.

Without getting into another message on this, in one sense this could also illustrate the truth known as the lesser magistrate. The lesser magistrate means that when a higher magistrate refuses to do his duty and obligation, the one under him is to step in and perform that duty. Since Trump is president, if he would not do what needed to be done, then Vance should step in and do it. If Vance would not do it, then the Speaker of the House should step in.

In other words, you would come all the way down. The same thing would apply to the governor of the state: if the governor would not do it, the lieutenant governor; if the lieutenant governor would not do it, then the Speaker of the House. It would go all the way down. The same principle applies in every county. It is the duty of the lesser magistrate. There is a wonderful little booklet by Matt Trella on the doctrine of the lesser magistrate, and it is a wonderful and true booklet.

But you have to understand something. Saul was the highest civil magistrate, but Samuel was the highest spiritual magistrate. The word magistrate, if I remember correctly, in the Hebrew is esser. It is used not only of the civil magistrate, but also of prophets and preachers, because there is a spiritual magistrate just as there is a civil magistrate. Clearly, then, Samuel stepped in and did that which God demanded to be done.

The first message I preached on the Black Robed Regiment dealt with the preachers in the American War for Independence. Historically, God's preachers have always been fighters. There was Peter Gabriel Muhlenberg, James Caldwell, and so many others. It is astounding how God used these men, especially Moses Allen and his brother Thomas. There is also the message on Confederate chaplains. These men have always been fighters.

Now understand what has happened. In 1 Samuel chapter 16, the Lord said unto Samuel, “How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him for reigning over Israel? Fill thine horn with oil, and go, and I will send thee to Jesse the Bethlehemite. For I have provided me a king among his sons.” Samuel said, “How can I go? If Saul hear it, he will kill me.” The Lord said, “Take a heifer with thee, and say, I am come to sacrifice to the Lord. And call Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show thee what thou shalt do, and thou shalt anoint unto me him that I name unto thee.” God had sent Samuel to Bethlehem to anoint David king.

“And Samuel did that which the Lord spake, and came to Bethlehem. And the elders of the town trembled at his coming and said, Comest thou peaceably? And he said, Peaceably. I've come to sacrifice unto the Lord. Sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice. And he sanctified Jesse and his sons and called them to the sacrifice.”

Here is the astounding thing: before Samuel could enter Bethlehem, the elders sent a delegation and asked, “Are you coming peacefully?” What a question to ask a preacher. Why would they ask it? They had heard what he had done to Agag. The Bible says, “And the elders of the town trembled at his coming.” The word trembled is the Hebrew word charad, meaning to tremble, to quake, to be afraid, or to be anxious. In other words, they were shaking in their boots, so

to speak. They were terribly afraid because Samuel was coming, and they wanted to know whether he was coming peaceably.

Can you imagine three or four preachers getting together in this day and time and going to a city council meeting or a county council meeting, and before they can reach the steps, a delegation is sent out asking, "Are you fellows coming peacefully or not?" Sadly enough, there is no reason to be afraid of most preachers today. Most preachers cannot pray, preach, fight, or do anything except be CEOs of corporations or something like that.

How did Samuel bridge the gap? How did he move from preacherhood to executioner, or to warrior? He knew the will of God and the Word of God. He knew that he was a magistrate equally as Saul was a magistrate. If you do not know the will of God and the Word of God, it is too late to try to figure them out in an emergency situation. If I am surrounded by people trying to harm Alice and me, and I have to determine what I am biblically allowed to do, it is too late. You need to know the Word of God, the will of God, and what God says about self-defense and self-protection. Samuel fulfilled his magisterial duty in light of Saul's defection. If you are ever going to be used of God to bridge the gap, save your family, save anybody, or do whatever is necessary, you had better be preparing.

You had better be training yourself and training your mind. We need to be vigilant, especially concerning tyranny and oppression. Most of the time, I think we are like that frog sitting in warm water, and the eye is turned up to boil, and the frog just sits there until he is boiled; once he is boiled, he is cooked, and it is over. So we have to be vigilant. We have to be looking at things, and we have to be prepared.

Look in your Bibles to the book of Numbers, chapter 10, and then we will make some applications. This is astounding. I was reading through the book of Numbers recently, and this really hit me very plainly. Look what God says in verse 9: Numbers 10 and verse 9.

He tells his people, "And if you go to war in your land against the enemy that oppresseth you, then shall you blow an alarm with the trumpets, and you shall be remembered before the Lord your God, and you shall be saved from your enemies." But note, if you would,

he said in verse 9, “And if you go to war in your land, in your land, against the enemy that oppresses you.” In other words, the enemy is within the land; he is not coming from the outside. We have plenty of enemies in our land today, and plenty who want to oppress and tyrannize.

Samuel and David are two men who both bridge the gap. I have not even talked to you about Samson, Moses, or Phinehas. I am simply pointing out the fact that there is a time when God expects us to stand in the gap, make up the hedge, intercede for the land, and do whatever is needed and necessary.

Applications for Believers

Here are a couple of applications. First, we may dream of victory and of being used and useful to God, but unless we are prepared, God will never use us. Many individuals like to think that they will physically fight when it comes time to fight, but it will never happen, because they are not willing to fight now mentally, emotionally, or spiritually. They are not willing to keep their minds pure, their lives clean, and do what is right.

You have to have a biblical mindset. If you do not already have a warrior mentality, a fighting mentality, when it comes time to fight physically, you will never fight physically, because it stems from a biblical mindset.

Second, each of us knows this because we have heard it all our lives: there are always loud talkers, braggarts, and show-offs talking about what they are going to do. The truth is, those are the ones who will never do anything. The man who always tells you what he is going to do to you is not going to do anything. The man who is going to do something is the man who does not say a word.

He just steps up and does it. Here is an anonymous quotation: “Beware the quiet man. For while others speak, he watches, and while others act, he plans, and when they finally rest, he strikes. Beware the quiet man.” God is going to use quiet, prepared, submissive, and faithful men. Quiet obedience and preparation are far more important than daydreaming and loud talk.

In order to bridge the gap—God requires us to submit to Him in His providence—there comes a time, as in Ezekiel chapter 22, when God says, “I’m just looking for someone who’s going to stand in the gap and make up the hedge. I’m looking for someone who’s going to bridge this gap and intercede for the innocent. I’m looking for someone who’s going to execute My justice and righteousness, stand up for My law, and stand against tyranny and wickedness. I’m looking for someone.” How do we bridge that gap?

By prayer? Yes. By preparation? Yes. By faith? Yes. By submission? Yes. We must recognize the will of God, the Word of God, and the proper time when God says, “There’s a time to love and a time to hate. There’s a time to live and a time to die. There’s a time to fight.” We must ask God for wisdom and discernment, so that when that time comes, we will know His will and His Word and move under His authority, in His will, and in His Word.

This is bridging the gap, standing in the gap, making up the hedge, honoring God, defending the innocent, and doing what we need to do as shepherds. A pastor is called a shepherd. Jesus Christ is the good Shepherd, the great Shepherd, and the chief Shepherd. Pastors are under-shepherds, and every head of his house is an under-shepherd of his family. We need to understand bridging the gap when it is time to say, “Lord, I know what You would have me to do, and I need to do it.”

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank You for Your Word and Your truth. We ask Your blessing and Your help. Teach us, we pray, in Christ’s name. Amen.

CHAPTER 33

Vain Worship

Introduction: The Problem of Vain Worship

Matthew 15, verses 1 through 9: "Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying, Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they wash not their hands when they eat bread. But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; And honour not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition. Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias 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 they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."

I trust that you can see in verse 9 where the title "Vain Worship" comes from. Do you enjoy wasting your time? How about wasting the time of others? When you waste your time, and especially when

you waste the time of others, it is theft. The stealing of time is just as wrong and just as wicked as the stealing of property.

When you make an appointment to meet someone and you're 15 or 30 minutes late for no reason whatsoever, you've just stolen that amount of time. In vain worship, you not only waste your time, you also waste the time of others. You are engaging in that which God absolutely hates and despises. It is exasperating to spend hours on a project just to see it fall apart, especially when you understand that all of your labor is in vain and the money that you spent is gone. It was fruitless, useless, and worthless.

Years ago, I helped a brick mason for a little while. I had a barbecue pit on a concrete foundation, and I decided to build myself a block wall around it. I did. It took me all day long to build that wall. I plumbed it and did everything the way I should, I thought. Then I called my brick mason friend over, let him look at my wall, and asked what he thought.

He walked up and down it, put his hand on his chin, and said, “Hmm.” Then he kicked it, and my wall fell. I had mixed the mortar wrong, and he knew it. Thankfully, he built the wall for me, and it was built right. But all the labor I had engaged in that day was gone. It was vain, foolish labor.

We have a pond near us—not our pond—which used to be important because it had a little spillway and a gristmill. Its dam had been condemned for years because it was worthless. The family that owns it decided to put a new bridge across it so they could walk, ride golf carts, and use four-wheelers there.

I watched a man build the dam and bridge. They spent $30,000 on it. When it was finished, it was beautiful. But it was not up a month before a torrential rain washed the dam away. Two weeks ago, that beautiful bridge was twenty feet down in a great hole. All that labor and money had been spent in vain.

Our Lord is speaking of something far more involved than a dam or a brick wall. He says, “But in vain they do worship me.” The Greek word for “vain” is *maten*, meaning that which is useless, fruitless, worthless, idle, unprofitable, and of no purpose. It is one thing to

waste your time, another to waste someone else's time, and something altogether different to waste time in vain worship.

Old John Trapp, the Puritan, said, "For they lose their labor, and which is worse, they commit sin. Displeasing service is double dishonor, and dissembled sanctity is double iniquity."

It is sad, but true, that most Christians never genuinely think about worship. They attend what are called worship services, where everything is laid out, performed, and done, and then leave without really worshiping or thinking about worship. Simply attending church does not equate with worship. Worship could be done, and should be done, in a church, but going to church does not necessarily mean that someone has worshiped God. Moreover, if they have worshiped, it does not necessarily mean they have worshiped correctly—that is, biblically and scripturally.

In Matthew chapter 15, the Pharisees were intent on a certain kind of worship. It was a worship of their design and making, according to their traditions. It was acceptable unto them, and they demanded that their traditions and form of worship be fostered upon others as well. Yet it was totally useless, worthless, and in vain, and rejected by God. Simply because someone engages in something religious does not mean that he has worshiped God.

John Calvin, speaking of the passage, "But in vain they do worship me," said: "The words of the prophet run literally thus: 'Their fear toward me has been taught by the precept of men.' But Christ has faithfully and accurately given the meaning that in vain God is worshiped when the will of men is substituted in the room for doctrine. By these words, all kinds of will-worship, as Paul calls it, are plainly condemned. For as we have said, since God chooses to be worshipped in no other way than according to His own appointment, He cannot endure new modes of worship to be devised."

"As soon as men allow themselves to wander beyond the limits of the Word of God, the more labor and anxiety they display in worshiping Him, the heavier is the condemnation which they draw upon themselves, for by such inventions religion is dishonored." There are two very important truths here that our Lord makes in

reference to worship. According to these two truths, all worship such as this is vain, useless, worthless, of no value, and purposeless.

Heartless Worship Is Vain Worship

First of all, in verses 7, 8, and 9, heartless worship is vain worship. He said in verse 7, “Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias 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 they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.” Our Lord in verse 8 is quoting from Isaiah 29 and verse 13: “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.”

What is heartless worship? Heartless worship, which we are going to be discussing for a little while, is intimately connected with the next point; in Matthew 15, you will shortly see how they connect. Heartless worship is that which is dead, formal, ceremonial, ritualistic, and performed by way of habit, dogma, and tradition. It is something performed without any thought, without any feeling, or any involvement. Let me give you a good illustration of what I am going to call heartless worship.

It is what most professing Christians do every Sunday. They attend church, sing, participate in the offering, listen to a sermon, and then go home and enjoy dinner. There has not been any praise or thanksgiving in their hearts, any appreciation or expression of love to the one true and living God, or any sensible thoughts in regard to God, His attributes, His greatness, His majesty, His power, or His mercy. The most the average Christian could say on Sunday after participating in what was called a worship service is, “We went to church.” That is it: “We went to church.” Many have stated, and I have heard them state, that they go to church because it makes them feel good. The problem is that worship is not for you; it is for God. It really does not matter how you feel, because you are there to give God the glory that is due unto His name.

He said in verse 8, “This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips.” Lip worship, or mouth

worship, is nothing more than mouthing the words. It is simply saying things without the heart being engaged.

God has commanded us to love Him with all of our hearts, all of our minds, all of our strength, and all of our being. Deuteronomy 6:5 says, "And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might." Deuteronomy 10:12 says, "And now, Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul?" In Matthew 22:37, Jesus Christ said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind." He said it again in Mark 12:30: "And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength."

This is the first commandment. If God commands us to love Him with all of our hearts, should our worship of Him be any different? If we love Him with all of our hearts, then our hearts should certainly be engaged in His worship. There should be real, warm, genuine affection for our Lord. Usually in the Bible, the word "heart" is used synonymously with the mind. Therefore, in worship, our minds should be actively engaged.

We are to be thinking, praying, and meditating for enlightenment, asking the Father to teach us and enable us to apply the truth, and giving Him praise and honor for all of His mercies and grace to us. We should not be sitting with a distressed look or a frown on our face, planning the afternoon's excitement—"What are we going to do after this is over?"—or planning our next week's work. We should not be thinking about our gardens or anything else. We should be actively thinking about God and His work of grace in our hearts.

Hold Matthew 15, but turn to Psalm 103. Here is an excellent illustration of what it means, I believe, to worship God with all of your heart. Look in Psalm 103, beginning with verse 1. If you would please, notice how David begins this Psalm and what he says in reference to blessing God: “Bless the Lord, O my soul.”

Now watch: “And all that is within me, bless his holy name.” He did not say, “Part of me is going to bless you, Lord, while I am

thinking about something else and planning for the week's work." No, no, no. He says, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name."

Now I want you to watch these next verses. Even while you are listening to a message, you can still actively do this in your mind and in your heart. He says, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits." While I am teaching, while I am preaching, or while any other preacher is preaching, if some of those benefits come to mind, or some of those benefits are suggested or mentioned, you can pause in your mind and say, "Thank you, Father, for that. Lord, thank you for allowing me to live. Thank you for allowing me to have truth." You could do that. Look what he says: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits."

Here are some of the benefits that He gives us daily: "Who forgiveth all thine iniquities"—I like that—"who healeth all thy diseases"—even the coronavirus. "Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies; who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's." These are some of the things David says he will bless the Lord for with all that is within him. Our hearts and minds can engage in such things even while we are listening to the sermon and while truth is being proclaimed to us.

If you look back in your Bible to Matthew 15:9, what did our Lord say? "But in vain they do worship me." In verse 7 He says, "Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias 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 they do worship me." When we come to the house of God, to our prayer closet, or wherever we are, our hearts are to be engaged in worship, study, and prayer, because heartless worship is vain, useless worship.

Humanistic Worship Is Vain Worship

That leads to my second point: humanistic worship is vain worship. Look in verse 1: "Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying, Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders?" "For they wash not their hands when they eat bread." But He answered, "Why do ye also transgress the

commandment of God by your tradition? For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; And honour not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition." Then He says, "Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you," again speaking of heartless worship.

Our Lord is referring to Isaiah 29:13. That is what He is quoting in verse 8. The last phrase is this: "...and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men." Their fear toward me is taught by the precepts of men. That phrase is exceedingly revealing. It demonstrates not only where they were, but also where we are. What our Lord is saying in Isaiah 29:13, as well as Matthew 15:8, is that most people have never been taught of God. The only thing they know is that which man has taught them. There has never been a real, genuine experience with the Lord.

In Psalm 71:17, David said, "O God, thou hast taught me from my youth: and hitherto have I declared thy wondrous works." Note what he said: "Thou hast taught me from my youth." In John 6:45, our Lord says, "It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God." Listen carefully to the rest of this verse: "And they shall be all taught of God." Then He says, "Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me." Those whom God teaches actually come savingly to the Lord Jesus Christ. Those whom men teach do not necessarily come savingly to the Lord Jesus Christ.

They may make a lip profession, a mouth profession, but their heart is certainly not engaged. I think of the illustration of Billy Sunday, the great Presbyterian evangelist. He was walking down the street and met an old drunk. The old drunk said, "Hey, Mr. Sunday, you remember me, don't you?" Billy Sunday said, "No, I do not." He said, "Yeah, I'm one of your converts." Billy said, "Bless God, you must be. You're certainly not one of God's. That's for sure."

There is a big difference between my teaching and that which God teaches. The apostle Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 4:9, "But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye

yourselves are taught of God to love one another." And in Job 36:22, he said, "Behold, God exalteth by his power: who teacheth like him?"

One of the greatest problems that we have in Christendom today is the fact that there are many church members who have never genuinely been convicted of their sin. They have never been converted by the grace of God. They have been instructed by man as to what they should do and believe, but they have never had a real saving experience with the grace of God.

I remember when I was seven years old, the pastor of our church came to me and said, "You're old enough to join the church. You're old enough to be baptized. You need to come forward next Sunday, and I'll baptize you, and you'll be a member." That is exactly what I did. The same thing happened to Alice. We were church members, but unsaved until years later. I am simply pointing out the fact.

You have to remember that the Pharisees, whom our Lord is dealing with in Matthew chapter 15, were regarded as the fundamentalists in the New Testament. They believed, but they believed that which was taught by the precepts of men. They believed the tradition of the elders.

Now look at verses 1 and 2. We are talking about humanistic worship. It is totally unacceptable. "Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying…" They were confronting Jesus: "Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they wash not their hands when they eat bread." The washing of the hands, and the washing of the cups and platters and all kinds of things, had a great deal of importance to these Pharisees.

Matthew Henry said concerning the Pharisees, "They placed a great deal of religion in supposing that the meat that they touch with unwashed hands would be defiling to them. The Pharisees practiced this themselves, and with a great deal of strictness imposed it upon others, not under civil penalties, but as a matter of conscience, and making it a sin against God if they did not do it." So they made it a sin if you did not.

That is why they ask, "Why do your disciples transgress?" A transgression is a sin, so they made it a sin not to wash your hands before eating. Rabbi Joseph was determined that eating with

unwashen hands was as great a sin as adultery. Rabbi Akiba, when kept close prisoner, received water both to wash his hands and to drink with his meat. When most of it was accidentally spilled, he washed his hands with what remained, leaving himself nothing to drink, saying that he would rather die than transgress the tradition of the elders. They would not eat meat with anyone who had not washed before eating meat.

This mighty zeal in so small a matter would appear very strange if we did not still see it incident to church oppressors: they are not only fond of practicing their own inventions, but furious in pressing them upon others. Modern-day professing Christianity is full of rules, regulations, demands, prohibitions, dogmas, ceremonies, rituals, and traditions of men. Yet while these things are emphasized, many will deny biblical law and the law of God.

I never will forget years ago, when wire-rim glasses were in vogue. A pastor friend had sons who wore them and asked them to attend a large independent Baptist convention. They did not want to go because they believed people would make fun of their glasses. He persuaded them to come, but the first sermon preached was against wire-rimmed glasses because the Beatles wore them. Therefore, the glasses had to be sinful. The boys told their father, “We told you this was going to happen.”

The point is this: these traditions become dogmas. Thus they ask Him, “Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they wash not their hands when they eat bread.”

Our Lord answered them with another question: “Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?” Humanistic rules and regulations, while followed to the letter, allow a person to violate the law of God with a clear conscience because he has kept the faith according to his own precepts and understanding. They asked why His disciples did not wash their hands before eating, and He asked why they transgressed the commandment of God by their tradition.

He gives a good illustration of how they violated the law of God by their tradition. He says, “For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die

the death. But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; And honour not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition." Man's traditions, dogmas, rules, and regulations not only violate the law of God; they make it void.

What does it mean when they say, "It is a gift"? In Mark chapter 7, which we will shortly read, the word "Corban" is used. "Corban" is a Hebrew word meaning a gift, or something dedicated to God.

The Pharisees were notorious for making such dedications. They devoted their property to God for what they considered sacred use, as they pleased. Whenever they used the word "Corban," "gift," or "dedicated," it meant that they were giving that property to God.

Albert Barnes explains the practice: "The law of God required that a son should honour his parent, among other things, provide for his wants when he was old and in distress. Yet the Jewish teachers said that it was more important for a man to dedicate his property to God than to provide for the wants of his parent. If he had once devoted his property, once said it was Corban or a gift to God, it could not be appropriated even for the support of a parent. If a parent was needy and poor, and should apply to a son for assistance, the son could reply, 'It is devoted to God. This property which you need, by which you might be profited by me, it is Corban, I give it to God.' The Jew said the property could not be recalled, and the son was not under obligation to aid a parent with it."

"He had done a more important thing in giving it to God. The son was free. They would not suffer him to do anything for his father after that. Thus, he might in a moment free himself from the obligation to obey his father or his mother."

The fifth commandment tells you to honor your father and your mother. Honor your father and your mother means far more than saying "yes, sir" and "no, sir" and "yes, ma'am" and "no, ma'am."

The Bible is very clear, and God is still talking about the fifth commandment. In 1 Timothy chapter 5 and verse 4, He says: "But if any widow have children or nephews, let them learn first to shew

piety at home, and to requite their parents: for that is good and acceptable before God."

There are several things to note. "If any widow have children or nephews." This normally goes to the immediate family, but it also goes to the extended family. He says, "If any widow have children or nephews, let them learn first to shew piety at home." What is piety? Piety is another word for godliness, sanctity. He says, "If any widow have children or nephews, let them learn first to shew godliness at home."

“And to requite their parents.” The word “requite” means literally to pay back. Your parents took care of you when you were young. When you were a baby or a child, you could not feed, clothe, doctor, or educate yourself. Your parents did all that for you. They fed you and spent money on you.

When you are an adult and your parents are elderly, sickly, or in need of help or assistance, God says that you pay them back and take care of them, “for that is good and acceptable before God.” What God requires, then, is that children pay back their parents. In other words, they are required to help their elderly parents.

Every time one of my daughters calls me, I say, “When are you coming home to help take care of your elderly parents?” They answer, “Oh, Daddy, you’re in better health than we are.” That may be true, but I still like to ask when they are coming home to help their elderly parents. I say, “Your mother sure could use some help. I need help fixing fence. Come on up.” It never works out, but that is all right; I still try. This is exactly what it means. I have no doubt that if I were really sick and needed help, my girls would come and help me. There is no problem there. But God says we are to pay them back.

What the Pharisees had done was use the magic word “Corban” to get around the fifth commandment. They taught that a person did not have to help his parents if he merely said the property or money was dedicated to God. Once dedicated, it could not be used for such a mundane purpose as taking care of elderly parents. Thus they were making void the fifth commandment.

Sometimes unethical and unloving sons paid graft to the rabbinical legalists for such dodges. Could it be possible that some of those to whom our Lord was speaking had done exactly what He was condemning? In Matthew 15:1-2 we read, “Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying…” They traveled a good way to confront Him. The same matter is repeated in Mark chapter 7.

“Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders?” Mark 7 gives essentially the same account. The Pharisees and certain scribes from Jerusalem saw some of His disciples eat bread with defiled, that is to say, with unwashen, hands, and they found fault.

Beginning with verse 7, our Lord says again: “Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.” Then He explains: “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. And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition.”

He then gives the example: “For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death: But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; he shall be free. And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother; Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye.”

It is possible that our Lord knew some of the men asking Him this question were guilty of the very thing He was exposing. Humanistic worship not only violates the Word of God; it makes it void. The precepts of men are not the precepts of God.

In Matthew 15:4, our Lord says plainly: “For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother”—the fifth commandment—“and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death.” Our Lord associates the death penalty with violating the fifth commandment. When He said, “For Moses said, Let him die the

death," or, "He that curseth his father or mother, let him die the death," He said in Mark 7, "Moses said it."

The Consequences of Replacing God's Word

Let me tell you what passages He is referring to. First, Exodus 21:17: "And he that curseth his father, or his mother, shall surely be put to death." Leviticus 20:9 says: "For every one that curseth his father or his mother shall be surely put to death: he hath cursed his father or his mother; his blood shall be upon him." Proverbs 20:20 says, "Whoso curseth his father or his mother, his lamp shall be put out in obscure darkness."

Our Lord is saying that God commands us to honor our father and our mother. The opposite of honoring them is cursing them. You either honor them or you curse them; there is no in-between. In honoring your father and mother, there is the promise of long life. In cursing them, there is the attachment of the penalty of death, indicating not only a shortened life, but a death penalty as well.

What these Pharisees had done was invent a way to circumvent keeping the fifth commandment and obeying the law of God. But they could not invent a way to circumvent the judgment and wrath of God. God says, "Whosoever curseth his father or mother, let him die the death."

Matthew Henry amplifies this point: "The sin of cursing parents is here opposed to the duty of honoring them. Those who speak ill of their parents or wish ill to them, who mock them or give them taunting and approbrious language, break this law. If to call a brother Raca is so penal, because God demands the death penalty, what is it to call a father so? By our Saviour's application of this law, it appears that denying service or relief to parents is included in cursing them. Though the language be respectful enough and nothing abusive in it, yet what will that avail if the deeds be not agreeable?"

"It is but like him that said, I go, sir, and went not." A child could be very polite and agreeable, yet if he disobeyed, he still cursed his parents. I have known individuals who literally cursed their parents. I know one young man who balled up his fist, hit his father in the

face, knocked him down and knocked him out, because his father was seeking to correct him.

Our Lord is saying that whenever you try to substitute man's law for God's law and man's worship for God's worship, it is absolutely, totally, and completely unacceptable because it is vain.

Applications: Worship in Spirit and Truth

Look carefully at verse 9 of Matthew 15: “But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines”—what?—“the commandments of men.” In other words, when there is preaching and teaching, it must be biblical doctrine.

The first application is this: God is absolutely sovereign. He has the absolute right to demand and determine what is acceptable unto Him in worship. Anything contrary to His demands is unacceptable. If Steve came to my house for supper and told me, “I really, really like a beef brisket and chocolate cake and peas, but I do not like cauliflower and broccoli,” and I invited him over, only to serve him a cauliflower and broccoli casserole, do you think he would be pleased? No, because he told me what pleased him, but I did not give him what pleased him; I gave him what pleased me.

It is the same thing with God. God says, “Here is what pleases me in worship. I want a heartfelt worship. I want your mind engaged. I want you to think biblically, scripturally, and doctrinally. I do not want you thinking about the traditions of men, planning your afternoon, or planning your week’s work. I want your mind actively engaged upon me.”

The second thing is this: The things man demands—the rituals, ceremonies, rules, and regulations—are insufficient and unacceptable in the worship of God.

There are churches where, if you go there, they will tell you, “You kneel now. You stand now. You kneel now. You have to do it our way. This is what we are telling you.” Most people go, and they simply kneel, stand, and do whatever they are told. Unhappily, this is where we are. People come up and say, “Well, we like it like this.” Have you ever stopped to think that your service and worship may be nice, warm, charming, colorful, neat, desirable to you, and satisfying to

you, yet could be vain and unacceptable to God? Worship is not for you. It is for God.

Unless you have a biblical mandate, unless God says, “This is the way you do it,” you do not add to it. You do not say, “I know God says this, but I prefer this way, or I think this way.” Worship is not for you. It is for God.

This is what He is telling us in Matthew 15: heartless worship is vain worship, and humanistic worship is vain worship. When the Word of God is perverted or replaced, the worship of God is corrupted. What did they do? They replaced the Word of God with their traditions. They corrupted the worship of God. They were not giving God worship; they were fulfilling their traditions. One cannot worship correctly apart from the Word of God.

John 4:24 says, “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.” God has placed two boundaries on His worship. First, He does not want heartless worship. It must be in spirit. That means your spirit must be involved, but the Holy Spirit of God must be involved as well. When we worship God, there is our spirit and the Holy Spirit on one side to keep us out of the ditch.

On the other side, we must worship in truth. In other words, our worship must be in line with the Word of God, with the mandates, demands, and commands of God. If we do not have boundaries on each side of our worship, inevitably we will fall into the ditch. The boundary is to keep us straight. “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.” When we worship God in spirit, our hearts are involved.

Our minds are working as we thank God and acknowledge His mercy and grace. You can listen and at the same time say, "Lord, thank you for providing for me." When forgiveness of sins is mentioned, you may say, "Lord, I praise you for that. I thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ." Or, hearing an application about worship, pray, "Lord, help me to make that application. Help me, Lord, to worship Thee in spirit and in truth." Our hearts must be involved. We cannot follow humanistic law or humanistic worship; worship must be in reference to the Word of God. Unless we worship God as

He demands, it is nothing less than vain, useless, worthless, and a waste of time. Unhappily, I have heard people say, "I wasted my time by going to church today." They probably did, because they never worshiped God. We come to worship and to give Him praise, honor, and glory according to that which He demands.

Closing Prayer and Exhortation

We cannot give Him heartless worship. Neither can we give Him humanistic worship. Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow before Thee this day. We thank You for Your Word. We thank You for Your truth. And Father, we must confess there have been times we've been very heartless in giving You worship. We've acknowledged You with our mouth. We've confessed You with our lips, but our hearts have been cold and dead and dull. O Lord, there's been times that we've just been humanistic. We've done what we wanted to do and what pleased us and what we thought and what we liked rather than what You have demanded. Help us, Father, to understand that we must worship Thee in spirit and in truth. We give Thee praise this day for the Lord Jesus Christ and for His grace and mercy to us. Help us, Father, love Thee, deliver Thee. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow before Thee this day. We thank You for Your Word. We thank You for Your truth. And Father, we must confess there have been times we've been very heartless in giving You worship. We've acknowledged You with our mouth. We've confessed You with our lips, but our hearts have been cold and dead and dull. O Lord, there's been times that we've just been humanistic. We've done what we wanted to do and what pleased us and what we thought and what we liked rather than what You have demanded. Help us, Father, to understand.

CHAPTER 34

Standing Or Falling

Introduction: The Call to Take a Stand

John 18:1–9 says, “When Jesus had spoken these words, He went forth with His disciples over the brook Kidron, where was a garden, into which He entered, and His disciples. And Judas also, which betrayed Him, knew the place: for Jesus oftentimes resorted thither with His disciples. Judas then, having received a band of men and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, cometh thither with lanterns and torches and weapons. Jesus therefore, 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. As soon then as He had said unto them, I am He, they went backward, and fell to the ground. Then asked He them again, Whom seek ye? And they said, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus answered, I have told you that I am He.”

“If therefore ye seek Me, let these go their way: that the saying might be fulfilled, which He spake, Of them which Thou gavest Me have I lost none.”

Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. That disciple was known unto the high priest and went in with Jesus into the palace of the high priest. But Peter stood at the door without. Then the other disciple spoke unto her that kept the door and brought in Peter. The damsel said unto Peter, “Art not thou also one of this man's disciples?” He saith, “I am not.”

The servants and officers stood there, having made a fire of coals, for it was cold; and they warmed themselves, while Peter stood with them and warmed himself. Again they asked him, “Art not thou also one of his disciples?” He denied it and said, “I am not.”

Everyone knows, or at least each one thinks he knows, what it means to take a stand. We often speak of drawing a line in the sand. That line represents the fact that when we reach that point, we will resist and we will fight. It is a point in which we have said that there will be no compromise and there will be no surrender.

The problem today with drawing a line in the sand is that the line keeps moving. We continue to compromise, give in, give up, and give out. We reach the point where basically we do not stand for anything.

Consequently, we end up falling for everything. It used to be different. Christians had convictions and understanding. Men in times past oftentimes chose to fight, believing not only that they were right to fight, but that the time was right as well. One good illustration was Colonel William Barrett Travis, who supposedly did that exactly for his men at the Alamo.

This young Texas colonel was only twenty-six years of age. He was a lawyer, not a professional military man, but Travis knew enough about war and history to understand that in a siege, those on the outside had a far greater advantage than those on the inside. Inevitably, those on the outside would usually prevail.

So, on that Saturday afternoon in March of 1836, he gathered his defenders together and said, “We must die. Our business is not to make a fruitless effort to save our lives, but to choose the manner of our death.” He saw three possibilities: surrender and summary execution by the Mexicans; trying to fight their way out, only to be butchered by the Mexican lancers; or remaining in the fort, resisting

every assault, and selling their lives as dearly as possible. Then, drawing his sword, he drew a line in the sand and said, “Whoever is determined to stay here and die with me, come across this line.” Practically every one of those men crossed it.

When General Santa Anna, who was also president of Mexico, attacked and ordered the 180 Texans to surrender, Colonel Travis answered with a cannonball and a rebel yell: “No, we’re not going to surrender.” He understood that it was time to take a stand, and they did fight.

Everyone remembers the words of Martin Luther. When the great reformer stood before the pope, his cardinals, Charles V, and his royal court, Luther was examined and asked to recant. They did not like his answer, so they asked him to speak in clear and unvarnished terms.

Here it is plain and unvarnished: “Unless I am convinced of error by the testimony of Scripture, or—since I put no trust in the unsupported authorities of popes or councils, since it is plain that they have often erred and often contradicted themselves—by manifest reasoning I stand convinced by the Scripture to which I appeal, and my conscience is taken captive by the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, for to act against our conscience is neither safe for us nor open to us. On this I take my stand. I can do no other. God help me. Amen.”

So here Martin Luther took his stand before the emperor and the pope. We fail oftentimes to stand, or at times we stand for the wrong reasons or with the wrong people. We have forgotten the commands of Scripture.

The Bible tells us in 1 Corinthians chapter 16 and verse 13, “Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong.” Here is a command to stand fast in the faith. In Galatians 5 and verse 1, the Bible says, “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.”

In Ephesians chapter 6, verse 11, He said, “Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.” Then, in verses 13 and 14, He said, “Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye 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."

Each of these is a command. In Philippians 4:1, the apostle Paul said, "Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved." In 1 Thessalonians 3:8, again he says, "stand fast in the Lord." In 2 Thessalonians 2:15, he says, "Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle." In 1 Corinthians 15:58, the Bible says, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."

Over and over in Scripture, and in many other passages, our Lord commands us to stand. The problem is that most of us have never really considered the implications of failing to stand for the truth or for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Our Lord makes this issue very plain and clear. In Luke 11:23, He said, "He that is not with Me is against Me: and he that gathereth not with Me scattereth abroad." When you are not with Him, you are against Him; that is, you are His enemy. When you are not gathering with Him, you are scattering abroad. You are not working with Him or submitting to Him. You are against Him; therefore, you are His enemy.

I want you to see two men in this passage: Judas and Peter. They prove this truth exactly. First, consider what He said of Judas in verses 1 through 9. Judas was a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ, but he was also the traitor of the Lord Jesus Christ. You could refer to him as Judas the betrayer, Judas the scoundrel, or Judas the thief. All of these epithets belong to this man.

Judas: Standing with the Enemies of Christ

Judas was a disciple for three years and the treasurer for the disciples. The Bible tells us in John that when something was not sold and the money put into the treasury for the poor, Judas complained. Our Lord said, "Not because he cared for the poor; but

because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein." Judas, then, was a thief. Although he walked with our Lord for three years, he did not know the Lord in a saving manner. Yet just because he did not know the Lord does not mean that the Lord did not know him. In John 6:64, our Lord says, "But there are some of you that believe not."

"For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray Him." When you get to John 6:71, it says, "He spake of Judas Iscariot the son of Simon: for he it was that should betray Him, being one of the twelve."

In John 13, our Lord girds Himself and washes the feet of His disciples. Beginning with verse 10, "Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all." What did He mean by that? Verse 11 explains: "For He knew who should betray Him; therefore said He, Ye are not all clean." Then, in verse 18, our Lord says, "I speak not of you all. I know whom I have chosen: but that the scripture may be fulfilled, He that eateth bread with Me hath lifted up his heel against Me."

So Judas may not have known our Lord, but our Lord certainly knew Judas. Now, to me, there is an absolutely amazing thing, and that is this: Judas was not only a thief and a scoundrel, a fake and a hypocrite, but he had all the other apostles fooled. Let me show you what I mean. Matthew 26, beginning with verse 20, records this:

"Now 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. And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto Him, Lord, is it I?" Now, isn't that interesting? Our Lord says one of you is going to betray Me, and each one of those apostles asked, "Lord, is it I?"

Our Lord had said that this man was going to betray Him. He identified the betrayer, and pronounced a solemn warning: "And He answered and said, He that dippeth his hand with Me in the dish, the same shall betray Me. 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."

Now look in Luke chapter 22, beginning with verse 4. There we see exactly how deliberate Judas was. He was purposeful and deliberate, and what he did in betraying our Lord was absolutely premeditated. The Bible says, “And he went his way,” that is, Judas, “and communed with the chief priests and captains, how he might betray Him unto them.”

“And they were glad, and covenanted to give him money. And he promised, and sought opportunity to betray Him unto them in the absence of the multitude.” Judas had deliberately betrayed the Lord Jesus Christ. He sold Him for the 30 pieces of silver, and he sought an opportunity to betray Him in the absence of the multitude. In other words, he wanted to betray Him on the sly. He wanted to betray Him secretly. He wanted to betray Him when no one would really find out about it as such.

He even gave a sign for those who were going to take our Lord Jesus Christ. In Matthew 26, verse 48, the Bible says, “Now he that betrayed Him gave them a sign, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is He: hold Him fast.” Jesus Christ was being betrayed by Judas.

When all of the apostles asked, “Lord, is it I?” Judas himself asked that question. He knew the answer, because he was the one who would ultimately betray the Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, he had already betrayed Him, but he asked, “Lord, is it I?” as well. All of this was done by Judas in secret.

Whatever we harbor in our hearts and minds, whatever we try to keep secret, inevitably and invariably comes out publicly and in our actions. The Bible says in John 18:5, “Whom seek ye?” Our Lord asked, “Whom seek ye?” They answered Him, “Jesus of Nazareth.” Jesus saith unto them, “I am He.”

Now watch the next sentence: “And Judas also, which betrayed Him, stood with them.” He was no longer with the apostles; he was now with the group that had come to arrest and capture the Lord Jesus Christ. The word “stood” is very interesting. It is the word histēmi in the Greek, literally meaning to cause or make a stand, to stand firm, to establish, and not to hesitate or waver. Judas was standing with the enemies of our Lord without hesitation or

wavering. He was not an idle spectator. He was leading the mob, coming to Jesus Christ, betraying Him with the kiss, and standing with those who would capture Him.

He was with a band of soldiers and with men carrying weapons. He had come for the simple purpose of betraying our Lord and selling Him into the hands of His enemies.

We must learn that it matters where we stand and with whom we stand. When you associate yourself with the enemies of Jesus Christ, you reveal that in reality you are an enemy of Jesus Christ. What did our Lord say? “He that is not with Me is against Me.” If you stand with the enemies of Jesus Christ and side with them, you are the enemy of Jesus Christ. Once you identify with the enemies of Jesus Christ, inevitably you must be classified as an enemy of Jesus Christ.

The interesting thing is that here was a man who was dishonest, dishonorable, and deceitful. All of that ultimately ended in his being revealed by standing with the enemies of Jesus Christ. That was Judas. The one I am concerned with next is Peter.

If you look again at verses 15 through 18, Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. That disciple was known unto the high priest and went in with Jesus into the palace of the high priest. But Peter stood at the door without. Then the other disciple spoke to the woman who kept the door and brought in Peter. The damsel asked Peter, “Art not thou also one of this man's disciples?” He said, “I am not.” The servants and officers had made a fire of coals because it was cold, and they warmed themselves; “and Peter stood with them, and warmed himself.”

Peter: A Believer Who Stood with the Enemy

Here we have a vast difference. Judas Iscariot was lost. Peter is a Christian; Peter is a believer. We know he is a believer because our Lord said to Peter, “Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not.” We know, therefore, that he had faith.

But note this: he stood with our Lord's enemies, and while he stood with them, he denied the Lord Jesus Christ. It does matter where you stand, and it does matter with whom you stand. You are

either standing for and with the Lord Jesus Christ, or you will ultimately end up standing against the Lord Jesus Christ.

When it came to Judas, I pointed out that the word “stood”—he stood with those enemies of Christ—was the Greek word histēmi. It is exactly the same word used here for Peter. Peter had a stand, and without wavering or hesitation, while standing with our Lord's enemies, he denied the Lord Jesus Christ. Now look at verse 15: “And Simon Peter followed Jesus.”

"And so did another disciple." That would be John. "That disciple was known unto the high priest, and went in with Jesus into the palace of the high priest. But Peter stood at the door." He did not go in. Evidently, the high priest did not know him, or Peter did not know anyone inside. So Peter stood at the door. Then John, who was known unto the high priest, went out, spoke to the maiden who kept the door, and brought in Peter. Peter was standing outside; John came back and told a little maiden, "Let him in," and she let him in. Then, in verse 17, "saith the damsel that kept the door unto Peter, Art not thou also one of this man's disciples? He saith, I am not."

I want you to understand something. This was a damsel, a maiden, a servant. She may even have been a slave; I do not know. Her menial duty was keeping the door, letting people in and letting people out. When Peter came in, this little girl, who was nothing more than a servant, said, "Art not thou one of his disciples?" And he said, "I am not."

Peter was a rough, tough fisherman. You do not get weak casting and drawing those nets, working with fish and with your hands all day. Yet here was a rough, tough fisherman quaking before a little maiden. She simply asked him, "Art not thou one of his disciples?"

Matthew Henry said, "How slight was this attack? It was but a silly maid, of so small account that she was set to keep the door, that challenged him, and she only asked him carelessly, 'Art not thou one of this man's disciples?' probably suspecting by his sheepish look and coming in timorously." He continued, "We should many a time better maintain a good cause if we had a good heart on it and could put a good face on it. Peter would have had some reason to take the

alarm if Malchus had set upon him and said, 'This is the man that cut off my ear.'"

"I'll have his head for it." But when a maid only asked him, "Art not thou one of them?" he might without danger have answered, "And what if I am?" Suppose the servants had ridiculed and insulted him over it. Those can bear but little for Christ that cannot bear this. This is but running with the footmen. You remember that passage in Jeremiah 12:5: "If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses?" Here's a little girl, a little silly maiden, and she asked, "Art not thou one of them?" And he denied.

The Danger of Pride and Self-Confidence

Now, let me show you something. It was Peter's pride and arrogance that brought him so low and made him so timid. Look in your Bibles to Mark chapter 14, beginning with verse 27. Our Lord is telling them that He is going to be captured and that they are going to be scattered:

"And Jesus saith unto them, All ye shall be offended because of Me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered. But after that I am risen, I will go before you into Galilee. But Peter said unto Him, Although all shall be offended, yet will not I. And Jesus saith unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this day, even in this night, before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny Me thrice."

"But he spake the more vehemently, If I should die with Thee, I will not deny Thee in any wise. Likewise also said they all."

When our Lord told Peter, "Yes, you will deny Me. And you'll deny Me three times before the cock crows twice," look how he disputed our Lord's words: "But he spake the more vehemently." He spoke more dogmatically, more forcefully, and more premeditatedly: "I will not. I will die with You. I will never ever deny You." Then we have this statement: "Likewise also said they all." When our Lord was captured and taken, how many fled and left Him? All of them. All of them. All of them. You know, the Bible says in Proverbs 16 and verse 18.

"Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall." In Proverbs 29, verse 23, the Bible says, "A man's pride shall bring him low." And in 1 Corinthians chapter 10 and verse 12, the Bible says, "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." Here's something that I want to really impress upon each of you: We need to learn how weak and vacillating we really are.

If the mighty apostles caved in and fled, and one of the leading apostles, Peter, denied our Lord three times in one night while Jesus Christ was physically present with them, the question has to be asked: how much more apt are we to deny our Lord and do that which is wicked and wrong when He is not physically present with us? I believe our present situation really and truly reveals how weak and worthless we are for the kingdom of God. I believe it reveals our cowardice and our spinelessness.

Contemporary Applications: Compromise and Cowardice

You look at the churches in our land that have closed on order of the state. The state has no authority over the church. They're totally separate jurisdictions. Look how many preachers and pastors have quit preaching without so much as a whimper. Look at the Christians today cowering beneath a shelter-in-place order that has no biblical or constitutional validity. We've often said that we will never deny Him. We'll always stand for Jesus Christ.

Well, what about that command in Hebrews 10 and 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." Stop and think about this. It did not take laws, guns, cops, force, or martial law—just an executive order that does not and cannot have the force of law—to do what has been done. Only legislatures can make law.

Your mayor is not a legislator. Your governor is not a legislator. Your president is not a legislator. They're executives. An executive order cannot possibly have the force of law. But look what has happened across our land. So many are going to try to use Romans chapter 13 to justify what they have done. If you really understood Romans chapter 13, then I believe you would be protesting, resisting,

standing, and fighting. If you'll look in your Bibles very quickly to Acts chapter 5, beginning there with verse 28, look at the apostles' response when the rulers told them not to preach anymore in His name.

"They brought them before the council, saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us. Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men." That was their response: "We ought to obey God rather than men." And that is the truth.

But look at the Christians who said they would never, ever deny Christ. At the same time, we are doing it every day on every hand.

Now go back to John chapter 18, because here is something very interesting. Look in verse 18. Peter is now in the palace: "And the servants and officers stood there, who had made a fire of coals; for it was cold: and they warmed themselves: and Peter stood with them, and warmed himself." Skip down to verse 25: "And Simon Peter stood and warmed himself. They said therefore unto him, Art not thou also one of his disciples?"

"He denied it, and said, I am not." I suppose these two verses point to the saddest time in Peter's life.

Look back at verse 18. Who are the "them"? The servants and officers—the ones who came out and arrested Jesus Christ. Now Peter is standing with them, warming himself around their fire. He is accepting comfort from the enemies of Jesus Christ while, at the same time, denying Jesus Christ.

It was John Gill, the great Baptist commentator, who said this: “The company and conversation of wicked men should be abstained from. No good is got thereby. Continuance among such is very dangerous. Men are too often more concerned for their bodies than their souls. Satan baits his temptations for the flesh and sensitive part. And that which is thought to be for good is often the occasion of hurt.”

Matthew and Mark give us extra details concerning Peter’s denial. In Matthew 26, beginning with verse 71, we read: “And when he was

gone out into the porch, another maid saw him, and said unto them that were there, This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth. And again he denied with an oath, I do not know the man."

The word histēmi means you do not waver; you do not hesitate. Here Peter is not wavering or hesitating, but very clearly, with an oath, saying that he does not know Jesus Christ. Mark 14:71 says, "But he began to curse and to swear, saying, I know not this man of whom ye speak." What? He began to curse and swear, demonstrating very obviously, "I can't be a Christian." Listen to me. Listen to what I'm saying. He was a Christian, but he was cursing and swearing. This was not a man wavering in uncertainty or hesitating over what he should say. He was clearly denying the Lord Jesus Christ, and he did so with an oath, cursing and swearing before those who were present.

Matthew 26:73 continues: "And after a while came unto him they that stood by," these were the ones with whom he was warming himself, "and said to Peter, Surely thou also art one of them; for thy speech bewrayeth thee."

"Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man. And immediately the cock crew. And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny Me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly."

Do you realize that Peter has denied the Lord Jesus Christ three times, twice to little maidens and once to these men, using oaths, curses, and swear words? There is a connection in the word. When our Lord said, "All of you shall betray Me this night," or "all of you shall leave Me this night," they all said, "No, no, no, Lord, we're not going to do this. We're going to stay with You." Our Lord said, "Yes, Peter, you're going to deny Me before the cock crows twice. You'll deny Me three times." Then Peter said vehemently, "I will never deny You. I'll die with You." Now he is vehemently, with an oath, curses, and swear words, denying the Lord Jesus Christ. He did that as he stood with our Lord's enemies.

We have to realize truthfully how weak we really are. No amount of braggadociousness or bragging will hold up. Our Lord said in Matthew chapter 26 and verse 41, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not

into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." We do not understand how weak we are. You can look left and right and find pastors falling; you will find Christians falling. Anytime you put confidence in the flesh, it is going to fail.

Our pride and arrogance get us into trouble, just as they did Peter. We are unable to stand on our own. We might think we are able to stand, but we are not. Unless God in His grace and mercy gives us courage, strength, and power, we will buckle and fall. We are absolutely helpless in and of ourselves. Do not trust in your flesh, your determinations, or your abilities. It is only in the grace, mercy, power, and strength of Jesus Christ that we must trust.

Peter accepted the warmth and comfort of the enemy's fire and placed himself in a position to deny Christ. He was standing with our Lord's enemies, accepting their warmth, comfort, and, I would suppose, their friendship or fellowship. He was standing there.

Have you thought about the implications of receiving the benefits of a stimulus check while refusing to worship and honor the Lord Jesus Christ? You will take the benefit, but you will not fulfill your duty, obligation, and privilege to worship. As Christians, are we being paid not to go to church? Are we being paid not to worship the Lord Jesus Christ? There is an implication there.

Has not God commanded us to work and earn our living by the sweat of our brow? We disobey God because some stupid, idiotic bureaucrat somewhere says that we are non-essential workers. I got news for you: my work is essential, and your work is essential, because God has commanded us to work. It is essential that we honor Him and that we work for our own sake, our own character, and our own morality. It is essential that we work because that is the way we support our families.

I do not care if you are a ditch digger or a dishwasher. I do not care what you are; your work is essential. The only non-essential workers that I can even think of are in Washington D.C. and probably the state capitals. They have continued to receive their paychecks. It should be an insult to every working American to be called a non-essential worker. One man complained to Mayor

Cuomo of New York about not being able to work, and Cuomo smarted off, “Well, just go out and become an essential worker.”

I got news for you: every work is essential. I do not care what the bureaucrats say. Do you know what the Bible says in 2 Thessalonians chapter 3 and verse 10? The apostle Paul said, “For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.” That sounds pretty essential to me. I do not care what it is. Listen to what economist Doug Casey said.

He said, “Since the government produces nothing, anything it even seems to provide is at the direct expense of somebody else. This simple fact evades almost everyone, from the most ignorant voter to the most powerful officials. Government produces nothing but wars, pogroms, confiscations, taxes, inflations, and regulation, but people still, idiotically, look to it for salvation, even though it’s the cause of their worst problems.” Which is true. I think it would be an absolute—and everyone should take it as an absolute insult—to be classified as a non-essential worker. I pray and hope that during the next election some of these governors and mayors will find out that they are non-essential as well, because the people should replace them, especially when they are acting unbiblically and unconstitutionally.

The Progression of Denial: Counsel, Association, Agreement

Look at Psalm 1, verse 1: “Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.” There is usually a progression in our denial of Jesus Christ. We do not usually start out cursing and swearing. Peter didn’t. He simply could not stand up to a little maiden, because of his pride and arrogance.

Put this all in A’s so you can see it and remember it. “Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel”—or the advice—“of the ungodly.” The first step in ultimately denying Christ is taking the advice or counsel of the ungodly. Secondly, “nor standeth in the way of sinners.” That is association. Once you start taking their advice, the next step is associating with them, just like Peter standing by the fire. The third step is, “nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.” That is

agreement. Peter was basically agreeing with the ungodly when he was cursing and swearing and saying, “I know not the man.” Whenever you start taking the advice of the ungodly and associating with the ungodly, you will end up agreeing with the ungodly.

The Apostle Paul said it very plainly in 1 Corinthians 15:33: “Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners.” Evil communications—that is, conversations—corrupt good manners. When we start associating with the wicked, we will not lift them up; they will pull us down. It is one thing to witness to them, to reprove and rebuke them, and to love them in the Lord, in the sense that we are willing to witness to them and befriend them. But when we associate with them, treat them as our equals, and take their advice and counsel, ultimately we will agree with them. God says no.

Look again at verse 1, and read through verse 3: “Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel”—or the advice—“of the ungodly, nor standeth”—or associates—“in the way of sinners, nor sitteth”—or agreeing—“in the seat of the scornful.” We do none of those things. What do we do? “But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in His law doth he meditate day and night.” That is where we get our counsel and advice. We associate with people who get their counsel and advice from God's law, and we can agree with them because it is biblical.

“And he shall be like a tree”—the man who meditates in God's law—“he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.” Our delight and focus must be upon God and His law. We must stand for Him and His truth, regardless of the situation or circumstance.

One last quote. Charles Haddon Spurgeon had been preaching a message on Esther's exaltation. She went into King Ahasuerus and said, “If I perish, I perish.” Here is what Spurgeon said: “Recollect that as God can do without us, it may be He will do without us. It might come to pass that God would say, ‘I will no more bless the world by this England or America.’”

She has become selfishly mercantile. She cares more for commerce than for righteousness. She is drunken and infidel. I will

give her up. Her merchants care nothing for the poor whose labor is ill required. Let her pass away as all oppressors must, and let the nation say, “Alas, alas, that great city, that mighty city, for in one hour so great riches is come to nought.” He may say to any church, “Repent, or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against thee with the sword of My mouth.”

“ Ichabod”—which means “the glory is departed”—“Ichabod has been written aforetime, and may again on places where once there shone upon the forefront this inscription, ‘Holiness unto the LORD.’” So also any man may be set aside, even as the Lord put away Saul and said to him, “Thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD hath rejected thee from being king over Israel.” The Lord may decline to use us if we are not prepared in such a time as this to do our very utmost and to lay ourselves out for the cause of truth and holiness.

Conclusion: The Necessity of Standing by God's Grace

It does matter whether or not you stand, where you stand, and who you stand with. We are either going to stand or fall. The only way we can stand is by the grace, mercy, goodness, power, and strength of Jesus Christ. If we trust in our flesh, hang on to our pride and arrogance, and fail to repent, we shall fall individually, familially, ecclesiastically, societally, and nationally. Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee.

We thank You for Your Word and truth, and for the opportunity to stand for Thee in a time in which standing may not be very popular. But Father, may we always stand with the Lord Jesus Christ, gather with Him, and always be for Him. Give us grace, Lord, that we may serve Thee acceptably with reverence and godly fear. In Thy name we pray, Amen.

CHAPTER 35

Shared Sins

Introduction to Shared Sins

Exodus 32:35 says that the Lord plagued the people because they made the calf, which Aaron made. When you hear the words shared sins, it is almost like a slap upside the head, simply because we never really think of such a concept. Yet it is a concept clearly based in Scripture and taught in Scripture. We are usually more concerned with what we would call individual or personal sins. In reality, all sins are individual and personal, but there are shared sins as well. Each individual is responsible, accountable, and answerable to God, known for his personal and individual sins, but also for the sins in which he shares. When you stop and think about the principle of shared sins, it should become obvious that there are many shared sins.

Consider, just for a moment, the sin of adultery. Each individual is accountable, answerable, and responsible. It is a personal sin, but it is also a shared sin in the sense that it involves the willfulness and cooperation of at least two people. It is not just an individual sin; it is a shared sin as well.

The very first sin that was ever committed was indeed a shared sin as well as an individual sin. Genesis 3:6-7 says, “When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons.”

Obviously, Eve was the very first one to sin. She took the fruit, ate, and then gave it to her husband. Each one of them was accountable, answerable, and responsible, but it was still a shared sin. Interestingly enough, even though Eve was the first one to sin, sin actually came into the world through Adam. Romans 5:12 tells us, “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.”

Obviously, God had His covenant with Adam, and sin came through Adam, even though Eve was the first one to transgress. Scripture teaches us that Eve was deceived, but not Adam. For in 1 Timothy 2:14, the Bible plainly says, “And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression.” Thus, although Adam and Eve sinned individually, they also sinned jointly. It was a shared sin as well as an individual sin. Romans 14:7 says, “For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself.”

The Ripple Effect of Sin

One clear implication is that our lives, deaths, and sins always affect other people. There is no way that you can sin just to yourself or reap the consequences of your sin just to yourself. Our sins always affect others: our spouses, children, family, church, and friends. We cannot live selfishly.

When someone says, “It’s my life. It doesn’t matter what happens to me. It’s just affecting me,” that is not true, because sin always affects someone else. We are still suffering from the sins of Adam and Eve. There are long-reaching implications of our sins. Many times we overlook the devastated families, ruined homes, spouses, and children who are hurt simply because someone thought selfishly, “It’s just my sin. It’s not going to hurt anybody but me.”

That is certainly not true. There are many passages in the Bible that teach this concept of shared sins.

Generational Consequences of Sin

Let me show you some verses, and then let me ask a question and try to answer it for you. I want you to look in your Bibles, first of all, to Exodus chapter 20, verse 5. God says this, part of the second commandment: "Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them," that is, to idols, "nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me." Now I want you to look closely at that, because God says he visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of those that hate him.

If you look in Exodus chapter 34 and verse 7, the Bible says, "Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation."

Then, in Numbers chapter 14, verse 18, we have this same truth: "The Lord is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation."

One more passage is found in the book of Deuteronomy, chapter 5 and verse 9. Note what God says again: "Thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me." Now, here is my question: How can God justly visit the iniquity of the fathers to the children up to the third and fourth generation?

The answer is very simple: the sons and remote descendants inherit the sins as well as the consequences of their father's sins. They inherit the consequences in disease, poverty, captivity, and every evil influence imaginable. Think about the little babies conceived, carried, and born already addicted to drugs because their

father or mother was a drug addict. Think of babies born with horrible diseases, usually venereal diseases, because of the sins of their parents. We can see an easy illustration of this. As I pointed out before, we are still reaping the consequences of the sins of Adam and Eve. Family sins are usually passed on. Idolatry is usually passed on. Wickedness is usually passed on.

That is why, in the book of Lamentations, chapter 5 and verse 7, the Bible says, "Our fathers have sinned, and are not; and we have borne their iniquities." The sins of the fathers are not only normally passed on to their children, but oftentimes the children are even worse than the fathers. In Jeremiah chapter 16, beginning with verse 10, God says: "And it shall come to pass, when thou shalt shew this people all these words, and they shall say unto thee, Wherefore hath the Lord pronounced all this great evil against us? or what is our iniquity? or what is our sin that we have committed against the Lord our God? Then shalt thou say unto them, Because your fathers have forsaken me, saith the Lord, and have walked after other gods, and have served them, and have worshipped them, and have forsaken me, and have not kept my law; and ye have done worse than your fathers. For, behold, ye walk every one after the imagination of his evil heart, that they may not hearken unto me: Therefore will I cast you out of this land into a land that ye know not, neither ye nor your fathers; and there shall ye serve other gods day and night; where I will not shew you favour."

God said, "I'm going to judge you because you are fulfilling the sins of your fathers. You're only doing what they've done." Yet they were doing worse than their fathers had done. The same matter continues in Zechariah, chapter 1, beginning at verse 3.

Usually, family sins are passed from generation to generation. Idolatry is usually passed from generation to generation. Zechariah 1:3 says, “Therefore say thou unto them, Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Turn ye unto me, saith the Lord of hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the Lord of hosts.” Then verse 4 says, “Be ye not as your fathers, unto whom the former prophets have cried, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Turn ye now from your evil ways, and from your evil doings: but they did not hear, nor hearken unto me, saith the Lord. Your fathers, where are they? and the prophets, do they

live for ever? But my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not take hold of your fathers? and they returned and said, Like as the Lord of hosts thought to do unto us, according to our ways, and according to our doings, so hath he dealt with us."

What did God tell these people? "Be not as your fathers." The tendency for our descendants is to do exactly as we do. Usually, if we exhibit more depravity, they will exhibit far more depravity than we do, because the progression is from worse to worse. Thus God said he would judge them to the third and fourth generation.

Sins and the consequences of sins are passed down among sons and descendants because they usually engage in the same sins. The only exception would be if one repented and turned to God in obedience. That is why Ezekiel 18:20 says, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him." If someone repents, he is to turn and listen to God. That is why Zechariah says, "Be not as your fathers."

Sins can be shared. We think of that in reference to family sins, and we can also think of it in reference to ecclesiastical sins. But have you ever thought of shared sins in relationship to national sins? People say, "What they do in Washington doesn't bother me." It does. "What they do in Atlanta or what they do in Tallahassee doesn't bother me." Yes, it does, because there can be shared national sins.

National Shared Sins

Here is a principle found in Scripture concerning rulers: when a ruler sins individually and privately, he is judged individually and privately. A good illustration is David's adultery with Bathsheba. The nation was not judged, but David and his household reaped what David had sown. However, when a ruler sins openly and publicly, and the people do not stop him or even attempt to stop him, then the people are judged along with their rulers.

Consider the awful, horrifying judgment that would fall upon Judah, the southern kingdom, and then see why. In Jeremiah 15:1, God says, “Then said the Lord unto me, Though Moses and Samuel stood before me,” that is, if they were trying to intercede for the Southern kingdom, “my mind could not be toward this people.”

“Cast them out of my sight, and let them go forth. And it shall come to pass, if they say unto thee, Whither shall we go forth? then thou shalt tell them, Thus saith the Lord; Such as are for death, to death; and such as are for the sword, to the sword; and such as are for the famine, to the famine; and such as are for the captivity, to the captivity.”

In verse three, God says, “And I will appoint over them four kinds, saith the Lord: the sword to slay, and the dogs to tear, and the fowls of the heaven, and the beasts of the earth to devour and destroy.” Why is God going to judge the southern kingdom so strenuously? The answer is in verse four: “And I will cause them to be removed into all kingdoms of the earth, because of Manasseh the son of Hezekiah king of Judah, for that which he did in Jerusalem.” God is going to send the entire southern kingdom into captivity, death, disease, famine, and pestilence because of Manasseh and that which he did. Manasseh was the most evil and wicked king in the southern kingdom.

When you get home, read 2 Kings 21, and you will see some of his heinous acts and serious crimes. But why are the people going into captivity because of that which Manasseh did? The answer is that they not only allowed what he did; they participated in what he did. God is judging the people along with their ruler.

I mentioned David earlier. When David committed adultery with Bathsheba, David was judged. But in 1 Chronicles 21, David wanted to number his fighting men and told Joab to go out and number them. Joab, wicked as he was and a murderer besides, said, “May the Lord increase his people a hundredfold or double or whatever, but why would you do this?” Even Joab knew it was wrong. The people were not to be numbered except in a time of war. When they were numbered, the half shekel of the sanctuary was to be taken for each man as his ransom or redemption money. There was no war, and no

half shekel was taken. Nevertheless, the king's word prevailed over Joab, and Joab began numbering the children of Israel.

He became so disgusted with it that he finally quit; he never even finished. Then the prophet of God came to David and said, "Now look, you sinned against God." David was told to choose one of three judgments: he could be chased by his enemies, have a famine, or have a pestilence. David said, "Let me fall in the hands of God, not in the hands of man." He would not choose; he would let God choose. So God sent a pestilence. First Chronicles 21:14 says, "So the Lord sent pestilence upon Israel: and there fell of Israel seventy thousand men."

Why did 70,000 men die? The answer is that everyone in Israel knew what David was doing was wrong, wicked, unbiblical, and ungodly, yet nobody stopped him or even attempted to stop him. Their attitude was, "He's the king, he can do what he wants to do." No, he was not able to do whatever he wanted to do. The Lord then sent this pestilence, and the people suffered because of their ruler. Obviously, there are clear implications of shared sins in the Bible.

The Golden Calf Incident as Shared Sin

Now go back to Exodus chapter 32, because shared sins may be familial, that is, in the family. They may be ecclesiastical, that is, in the church, but they can also be national, that is, in the nation. In Exodus chapter 32, verse 1, we read, "And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron."

The first question we need to answer is, Why did the people go to Aaron? Moses was in the mount receiving the law of God. If you look back to Exodus chapter 24 and verse 14, before Moses went into the mount, you find the directions he gave to the people: "And he said unto the elders, Tarry ye here for us, until we come again unto you." He continued, "And, behold, Aaron and Hur are with you: if any man have any matters to do, let him come unto them." He left Aaron and Hur in charge. Therefore, when you look in Exodus chapter 32 and verse 1, the people come to Aaron.

Moses had been gone long enough—he was in there 40 days—that they assumed he was dead. They showed great disrespect and reproach for Moses by referring to him as "this Moses." It is like in the book of Daniel, where Daniel's enemies referred to him as "that Daniel." So it is "this Moses" and "that Daniel."

They were assuming that Moses was dead, consumed by the fire, taken to heaven, or otherwise removed. In other words, they assumed he was not coming back. This demonstrates not only their impatience, but their lack of faith as well. Exodus 32:1 says, “And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him.”

Obviously, these people wanted a god either to lead them through the wilderness or to enable them to return to Egypt. Adam Clarke, in his commentary, said that the people came to Moses in a tumultuous and seditious manner, insisting that an object of religious worship be made for them, and that they intended to return to Egypt under this idol.

Acts 7:39-41 gives further light: “To whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt, saying unto Aaron, Make us gods to go before us: for as for this Moses, which brought us out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him. And they made a calf in those days, and offered sacrifice unto the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands.”

These people were lacking faith. It is impossible to know exactly the extent of the pressure placed upon Aaron. Yet in Exodus 32, the Scripture shows that he was a willing participant in this idolatry. The idolatry was so wicked and vile that Moses assumed the people had somehow forced Aaron to do it. In verse 21, Moses asked him, “What did this people unto thee, that thou hast brought so great a sin upon them?” In other words, what did they do to you? How could they threaten or coerce you? How could they make you do something so vile and wicked?

Aaron is often portrayed as having been forced to make the calf. However, when we read the context, it appears that Aaron was a willing participant—and not merely a participant, but the one giving the directions. Exodus 32:1 says, "And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him. And Aaron said unto them, Break off the golden earrings, which are in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring them unto me. And all the people brake off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them unto Aaron." Aaron received the golden earrings; indeed, he asked for them.

Later, Aaron tried to indicate that the people had forced him to do this. When Moses asked, "What did this people do to you to make you do this?" Aaron answered in Exodus 32:22, "And Aaron said, Let not the anger of my lord wax hot: thou knowest the people, that they are set on mischief." In other words, he was saying, "It was the people and their sins that pushed me."

The Hebrew word for mischief refers to that which is evil, wicked, grievous, sinful, bad, and hurtful. Aaron was saying that the depravity of their hearts was working itself out. Yet the Bible makes it exceedingly clear that Aaron made the calf. Not only did he ask for the golden earrings; verse 4 says, "And he received them at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf." Then they said, "These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt."

Note carefully what is said: Aaron received the gold, fashioned it, used a graving tool, and made it a molten calf. He cast a mold, made the calf, and then used the graving tool to put all the fine features on it. So here is the question: Why did he make a calf? Why did he not make an eagle? Why did he not make a man? Why did he make a calf?

And the answer is very simple. Because the great idols of the Egyptians were Apis, Serapis, and Isis, which were oxen and cows. The Hebrew word for calf is also the Hebrew word for ox. And the Israelites were familiar with the worship of the ox in Egypt. And

Heliopolis, which was right almost on the border of Goshen, they could have seen these rites over and over. And of course, they had to be acquainted with the great worship of Apis and Memphis in Egypt.

And so they understood what this was all about. And by the way, I want you to understand that while they were in Egypt, they gave into this worship, and they continued this worship even afterwards, which I'm going to show you. But I want you to turn in your Bible, hold Exodus 32, but look in the book of Joshua chapter 24. Joshua 24, and look if you would please at verse 14. Just to show you, Joshua 24, and look if you would please at verse 14. Joshua tells them, "Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood."

That would be when they were back in Ur of the Chaldees and all that area. And then he says, "and in Egypt." So evidently these people were used to worshiping a calf or an ox while they were in Egypt. And so Joshua was saying, "You better put away all these false gods. You better get rid of them."

Now, if you look in your Bibles very quickly to the book of Ezekiel, Ezekiel, and notice if you would, chapter 20 and verse 8. Ezekiel 20 and verse 8. Look at what God says, Ezekiel 20 and verse eight. He said, "But they rebelled against me, and would not hearken unto me: they did not every man cast away the abominations of their eyes, neither did they forsake the idols of Egypt: then I said, I will pour out my fury upon them, to accomplish my anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt." He said they did not forsake the idols of Egypt.

So the ox and the calf was indeed a religious object and an idolatrous symbol. And it was the emblem of Egyptian worship.

In referring to shared sins, go back to Exodus 32. Look at verse 4: “And he received them at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.” Aaron made it, but they said, “These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.” When Aaron saw that they

were making a god out of this calf, what did he try to do? He tried to do that which was impossible.

Aaron's Attempt to Syncretize Worship

Look in verse 5: “And when Aaron saw it,” when he saw that they were worshiping this calf, “he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation, and said, To morrow is a feast to the Lord,” that is, to Yahweh, to Jehovah, the one true and living God. Aaron was attempting to make idolatry into the true worship of God. He was endeavoring to have God worshiped under the auspices of an Egyptian emblem. He gave orders throughout the camp that the people would come together and have a solemn feast. This was to be a worship of God.

This is known as the reduction of Christianity, or the reduction of the Word of God. What Aaron is attempting to do is bring down the true spiritual worship of the one true living God and put it on a par with the worship of the Egyptian idols and oxen. In effect, he is saying, “Here is what God said, but that does not really matter. We are going to bring this down and put His Word equal to the Egyptian word, or to the Islamic word, or to the Hindu word, or whatever word you want to.” In other words, it is bringing God down to the level of man. God may now be worshiped according to the flesh, according to the will of man, and in any way that man chooses to worship Him.

So it is a dethroning of God and an enthroning of man. It is setting ourselves up, bringing God down, and making God subject to us. Unhappily, in most of our churches, the same idolatry is taking place. The pastor and the people endeavor to worship God according to their own desires, their own wills, and their own way.

They are not worshiping Him based upon the Scripture. They are trying to give Him worship that pleases them. I have heard people say, “The reason I go to that church is it makes me feel good.” Others say, “I like the music,” “I like the children’s program,” or “I like the fact that we are out quickly.” I am serious; I have heard people say all of these things. It is not that we are there to worship God, or that we are there to give God honor and glory. We are determining for

ourselves what we are going to give to God and not allowing God to speak to us.

If you look in your Bibles at Exodus chapter 20, this was already clearly in place. Notice verses four and five: “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me.”

Aaron has made this calf, and now he is going to try to get the people to worship the one true and living God under the emblem of the calf. I have been in some churches where you would think you had stepped into a saloon or bar. I have been in some churches where you could not tell the difference between the music there and a nightclub. I am serious.

To demonstrate this fleshliness, look at Exodus 32:6: “And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play.” They sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.

Fleshly Worship and Its Consequences

The Hebrew word play is vital to our understanding of what is happening here. It means to mock, to play, to laugh, and to make jest. But it also means to sport, to make sport, to toy with, and to make a toy of. Hold Exodus 32 and turn back to Genesis 26.

You remember when Abraham went down into the land and said that Sarah was his sister. She was, in fact, his half sister. Abimelech took her, but God plagued him and said, “If you touch her, you’re dead, man, because she’s a man’s wife.” God refused to have Abimelech touch her.

Isaac now plays the same trick. Genesis 26:6 says, “And Isaac dwelt in Gerar: And the men of the place asked him of his wife; and he said, She is my sister: for he feared to say, She is my wife; lest, said he, the men of the place should kill me for Rebekah; because she

was fair to look upon. And it came to pass, when he had been there a long time, that Abimelech king of the Philistines looked out at a window, and saw, and, behold, Isaac was sporting with Rebekah his wife." The word sporting is the same Hebrew word rendered play in Exodus 32. Isaac was playing with Rebekah in such a way that Abimelech said, "That's not his sister. You don't act like that toward your sister."

Go back to Exodus 32. In verse 6, the Bible says, "And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play." You have to remember that sex was always a part of the worship in heathen practices and heathen idolatries.

Look at the impact of this in Exodus 32:25: "And when Moses saw that the people were naked; (for Aaron had made them naked unto their shame among their enemies:)" What were they doing? They were fornicating. They were committing adultery, all to God's honor and God's glory and trying to worship him. You don't know fleshly worship. You're talking about wicked worship.

In light of that, look at Exodus 32:26: "Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, Who is on the Lord's side? let him come unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him." Moses commanded them, "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour. And the children of Levi did according to the word of Moses." There fell of the people that day about three thousand men. Evidently, these were the ones involved in fornication and adultery.

The New Testament gives basically the same truth in relationship not only to this passage, but also to Numbers 25. First Corinthians 10:7 says, "Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play." Then verse 8 says, "Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand." That is 23,000 killed in one day.

When you read Numbers 25, you find 24,000 killed altogether, when the Midianites seduced the people and they committed adultery. That is not a discrepancy. In verse 8, the apostle tells us how many were killed in one day: 23,000. Numbers 25 tells us how many were killed altogether: 24,000. Obviously, God is not pleased with this type of fleshly worship at all.

Exodus 32:35 is extremely clear and concise: “And the Lord plagued the people, because they made the calf, which Aaron made.” Who made the calf? Aaron made the calf. But the people made the calf as well. In other words, they wanted it, provided the materials, and Aaron simply cast it into a mold and fashioned it with an engraving tool. Here we have shared sins: the Lord plagued the people because they made the calf that Aaron made.

Besides all of the fleshliness, besides all of the wickedness, besides all of the idolatry, consider something else they did. Acts 7:41 says, “And they made a calf in those days, and offered sacrifice unto the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands.”

Rejoicing in Man's Works vs. God's Works

They were not rejoicing in what God had done; they were rejoicing in what they had done. Here is the difference between God's salvation and man's salvation. Here is the difference between God's worship and man's worship. Acts 7:41 says that they rejoiced in the works of their own hands. First Corinthians 1:29 says that “no flesh should glory in his presence.” Then it says, “But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.” In other words, the difference between God's salvation and man's salvation is simple. Man always rejoices in his own works. In God's salvation, we rejoice in what God has done. In the worship of God, as we give Him that which He demands in the way that He demands it, we give God-honored glory.

When we do not give Him what He demands in the way that He demands it, we are rejoicing in what we have done: our stained-glass windows, our padded pews, our beautiful building, the way we sing, the way we deport ourselves, the way we dress—whatever.

When you look at Exodus 32, Aaron blamed the people, and the people could rightly blame Aaron because Aaron made it. Who was responsible? The answer is all of them. They were responsible not only individually and personally, but also corporately, because it was indeed a shared sin.

Long-Lasting Consequences and Modern Application

We do not like to think about the long-lasting consequences of our sins. We like to think, "We'll sin, we'll repent, and it'll be over with." Really? David sinned and committed adultery with Bathsheba. He repented; that is true. But look at what he reaped over a period of time. Amnon, his son, raped his own sister, Tamar. Absalom murdered his own brother, Amnon. Adonijah tried to usurp the throne from Solomon. Absalom tried to usurp the throne, ran his own father off the throne, and tried to kill him. That did not happen overnight. It was a long-lasting consequence of that sin.

Aaron and the people made the calf. You may say, "Moses ground that sucker up, put it in the water, and made the people drink it. It was over." No, no, no, no. The first king of Israel, Jeroboam, made two golden calves, putting one in Dan and one in Bethel, and the people worshiped those calves. That was the destruction of the northern kingdom, because they never got over calf worship.

We have to understand the consequences of our sins. We may be forgiven, but those consequences often last for a lifetime. Here is the second thought: I really think and believe that what I have just preached to you is one of the great pretensions of modern-day Christianity. We pretend that we are worshiping God, serving God, that we want His will, and that we want to give Him honor and glory. Yet in all our pretensions, and in all our pretended submission and subjection to Him, what we really want is our own will and our own way. We want God to subjugate Himself to us and to what we desire. This thought hit me this morning. If you would stop and think of all the churches in America, I just saw this this morning.

Andy Stanley, Charles Stanley's son, is supposed to have one of the biggest churches in the Atlanta area. He said they were not going to have service until next year because worship is not essential. His kind of worship probably is non-essential; his church is probably

non-essential, and he is non-essential. But the point is this: when churches have pastors who are not really interested in teaching and preaching the Word of God, and people who are not really interested in hearing, learning, and obeying it, you have not only individual sins but shared sins. The support of those churches is sharing in their sins.

God takes His worship very, very seriously. They that worship Him, the Scripture says, must worship Him in spirit and in truth. True worship is bounded on one side by spirit and on the other by truth. It must be not only in the Holy Spirit but in the truth of the Word of God. If it is not in spirit, if it is not in truth, it is not the worship of God. What we are doing in most of our churches is simply participating in shared sins.

Call to True Worship

We can do that in the family, in the church, and in the nation. God will hold the rulers and the people accountable and responsible.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to thee this day. We thank you for your word and truth. Lord, I pray that you would impress this concept of shared sins upon our minds. Help us understand it and do as you have commanded: “Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil.” If a multitude of people are failing to worship thee aright, may we not join with them. May we worship thee aright, even if we have to do so individually. Lord, help us to love thee; teach us that we may learn and give thee all the honor and glory. We recognize that thou art God and besides thee there is none other. We ask these things in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is our Lord and Savior. Amen.

CHAPTER 36

God Manifest Among Us

In Psalm 68 and verse 18, the word of God says this: “Thou hast ascended on high. Thou hast led captivity captive. Thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them. Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation.”

Introduction: The Desire for God's Manifest Presence

Here is a good question: Would you like to be in the presence of God on this earth? Would you desire to see, to know, and sense His manifest presence as the Israelites did in the Old Testament when they were being led through the wilderness by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night? Would you also like to observe the manifest presence of God as did the people when the temple was dedicated? Or in 2 Chronicles chapter 5 and verse 14, the Bible says, “So that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud: for the glory of the Lord had filled the house.” In other words, the priests had to get out of the temple because the glory of the Lord was so powerful. His presence was so manifest, they could not stay in the temple.

It is a ground for wonder and amazement that God should even dwell with men, especially when we contemplate upon His holiness, His righteousness, His immensity, His independence, His sovereignty, and also when we consider the absolute sinfulness of man. I'm going to make a statement. I'm going to show you the scripture. It is indeed humbling for God to even observe the things on this earth.

I want you to hold Psalm 68, but turn in your Bibles to Psalm 113. Psalm 113. This is a wonderful Psalm, very beautifully expressed. I want to begin reading with verse five and read through verse nine. I want you to look what the Bible says. Psalm 113 in verse five: "Who is like unto the Lord our God, who dwelleth on high, who humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven, and in the earth!"

God's Humility in Beholding and Helping Humanity

"He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill; that he may set him with princes, even with the princes of his people. He maketh the barren woman to keep house, and to be a joyful mother of children. Praise ye the Lord." It is an astounding condescension of God for God even to behold the things on this earth. Not only does He behold the things on this earth, but the Bible tells us that He raises up the poor out of the dust and lifts up the needy out of the dunghill. He makes the barren woman to keep house and to be a joyful mother of children. Interestingly, in the Old Testament, those who were poor and those who were childless were despised. That is why I think it was Rebecca who said to Isaac, "Give me children, or else I die." The truth of the matter is that God, in His great condescending humility toward us, not only observes us and the things on the earth, but He helps us as well.

May I remind you that our low estate does not deter His humility, His grace, or His mercy. It was Mary in Luke chapter 1, verses 46 through 49, who said: "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name."

Note what she confessed. She confessed that He, that is God, hath regarded the low estate of His handmaiden. Here, then, is a very clear application for each one of us. Many individuals on this earth, and I have met some of them, do indeed think that they are high and mighty in and of themselves. They are proud, lifted up, and arrogant. They are not high and mighty; they simply think that they are.

Consequently, they totally ignore others, especially those who are in need, poor, or desperate. They have absolutely no compassion and are very uncaring. That is very unlike God and very unlike our heavenly Father. When you encounter a Christian who is supposedly a Christian, yet is proud, arrogant, high, heady, high-minded, and thoughtful of himself but unthoughtful toward others, he is not only unlike our heavenly Father, but knows absolutely nothing about biblical humility and biblical submission.

As I was reading through Psalm 68, it was verse 18 that caught my attention. When the Bible says very clearly there that when He ascended upon high, He led captivity captive and He gave gifts unto men. And the reason being in verse 18 was so that the Lord God might dwell among them.

Now I am going to come back to this verse. I am not necessarily going to expound it right now, but I think before I finish, you are going to see the exposition of this verse. I want to point out that this is a biblical concept: God being manifest among His people. It is not only a biblical concept, but it is also a concept that should be much desired and coveted after.

The Old Testament Foundation: Tabernacle and Temple

To lay out the foundation, let me ask you to think with me concerning the Old Testament, especially the tabernacle and the temple. Do you realize the purpose for the tabernacle and the purpose for the temple was for the manifest presence of God, that He might dwell among His people? In other words, they knew that God was there. They saw the glory cloud, so to speak. His manifest presence was there in the tabernacle and in the temple, and it was there they communed with God.

Let me show you. I want you to turn in your Bibles, first of all, to the book of Exodus, chapter 25, and look at verse 8; then we will go to Exodus 29. I am talking about the purpose of the tabernacle. Look at it. He said, “And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them.” So the purpose of that tabernacle was so that God would dwell among His people. Now look in Exodus 29, beginning there with verse 44, and let us read through verse 46.

Again, He makes this very plain: “And I will sanctify the tabernacle of the congregation, and the altar: I will sanctify also both Aaron and his sons, to minister to me in the priest's office. And I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will be their God. And they shall know that I am the Lord their God, that brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, that I may dwell among them: I am the Lord their God.”

Note very carefully and precisely that the tabernacle, and later the temple, was for the specific purpose that God might dwell among His people. We may not have the physical tabernacle today as they did in the Old Testament. Neither do we have the physical temple as they did then. But we still have the manifest presence of God among us.

In 2 Corinthians 6:16, the Bible says, “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.” He adds, “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you.” Notice again the promise: “I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”

Revelation 7:15 says, “Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.” The apex, the height of our salvation, is when we dwell with God and He dwells with us. Revelation 21:3 says, “And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.” Note it: “He will dwell with them, and God himself shall be with them.”

The Present Reality of God's Manifest Presence

Think in the Old Testament. In all the types, emblems, and pictures, there was the manifest presence of God in the tabernacle and in the temple. In eternity, in the future, God says, “I will dwell with them, and they will be my people and I'll be their God.” In the past, you had the manifest presence of God; in the future, you have the manifest presence of God. So where is the manifest presence of God in the present? If you had the presence of God in the past and will have the presence of God in the future, then obviously you should have the presence of God here and now. The manifest presence of God is here.

We are simply unobservant, or we are totally ignorant of its reality. I want to point out three historical instances of the manifest presence of God. The very first one should be obvious: the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is God. Jesus Christ is Lord. Jesus Christ is God in the flesh. The incarnation is nothing less than God becoming man. The physical tabernacle and the physical temple in the Old Testament were nothing more than an emblem or a type of the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

First Instance: The Incarnation of Jesus Christ

How can I say that? Look in your Bibles to Hebrews chapter 10, beginning with verse 5. Remember that the Old Testament tabernacle is nothing more than an emblem, symbol, type, and picture of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Hebrews 10:5 says, “Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith...” “Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me.” In other words, no longer the tabernacle, no longer the temple where sacrifice and offering were offered. What is replacing that tabernacle and that temple? “A body hast thou prepared me.” “In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure.” That is in the tabernacle and the temple. That is past tense.

"Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God. Above when he said, Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and offering for sin thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure therein; which are offered by the law;" that would be the ceremonial law in the tabernacle in the temple. "Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first,

that he may establish the second." "By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."

In other words, the tabernacle and the temple are over and done with because there is no more sacrifice for sin. Jesus Christ is indeed the perfect sacrifice. The sacrifices were nullified because they were no longer needed, since Jesus Christ was and is the perfect sacrifice. Therefore, the tabernacle and the temple are no longer needed because the sacrificial system is over and done with.

The body of our Lord was the tabernacle, the temple, in the sense that He is the full and final sacrifice. Hebrews 10:11 says, "And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified."

Clearly, that tabernacle and temple foreshadowed the body of the Lord Jesus Christ, who was going to take care of sin permanently through the sacrifice of Himself. The declaration that Jesus Christ is God is found over and over in the Bible. John 1:1-3 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 the Creator. Jesus Christ is God. When you get down to verse 14, the Bible says this: “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,)” The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. The Word was incarnated and dwelt among us. Now let me tell you the important thing about verse 14. The word “dwelt” is from the Greek word skēnoō, which literally refers to a tabernacle—to live in a tabernacle, to fix one’s tabernacle. Literally, John 1:14 says, “And the Word was made flesh, and tabernacled among us.” His body was His tabernacle, and in that tabernacle He offered the full and final sacrifice for sin. Why, then, was Jesus Christ made flesh?

Hebrews 2:14 answers the question: “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood,” that's us; we have a fleshly body, “he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.” Our Lord tabernacled in the flesh because we are in the flesh. Therefore, He became the perfect sacrifice for sin.

Moreover, one of the clearest and most concise statements concerning the incarnation of Jesus Christ is found in 1 Timothy 3:16. In that passage, the Bible says: “And without controversy”—there is no argument about this—“great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.” So he said, “without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh.” Jesus Christ is God manifest in the flesh. This brings to mind the passage in John 14, where our Lord was telling His disciples that He was going to leave them.

Philip said to our Lord, “Show us the Father, and it sufficeth us.” In John chapter 14, verses eight and nine, Jesus answered Philip: “Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father?” Why? He said, “I am the Father.”

“I am God in the flesh.” That is why He said in John 10:30, “I and my Father are one.” Jesus Christ is God. One of the greatest passages concerning the incarnation is found in Philippians chapter 2, verses five through eight:

“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being

found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

Our Lord then tabernacled among us. He lived in that fleshly body in order that He might put an end to the ceremonial and sacrificial system, because He Himself is indeed the perfect sacrifice. In doing so, He reconciled us unto God the Father. Consequently, since He is perfect God and perfect man, He is also the perfect mediator. That is why 1 Timothy chapter 2 and verse 5 says: "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."

We have the manifest presence of God in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Secondly, God manifests Himself in us by the abiding of the Holy Spirit in our lives. As Christians, God manifests Himself in us by the abiding of the Holy Spirit.

Second Instance: The Indwelling Holy Spirit

In John chapter 14, beginning with verse 18, our Lord says to His disciples: "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also. At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you. 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 to him."

Judas saith unto him, not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world? Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me.

Note also verse 21: "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 to him." Then verse 25: "These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you. But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and

bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you."

The interesting thing is that the word for Comforter there is paraklētos. He is the divine Paraclete, the one called alongside to help. The truth of the matter is this: the promised manifestation of Christ in us is by the abiding of the Holy Spirit, which proceeds from the Father and the Son. The very fact that the Holy Spirit of God resides in us is indeed the manifest presence of God in us.

Please take note of two things. Number one, the Holy Spirit is a witness with us. Number two, the Holy Spirit is a witness to us. First of all, Romans 8:16 says, "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." He is a witness with us. So you ask, how in the world does the Holy Spirit bear witness with my spirit that I am a child of God?

Our Lord said in John chapter 14, "If you love me, you'll keep my commandments." He also said that the Holy Spirit would not speak of Himself, but would speak of Jesus Christ. Everything about Christ He would teach us and bring to our remembrance. It is the Holy Spirit, then, who provokes us to holiness and obedience, leads and guides us to obedience, and gives us grace and the ability to obey. As we obey, He witnesses with our spirit that we are indeed the children of God.

By nature, man does not like to be obedient or desire holiness. Anytime we desire holiness, obedience, and godliness, it is not from us; it is from the Holy Spirit of God. He witnesses with our spirit that we are the children of God. Hebrews 10:15 says, "Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us."

"For after that he had said before, This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them." The Holy Spirit is not simply a witness with us; He is also a witness to us. These truths should lead us to understand that the Holy Spirit indwells our bodies, and therefore our bodies are now the temple of the Holy Spirit.

First Corinthians 6:19–20 says, "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have

of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." "What? know ye not"—don't you know this—"that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost?" I think the Greek word is naos. It is a holy place. It is the most holy place. Your body is the temple. It is a holy of holies, which is in you, which you have of God, and you're not your own, for you're bought with a price. Therefore, you're to glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are His.

If you comprehend this fact, if you understand that your body is a temple of the Holy Ghost, then you will see the awfulness and the wickedness of fornication, adultery, and anything that will defile your body. Beginning with verse 15 in 1 Corinthians chapter 6, Paul says, “Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ?” Remember, Christ is our Head, and we are His body; therefore, we are joined together. “Shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid. What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh. But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit. Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?”

It is the Holy Spirit who guides us, directs us, and leads us into obedience, holiness, and sanctification. In this, He is indeed the manifestation of God in our lives. He speaks the truth of Jesus Christ, leads us into conformity to His Word, intercedes for us, and prompts us to prayer and faith. We must understand that the Holy Spirit of God abides in us, and that this is a manifestation of God, for our Lord said, “We will come unto you and we will manifest ourselves unto you.” Thus we see the manifest presence of God in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. We can see the manifest presence of God in our bodies. Thirdly, we see the manifestation of God’s presence in His church.

Third Instance: God's Presence in the Church

In Matthew chapter 18, verse 20, our Lord says, “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of

them.” This is a verse every one of us can quote, and one we have often quoted in times past. We often quote this passage when our numbers are small and we seek to encourage ourselves.

A crowd is not necessary to pray, proclaim the truth, preach, or worship. It is equally true that where two or three are gathered together in His name, there He is in the midst of them. However, the promise, “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them,” is given not only to the church, but in the context of church discipline.

Go back to Matthew 18:15: “Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.” Suppose Joshua has done something against me. He has sinned against me, and it has upset me. What am I to do? Am I to go to Gary and say, “Gary, let me tell you what Joshua just did to me”? No. Am I to go to Francis and say, “Francis, let me tell you what that boy did”? No. Scripture says that if he upsets me, has done something against me, or sins against me, I am to go to him privately and tell him the fault between me and him alone.

If he hears me, everything is worked out. But what if he does not hear me? What if he is recalcitrant, rebellious, stubborn, and hard-headed? I looked at his wife; I knew I was going to get an answer from there. But he will not listen. What do I do next? In verse 16: "But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established." So I may go to him privately three or four times, and it does not work out.

Then I can come back and say, "All right, James. All right, Francis, you go with me. We need to confront Joshua." The Bible says I am to take two or three witnesses, that every word should be established. Let us suppose he is still recalcitrant and stubborn. What happens then? He will not hear me; he will not hear us. Verse 17: "And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church." Now it becomes a matter of church discipline. "But if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican." Excommunicate him. He is out. He will not listen to the Word of God.

Now look in verse 18: "Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." That is not the keys of the kingdom given to the Pope, I can assure you, because now He is talking about church discipline. He said in verse 19, "Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." So it regards church discipline, binding and loosing. It does regard praying, that is for sure. But note that this promise, "there am I in the midst of them," is given in the context of the church. You are there for obedience to God, obedience to the Word of God, doing that which He commanded in the way that He commanded.

Psalm 68:18 says, "Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them." Does that Scripture ring a bell? Does Psalm 68:18 remind you of any other passage in the Bible, especially in the New Testament?

Ephesians 4:8 says, "Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?" That is, He was buried. "He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens."

"That he might fill all things." He is seated at the right hand of God. "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;" It is actually one group. Why? "For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

"That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together

and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love."

His ascension and leading captivity captive was necessary in order to give gifts unto men. He specifically gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastor-teachers. There are no apostles today like there were in the New Testament, like the original twelve. It cannot be so because, to be an original apostle, you had to be there when Christ was alive and observe His death and/or His resurrection.

Paul was specially chosen, I think, but those were the qualifications laid out in Acts chapter 2. There were other apostles in the New Testament besides the twelve. James, in fact, is called an apostle, although he was not necessarily listed among the original twelve. The word apostle comes from the Greek word apostolos, which simply means “a sent one.” If this church sent Gary to a conference to represent us and our views, he would be an apostle from this church simply because the word means a sent one. We sent him; that is all it means. So we might have an apostle in that sense of the word, but we do not have an apostle in the New Testament sense of the word.

What about a prophet? No, we do not have prophets today either. “I know people who call themselves prophets.” Well, I could call myself the Empire State Building, but that does not mean I am the Empire State Building. The Hebrew word for prophet is nabi.

A prophet did two things: first, he foretold; and second, he told forth. There are no prophets in the sense of the Old Testament and New Testament prophets who foretold events. We do not need them if we have the full and final revelation of God in the Word of God and in the Lord Jesus Christ. I could be a prophet in the sense that I tell forth what is coming based upon the completed revelation of God in the Word of God. That sense of the word might work, but not in the original sense—seeing visions, having trances, and receiving revelation from God that had never before been known to the human mind.

What about the evangelist? The apostle Paul told Timothy, who was a pastor, “Do the work of an evangelist.” We have many who call themselves evangelists. Maybe they are; I do not know. But Paul told Timothy, a pastor, to do the work of an evangelist. Basically, what we have today is pastor-teachers. How do you pastor? By teaching. In other words, a pastor who does not teach is really not pastoring. I am going to show you why momentarily.

The Bible says that when He ascended, He led captivity captive and gave gifts to men. Why did He give gifts to men? The answer is found in Ephesians 4:11-16: “He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers.” Why? “For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.”

“But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted…”

How are the saints perfected? How do the saints perform the work of the ministry? How do we come into the unity of the faith? How do we mature? How do we avoid error and heresy? How are we to grow up in Jesus Christ? How are we to minister to each other and to edify each other in love?

Look in Ephesians 4 and verse 8: “Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.” What is lacking in this verse that is applied for us in Psalm 68 and verse 18? Psalm 68:18 says, “Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them.” Isn’t that amazing? Why in verse 8 of Ephesians 4 did he not say, “Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men, that God might dwell among them”?

How does God dwell among His church? The answer would be through the preaching of His word. When people live together, there is always conversation. Whether you believe it or not, after 58 years of marriage, I still talk to my wife, and she still speaks to me every now and then. But there is conversation. Anybody who comes to visit us, there is conversation.

We don't just sit there with our arms folded, staring at each other, hoping somebody will get up and leave first. No, no. No, there's conversation. How does God manifest Himself in His church? And the answer is He speaks to His people. He instructs us. He teaches us. He directs us. Let me show you. Turn in your Bibles to the book of Deuteronomy chapter 33 and verse 3. Deuteronomy 33.

We're going to look at several verses real quickly. But look if you would, Deuteronomy 33. And notice, if you would please, verse 3. Deuteronomy 33 in verse 3. The Bible says, "Yea, he loved the people;" this is God now. We're talking about the Lord. You will find that in verse 2. "Yea, he loved the people; all his saints are in thy hand: and they sat down at thy feet; every one shall receive of thy words." Everyone, that is all the saints will receive of His words. If you would turn right over to the book of Job, right before the book of Psalms, Job 36 and verse 22. Job 36 verse 22. Look at what the Bible says. Job 36 and verse 22.

Here it is. "Behold, God exalteth by his power: who teacheth like him?" Behold, God exalteth by his power: who teacheth like him? Then if you would turn right on over to Isaiah, chapter 48, Isaiah 48. And look, if you would please, at verse 17, Isaiah 48 and verse 17. Isaiah 48 verse 17. "Thus saith the Lord, thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel; I am the Lord thy God which teacheth thee to profit, which leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldest go." God said, "I teach you and I teach you to profit and I lead you by the way that you should go." Now look in your Bibles to the book of John chapter six, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, John chapter six. And notice if you would be getting there with verse 43, John chapter six and verse 43. Watch carefully. John six, verse 43.

"Jesus therefore answered and said unto them, Murmur not among yourselves." Now, look what He tells them. "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I

will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God." Now watch what happens when God teaches you. "Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me. Not that any man hath seen the Father, save he which is of God, he hath seen the Father. Verily, verily, I say unto you," verse 47, "He that believeth on me hath everlasting life."

But note what He said: “It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall be all taught of God.’” Everyone who has been taught of Him, who has heard Him, comes to Jesus Christ.

The Bible says in First Thessalonians 4:9, “But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another.” What did he say? “Ye yourselves are taught of God.”

God dwells with His church. God manifests Himself in His church. How does He do so? Through the exposition and application of His Word, through the preaching and teaching of His Word. So the question is this: Do you hear God speaking?

Do you receive His instruction? Do you make application to your life? You see, God speaks through His Word. Listen carefully as that Word is expounded, explained, and applied by the preacher. The apostle Paul said to the Thessalonians, "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing." Here is a special reason to thank and praise God. What is that special reason? "Because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us," that is, they were preaching and teaching, "ye received it not as the word of men." Paul was not presenting merely his own ideas, and this was not simply what Paul thought or what Silas said. He continued, "But as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe."

How does God speak? Through His Word. How does God manifest Himself? Through the preaching and teaching of His Word. This is why the Word must be received as it is in truth, the Word of God, rather than as the word of men.

Application: Hearing God with a Humble Heart

Now, listen to this application. If you want to know the manifest presence of God, then you must listen to His Word with a humble, contrite, and obedient heart. I can assure you that this is one of the main reasons most folks never learn the Word of God. They do not come with a humble, contrite, or obedient heart. They may come out of rituals, ceremonial acts, curiosity, or necessity, but they do not really come to learn. They may hear the preaching and teaching, yet they do not receive it with the heart required to learn from God.

Isaiah 57:15 is a wonderful passage: "For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." God dwells in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a humble and contrite heart. So if God speaks, we need to have a humble and contrite heart to listen.

Here is a principle that you and I need to understand, because God works with us. We oftentimes work the same way with our children that God works with us. For instance, if I were to say to my child, "I want you to do this and this and that. Do you understand?" "Yes." "Fine. Please get this done." I want to show you this principle in Psalm 32.

I come back four or five hours later, and it is not done. So I call my child and say, “Did you not hear me?” “Yes, Dad, I heard you.” “Well, did you not understand?” “Yes, I understood.” “Why, then, did you not do what I asked you to do?” “Well, I just didn’t want to do it.” “Really? Well, son, you know, God made peach trees for several reasons, not just to bear fruit. I have a peach-tree limb out here that might make you really want to obey me.”

My child can learn by listening and being obedient, or he can learn by being disciplined. Look in Psalm 32, beginning in verse 8. God says, “I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go.” Isn’t that wonderful? God promises to instruct us and teach us. He says, “I will guide thee with mine eye.” That is very easily done: just look at His eyes. God says this is the easy way, but look at verse 9: “Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have

no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee."

God says, "Don't make me put a bit and bridle in you. Don't make me jerk you around. Don't make me pull back so hard I'll break your teeth." You can learn by listening and be obedient, or God can put a bridle on you and make you do what He wants you to do. This is why we need to understand that the word which you hear is not the word of man, but indeed the word of God.

Psalm 85:8 says, "I will hear what God the Lord will speak: for he will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints: but let them not turn again to folly."

So the truth of the matter is this: God does manifest Himself in the present. He manifests Himself in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, in the indwelling Holy Spirit in His people, and in His church through the preaching and teaching of the Word of God.

So the question is, do you perceive the manifest presence of God? Do you understand that when you miss the preaching and teaching of the Word of God, you are missing the manifest presence of God? God dwells among His people and with His people, as well as in His people. God is just as present today—more so than He was in the Old Testament in the tabernacle and temple.

We just do not perceive it. We do not grasp it. In the future, in eternity, it will be an even greater revelation when our faith becomes reality. God manifests Himself in His church.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee this day. We thank You for Your Word and Your truth. We ask, Lord, that You would teach us, build us up in the most holy faith, and make us holy, godly, and obedient. In Thy name we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 37

A Setup Gone Wrong

Introduction: The Nature of Setups

In Matthew chapter 12, beginning with verse 9:

"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, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out? How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days. Then saith he to the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it forth; and it was restored whole, like as the other. Then the Pharisees went out, and held a council against him, how they might destroy him. But when Jesus knew it, he withdrew himself from thence: and great multitudes followed him, and he healed them all."

Setups are very prominent. Everyone hates them, even those that are supposed to be funny. We have all been set up one way or the other, usually around a birthday, an anniversary, or some other

special event. Sometimes these setups succeed, sometimes they fail, and sometimes they are funny; but sometimes you end up crying as well. Setups can become very serious, especially when governmental entities are involved.

Oftentimes, corrupt police have been known for setting up innocent citizens. I recently read an article concerning a man who was trying to go into Mexico to visit relatives. They found five bullets in his truck—just five bullets. The man happened to be an American citizen and a Texan, and he also had a concealed carry permit. But there were no weapons on him and no weapons in the truck whatsoever.

But he did stand up for his rights, and he evidently made the border patrol agents angry. They found these five bullets, declared them to be munitions of war, and confiscated his truck. According to the article, it has now been two years, and he still has not gotten his truck back. Obviously, setups can be very, very serious.

I've not only read this, but also received verification from several sources of how absolutely simple it is for governmental agents to plant pornography on someone's computer—even child porn and pedophilia—while the owner remains completely ignorant of it. Then, during an investigation, the material is found on his computer; he is charged and ruined professionally as well as personally.

Those who do any reading at all understand that the FBI is well known for its sting operations. But setups occur in the religious area as well. All you have to do is read Foxe's Book of Martyrs, and you will see the intrigue, collusion, and conspiracy of the Roman Catholics to destroy the Reformers or anyone who disagreed with them.

Historical Examples of Religious Setups

There was one reformer, Pierre Viret, of whom I have several books. He was so hated by the Roman Catholics, especially the priests, that they had the poor man poisoned, which he survived. They ambushed him, beat him, and stabbed him, yet he still survived and preached the wonderful gospel of Jesus Christ for many years afterward.

If you've done any reading on history, you've probably encountered the name Cardinal Richelieu. In France, he was notorious for destroying anyone who opposed him or stood up against him; very obviously, he had many of them set up, put to death, or arrested.

Over and over in the New Testament, you find that the scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians tried to set up Jesus Christ. Our text is one of those instances. Before I expound this text and point it out to you, I want to show you very quickly some other passages of the Bible where they sought to set up Jesus Christ in order that they might accuse and condemn Him.

Biblical Examples of Setups Against Jesus

In Matthew 19:3, the Bible says, “The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?” Notice that the Pharisees came also unto Him, tempting Him and supposedly asking Him this question: “Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?”

What appears to be a legitimate question does not necessarily mean that it is a legitimate question. In this instance, it certainly was not a legitimate question whatsoever. You have to understand the background for this particular question. In Judaism, there were two competing schools: one was known as the school of Shammai, and the other was known as the school of Hillel.

The school of Shammai were ultra-conservatives. They were very religious, known as religious fundamentalists, so to speak. Not only were they religious fundamentalists, they had a pathological devotion to obey what they determined to be the traditions and the ceremonies and rituals concerning the law. What they believed was simply this: all of these traditions, ceremonies, and rituals were nothing more than a fence around the law, to protect the law, so to speak. The school of Hillel, on the other hand, were more liberal, milder, and less strict in relationship to all of these traditions, ceremonies, and rituals as well.

So they came to Jesus Christ in Matthew chapter 19 and asked a seemingly simple question: “Is it lawful for a man to put away his

wife for any cause whatsoever?" The ploy was to get Jesus Christ either to side with the school of Shammai or with the school of Hillel. These two schools were very contentious; they argued and fought. If they could get Christ to side with one of these schools of thought, they would have Him pigeonholed, and they could then use the other school to attack Him and accuse Him.

Here is another setup. In Matthew chapter 22, verses 15 through 22, they tried to set up Jesus Christ. We are talking about setups, how they tried to set up Jesus Christ.

In Matthew chapter 22, beginning with verse 15, the Bible says: "Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel how they might entangle him in his talk." The word entangle is important. "And they sent out unto him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man: for thou regardest not the person of men."

This sounded like a compliment, but it was a setup. They wanted Christ to specify His answer and be very clear in answering their question. After giving Him this great build-up, they asked, "Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not?"

The Lord perceived their wickedness and said, "Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites? Shew me the tribute money." They brought Him a penny. He asked, "Whose is this image and superscription?" They answered, "Caesar's." Then He said, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." When they had heard these words, they marvelled, and left Him, and went their way.

Here was the setup. If Christ said, "Yes, give Caesar the tax," He would be supporting the hated Roman Empire, and all the Judeans would be against Him because they despised the Romans. If He said, "Do not pay the tax," they would report Him to the Roman Empire so that He would be known as an anarchist, an insurrectionist, and someone against the Caesar cult and the Emperor cult.

Obviously, they thought they had Him trapped. Our Lord escaped their trap by asking, "Whose image is on this coin?" Caesar's. He

said, "Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things which are God's." What belongs to God? Everything—everything, the world and they that dwell therein. He is the Creator. Everything basically belongs to Him.

When they saw they could not take hold of His words, they left Him. The same day came to Him the Sadducees, which say that there is no resurrection, and asked Him, saying, “Master, Moses said, If a man die, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother.” This had to do with the levirate marriage. They said there were seven brothers. The first married a wife who had no child; then the second married her, and they had no children. The third married her, and so it continued up to the seventh. Finally, the seventh brother died. The woman was left alive alone, still without seed. Then they asked Him, “Well, whose wife is she going to be in the resurrection?”

Our Lord said, “Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage.” He went on to say, “You must remember that God said to Moses, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. He is not the God of the dead, but of the living.” Obviously, they were still trying to entangle our Lord and set Him up, because they clearly did not want Him teaching what He was teaching.

Let me give you one more illustration before we go back to Matthew 12. Everywhere you turn, seemingly even today, there are setups. Setups can be in any area of life. In John chapter 8, beginning with verse 3, we have the account of the woman taken in adultery: “And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst, They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act.”

In John 8, the Pharisees said to Jesus, “Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou?” This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not. When they continued asking him, he lifted up himself and said unto them, “He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.” Again he stooped down and

wrote on the ground. Being convicted by their own conscience, they went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last. Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. He asked her, “Woman, where are those thine accusers? Hath no man condemned thee?” She said, “No man, Lord.” And Jesus said unto her, “Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.”

Obviously, this was a setup. The Pharisees were not interested in righteousness or justice. If they had been interested in justice, we would have to ask: Where was the man? Why did they bring only the woman? It takes two to commit adultery. They simply brought the woman, leaving the man behind.

Here is what they were trying to do. If Jesus Christ condemned the woman, He would no longer be known as the friend of sinners. If He did not condemn her, He would be against the law, which He came to fulfill. The Pharisees believed that either way they had Him, pitting Him against sinners and against the law of God at the same time. Instead of falling into their trap, He proved Himself to be the friend of sinners by obeying the law as well.

Many years back, I preached an entire message entitled “The Clean Hands Doctrine.” This is not only a doctrine found today in our own jurisprudence; it was clearly taught in the Bible. If I accuse Gary of a sin or a crime, the clean hands doctrine requires that I be innocent and free from that sin or crime myself. In other words, if I condemn him for a crime while I am guilty of that crime, I am condemning myself as well as him. The clean hands doctrine is very prevalent.

Have you ever wondered what Jesus Christ did when He stooped down and wrote on the ground? I have no idea, and I cannot prove what I am about to say. If you go back to Leviticus, you remember the woman who was taken in adultery. The priest made her drink the bitter water which causes the curse, and then he wrote in the dust there in the tabernacle. I would tend to think that when our Lord wrote on the ground, He was writing down names, dates, and places, because the Bible says they, being convicted by their own conscience, went out beginning from the oldest to the last. When our Lord looked up, He said, “Woman, where are those thine accusers?”

"Hath no man condemned thee?" She said, "No man, Lord." He said, "Neither do I condemn thee."

How could our Lord say that when He obviously knew she was guilty? If you go back to Deuteronomy and the book of Numbers, you will find that the law of God demanded a minimum of two witnesses for the death penalty to be executed. Where were her witnesses? They were gone. She had no one to accuse her. So, according to the law, the only thing our Lord could do was let her go. Therefore, He said, "Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more." They were trying to entrap Him, and they clearly failed, for which I am certainly thankful.

The Setup in Matthew 12: Healing on the Sabbath

Now, in Matthew chapter 12, our text, we have a definite design by the Pharisees, by the Jews, to try to set Jesus Christ up in order that they might accuse Him. What were they going to accuse Him of? They were going to accuse Him of healing someone on the Sabbath day.

Look at verse 10: "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?" Note the last phrase: "that they might accuse him." To whom would they accuse Him? To the Sanhedrin. When they took Jesus Christ in John chapter 19, where did they take Him? To the Sanhedrin. They took Him there first, to the high priests and those seventy gathered together. They condemned Him, and then took Him to Pilate.

Clearly, they were going to condemn Him for violating—not the Sabbath, but their interpretation of the Sabbath. There is a vast difference between violating God's law and violating how some people interpret God's law. If you read Mark chapter 7 and Matthew 15, you will find that their traditions continually violated the law of God. Our Lord said, "In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." In other words, their traditions were worthless. The only thing they were good for was to make void the law of God.

Thus, they were going to accuse Him, not of truly violating God's law, but of violating their interpretation of it. This same incident in Matthew chapter 12 is also recorded in Mark chapter 3 and Luke chapter 6. This one incident is recorded three times in the Gospel.

Look again at verse 10: "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?" They asked specifically and deliberately, "that they might accuse him."

Here is an important truth for us to grasp: all questions are not necessarily simple questions. Questions may be used as a setup. There is a vast difference between asking a question in order to get a good answer, to be informed, or because one desires to know something, and asking a question in order to set someone up so that he could be mocked, criticized, condemned, entrapped, and ensnared.

Moreover, you must consider this: many times, questions are asked not because the questioner truly desires an answer, but to set up the person who answers. Then the questioner can respond with what he thinks, believes, and wants to do, using the exchange to teach. Some questions are asked simply for debate and challenge. In each instance where questions are asked illegitimately, it is usually because someone wants to demonstrate an attitude of superiority or arrogance.

The Jews, Pharisees, Sadducees, and all these people boasted of their superior knowledge. Yet their knowledge was deficient because they did not obey the law themselves. They wanted everybody else to do what they were told to do. Romans chapter 2, verse 17, says, "Behold, thou art called a Jew," or a Judahite.

Remember that the people referred to as Jews included several groups. Geographically, they were the people in Judea, not the northern kingdom, but the southern kingdom. Those in Judea, and those born of the tribe of Judah, were known as Jews as well. The ruling elite in the Bible were also called the Jews. Paul continues: "Behold, thou art called a Jew, and restest in the law."

Now watch: "and makest thy boast of God, And knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed

out of the law; And art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, An instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law. Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege? Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God? For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written."

Here are people who had a form of knowledge and boasted that they really knew, when in reality they did not know and certainly were not going to obey at all. It is the height of arrogance and pride to demand that others listen to us, do as we say, and follow our directions, even though we do not obey ourselves.

We have six grandkids. Renee is our oldest granddaughter, and Casey is our oldest grandson; both are thirty-two, though Casey is a week younger. There were four others, and when this happened Renee was probably five or six, while the rest were four, three, and right on down. They were all fishing down on the pond dam. Renee walked up and down, telling the rest of the children how to fish and what to do. The funny thing was, she had never been fishing in her life, but she demanded that everybody fish the way she told them to fish. Finally, Casey looked at her and said, “Renee, if you’d be quiet, maybe we can catch some fish.”

That is the way people are. We demand that folks do things our way. Whether we do them or not, we think that is how they should be done, and therefore everyone must do them our way. But it is absolutely asinine and a display of ignorance to expect and demand that everyone accept your positions, interpretations, and views without having your background, opportunities, experience, and study habits. That is exactly what the Pharisees did.

They demanded that the peasants obey them and do as they were told because they were the elite. They were the ones who supposedly knew, and they boasted that they knew. So now they come to Jesus Christ and ask Him, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath day?” That would be a lawful and legitimate question if it were asked in

sincerity. But when it is asked to accuse and condemn, it is evidence of a haughty, arrogant, and wicked motive. Moreover, the evidence in our text demonstrates that the question was asked not out of concern for the sick, not out of concern for the disabled man, and not out of concern for anyone who was wounded and helpless, but simply that they might outsmart Jesus Christ and thus accuse Him and condemn Him.

Here is the setup. If Christ answered that it was wrong to heal on the Sabbath, they would ask, Where is His compassion for the weak, the sickly, the disabled, and the hurted? If Christ healed on the Sabbath, they would condemn Him because, according to their interpretation of the Sabbath, healing was not permitted. It was considered work. Therefore, since Jesus Christ would not conform to their interpretation, He would certainly be condemned.

Here is how our Lord gets out of this setup. “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, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out?” Our Lord knew their habits, their deeds, and their actions.

Jesus' Response: The Lesser to Greater Argument

Yes, they would help their animal. They would save the life of their animal. Biblically, it would be right to do that. Proverbs 12:10 says, “A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast: but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel.” The problem in this passage is very simple: they were more concerned over a suffering, endangered animal than they were over a suffering, disabled man. If they had a sheep and it fell into a pit, they would get it out. Then Jesus asked, “How much then is a man better than a sheep?”

"Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days." In this passage, our Lord is arguing from the lesser to the greater, an argument used many times throughout the Bible. If it is right to save the life of an animal on the Sabbath day, how much more is it right to save the life of a man? If it is right to show mercy to an animal on the Sabbath day, how much more is it right to show mercy to a man

on the Sabbath day? Our Lord is not denying the importance of the lives of animals. By comparison, the life of a man is more valuable and more important. If you are going to save an animal's life, then obviously you should be willing to save the life of a man or woman as well.

Contrasts are important when you read the Bible. First, it is not only lawful but necessary to do well even on the Sabbath day. If it is lawful, right, and necessary to do well on the Sabbath day, how much more is it lawful to do that which is right and holy every other day? If it is right to do this on the Sabbath day, it is right to do this any day, as long as people are being helped.

The Principle of Contrast: Doing Good vs. Doing Evil

The same incident is recorded in Mark and Luke. In Mark 3:4, notice the question that our Lord asked them: "And he saith 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.” It is important to learn from contrast. Our Lord asked, “Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath days? Is it lawful to save a life, or to kill? Is it lawful to do good, or to do evil?”

Here is what He was telling these Pharisees: If you do not do that which is right, holy, and lawful on the Sabbath day, then you are doing evil. If you do not save a life on the Sabbath day, then you are killing; you are a murderer. If you do not show mercy on the Sabbath day, by contrast, you are showing that you are unmerciful. If you do not show justice on the Sabbath day, you are showing that you are cruel and unjust. Our Lord cornered His adversaries at this point. He shut them up. Notice again that the Bible says, “They held their peace.”

Here was a startling truth found by way of contrast: Not to do good, when it is in the power of our hand to do it, is to do evil. Not to save a life, when it is in the power of our hand to save a life, is to kill. Not to be merciful, when it is in the power of our hand to be merciful, is to be cruel and unjust.

What our Lord was showing these Pharisees was that, in reality, their pretense at keeping the law was nothing more than a violation

of God's law. Their traditions were completely contrary to the law of God. John Calvin writes, "He who takes away the life of a man is held to be a criminal. And there is little difference between manslaughter and the conduct of him who does not concern himself about relieving a person in distress. So then Christ indirectly charges them with endeavoring, under the pretense of a holy act, to compel him to do evil, for sin is committed, as we've already said, not only by him who does anything contrary to the Lord, but also who neglects his duty."

Our Lord was saying, "It is my duty to heal on the Sabbath day because it is saving life. It is an act of mercy and justice." If it is lawful, right, and holy to save a life and to show justice, mercy, and compassion on the Sabbath day, how much more is it right to do the same thing every other day of the week?

Obedience Despite Opposition

Our Lord did that which was right, and He obeyed God's law, regardless of what the Pharisees said or thought. In Matthew 12:13, we read, "Then saith he to the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it forth; and it was restored whole, like as the other."

Adam Clarke, in his commentary, said, "The bare command of God is a sufficient reason for obedience." He then wrote: "The man might have reasoned thus, 'Lord, my hand is withered. How can I stretch it out? Make it whole first, and afterwards I will do as thou commandest.' This may appear reasonable, but in his case, it would have been foolishness. At the command of our Lord, he made the effort. And in making it, the cure was effected. Faith disregards apparent impossibilities where there is a command and a promise of God."

Let that sink in. The bare command is sufficient for obedience. Wherever God commands and we are obedient, God is the one who gives the power. How often we have despised and disregarded the commands of our Lord to our own detriment, sitting back and saying, "Lord, I don't have the power to do that." That is because we are sitting back in unbelief. If He commands you to do something, that is sufficient, and you must do what He commands.

Our Lord obeyed the law in healing the man. He not only showed mercy; He also showed compassion. At the same time, He exposed the error, hypocrisy, heresy, and wickedness of the Pharisees. In Mark 3:4, He asked 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.” Their response was understandable. They refused to answer because they could not answer. Had they answered His question, it would have proven that He was right and they were wrong. Their setup failed miserably. They were hypocrites. They did not know the law of God, nor did they care about the law of God. They did not care about the man who was suffering. The only thing they cared about was their interpretation and their traditions.

Here is another incident that clearly sets forth hypocrisy. In Luke 13, beginning with verse 10, we read: “And he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. 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.” She was almost bent double. “And when Jesus saw her, he called her to him, and said unto her, Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity. And he laid his hands on her: and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God. And the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because that Jesus had healed on the sabbath day, and said unto the people, There are six days in which men ought to work: in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the sabbath day. The Lord then answered him, and said, 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 loosed from this bond on the sabbath day? And when he had said these things, all his adversaries were ashamed: and all the people rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by him.”

What indignation! Why? Because He healed her on the Sabbath day. The ruler said that men ought to work six days, not on the Sabbath. Our Lord said, “You hypocrite, you're worthless.” You will take your animal and lead him away to drink water. This is the daughter of Abraham. Should she not be healed even on the Sabbath day?

Now let me ask you a question. In each one of these instances where Jesus Christ was set up, or attempted to be set up, by the scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians, He defeated them. It was not merely a defeat; He was exposing the truth, their error, their misinterpretation, and the hypocrisy of their lives. Do you think that the Pharisees said to themselves and each other, “Wow, what a wonderful truth”?

The Pharisees' Reaction: Anger and Conspiracy

Do you think the Pharisees said, “This man is right. We have been wrong for hundreds of years. I am so thankful that at last, finally, we have the truth, and we can change our lives”? No. After Jesus Christ exposed their error, hypocrisy, and sin, Matthew 12:14 says, “Then the Pharisees went out, and held a council against him, how they might destroy him.” Then Luke 6:11 gives the same account: “And they were filled with madness; and communed one with another what they might do to Jesus.” They were insanely mad. They were upset. They said, “We have got to get rid of this man. We have got to kill him. We are going to take counsel how we might destroy him.”

Listen to me very carefully. Men who do not love or hold the truth will not take lightly to having their sins and errors exposed. If you do not love the truth, if you do not want the truth, it will infuriate you to have your sin, error, and heresy exposed. This is equally true today as it was in the days of Jesus Christ.

I can prove this very simply. If you do not believe what I have just said, begin exposing the corruption in our governmental entities today. Take on the judicial system and expose the corruption there. Take hold of the IRS. Grab hold of Congress and expose how unbiblical they are and how contrary to the Constitution they are.

Application: The Human Rejection of Truth

When was the last time you wrote or spoke to a congressman and he said, “Thank you for helping me. I now see the biblical truth and where I have been violating my oath to the Constitution, and I am going to change. I am going to start obeying my oath and the Bible”? How many times has that ever happened? No, they will get mad at you. The truth of the matter is, they will stick the IRS or the FBI on

you. They will seek to destroy you simply because you have exposed their error, heresy, and sin.

If that is not sufficient for you, begin a campaign to expose the corruption, error, and heresy in the leading denominations of our day. See how far you get with that. They will not say, "I did not know that we had drifted so far from the Word of God. I am thankful that someone has pointed out our error." They will do everything they can to destroy you. If that is not sufficient, take one of the megachurches and its megapastors, expose their sin, error, and heresy, and see how far that goes with their followers.

Instead of being happy that they have been exposed to the truth, they will be full of anger, resentment, hatred, and perhaps violence, because they do not want the truth. Here is something we must understand: man by nature does not love truth, does not want truth, and will not accept truth. What men by nature want and hold to are traditions, rituals, ceremonies, habits, customs, feelings, emotions, personal satisfaction, and personal contentment. They place every one of these things above the Word of God and would rather have them than the truth.

Application: Obedience and Trusting God with Results

Our Lord knew the truth, applied the truth, and obeyed the law of God regardless of the circumstances. He knew their attitude, knew what they were going to do, and knew they would take counsel to destroy Him. What did He do? He simply did that which was right. He told the man, "Stretch forth thine hand." When he stretched it forth, it was restored and made whole, just like the other. They were so angry that they then sought counsel to destroy Him.

The point is this: We must be likewise. We must give no consideration to the results of our godly, obedient, and biblical actions. If it is godly, biblical, and in obedience to God, we must obey Him regardless of the outcome and circumstances. The duty of obedience is ours; the results belong to God. We cannot control the results. We are responsible only to obey. Duty is ours; the results are God's.

Our Lord teaches us clearly that works of mercy are indeed works of necessity. If there is a need for mercy, it is a necessary work, and that work of mercy and necessity is to be done regardless of the day. It does not matter whether it is the Sabbath or a regular day. Moreover, if we fail to exercise mercy, He says it is cruelty. If we fail to exercise justice, He says it is injustice. If we fail to save a life, it is the same as killing.

Here is the second truth: at times, setups backfire. They backfired on all the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians. I read not some time ago of a corrupt cop who wanted to arrest a man, though there was nothing to arrest him for. So he planted drugs in the man's car. He cut off his body camera, either not knowing or forgetting that, once cut off, it continued to record for thirty seconds. He caught himself on his own camera planting the drugs. Then he turned the camera back on and filmed himself finding them. At court, the man was totally exonerated and found innocent when the body-camera footage came into evidence, because the cop was clearly planting drugs that did not belong to the citizen.

Have you ever stopped to think about this when you read through the Psalms, that the Bible says, “he that diggeth a pit shall fall therein,” and, “he that setteth a snare shall be ensnared by it”? The Bible says that God shall bring it down upon their own pate, that is, the top of their heads. I love that passage in Psalm 2, where the kings of the earth and the heathen all raged together against God and against his Christ. The Bible says, “He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision.”

Clearly, setups do indeed backfire. In the sovereign providence of God, many times He has caused some to backfire in our lives, of which we probably did not even realize they were setups. He simply protected and preserved us. But here is the third one, an application that you and I must make, not only in our attitude, but also in our daily life.

Application: The Danger of Hardness of Heart

Look in your Bibles again to Mark chapter 3. Mark 3, verses 4 and 5: “And he saith 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.” “And

when he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, he saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it out: and his hand was restored whole as the other."

Do you realize that hardness of heart, an unmerciful and uncompassionate spirit, and a lack of concern for others grieve and anger the Lord Jesus Christ? He looked around with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts.

The Bible says in Ephesians 4 and verse 30, "And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption." How do we grieve the Holy Spirit? By acting disobediently, by doing those things contrary to God in His Word. When you and I have a hard, unmerciful, unforgiving, uncaring, unconcerned heart, it angers our Lord and is grievous unto Him.

Conclusion: Jesus Withdraws from Rejecters of Truth

We have to watch our attitude. We have to watch our heart. The Pharisees went out and held a council against Him, how they might destroy Him. But when Jesus knew it—and He did—He withdrew Himself from there. You want your error? You may have it. You want your lies? You may keep them. You want your traditions? Follow them to your heart's desire. If you have no regard for truth, and if you do not want the truth, I will leave you to yourself.

The disciples asked, "Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying?" Our Lord answered, "Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up. Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch." What did our Lord do when He withdrew Himself from those Pharisees? He left them alone. If our Lord ever leaves you alone, it will not be to your advantage. It will be to your disadvantage.

You need to make sure that you love truth, desire truth, and want truth, and that you are willing to let any error, any heresy, any unmerciful, uncompassionate, wicked attitudes or desires go and say, "I want truth. I want truth more than anything else." If you do not want truth, I can assure you our Lord will not give it to you. He

will leave you in your error and your sin. Truth is what we need, and truth is how we are to live.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we ask You for Your grace and Your mercy. We ask, Lord, that You would indeed teach us and build us up in the most holy faith. Give us Thy truth, for Thou art truth incarnate. Help us, Lord, to love Thee, to live for Thee, to stand for Thee, to obey Thee, not even thinking of the consequences for our obedience, but just trusting Thee with the results. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

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CHAPTER 38

The Perfect Community

Introduction: The Oxymoron of a Perfect Community

The message today is extremely practical, and the title is “The Perfect Community,” or “How to Live with Others.” In Deuteronomy chapter 11, verse 21, God says, “That your days may be multiplied, and the days of your children, in the land which the Lord sware unto your fathers to give them, as the days of heaven upon the earth.” The perfect community has to be an oxymoron. If it is a community of people, it cannot be perfect. If it is perfect, there must not be any people in it.

I've often said to Christians who were looking for the perfect church, “If you find it, don't join it. You'll mess it up.” There have been several programs, or, I should say, socialistic utopias, that began as a perfect community. Each one failed miserably, except one that did indeed last for 100 years. First of all, there was Brook Farm, a transcendentalist utopian settlement close to Boston, Massachusetts. It attracted many intellectuals who were curious about forming an agrarian society. The community was founded by George Ripley, a former Unitarian Universalist minister, along with his wife and 15 other members, but it did not last very long. Then

Vermonter John Humphrey Noyes started the Oneida community in 1848.

Historical Failures of Man-Made Utopias

This was to be a haven for the perfectionist. The perfectionist embraced communalism, free love, and equality. The commune shared pretty much everything, including incomes and partners. Noyes initiated what he called complex marriages, where every man was married to every woman in that particular community. They were encouraged to reject monogamy and, of course, have multiple partners. They believed that these practices would shape what they called a man-made Eden.

There must have been a multitude of problems outside of the biblical problems as well. Thirdly, there was the Harmony Society, formed by Catholic separatist George Rapp. He formed communities in Pennsylvania and Indiana after immigrating from Germany. The Harmonists centered their community on piety, shared ownership, and celibacy. When you joined, you gave everything you had to the community, and in exchange they took care of you until you died. This community lasted from 1805 to 1905—100 years.

Fourthly, there was Fruitlands, founded near Harvard, Massachusetts, as a self-sufficient farming society. It was begun by Charles Lane and Bronson Alcott, neither of whom knew anything about farming or self-sufficiency. Lane advocated a far more rigorous lifestyle.

Settlers were forbidden to eat meat, consume stimulants, use any form of animal labor—in other words, everything had to be done by hand—create artificial light, or enjoy hot baths. Neither could they drink anything but water. Later, Lane's ideas evolved to include celibacy within marriage. Obviously, Mr. Bronson had his wife and daughters there. One of those daughters was Louisa May Alcott, who wrote Little Women. When this community failed, as it did, she wrote a very scathing report on Fruitlands called Transcendental Wild Oats.

I think it lasted only about four or five months. Then, fifthly, there was New Harmony, noted as the "boatload of knowledge," which

began in New Harmony, Indiana. Its founder, Robert Owen, talked to many scientists and intellectuals and persuaded them to come and form this community. Since many of them came by boat, it was called a boatload of knowledge. Some of these men were indeed involved in founding the National Academy of Sciences. The interesting thing is that it did not last long because there was a major division over money and many other things. Thus, many of these utopias certainly did not exist. When we look at Deuteronomy chapter 11, Israel is about to enter the promised land.

God's Community vs. Man's Utopia

They were going to enjoy the liberty, freedom, and blessings God had given them. He said, in verse 21, that they should indeed be obedient: “That your days may be multiplied, and the days of your children, in the land which the Lord sware unto your fathers to give them, as the days of heaven upon the earth.”

Men have always wanted a perfect society. However, they did not want that society based upon God or His law; they wanted one that was man-made. Such a society, such a community, does not exist, nor will it ever exist, nor can it exist, because men by nature are in rebellion against God and His law. I have often laughed over the word “utopia.” We have heard of a communistic utopia or a socialistic utopia, but the truth is that it does not exist and cannot exist. Our English word “utopia” comes from the Greek. It is made up of two Greek words: “topos,” meaning place, and “u,” which precedes “topos” and is a negative meaning no. Thus, “utopia” means no place. It really does not exist; it is only in someone’s perverted brain and mind, because man is indeed a sinner. But God’s community is not a utopia. It is a community based on a theocracy.

A theocracy is nothing more than the rule and reign of God. It seems to me like everyone gets upset over the term “theocracy.” Well, it simply means “theos” is the Greek word for God, and “kratos” is the Greek word for power. All theocracy means is the rule of God by His power. Interestingly, when you mention the word “theocracy,” everyone gets bent out of shape. But no one gets bent out of shape over autocracy, plutocracy, or democracy. Autocracy is

the rule of self, plutocracy the rule of the elite, and democracy the rule of the mob.

It amounts to 51 percent ruling over the other 49 percent. Each one of these words deals with power, and everyone is quite comfortable with autocracy, plutocracy, or democracy. But you begin to talk about theocracy, where God's power is involved and God's law is involved, and then everyone goes bonkers. The truth of the matter is that only God has the absolute right to rule and to reign, because He alone is sovereign.

The Need for Biblical Community Amid Societal Collapse

Now let me just tell you what I kind of look into my little mind and see forming. The truth is this: I believe that you and I are facing, and are going to be facing, a societal collapse. Man's efforts, man's politics, and man's attempts at playing God are quickly coming to an end. Our economic system is at the breaking point; the judicial system is corrupt; the legislative system is anti-God, anti-Christ, anti-Bible, and anti-constitution; and our executive branch of government is epitomized in Joe Biden, who is a demented, corrupt, immoral fool who has consistently betrayed America and Americans.

We've been sold out to China. Bio warfare is being waged against us, and we're being divided, scandalized, and demonized. Anyone—just listen to the news—who challenges the last election or the gene therapy shot is now known as a domestic terrorist. What is happening is this: it's no longer just Republicans against Democrats, whites against blacks, or Christians against Muslims. Now it's going to be the vaccinated against the unvaccinated, and the unvaccinated are going to be the current bubonic plague. That is what it amounts to now. So the point I'm trying to make is that when we think about community, we're going to have to think from a biblical standpoint.

There was a little twelve-minute video that I watched recently and sent to some of you. I don't know whether you watched it, but the title, I think, was "The Way Forward." It dealt with the fact of escape from a totalitarian regime or totalitarian society. In those twelve minutes, he compared this way of escape with what we normally think about as several other ways to get out of a totalitarian regime.

The first way he discussed was the backward escape, where people actually give in to drugs, alcohol, games, television—anything that will dull their minds and keep them from thinking about the situation in which they are living. He also mentioned those who think that simply submitting or acquiescing to the demands of the tyrant will somehow make things easier for them and get everybody back to normal.

You hear this constantly today: "The only way back to normal is do what we say," this kind of thing. He points out that this is utter ridiculousness. It simply will not work, because the more you bow, the more you acquiesce, and the more you give in, the deeper you are digging your own grave.

Then he discussed a forward escape, where some people move from one state to another or from one country to another. He pointed out two major problems with that. Number one, not everybody can move; not everybody can pick up and leave. Number two, even if you leave and go to another state or country, if totalitarianism is global, the state or country to which you flee may soon be enveloped in the same tyranny, and now you are up against it again.

Then he came out with this conclusion: the only answer is basically to form an alternative community or an alternative society, where you are living together completely independent of the totalitarian regime and are able to function as a community and as a group. Here is the point I want you to understand: we will not survive on our own.

Years ago, I took a course from Selco, who, of course, was in Bosnia-Herzegovina. He was an EMT. They went to bed free and happy and woke up the next morning surrounded by armies. For a year they had no electricity or running water. They cut down every tree and pulled the molding off their houses to use for firewood and to cook with. They had to run at night and try to avoid the snipers. It was absolutely horrendous. But the point I am trying to make is this.

He survived in his family because there were fifteen of them living in one house. It is absolutely impossible for one man to remain up twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. The point is this: We

need community. We need each other. We need to learn to be independent, but at the same time we also need to learn to be dependent upon each other as well as the Lord. We have to learn to live together and work together.

People place their trust in many different things. If you want to place your trust in yourself—autocracy—have at it. If you want to place your trust in a plutocracy, where a small elite is ruling over you, you may do so. If you want to trust in our democracy, have at it. Personally, I prefer a theocracy; I prefer the rule and reign of God.

What is it that will hold a community together? Let me rephrase that question: What is it that will keep a Christian community together? Simply because someone is a Christian—and I am not talking about just a professor, but someone who is a real, genuine Christian—does not mean that he has his act together, understands truth, or knows how to apply truth.

There are a number of Christians who have royally messed up their lives. They have messed up their families, have failed health, and empty pockets. You have to ask why. The answer is that they basically fail to obey God's Word, God's law. They fail to keep the principles and precepts that He has enunciated. I think it would be wise for everyone to read Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 every day for a number of months, until all of those principles sink in.

Notice in Deuteronomy chapter 11, beginning in verse 26, the warning that He gives: “Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; a blessing, if ye obey the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you this day: and a curse, if ye will not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside out of the way which I command you this day, to go after other gods, which ye have not known.”

Notice that he is speaking of both a blessing and a curse: the curse will be upon you if you go after other gods. When we think of other gods, we think of fake gods, false gods, and idols. But have you noticed how the Bible speaks of self-will and self-worship? It even says that we can make gods out of our own bellies.

That does not mean that we just love food. What it does mean is that we love our flesh. Listen to what the Apostle Paul said in

Philippians 3, verses 18 and 19: “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.” A false god can be your own belly, your own flesh, your own desires, or your own will. God is placing a curse on anyone who follows these false gods.

The flesh, fleshly desires, self-will, self-pleasing worship, disobedience, and rebellion will tear any society apart. Look what has happened to our society. Let me remind you of Galatians 5, verses 15 through 17: “But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another. This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.”

Notice what he said: “But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another.” The biting and devouring of one another stems from the works of the flesh. Our flesh cries out for satisfaction and fulfillment, and it will destroy anything and everything in order just to have its own way.

The Lord understood this, and that is why, in Deuteronomy chapter 11, He laid down the law for these people who were about to go in and live on the land He had promised, have a community, and have an organized society. When we think of the nation Israel, we always think of the twelve tribes. There were twelve tribes, but there were also families and clans. If you take the Levites, there were the Kohathites, the Merarites, and all kinds of Levites. The same thing was true with Judah. Once you account for all these families, you have not only tribal society but family societies as well. We may be a family of faith, and we may even be related to each other by blood, but we still have to learn to work together, live together, and follow God's Word.

Otherwise, we are going to have absolutely nothing but problems. Now, the interesting thing is this: what I am sharing with you is actually a picture of the church. How can I say that? Let me read to you Ephesians chapter 4, verse 16: “From whom the whole body fitly

joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." He is talking about the church in Ephesians chapter 4, but he is talking about the whole body being fitly joined together and how every part has to work together in order to increase. My hand and my arm have to work with my mouth in order to eat. I mean, it is just that simple. If my hand and my arm refuse to work, I have to find some other way to eat, or I die. It is just that simple.

Point 1: A Community Where God's Law is Observed

The community, or the society, that is a little bit of heaven on earth is one that operates based upon God's Word, God's will, and God's way. What kind of community, what kind of society, will be a little bit of heaven on earth? The community or society that is a little bit of heaven on earth is a community where the law of God is observed and kept. Deuteronomy chapter 11, verses 1 and 8, says, "Therefore thou shalt love the Lord thy God, and keep his charge, and his statutes, and his judgments, and his commandments, alway." "Therefore shall ye keep all the commandments which I command you this day, that ye may be strong, and go in and possess the land, whither ye go to possess it."

Now, I must point out a well-known truth and press it home. Listen carefully: love is obedience. I do not care what you profess. I do not care where you go to church. I do not care how often you testify. The truth of the matter is this: if you do not obey God, you do not love him. Look what he said in verse 1: "Therefore thou shalt love the Lord thy God." How do you love the Lord thy God? By keeping His charge, His statutes, His judgments, and His commandments always. Let me remind you of Romans chapter 13, verses 8 through 10. God says, "Owe no man any thing, but to love one another." "For this," He said, "for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law."

"For he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love

worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law."

Love is not a feeling, some abstract thing, or sentimentality. Love is obedience. In Galatians chapter 5, he says, "For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." And in James 2:8, he says, "If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well."

First John 5:3 gives us a definition of the love of God: "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous." The love of God is keeping His commandments. It is obedience. Love is the fulfilling of the law. Therefore, when someone says, "Well, I love Him, but I just live contrary to Him," that person does not love Him. First John 2:3–4 says, "And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him."

Love is obedience. God's law is the law of love. It is not legalism, and it is not pharisaism. Legalism is pharisaism; it is man's law. But it is not God's law. God has the absolute right to lay down His law for His creatures.

Deuteronomy 11:8 also makes clear that there is strength in keeping God's law: "Therefore shall ye keep all the commandments which I command you this day, that ye may be strong, and go in and possess the land, whither ye go to possess it." If we wish to be strong, we must be obedient.

In 1 John chapter 3, verses 18 through 20, the Scripture says, "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. And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight."

If I want to be strong in the Lord, the way to be strong in the Lord is through obedience. David said it like this in Psalm 119:96: “I have seen an end of all perfection: but thy commandment is exceeding broad.” When we talk about God’s law and commandments, we have to understand their breadth and all that they entail and include. In order to flesh out what the commandments really and truly mean, we have to study all aspects of the law. We cannot be like the Pharisees and limit the law of God to something merely physical. They believed that if they had not taken a knife and plunged it into a man’s heart, they were not murderers; if they had not physically committed adultery, they were not adulterers. They limited God’s law to a mere physical act.

Most professing Christians would never put a pistol between someone’s eyes and say, “Give me all your money.” Everybody knows that is theft, wicked, wrong, and vile. No real Christian would do anything like that. But many Christians will lie, cheat, defraud, and use false weights and measures, which is another way of stealing. There are a multitude of ways to violate the eighth commandment. You do not have to stick a gun in someone’s face and demand their money in order to be a thief.

Can you imagine a community that wants to obey God and keep His law in every area? If there is a question, they are more than willing to give God the benefit of the doubt. They are more willing to do without than to sin against God. Can you imagine a society, a family, or a church where they would rather suffer than sin? Can you imagine a group of believers living together, working together, and cooperating with each other, willing to give God the benefit of the doubt in every area and do that which is right and holy? Can you conceive what it would be like to live in a society or community where God's law is honored, observed, and kept?

The truth is, we cannot keep it perfectly, but that does not hinder us from seeking to keep it perfectly. It does not hinder us from seeking to obey it in every area that we can understand.

The perfect community, first of all, is the community that understands God's law. Secondly, it is a community where God is honored, worshipped, and served—a community that is indeed a little bit of heaven on earth. Deuteronomy 11:13 says, "And it shall

come to pass, if ye shall hearken diligently unto my commandments which I command you this day, to love the Lord your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul."

Point 2: A Community Where God is Honored, Worshipped, and Served

You must see the connection between the first point and this point. We serve God through obedience to His Word. We do not serve God simply by giving to Him. Who in the world can give to God first? No one. The only thing that we give to God is out of that which He has given to us. We serve Him by serving each other.

Hebrews 6:10 says, "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 we serve God? How do we worship God? The answer is by ministering to each other. You must remember that a king rules by his law, and the same is true of the King of Kings. His law-word is His will for His people.

Let me give you an illustration. Consider the seventh commandment: “Thou shalt not commit adultery.” What is involved in that commandment? How would we apply that commandment to our lives? I want you to see how the Apostle Paul applies it. In 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 and verse 3, he says, “For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: that every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour.”

Here is a negative: “Not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God: that no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified. For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness. He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit.”

Notice that there is both a positive and a negative. The positive side of the seventh commandment is this: that we know how to possess our vessel, that is, our body, in sanctification and honor.

That means we walk in purity and obedience to the Lord. The negative side is that we are not to do that which the wicked, the unsaved, do in their own fleshly lusts. Because he says in verse 6, we know that the Lord is the avenger of all such who violate His law. And then he says, “For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness.”

“He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit.” When we are talking about the law of God, we are talking about making application to every area. Usually there is a positive and a negative to it. He is indeed the avenger of all such. What does obedience have to do with the worship of God and serving Him?

You cannot overlook the connection between point one and point two. Psalm 66:18 says, “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.” The word “regard” is a Hebrew word, “ra'ah,” and it means to regard, to respect, to consider, and to look upon with delight and joy. David said, “If I regard iniquity in my heart, if I look upon it with delight, if I look upon it with joy, if I say, ‘Yes, I’d like to engage in that, yes, I’d like to do this,’ if I have respect to it, the Lord will not hear me.”

If merely regarding iniquity, counting it highly and considering it desirable, is sufficient to stop God from hearing your prayers, how much worse is it to commit the acts and do that which God has forbidden? Everyone knows about David’s sin with Bathsheba, but the implications of that sin are found in 2 Samuel 12:9: “Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in his sight? thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon.”

“Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord?” He despised the seventh commandment. He despised the sixth commandment. He despised the tenth commandment. He despised the first commandment. He despised the second commandment. “Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife.”

Despising God's commandments is despising God. It is impossible to separate God from His law, or obedience from worship. It is impossible to maintain one attitude toward God and His law and a different attitude toward God. It is impossible to say, "I am here now, and I'm willingly, deliberately, premeditatingly planning on violating the law of God, but I really, really love Him." No, you do not. "He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." Love is the fulfillment of the law.

This is epitomized in Isaiah chapter 1. It is impossible to worship God aright without obedience. God is speaking to Judah and Jerusalem: "Hear the word of the Lord, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah." He is not talking to Sodom and Gomorrah; He is talking to Judah and Jerusalem. That is what He calls them.

"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; 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. Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow."

A Community That Recognizes God's Blessings

"Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord." God said that all of their sacrifices and offerings were worthless because they were disobedient. Worship without obedience, and worship without righteousness, is worthless. If we are going to serve and honor God, we must be obedient to him.

Point 3: A Community That Recognizes God's Blessings

The perfect community is not only one where the law of God is honored and God is worshiped; it is also a community that experiences and recognizes the blessings of God on a regular basis. Deuteronomy 11:14-15 says, "That I will give you the rain of your land in his due season, the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil. And I will send grass in thy fields for thy cattle, that thou mayest eat and be full."

Mark this down: blessings always follow obedience. The family, church, community, or society that obeys the word of God, serves and honors him, and worships him in spirit and truth will always be blessed.

One of our biggest problems is not a lack of blessings, but a failure to recognize them. We are blessed with such abundance and such regularity that we often take them for granted. Think about the rain, your garden, fruits, your animals, life, health, and your family.

Acts 14:17 says, "Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness." When was the last time you thanked God simply for the ability to enjoy your food? We have an abundance of blessings; we just fail to realize them. The common, ordinary, everyday blessings are witnesses to God's goodness. Any society, family, church, or community that obeys God's law and worships him will have an abundance of those blessings.

Fourthly, the community, society, church, and family—this little bit of heaven on earth—is a community where emotions, feelings, and dispositions are subservient to the Word of God. Deuteronomy 11:16-17 says, “Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived, and ye turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them; and then the Lord's wrath be kindled against you, and he shut up the heaven, that there be no rain, and that the land yield not her fruit; and lest ye perish quickly from off the good land which the Lord giveth you.”

Point 4: A Community Where Emotions Are Subservient to God's Word

Therefore, “shall ye lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul, and bind them for a sign upon your hand, that they may be as frontlets between your eyes. And ye shall teach them your children, speaking of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt write them upon the door posts of thine house, and upon thy gates: that your days may be multiplied, and the days of your children, in the land which the Lord sware unto your fathers to give them, as the days of heaven upon the earth.” God's Word was to be constantly and continually before them. They were to hide His words in their hearts, keep them in plain sight, teach them, recite them, place them on the walls of their homes, and instruct their children in His law.

His precepts and principles were to be the joy of their lives, the director of their steps, the path for their feet, and the controller of their thoughts, emotions, and dispositions. Every one of us has been hurt at one time, usually by another Christian. We get our feelings hurt, become angry, bitter, and resentful, which are all sins. So if Steve says something that I do not like, and it is not that I merely dislike it—I think he is slamming me—

What am I to do? Am I to sit here and say, “Mm-hmm, yeah, I know what he means. I’ll bet you a nickel that’s what he means,” while building up something in my mind? You know what the Bible says in Matthew chapter 5: “Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.”

In Matthew 5:23-24, I do not have anything against Steve, but Steve has something against me, and I remember it. What does God tell me to do? Go and be reconciled to him, and then come back and offer my gift.

When you get to Matthew chapter 18, He says, “Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy

brother." Now Steve does not have anything against me; I have something against him. What do I do? I go and confront him: "Steve, did you mean this? This is the way I interpreted it. Is that how you meant it?"

Let me tell you something, folks. I can say many things, and so can you. Everything we say can be misinterpreted. The only way I know what Steve means when he says something is to ask him: "Did you mean it as a slam?" "No, I was joking with you." Why in the world will we not confront each other? This is the point I am trying to make. If you are going to have a church, a family, a society, or a community that is going to be a little bit of heaven on earth, you had better make sure that your emotions, dispositions, and feelings are subservient to the Word of God.

Instead of building up enmity in my mind against Steve, I go to him. He comes to me. We reconcile and work it out. It is just that simple. Ephesians 4:26–27 says, "Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath. Neither give place to the devil." Get it settled before the day is over. When we let our feelings, emotions, and dispositions get in the way of obedience to God, we are giving place to the devil. If you want a family, a church, or a community where envy, bitterness, resentment, and anger do not abide, you must learn to subjugate your feelings, emotions, and dispositions to the Word of God. When you fail to work things out daily, you allow the enemy room in your life and build up bitterness and resentment.

Anytime you are living close to people, there will always be someone who rubs you the wrong way, and you have to learn to settle it. If you want a church, community, or society free from fornication, adultery, and sins of the flesh, you have to learn to be content with the spouse God gave you.

That is what he said in Proverbs 5: "Let thy fountain be blessed: and rejoice with the wife of thy youth. Let her be as the loving hind and pleasant roe; let her breasts satisfy thee at all times; and be thou ravished always with her love." In other words, you are not going shopping or looking around. I have often said to Alice, "Why would you go shopping when you cannot afford one? Why would you go looking around?"

We have to learn to be content with that which God has given us. When people are living together in a community or society, those emotions and feelings must be brought into subjection to the Word of God, or else there will be trouble, period. Deuteronomy 11:22–25 describes a community that experiences not only providential protection, but also exhibits a dominion attitude in subduing all things for Jesus Christ.

Point 5: A Community with Providential Protection and Dominion

He says, "For if ye shall diligently keep all these commandments which I command you, to do them, to love the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, and to cleave unto him; then will the Lord drive out all these nations from before you, and ye shall possess greater nations and mightier than yourselves. Every place whereon the soles of your feet shall tread shall be yours. From the wilderness and Lebanon, from the river, the river Euphrates, even unto the uttermost sea shall your coast be. There shall no man be able to stand before you: for the Lord your God shall lay the fear of you and the dread of you upon all the land that ye shall tread upon, as he hath said unto you."

Here is a very important point. The perfect community is not only the community that experiences the providential protection of God, but one that has a dominion attitude in subduing all things to the Lord Jesus Christ. Before we can exercise dominion over others, before we can conquer anyone else or anything else, we must first learn to conquer ourselves. You cannot jump to point five and leave out the first four points. You will never have a dominion attitude, nor will you ever conquer for Jesus Christ, unless you learn to have mastery over your flesh, your feelings, and your emotions, and learn to bring every thought into captivity to the Lord Jesus Christ. If you have never learned the truth of Romans chapter 6, I encourage you to learn that truth.

The Bible teaches that we are free from the dominion of sin. This does not mean that we are not sinners. He says, "Let not sin have dominion over you." Sin may be in us, but it does not dominate us. Romans chapter 6 teaches that Jesus Christ freed us from the

dominion of sin; we are no longer under sin's dominion, but under the dominion of the Lord Jesus Christ. While we are sinners, that is a truth, there is another truth: we do not have to sin. Sin cannot command me to jump while I ask how high. Sin has no mastery over me. The Bible says in 1 John 2 and verse 1, "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."

Therefore, I have an absolute right to say to sin, "I refuse that thought. I refuse those sensations and those feelings. I will not do this. My allegiance is to Jesus Christ, and it's not to sin."

Applications and Conclusion

Do not dismiss this message as the ramblings and rantings of an aged pastor. Every family, every church, every community, and every society must be ruled by some law. The question is not, “Will you have a law for your family, your church, your community, or your society?” The question is, “Whose law will you have?”

You have only two alternatives: either God's law or man's law. You will not run a community, society, church, or family on good ideas and altruistic feelings. You are going to have a law, and it will be either God's law or man's law. No community, society, or church will ever succeed apart from God's law.

If you cannot govern yourself, you will never be used of God to govern others. Self-rule, self-control, and self-dominion are absolutely basic requirements for ruling over others. If you cannot do the lesser, what makes you think you can do the greater? Our Lord said through the Apostle Paul, speaking of pastors in 1 Timothy chapter 3, “For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?” If you cannot do the lesser, what makes you think you will do the greater? It is impossible. Therefore, the very first thing that you and I must do is learn to control our thoughts, our emotions, and our lives, bringing them into obedience, submission, and subjection to the totality of the word of God.

We can work together, live together, and help each other only as long as we obey God's law. He told Israel, as they were about to enter

the land, “If you'll keep my law, if you'll worship me, if you will receive my blessings, and if you will submit and subjugate your feelings and your emotions to my law, I'll give you dominion, and you will have a little bit of heaven on earth.” The perfect community, or how to live with others, is found in living in obedience to the word of God.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to thee. We thank you for your word and your truth. We ask, Lord, that you'd prepare our hearts, teach us, build us up in the most holy faith, and give us Your grace and Your mercy. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 39

Do You Have Anything To Rejoice About?

Introduction: The Problem of Joyless Christians

The title of the message is, “Do you have anything to rejoice about?” Nehemiah 8:10 says, “Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared. For this day is holy unto our Lord. Neither be ye sorry, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.” Note that phrase: “the joy of the Lord is your strength.” We will come back to the context a little later.

I believe that most Christians today are the whiniest, the most complaining, griping, bellyaching people on the planet. We are basically ungrateful, unthankful, and unappreciative of God’s mercies toward us, even though he bestows them upon us daily, and yea, even hourly. Most professing Christians are basically disobedient, sinful, and even rebellious. We do not know how to rejoice in the Lord, and if the joy of the Lord is our strength, we are probably the weakest people on earth. Clearly, then, we are unlike the early Christians.

When you look at Acts chapter 5, you find that the apostles were beaten, rebuked, and commanded not to speak anymore in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. We read in verses 40 and 41: “And to him they agreed,” talking about Gamaliel, “and when they had called the apostles and beaten them, they commanded them that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and they let them go. And they departed from the presence of the council rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.” So they were actually rejoicing that they were beaten and commanded not to preach anymore in his name.

Suffering as a Gift and Ministry

Most of us have never had this principle enter our minds: suffering can only be a blessing. But suffering can also be a ministry. The Bible says in Philippians chapter 1 and verse 29, "For unto you it is given on behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake." He said, "unto you it is given." Just as faith is the gift of God, suffering is the gift of God. And just as not everyone receives the gift of faith, not everyone receives the gift of suffering.

The interesting thing in Philippians 1:29 is the word charizomai. It means literally to do something or give something that is pleasant and agreeable, favorable. It means to gratify, to give graciously, and to bestow and give freely. God bestows His gift of faith freely and liberally. He also bestows and gives His gift of suffering.

It is in His mercy and grace that He allows us to believe, and it is in His mercy and grace that He allows some to suffer. If we are sick, bedridden, hospitalized, in nursing homes, or suffering in any number of ways, it is possible to suffer for God's honor and glory. Suffering can be a ministry. No matter what our physical condition is, we can thank Him that we are not worse off than we are.

I can tell people, "I don't like losing the use of that finger right now, but I am thankful I still have the finger, and I am thankful I still have the hand and the arm as well." The point is, it does not matter how bad off we are; we can always be a little bit worse.

In James 5:10, James wrote, “My brethren, take the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of

suffering, affliction and patience." Take the prophets. As you read through the Bible, especially the prophets, you see how many of them suffered; they suffered willingly, and many gave their lives willingly as well. When you think of Fox's Book of Martyrs and all the martyrs who were killed and murdered in numerous ways, yet died rejoicing, you find many stories of martyrs who were burned at the stake. While they were being burned alive, they praised the Lord, sang psalms, and prayed for their enemies. That would be a ministry of suffering in that sense of the word.

The Apostle Paul said something else in Colossians 1:24: "Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you." Paul was suffering for the brethren, for the ministry to the brethren. He says, "Who now rejoice in my suffering for you and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church." Paul was rejoicing that he was able to suffer for others for whom he was ministering. Remember how many times he was beaten, how many times he was left for dead, night and day in the deep, and all kinds of hunger and famine; yet he said he was rejoicing in those sufferings. Paul was willing to suffer for the sake of the church.

Unless you and I really grasp this biblical doctrine of suffering, we will abhor it, despise it, and certainly want no part of it.

Now, let's be absolutely honest. Not a person in this room wants to suffer. I don't want to suffer either. Our flesh recoils at that. We don't want to go through suffering. But the truth of the matter is, if God allows it to come upon us, we, of course, can endure it by His grace and do so biblically as well.

First Peter 2:19–20 says, "For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? But if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God." In other words, he says very clearly, if your suffering is brought upon yourself by your own sins and your own stupidity, there's no glory in that. But if our suffering is from doing that which is righteous and holy, then he says, and we endure that patiently, it is acceptable unto God, that is for sure.

Now look in 1 Peter 4 and verse 13. He says, "But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy." So he says we can rejoice inasmuch as we are partakers of Christ's sufferings. The world hated Christ; it hates us. The world blasphemed Christ; it blasphemes us. The world misunderstood Christ, and of course it misunderstands us as well.

You remember that passage in Matthew chapter 5, where our Lord said, "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake." Listen to what else He said: "Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you." So He says, blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and say all manner of things against you. Note this next word: falsely. In other words, these are false accusations. We're not being blamed for that which is true. We're being blamed for that which is false. With this understanding in mind, and with the fact that the Scripture does indeed teach that we can rejoice in our sufferings, suffering can be a ministry, and suffering can be endured for God's honor and God's glory, here's my next question: Have you ever noticed in the Bible all of the commands to rejoice?

Biblical Commands to Rejoice

Let me give you just a smattering of them. We're coming back to Nehemiah chapter 8, but look in your Bibles to the book of Deuteronomy chapter 16. Deuteronomy 16, and I'll come back with the emphasis on some of this just momentarily. Well again, Deuteronomy chapter 16, and let's begin reading there with verse 11. Deuteronomy 16 verse 11, God says, "And thou shalt rejoice before the Lord thy God, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy manservant, and thy maidservant, and the Levite that is within thy gates, and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, that are among you, in the place which the Lord thy God hath chosen to place his name there." But notice it: "and thou shalt rejoice before the Lord thy God," which is a command. Then if you would turn right over to 1 Chronicles, 1 Chronicles 16 and verse 10. Right after 1 and 2 Kings, you have 1 and 2 Chronicles. So notice 1 Chronicles 16 and

verse 10. Here's what the Scripture says. 1 Chronicles 16 and verse 10, "Glory ye in his holy name: let the heart of them rejoice that seek the Lord."

"Glory ye in his holy name: let the heart of them rejoice that seek the Lord."

Now, let me just give you some quotes because you are familiar with most of these passages that I'm about to quote at this point. But Psalm 32 and verse 11 says this, "Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, ye righteous: and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart." So he says be glad in the Lord and rejoice. And then when you get to the book of Habakkuk chapter 3 and verse 18, and let me just mention this because obviously you need to know the context of this. Habakkuk is understanding that his nation is about to be judged, and yea, a lot of them are going to be destroyed. And of course, there's going to be famine, there's going to be death. And Habakkuk says this, though the fruit tree does not blossom, and though there's no calf in the stall, in other words, it's going to be horrible circumstances. He goes on to say in verse 18, "Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."

In light of all the war, suffering, and famine, Habakkuk said, “Yet I’m going to rejoice in the Lord.” When you get to Philippians chapter 3 and verse 1, the apostle Paul says, “Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord.” Then in Philippians 4 and verse 4, “Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice.” In 1 Thessalonians 5 and verse 16, he simply says, “Rejoice evermore.” These verses, along with the others we have read and quoted, are only a smattering of the verses found in Scripture. There are an awful lot of verses that command us to rejoice.

Think about this for a moment. Nehemiah 8 and verse 10 says that the joy of the Lord is your strength. If the joy of the Lord is our strength and we do not have the joy of the Lord, then we are in a state of weakness. Probably one of the many causes for the weakness of the church of Jesus Christ today is a failure to rejoice in the Lord. The same would be true individually. If we do not understand what it means to rejoice in the Lord, and do not rejoice in the Lord, then, if the joy of the Lord is our strength, we are getting weaker and weaker and weaker.

Since there are so many commands in Scripture to rejoice in the Lord, a failure to rejoice in the Lord would have to be considered sin in and of itself. David said, “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.”

The Tithe of Rejoicing

Years ago, I preached an entire series on biblical wealth. In that series, I distinguished the three tithes mentioned in Scripture. What many people do not know is that there is not one tithe in the Scripture, but three. The first tithe, of course, was the tithe for the Levites and high priests, which was 10 percent and went for the furtherance of the Gospel, because those Levites were charged with teaching the Word of God. Ezra was the ready scribe in the Law of Moses. This was the Levitical tithe. The second tithe mentioned in the Bible is the poor tithe.

Now, it too was ten percent, but it was taken only every three years; annually, that meant three and one-third percent. Thus, the Israelites would tithe thirteen and one-third percent every year. But there was a third tithe, called the tithe of rejoicing. This tithe was unusual. Israel had seven annual feasts, and three times a year all the males had to appear before the Lord at the place He chose, Jerusalem. They had to be there, and the Word of God said, “They shall not appear before Me empty.” In other words, they had to bring certain things there, not only to serve the Lord, but also for themselves.

Deuteronomy 14 speaks of the tithe of rejoicing. This was a tithe spent upon yourself and your family. It did not go to the church, the Levites, or the poor; it was spent on yourself. But it was always so that you might learn to fear the Lord. It was not a tithe spent on going to Disney World. It was spent on going to a Bible conference, a Bible retreat, or someplace where you would fellowship with God's people and learn about God.

God says, "Thou shalt truly tithe all the increase of thy seed, that the field bringeth forth year by year. And thou shalt eat before the Lord thy God, in the place which he shall choose to place his name there, the tithe of thy corn, of thy wine, and of thine oil, and the firstlings of thy herds and of thy flocks; that thou mayest learn to

fear the Lord thy God always." This is a vacation, so to speak, but a religious vacation, in the sense that you are learning something about God, and to fear and obey Him.

"And if the way be too long for thee, so that thou art not able to carry it; or if the place be too far from thee, which the Lord thy God shall choose to set his name there, when the Lord thy God hath blessed thee: Then shalt thou turn it into money." You would sell your cow, your sheep, or whatever you had, and turn it into money. "And thou shalt bind up the money in thine hand, and shalt go unto the place which the Lord thy God shall choose." What would you do with that money? "And thou shalt bestow that money for whatsoever thy soul lusteth after, for oxen, or for sheep, or for wine, or for strong drink, or for whatsoever thy soul desireth: and thou shalt eat there before the Lord thy God, and thou shalt rejoice, thou, and thine household."

This was the tithe of rejoicing. Rejoicing was a command, not only in the Old Testament, but also in the New Testament. Someone says, "I really don't have anything to rejoice about." Really? You are alive, are you not? You have a full stomach, do you not? You have your health, do you not? Let us be honest: you are still able to think.

A Reason to Rejoice

You are still able to work, provide for yourself and your family, and move about freely as you please, at least temporarily. There is so much that you and I need to be thankful for and should be thankful for. The problem is that we do not have a sufficient reason to rejoice because we are unwilling to rejoice, unwilling to be thankful, grateful, and appreciative for everything that God does for us and is doing for us. He does so basically every hour of the day.

First Reason to Rejoice: Understanding God's Word

I want to show you from the Scripture three things in which you and I must absolutely rejoice and for which we must be thankful. The very first reason to rejoice is that you have been enabled to hear and understand the Word of God. Look at Nehemiah 8:1:

"And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded to Israel. And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month. And he read therein before the street that was before the water gate from the morning until midday, before the men and the women, and those that could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law."

"And Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose; and beside him stood Mattithiah, and Shema, and Anaiah, and Urijah, and Hilkiah, and Maaseiah, on his right hand; and on his left hand, Pedaiah, and Mishael, and Malchiah, and Hashum, and Hashbadana, Zechariah, and Meshullam. And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people;) and when he opened it, all the people stood up: And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground."

"Also Jeshua, and Bani, and Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and 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. And Nehemiah, which is the Tirshatha, and Ezra the priest the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said unto all the people, "This day is holy unto the Lord your God; mourn not, nor weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law."

"Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the Lord is your strength. So the Levites stilled all the people, saying, Hold your peace, for the day is holy; neither be ye grieved. And all the people went their way to eat, and to drink, and to send portions,

and to make great mirth." Why? Because they had understood the words that were declared unto them.

On the second day were gathered together the chief of the fathers of all the people, the priests, and the Levites, unto Ezra the scribe, even to understand the words of the law. These people were rejoicing and celebrating because they understood the Word of God.

I believe that—even speaking of real, true believers—we have heard the Word of God so often that we have a great tendency to take it for granted. We do not really appreciate it. It is like 1 Samuel 3, where the Bible says, "the Word of the Lord was precious in those days; there was no open vision." In other words, there was no open preaching or teaching. Anytime anybody could get to the Word of God, it was counted exceedingly precious. That which makes something precious and valuable is scarcity. Today, most Christians have heard the Scripture so much and so often that they really do not pay any attention to it. They simply take it for granted.

Moreover, most people today really do not want the Word of God. They do not want truth or understanding. If God, in His sovereignty, has providentially placed you in a position to hear the Word of God and given you grace to understand it, you have something to rejoice in. Think about this: If God had not opened your understanding, given you truth, and enabled you to understand, you would be a heathen today.

SCRIPTURE READING - Matthew 13:10-17; Luke 24:45; Acts 16:14 (KJV)

Look in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 13, beginning at verse 10. Our Lord is teaching in parables and has just taught the parable of the sower. "And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables?"

A parable is something that can be very difficult to understand. Here is the answer that He gave: "He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they

> understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them."
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> Then he says this: "But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them." Why are you speaking in parables? He says, because to you it is given to know and to understand, and to them it is not given.
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> Has the Lord opened your understanding? Has the Lord opened your eyes so that you could see and understand the Word of God as He did His disciples in Luke chapter 24 and verse 45, where the Bible says, "Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures"? Has your heart been opened to receive the word of God as the heart of Lydia? In Acts chapter 16 and verse 14, the Bible said, "And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul." So God opened the understanding of his disciples, and he opened the heart of Lydia.

How can you not be thankful and how can you not rejoice in the fact that God did not leave you in your ignorance and your stupidity? If God had not opened our understanding, we would still be lost and believing some of the worst lies and deceptions imaginable.

I do not know everything about the Bible, and I do not claim to know everything about the Bible. In fact, I never will know everything about the Bible in this life, and neither will any man. But for what I do know, I am thankful. For that bit that God has opened my eyes to see, my heart to receive, and my mind to understand, I am thankful. I have the degree of light that God in His grace and mercy has given unto me. You have the degree of light that God has

given unto you. Whatever degree of light that is, at least we are not left in our ignorance and our stupidity. At least we know something about God and something about His Word and His truth.

We need to learn to be thankful for that. The very first reason to rejoice is that God has not left us alone. He has not left us to ourselves, nor left us in our ignorance and our stupidity. He has opened our minds that we may receive the truth of God. Now, I am going to show you two truths that are vitally connected with this first truth.

Second Reason to Rejoice: Access to God through Justification

Turn in your Bibles to Romans chapter 5, verses 1 and 2. The second reason to rejoice is that through His Word and grace, we have access to the one true God. The Apostle Paul wrote: "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God."

This passage deals with justification. Justification alone is reason to rejoice. Our standing before the law of God has been made perfect in the Lord Jesus Christ. We are no longer under condemnation, nor counted or imputed as sinners. We are counted and imputed as righteous in Jesus Christ. We are justified, pronounced legally innocent from all our transgressions and violations of the law of God. Thus we stand before the Judge of all the earth in Jesus Christ, just as though we had never sinned.

Justification also brings us peace with God. The Bible speaks of peace with God and the peace of God, but peace with God means that we are no longer rebels or fighting against God. We have thrown down our weapons of warfare and submitted to Him. We are not fighting, arguing, confronting, or raging in anger. We are submitting and saying, Yes, You are God of gods, King of kings, Lord of lords, and You have the absolute right to rule my life. You have the absolute right to tell me how to live and how not to live, what to say and what not to say, and to lay down the rules for my life. We acknowledge Him as King. Once we have peace with God, we are willing to abide by His law. I do not want any other God. I do not

want an image of anything in my house. I do not want to profane His name, violate His Sabbath, dishonor my father and my mother, or murder.

I do not want to commit adultery. I do not want to steal. I do not want to bear false witness. I do not want to covet. In other words, we understand peace with God. We are now throwing down our weapons of warfare and saying, Lord, we are Yours. You have the absolute right to rule our lives.

He said, "Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ," but something else: "By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." So we have access into this grace. Who is the source of grace? Who is the author of grace? It is God the Father.

In Hebrews 10:19, we read, "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus." In the Old Testament, the holiest of all was entered only once a year, only by the high priest, and not without blood. Now, in Christ Jesus, we have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus.

In other words, we may freely and fully and frequently and boldly come to our heavenly Father. He says, "By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; And having an high priest over the house of God; Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water." In other words, we now may boldly come to our Heavenly Father.

Hebrews 6:19-20 says, "Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec."

Why is it that we can go into the holiest of all boldly? The answer is because that is where the Lord Jesus Christ is. He is our forerunner; He is our head, and where He is, we already are. Just stop and think about this momentarily. Here is a principle: just as surely as Jesus Christ is in the presence of the Father, and just as

surely as Jesus Christ is seated at the right hand of God, just that surely our hope of glory is sealed in absolutely certain and sure. Why? We are in Him.

The Father has accepted His work. The Father has raised Him from the dead. The Father has seated Him at His own right hand. He will accept us because He has accepted His Son, and we are in Him. Think about this. If you cannot rejoice in the fact that God has opened your eyes to see, your ears to hear, and your heart to receive; if you cannot rejoice in the fact that God has justified you, that you have peace with God, and that you now have free access whereby you may boldly come to the Father, you may not even be a Christian. You need to check your salvation.

God has not left us to our ignorance or our stupidity. There is no reason for a child of God not to rejoice. In Nehemiah 8, He laid the foundation when He said, "The joy of the Lord is your strength." That joy came from understanding the Word of God. Understanding the Word of God leads us to see the access that we have to God the Father through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Third Reason to Rejoice: The Atonement of Christ

There is a third truth, intimately tied to the two preceding truths. We rejoice in Jesus Christ, who has made the atonement for us. Romans 5:10-11 says, "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement."

We have heard, learned, and understood the word of truth. We were justified by faith, made peace with God through Jesus Christ, and given free access to Him. Why and how? The why is because of Jesus Christ, and the how is because of the person and work of Jesus Christ. It is Jesus Christ who has reconciled us to the Father. Note that in verse 10 he speaks of being reconciled, and in verse 11 says that we have now received the atonement.

You can understand atonement by simply saying at-one-ment. We are one with the Father through Jesus Christ. The word atonement is

also translated as reconciliation. We have been restored to favor. Here is a husband and wife who get into an argument and separate. She goes home to her parents, while he remains at the house. A pastor or someone else becomes involved, works everything out, and then they are reconciled; they come back together as husband and wife.

Think of it this way: it was in the garden that we sinned, fled, and deserted, and now Jesus Christ has made the atonement. He has reconciled us and brought us back to favor with God the Father.

Spurgeon said, “Christ has made the atonement for us, and God has accepted that atonement on our behalf. We also have received it ourselves, and now we are glad in God. Glad that there is a God, glad that there is such a God, and glad that He is our God and Father in Jesus Christ.”

The word glad is a wonderful word, but the Scripture indicates something far more than gladness. The word joy is kauchaomai, and it actually means to glory, to rejoice in, to boast in, and to exult in. What are you doing when you are exulting? Basically, you are jumping up and down with joy, kind of like a little child. A child has been wanting a toy, wanting a toy, wanting a toy, and finally Dad or Mom buys that toy. You can just see the child as he sees it: jumping up and down, clapping his hands, his eyes shining, squealing and screaming because he is so happy. That is exactly what this word means.

Consider 1 Peter 1:8, speaking of Jesus Christ: “Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.” When was the last time you were so joyous and joyful for what Jesus Christ has done for you, so thrilled that you were unable to speak? That is what he says: We rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

Every day should be a day of rejoicing for the child of God, regardless of our circumstances or situation. It does not matter if war comes, or famine, foul weather, or drought. We still have plenty in which to rejoice. We understand, hear, believe, and have received; we bow before Him. Even on the day of our death, we still have something to rejoice in, because now we may see Him face to face.

Applications: Rejoice in Your Salvation

And now our joy will be eternally filled. That is for sure. Let me give you a quote by John Calvin. I want to add something to this quote, changing a few words, but I want you to listen to what he said: “For until men recognize that they owe everything to God, and that they are nourished by His fatherly care, that He is the author of their every good, that they should seek nothing beyond Him, they will never yield Him willing service. Nay, unless they establish their complete happiness in Him, they will never give themselves truly and sincerely to Him.”

What has Calvin just said? Until we recognize that everything good we have comes from God, our Father, that He nourishes us and takes care of us, we will never fully and genuinely give ourselves to Him. That is absolutely true. But I would add this: Unless we recognize that everything we are, everything we have, everything we ever will be, and everything we ever will have is only because of Him, by Him, through Him, and ultimately to Him, we will never, ever really rejoice in Him the way we should.

The reason you and I do not rejoice as we should is that we are not as appreciative, grateful, and thankful as we should be for His kind and gracious providence. The Bible says in 1 John 4:10, “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” Then He said it like this in 1 John 4:19: “We love him, because he first loved us.” Each time you tell the Lord that you love Him, you need always to thank Him for first loving you and allowing you to love Him. Had He not loved you first, you would never love Him. Had He not sent His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to be the propitiation for our sins, you would still never have loved Him, for you would never have known Him. We do have plenty in which to rejoice.

Turn to the book of Luke, chapter 10. I want you to see what our Lord says. Let us begin reading with verse 17. Our Lord had sent out seventy of His disciples.

"And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name. And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven. Behold, I give unto you

power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven." Is that not something in which to rejoice daily, that our names are in the Lamb's book of life?

If we are genuine children of God, and our ears and eyes have been opened and our hearts made receptive to His Word, we have been justified by faith, have peace with God, and have full access to God our Father—all because of the person and work of Jesus Christ. We have been reconciled unto Him through Jesus Christ. Therefore, as children of God, we should not fear, be discouraged, downcast, or depressed. There is so much for which we should be thankful, grateful, and appreciative. We must learn to glory in His name, His person, and His work; to exalt and rejoice in everything He has done for us.

I have known many people with real problems of depression and discouragement. Alice can tell you that I am hardly ever discouraged or depressed; perhaps that is the way the Lord made me. But if you ever become downcast, discouraged, or depressed, do not give in to those thoughts or feelings. Start praising the Lord and thanking Him for every possible thing you can think of. Within a few minutes, your attitude will have changed immensely. We need to learn to praise and rejoice in the Lord rather than yield to our feelings, circumstances, or situations. We have to learn to rejoice in Him.

Here is the second application. As the old adage says, he who laughs last, laughs best. Do you realize that we are going to have the last laugh? It will be a laugh of eternal joy. Isaiah 66:5 says, “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.”

When the Lord appears, I want it to be for my joy, because I want to be found in obedience to Him, and I want to be found praising Him. We have a whole year ahead of us, if the Lord allows us to live.

Praise Him daily. David said, “Three times a day will I pray,” and he did. You may have three prayer times, but you could also have three specific times of praise and thankfulness. Rejoice in the Lord. We have so much to rejoice about. And if we think we have nothing, at least we can thank Him that our names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank You for Your Word and for Your truth. Lord, we confess our sin of failing to rejoice in Thee. We acknowledge our weaknesses, deficiencies, faults, sins, disobediences, and rebellions. Help us to rejoice in Thee. Help us to be more thankful, more grateful, and more appreciative, and to praise You for Your goodness to us on a daily basis. Give us a desire to praise and glorify Thy name. Thou did say, “Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me.” May we not only praise Thee, but rejoice in all that You have done for us through the Lord Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 40

A Christian View Of Death

Biblical Foundation: Following God into the Unknown
Introduction: The Inevitability of Death

In Joshua chapter 3, Israel was commanded to follow the ark of the covenant: “When you see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, and the priests of the Levites bearing it, then you shall remove from your place, and go after it.” Yet there was to be a space between them and the ark, “that you may know the way which you must go, for you have not passed this way heretofore.” Note that phrase: “for you have not passed this way heretofore.”

Death is a subject that very few desire to discuss, very few desire to think upon, and certainly no one wishes to dwell upon it. Yet the truth of the matter is very simple. Each of us must die. He will die. I will die.

The wise thing to do is to be prepared for the inevitable. I've often said that no one is really prepared to live until they are prepared to die. You remember the passage in 2 Kings 20, where Hezekiah was sick. God spoke to him through the prophet Isaiah: “In those days Hezekiah was sick unto death. And the prophet Isaiah the son of

Amos came to him and said, Thus saith the LORD, Set thine house in order, for thou shalt die and not live."

In one sense of the word, it is not necessary for God to send a prophet to each one of us, because the Bible says very plainly in Hebrews 9 and verse 27, "And it is appointed unto man once to die, and after this, the judgment."

There is an interesting verse in Ecclesiastes chapter 8 and verse 8: "There is no man that hath power over the Spirit to retain the Spirit, neither hath he power in the day of death. And there is no discharge in that war." No one is able to retain his spirit. No one is able to prevent the day of his death. Scientists looking for the eternal gene or the God gene or the longevity gene are absolutely insane in one sense of the word, because God has appointed a day in which we are going to die. It is just that simple.

Setting our house in order involves far more than wills, instructions, deeds, and plans for the family and for prosperity to continue. Preparations must also include mental, emotional, and, above all, spiritual preparations in light of death. Will Rogers, the Oklahoma cowboy humorist, said one time, "If you do not believe in life insurance, just try dying one time without it." I would paraphrase that in my own words: If you do not believe savingly in the Lord Jesus Christ, just try dying one time without Him. You will recognize the absolute need. Unless one has made his peace with God the Father through the grace, mercy, and personal work of the Lord Jesus Christ, he is not prepared to die.

When you think about death, I would suppose that it has touched just about every person in this room. Usually, some member of the family has died. It is true that we mourn and grieve at the loss of our loved ones. We desire that they would continue to live with us and be with us, but we have to understand that this is impossible in this life.

I want you to think upon this truth for a moment. The Apostle Paul talks about death, but he also tells us that we are different from unbelievers. He says, "But I would not have you ignorant, brethren," concerning them which are asleep. In other words, this is something you and I should know; we should not forget it.

"That you sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him. For this I say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain in the coming of the Lord shall not prevent or precede them which are asleep." They are already there. "For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, with the trump of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, so shall we ever be with the Lord."

"Wherefore comfort ye one another with these words." We may sorrow, but we do not sorrow as others who have no hope. We sorrow in hope; that is, we are not in despair or agony. Our sorrow is tempered with truth and with the realization that our separation is simply temporary.

Notice that he says, "Wherefore comfort one another with these words." The word translated "comfort" is the Greek word parakaleo, which literally means "one called alongside to help." Kaleo is the verb "I call," and para is the preposition meaning "alongside of." This word, parakaleo, is also used for the name of the Holy Spirit in John 14:26 and other passages. It is likewise used of the Lord Jesus Christ in 1 John 2:1, where the Bible says, "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." Thus, the word "advocate" is parakaleo, or "one called alongside of to help."

The Bible teaches that we basically have three comforters. The Lord Jesus Christ is our Comforter in the sense that He is interceding for us and praying for us. The Holy Spirit is our Comforter in us, and the Word of God is our Comforter. In other words, the Word instructs us, teaches us, and builds us up in the most holy faith.

The Word of God is very important. Looking back in Joshua 3:4, remember that the children of Israel had been wandering in the wilderness for forty years. Now they are crossing the Jordan and going into the Promised Land. The priests have the ark and go in front of the people; they step into the Jordan, and the river parts left and right so Israel can cross. Yet in verse 4 he says, "Yet there shall

be a space between you and it," that is, the ark, "about 2,000 cubits by measure."

“Come not near unto it.” Why do you want to stay 2,000 cubits away? Here is why: “that you may know the way which you must go.” You had to see the ark and the priests who bore it. Then he adds, “for you have not passed this way heretofore.” Obviously, it was necessary for them to follow the ark. Likewise, it is necessary for us to follow the Word of God. God had led them in the wilderness by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. He had led them all through the wilderness.

But now they were crossing Jordan and going into the Promised Land, and they had never trodden that ground before. They may have known the wilderness quite well because God led them through several different places. But now there was a new mystery, a new adventure, something to which they had better pay close attention because they had never been that way before. Likewise, it is our responsibility, and it is necessary, that we pay close attention to the Ark of God, particularly to the Word of God, because we have never done this before as well.

I suppose the most difficult thing about death and dying is simply this: we have never done it before. I do not know about you, but I have never died, at least not yet. There is some apprehension and concern about it. Since we have never died before, we are naturally a little apprehensive. But the Word of God, if we listen to its instruction, will alleviate that apprehension and certainly calm our fears.

We should understand another truth that I have spoken of before: dying is a part of living. You cannot die unless you have lived. Dying is therefore something natural for each of us, and it should be welcomed and counted as our friend, which I will explain shortly. According to Scripture, death is now no longer our enemy. It is necessary that we die, and I will show you why. Turn in your Bibles to the book of John, chapter 12.

Death as Necessary for Glorification

Look at what our Lord said concerning Himself. This principle will apply to us as well. In John chapter 12, certain Greeks came to worship at the feast. These Greeks were proselytes. “So there came up certain Greeks among them that came up to worship at the feast. The same came therefore to Philip of Bethsaida of Galilee, and desired him, saying, Sir, we would see Jesus. Philip cometh and telleth Andrew. And again Andrew and Philip tell Jesus.” Jesus answered them, saying, “The hour is come that the Son of man should be glorified.”

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone. But if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.”

He made this statement in reference to Himself, because in order to finish the atonement, He must die. You remember in Isaiah 53, the Bible said He shall see His seed, and He shall see everything that He purchased. He is saying that it is absolutely necessary that the corn of wheat fall into the ground and die.

We understand this when it comes to gardening. The seeds that we plant die, and from that death an awful lot more fruit is produced.

Stop and think about this. It is true that we worship the Lord. It is true that we pray. It is true that we read our Bibles. It is true that we endeavor to serve. But all of our worship, all of our prayer, all of our service, and all of our study are mixed with sin. You and I will never, ever be able to produce the fruit that we should, in the sense of giving our Heavenly Father perfected praise and worship through the Lord Jesus Christ, until we are in a glorified, resurrected, sinless body. That is when we will produce much fruit, especially in reference to praising and honoring Him.

Another passage teaches basically the same thing. First Corinthians chapter 15 enlarges upon this truth, speaking of the resurrection and a resurrected, glorified body: “But some men will say, How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?”

"Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die." This is the same principle taught in John chapter 12. "And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain. It may chance of wheat, or some other grain, but God giveth it a body as is pleased him, and to every seed his own body. All flesh is not the same flesh. But there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, another of birds.

"There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial. But the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars. For one star differeth from another in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption," that is, the body; "it is raised in incorruption," the new body. "It is sown in dishonor," our fleshly body; "it is raised in glory," the glorified body. "It is sown in weakness," our frail, dying body; "it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body and there is a spiritual body." Paul is speaking clearly of a resurrected, glorified body.

You understand that when you take one grain of corn, I do not care how beautiful that grain of corn is. I don't care how polished it is. I don't care how potent it is. If it is never buried, if it never dies, it never produces fruit. Many young women, when Alice and I were growing up, had the mustard seed on the necklace, encased in glass. It might be pretty, but it'll never produce because it can't die. So the principle is that we have to die in order to produce. That is exactly what he's telling us here: God will raise us up and give us a body that will enable us by His grace and power to give the fruit that we need.

So the only way we can receive our resurrected glorified bodies is through death. We need to understand a principle. For the child of God, life does not begin at forty. It begins at death. Death, which I'm going to point out later, for the child of God is really and truly not death. It is nothing more than trading an old, worn-out, and sinful body for a new, glorified, resurrected body, that will never sin and never know sin.

The Believer's True Life Begins at Death

I have a collection at the house—not that it is a habit or a hobby, but I pick them up every time I see them. I have a collection of turtle shells, and I put them in Alice's planters and windows. I might have seven or eight of them until she either throws them away or the dogs get one to chew on. But do you know why I find so many turtle shells?

Because the turtles outgrow them, or something kills them. Usually, they will grow a new shell or get a new shell somehow, just like an old snake shedding its skin. Basically, what we are doing is trading an old, worn-out body for a new heavenly body. That is what he is saying here.

Look in 2 Corinthians chapter 5, beginning in verse 1: "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved," so he is talking about our physical body, "we have a building of God, a house not made with hands eternal in the heavens." He is referring to a new heavenly, glorified body. Verse 2 says, "For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house, which is from heaven." In other words, we really desire to have that glorified body. "If so be that being clothed, we shall not be found naked. Now watch carefully. For we that are in this tabernacle," that is, this body, "we do groan, being burdened, not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life."

Now I want you to pay close attention to the latter part of verse 4. He said, "that mortality might be swallowed up of life." This means our mortality, in which we die, is now swallowed up in life. Our Lord said it like this in John 5, verse 24: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life." So, in one sense of the word, we have already passed, by believing in Him, from death unto life.

In John chapter 11, beginning with verse 20, we have our Lord's conversation with Martha. Remember that Lazarus died, and Mary and Martha were his sisters. Martha came to our Lord in John 11 and verse 20 and said, "Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met him. But Mary sat still in the house. Then

said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. But I know that even now whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee. Jesus said unto her, Thy brother shall rise again. Martha said unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection and the life."

"He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?" She saith unto him, "Yea, Lord, I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which is come into the world."

Notice what He said: "I am the resurrection and the life. He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?" Our dying and our death is not a real dying or a real death in one sense of the word. But it is true in another sense of the word that each one of us are going to die. Yet He said, "I am the resurrection and the life."

I like what Lester Olaf said years ago. Reading this passage, he commented on the fact that Jesus went to Bethany where they lived, and said, "The resurrection just walked into town." That is true. Our Lord said, "Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." One of these days you are going to hear John Weaver is dead. But don't believe it for an instant.

I may have passed out of this body because death is nothing more than the soul departing from the body. But I will have traded this old decaying mortal body for a new glorified resurrected body. To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord, the Word of God teaches us. Obviously, I will have traded one body for a new body and one habitation for another habitation. I will still be alive, because those who are trusting in the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ never die.

You know what He said in Hebrews 7 and verse 25: "He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them." That is why our Lord said, "He that liveth and believeth in Me, he shall never, ever die."

Here is a truth concerning death that we need to set our hearts to. Death has been spoken of as crossing Jordan. The Jordan River was usually very passable except in flood stage, when it was extremely dangerous to cross. Death, therefore, has been referred to as crossing the Jordan. There is a song written about this years ago, titled “I Won’t Have to Cross Jordan Alone.”

The hymn says:

“When I come to the river at ending of day, When the last winds of sorrow have blown, There will be someone waiting to show me the way; I won’t have to cross Jordan alone.

“Though the billows of sorrow and trouble may sweep, Christ the Savior will care for His own, Till the end of the journey, my soul He will keep; I won’t have to cross Jordan alone.”

The chorus says:

“I won’t have to cross Jordan alone. Jesus died all my sins to atone. When the darkness I see, He’ll be waiting for me. I won’t have to cross Jordan alone.”

The Bible says in Hebrews 13 in verse 5, “I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.” He will not leave us. He will not forsake us. May I point something out? If He is our Head and we are His body, it would be impossible for Him to leave us or for Him to forsake us.

God's Guidance Through Death

Now, I want to show you a couple of passages. Psalm 48 and verse 14 says, “For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death.” Look at that verse again: “For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death.” When you think about our text in Joshua chapter 3 and verse 4, God had guided the children of Israel all the way through the wilderness for forty years. He was their God forever and ever, and He was their guide even unto death.

When it came time to cross the Jordan and get into Canaan land, He did not forsake them. He said, “You keep your eyes on the ark. You follow Me; I'm going to give you direction.” Do you realize that

God has guided us all our lives? He's preserved us, sustained us. It is His providence that has allowed us to get where we are today.

And His guidance does not stop at death. God does not guide us, bring us up to death, and then drop us, saying, “You're on your own; see if you can make it through.” No, He doesn't do that. The Bible says, “He will be our guide even unto death.” Remember how God sovereignly and powerfully brought the children of Israel out of Egypt.

They sinned against Him and provoked Him many times in the wilderness. In fact, the Bible says ten times they provoked Him. Yet Scripture says He did not bring them out of Egypt to drop them in the desert. He brought them out of Egypt to bring them into Canaan land, the promised land.

Deuteronomy 6:23 says, “And he brought us out from thence that he might bring us in to give us the land, which he sware unto our fathers.” He brought us out that He might bring us in. God does not bring us out of our sins, unbelief, stubborn wickedness, and rebellion merely to drop us at death and leave us to ourselves. No, He brought us out that He might bring us in, just as He brought the children of Israel out of Egypt and into the promised land. He brought us out of our sins, and He will bring us unto Himself.

Psalm 48:14 says, “For this God is our God forever and ever. He will be our guide even unto death.” Now look at Psalm 23, beginning with verse 1: “The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want.” That is provision. “He maketh me to lie down in green pastures. He leadeth me beside the still waters.” That is peace. “He restoreth my soul. He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His namesake.” That is pardon.

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me. Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me." That is His presence. "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies. Thou anointest my head with oil, my cup runneth over." That is protection.

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." That is paradise or

pleasure, because the Bible said, "At thy right hand are pleasures for evermore."

Go back to verse 4: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil." Why? "For thou art with me. Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me." Our Lord is our guide, not even unto death and in death only; He is our guide through death.

The shadow is not the reality. If you are in the shadow of a tree, that does not mean you are in the tree. The shadow is only a reflection of the tree. David said, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death." God, our Lord Jesus Christ, has suffered the real death that we should have suffered. He suffered in our stead as our substitute.

Death's Sting Removed for Believers

He has defanged the serpent and taken the stinger out of death. You and I do not experience what is known as real, true death; we are merely passing through its shadow. Let me show you. Look in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians chapter 15. You will see this stated very plainly—very bluntly, I might add. Let us begin reading at verse 51: “Behold, I show you a mystery,” he says.

"We shall not all sleep but we shall all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump, for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us a victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

"O death, where is thy sting?" The sting is gone; it has been taken away. "O grave, where is thy victory?" It cannot hold us because it could not hold the Lord Jesus Christ. The sting of death is sin, but our sin has been dealt with. We no longer are in our sin; we are in the Lord Jesus Christ. The strength of sin is the law, but we have

now perfectly obeyed and perfectly fulfilled the law in the Lord Jesus Christ. Our victory over death is the same as the victory our Lord Jesus Christ made when He defeated death. Death is a defeated enemy, a conquered enemy.

Therefore, it holds absolutely no horror and no fear for the child of God. It has been defanged; the stinger is gone. That is why, for us, it is merely a shadow. It is not the reality of the horror that the unsaved are going to face and go through—not at all.

Moreover, the Scripture teaches that our Lord has also removed for us the fear of death. Hebrews 2:14-15 says, "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same, that through death He might destroy him that hath the power of death, that is the devil, and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject unto bondage."

The Bible says very clearly that we are no longer in bondage to the fear of death. He has delivered us. We may not want to die, but we are not afraid to die. We may want to live, but we are not afraid to die. If I were to ask you to raise your hand if you want to live, every hand would be raised. Of course. I want to live. I do not want to leave Alice. I want to live because I do not want to stop preaching or teaching. I do not want to leave my animals.

You say, “But you have children and grandchildren.” I do, but they are all grown and have families of their own. I certainly want to live, but I know that one day I am going to die. What I am trying to tell you is that there is no fear in death, because our Lord has dealt with that. When you and I die, it is nothing more than a passage, nothing more than going through a tunnel.

Death as Sleep and Family Reunion

I want to show you two illustrations of what death is for the child of God. First of all, death is likened unto sleep for the Christian. In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14, the Apostle Paul says, “But I would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, even as others which have no hope. For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with

him." He is describing those who have died, referring to death as sleeping.

In John 11, our Lord goes to Bethany, to the house of Mary and Martha and Lazarus, because Lazarus has died. The Scripture says, "These things said he, and after that he saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth." "But I go, that I may awake him out of sleep." He was dead. The disciples said, "Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well." However, Jesus spoke of his death, while they thought He had spoken of taking rest in sleep. Then Jesus said plainly, "Lazarus is dead." But note what He said: "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth." He is asleep.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:9–10, we read: "For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake"—that is, are alive—"or sleep"—that is, are dead—"we shall live together with Him." He divides us into those who are alive and those who are asleep. Over and over, Scripture refers to death for the child of God as sleep.

Let me ask you a very simple question: Who in this room is afraid to go to sleep? The truth of the matter is this: Do you not want sleep? Do you not need sleep? Do you not desire sleep? Do you not even enjoy sleep? The answer is yes. Oftentimes we say, "Wow, I had a good night's sleep last night," meaning, "I am invigorated, refreshed, ready to go; I can tackle the world."

Sleep in the Bible is nothing more than a picture of death for the believer. Just as you and I lie down each night, rest, and go to sleep, that is what death is for the Christian. We simply go to sleep in our Lord, rest in Him, and to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. In 2 Corinthians chapter 5, the Apostle Paul said, "Yea, we are groaning for that, we want that, because we want to be clothed upon with our heavenly body, with our glorified body."

Who in the world should be afraid of sleep? Death for the child of God is nothing but resting in the Lord. I read of a saint whose time came to die. On his deathbed, he said, "Is this death? Have I been fearful of this? Have I been apprehensive of this? This is not death, this is life. Welcome death."

And then he talked about dying being easy right before he died. Another individual said, "Living is hard, dying is easy," and it is for the child of God. It's nothing more than going to sleep in the arms of our Lord. Here's the second one. I want you to turn in your Bibles, if you would, first of all, to Genesis 35, because I want to show you several passages that you might see this. Genesis 35 is where we're going to start. Not only for the child of God, death is likened unto a sleep, but also for the child of God, death is likened unto a family reunion. Notice if you would, in Genesis chapter 35 and verse 29, Genesis 35 verse 29, "And Isaac gave up the ghost and died and was gathered unto his people being old and full of days."

"And his sons, Esau and Jacob buried him." Note, if you would, Isaac died and was gathered unto his people. If you look at Genesis chapter 49 and verse 33, Genesis 49 verse 33, the Bible says, "And when Jacob had made an end of commanding his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people." So Jacob commanded his sons, got back in bed, yielded up the ghost, died, and was gathered unto his people. If you will go to the book of Numbers chapter 20, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Numbers chapter 20, and look if you would please at verse 24. Numbers chapter 20 and verse 24. God says, "And Aaron shall be gathered unto his people, for he shall not enter into the land which I have given unto the children of Israel, because he rebelled against My word at the water of Meribah. Aaron shall be gathered unto his people." Now skip down to verse 26. "And strip Aaron of his garments, and put them upon Eliezer his son, and Aaron shall be gathered unto his people, and shall die there."

So death is likened to be gathered unto your people. Now, if you will turn right on over to Deuteronomy chapter 32. Next book, Deuteronomy chapter 32. And notice if you would please verse 50.

Now we're going to read about Moses. Deuteronomy 32 and look at verse 50. The Bible says God is telling this to Moses. "And die in the mount, whither thou goest up, and be gathered unto thy people, as Aaron thy brother died in Mount Hor and was gathered unto his people." Hmm. Just being gathered together to your people. Now, if you will turn to Hebrews chapter 12. Hebrews chapter 12.

Hebrews chapter 12, beginning with verse 22, says: “But you are come unto Mount Zion, unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaketh better things than that of Abel.”

Here, our final entrance into glory is a family reunion in that sense of the word, because we are coming to the General Assembly and Church of the Firstborn. We are coming to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Mediator of the New Covenant.

Who does not want to see their family and friends? I would like to see my father and mother. I think of them often; they have been dead for many, many years. But it is not just my mother and father. I would certainly want to see the Lord Jesus Christ, that is for sure. I would like to see God the Father, and the Scripture says, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”

Would you not like to sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? Would you not like to talk to Noah, or speak to the prophets and the apostles? Would you not like to meet some of those men as you read through 1 Chronicles and 2 Chronicles? You read about them, but you could not even pronounce their names. Who is afraid of a family reunion? We want to get together with family and friends.

I have been asked innumerable times, “Do you think we will know each other in heaven?” My standard response is, “We will not be any more stupid there than we are now.” If we know each other now, obviously we are going to know each other there. We will have renewed minds and glorified bodies. Sure.

And may I remind you that at the Mount of Transfiguration, Moses and Elijah appeared with our Lord, while Peter, James, and John were there. Peter said, "Lord, it's good that we be here. Let us make three tabernacles: one for thee, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." How did he know Moses and Elijah? He had never met them or seen them, yet he knew exactly who they were. Of course, we're

going to know each other. For the child of God, death is just going to sleep. It is being gathered to our people, a heavenly family reunion.

Now, let me make some applications. First, we may safely trust our Lord and rest in Him alone.

Applications: Trust, Detachment, and Fearlessness

Remember Abraham. The Bible says Abraham went out not knowing whither he went. How would you like to start on a journey without knowing where you are going, having no idea how long it will take to get there? If you do not know where you are going, how will you know when you get there? Yet Abraham did that. It was said, "Abraham left all for God, left all to God and with God, found all in God, yielded all to God, and God brought him safely into the land He had promised him." Stop and think how God has led us all our lives.

Francis Havergill had written this short poem:

“The Lord hath done great things for thee all through thy fleeting days. Jehovah hath dealt wondrously. Lift up thy heart and praise for greater things than I shall see. Child of his loving choice. The Lord will do great things for thee. Fear not. Be glad. Rejoice.”

Charles Haddon Spurgeon, who died in 1892, said, “But all things are present to the eye of God. Tomorrow, there is no such thing with Jehovah. Yesterday, there is no such thing with Jehovah. Past, present, and future. These are human words.

“Now is God’s word, and it comprehends all. He who should look upon a country from a star, taking a bird’s eye view, would have all parts equally before him, while he who traverses it with slow step leaves a portion of the territory behind him, and another part is yet before him. So it is with man. Creeping like an insect from leaf to leaf, he leaves something behind and has something yet before.

“But God, looking down upon all things at once, serenely fills his own eternal now and sees our ages pass. The peculiar troubles of today which are exercising you, dear child of God, your heavenly father was cognizant of 10,000 years ago, and nothing about them comes upon him by surprise. The Lord has no emergencies. He is never at the end of his resources. Oh beloved, it makes my heart smile while I mention such a notion. It is a childish folly indeed to

think that the infinite God who filleth all and sustains all can ever meet with anything that to Him shall be hard. Rest then, O fellow pilgrim, in this confidence that the new road to you is an old road to God."

And that is a fact. Another truth: We go as we came. What does that mean? Ecclesiastes 5:15 says, "As he came forth from his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came and take nothing of his labor." Job said, "Naked came I forth from the womb and naked shall I return." Everything that we have acquired, whether much or little, whether a lot or nothing, will be left behind. We will take absolutely nothing with us. As we came into this world, so shall we go out of this world.

The third one is this: We have no need to fear death. The stinger has been removed. The serpent has been defanged.

My mother had a little dog named Blair. I forget what kind she was. She was just about this long and about this high, and may have weighed three or four pounds, sopping wet. That dog loved my mother. She lived with her and slept in the bed with her, especially when Mother was basically bedridden. I remember going over to visit and bending down to kiss Mother goodbye. That little dog would come over: "Get away from her, get away from her."

The funny thing was, the dog was so old she did not have any teeth. She had to be fed soft food. Occasionally, when she came at me, I would say, "Here it is, go ahead and bite it." She would put it in her mouth, but she could not bite. All she could do was gum it and wet it just a little bit. I have often thought about that.

That is what death is to the child of God. It will sound like, "I'll eat you up," but it has no teeth. It has been defanged. For the child of God, death is asleep. Just stop and think: Our sins have been forgiven, our iniquities have been purged, and the Lord Jesus Christ is our advocate, our defender, our Savior, our Lord, our intercessor, and our life.

Therefore, we live in Him. Death for the child of God is nothing more than a passage from mortality to immortality, from corruption to incorruption, from dying and death into a life in which we never ever die. That is why the Apostle Paul said in Philippians 3 and verse

9, “And be found in Him, not having a righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.” We must be found in Him alone. We are saved only by His work, not our work; His righteousness, not our righteousness; and by His grace and mercy alone. Being saved, we have no fear of death. We do not die. We have passed from death unto life.

We'll trade this failing, faltering shell for a resurrected, glorified body.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to thee. We thank you, Lord, that you have conquered death. We thank you, Father, that you have defanged death and removed its stinger. And for us, Lord, it's merely the shadow of death. Help us to rejoice in thee. Help us, Lord, to prepare our hearts spiritually, mentally, and emotionally. Understand, Lord, that we need to rejoice with those of our brethren and sisters who have gone before us because they are now experiencing pleasures at thy right hand forevermore. Give us grace that we may serve thee acceptably with reverence and godly fear. In thy name we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 41

A Study In Contras

A Study in Contrasts

Introduction to the Law of Contrast

A number of years back, I had a one-day seminar at the house on how to study and how to learn biblical truth. I spent seven hours that one day teaching. Afterward, one of my men who was there in Waycross said, “I want you one of these days to present all of that just to our church in general and to anybody who wants to listen.” I said, “Well, I’ll take that in consideration.”

One of my prayer requests is, “Lord, give me what your people need.” I have been busy studying. Then I received two or three different calls from individuals saying they needed help with studying and interpretation. I said, “Well, OK.” So I started looking at some things, and I am already on number four of a series of messages dealing with reasons to interpret, how to interpret, and how to study.

I have not even gotten to the section that I taught for seven hours. So, Lord willing, next Sunday I am going to start with message

number one on that. I do not know how long I will go. The message today could be an introduction to that, or it could be added to it, but it is dealing basically with a hermeneutical principle: the law of contrast.

Look in Proverbs chapter 15 and verse 1. Scripture says, “A soft answer turneth away wrath, but grievous words stir up anger. The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright, but the mouth of fools poureth out foolishness. The eyes of the Lord are in every place beholding the evil and the good. A wholesome tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness therein is a breach in the spirit.

“A fool despiseth his father’s instruction, but he that regardeth reproof is prudent. In the house of the righteous is much treasure, but in the revenues of the wicked is trouble. The lips of the wise disperse knowledge, but the heart of the foolish doeth not so. The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is his delight. The way of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but he loveth him that followeth after righteousness.”

Contrasts are important. I believe that I could easily prove that contrasts are important in practically every area. When you and I think of contrast, we normally think of contrasts that we see all the time.

For instance, the differences between men and women. We think about hot and cold. We think about silly and serious. We think about wet and dry. We think about night and day. Most of our contrasts are opposites in one sense of the word. However, sometimes there are contrasts that, while they are indeed contrasts, are not quite as obvious as others are. There are many areas in which contrasts are vitally important. For instance, in hunting, training, and warfare, contrasts are extremely important. In those areas, you have to look for contrasts in color, size, shapes, movement, stillness, or anything that happens to be out of place in an environment. For instance, if you were downtown in July, and it was pushing 100 degrees, and you saw a man walking along the street in a long coat, that should catch your attention. Usually, people wearing long coats in hot weather are hiding shotguns, rifles, or something like that.

I am simply pointing out that if you observe it, a contrast will really help you. I was hunting one evening and noticing all the bushes around me. I always try to do that. Usually, when I go hunting, I carry my Bible or a book, sit there and read, then lift my eyes and look around. I happened to look and thought, "You know, I just don't remember that limb being there." I watched that limb, and the next thing I knew, the limb moved.

It was a big buck. When he stepped into the open, that was the end of him. I am simply saying that the contrast caught my attention.

Biblical Basis for Contrast: The Word 'Contrary'

While the word "contrast" does not appear in the Bible, its importance does indeed appear there in the Bible. Another frequently occurring word is essentially the same: "contrary." Before we get to Proverbs chapter 15, I want to show you a number of verses. Let us begin in Leviticus chapter 26, while you hold Proverbs 15, because we will look in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. I am going to show you the law of contrast. In Leviticus 26, in this passage, the contrast is between obedience and disobedience, and you can also see a contrast between blessing and cursing. Look, please, at verse 21: Leviticus 26 and verse 21.

The Lord says to His people, "And if you walk contrary to Me"—that is, the opposite of Me—"and will not hearken unto Me, I will bring seven times more plagues upon you according to your sins." He says, "Then I will also walk contrary to you"—or opposite of you—"and will punish you yet seven times for your sins." In other words, no blessings as He has promised; instead, He will judge and punish. Again He says, "And if you will not for all this hearken unto me, but walk contrary"—or opposite to me—"then I will walk contrary to you also in fury, and I, even I will chastise you seven times for your sins."

Then He says, "If they shall confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers with their trespass, which they trespassed against me, and that they also have walked contrary to me"—or in opposition to me—"and that I also have walked contrary unto them, and have brought them into the land of their enemies, if then their

uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity, then will I remember my covenant with Jacob, and also my covenant with Isaac, and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land." In other words, God says, if you repent and confess that you have walked in opposition and contrary to Him, He will remember you. He says, in effect, that you must repent, and then He will remember you.

In the New Testament, Romans 16:17 says, "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which you have learned and avoid them." Paul had taught them good doctrine; he had taught them true doctrine. Anyone who teaches in opposition or contrary to what they had been taught was to be marked and avoided, because that doctrine was wrong. Thus the contrast appears in both testaments.

Galatians 5:17 also shows distinctly the opposition, that which is contrary: "For the flesh lusteth against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh.

“And these are contrary, the one to the other, so that you cannot do the things that you would.” The flesh is the opposite of the Spirit, and the Spirit is opposite to the flesh. You are either walking in the flesh or walking in the Spirit. You cannot walk in both at the same time because they are opposites, just as you cannot have cold and heat, or night and day, at the same time. They are contrary to each other.

In 1 Thessalonians 2:14-15, the Apostle Paul speaks of the Jews: “For you, brethren, became followers of the churches of God, which in Judea are in Christ Jesus. For you also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews, who both killed the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us, and they please not God, and are contrary to all men.” The Jews not only killed the Lord Jesus and persecuted their own prophets; they pleased not God and were in opposition, basically, to all men.

Now look at 1 Timothy chapter 1, beginning with verse 8. This is the last passage I will show you, but I think it summarizes just about everything I have told you. Paul writes: “But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully: Knowing this, that the law is not made

for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly, for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons." Let me stop right there and say this: if we took the time, I could show you that what Paul lists in verses 9 and 10 violates the Ten Commandments. Every one of these would be a violation of God's law. Someone violating God's law is not using God's law lawfully. But note verse 10: "for whoremongers,"

Paul lists those who defile themselves with mankind, menstealers, liars, and perjured persons, and then says, "...and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine." It should be clear, according to this passage, that anyone walking, talking, acting, and living contrary to, in opposition to, or in disobedience to God's law does not have or possess sound doctrine. In other words, sound doctrine prohibits you from doing these things. If you walk in these things, if you live in these things, it is clear evidence that you do not understand doctrine at all and do not possess sound doctrine. These passages dealing with things that are contrary or opposite establish a clear hermeneutical principle.

Hermeneutical Questions for Application

Hermeneutics is simply the art or science of Bible interpretation, how to interpret the Bible. One of the principles of hermeneutics is the law of opposites. Whenever you read a passage or a Scripture, there are three things that you should ask yourself. Number one, what does this passage teach? That is, what is the positive? Number two, what does this passage not teach? That is the negative. The third question you need to ask is this: how does this passage apply to my life?

If I am considering the positive, I must ask how it is to affect me and how I am to change my life. If I am considering the negative, I must ask myself what it is I am to avoid in order that I might not disobey God. Then I ask how it is to apply to me in my everyday life, in practical everyday living. If you do not apply the truth, then

obviously the truth is not any good to you at all. Truth is not just to be known; it is to be applied.

Contrasts in Proverbs 15:1-7

Turn back in your Bibles to Proverbs chapter 15. Before I actually get to the three points I want to share with you, I want to work our way down through Proverbs 15 until we get to verse 8, just to show you the opposites and the contrast. Look at verse 1: “A soft answer turneth away wrath, but grievous words stir up anger.” Verse 1 is a contrast between a controlled spirit and a soft answer, as opposed to an uncontrolled spirit and an angry, unchecked tongue.

That one should be obvious. Look at verse 2: “The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright, but the mouth of fools poureth out foolishness.” This verse sets speaking wisely on one hand against pouring out foolishness on the other. That is what most people do: they speak foolishly without any consideration. I have used this example before because I have done it, and so have you. I have heard people say very dogmatically, “I know what I would do if I were in that situation.” The truth is, you do not know what you would do until you are in that situation. Thus, you are speaking foolishly, because you are not speaking in wisdom.

Number three is a declaration: “The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.” Verse three, then, is an incentive to do the positives and not the negatives in these passages. Look at verse 4: “A wholesome tongue is a tree of life, but”—here is the opposite—“perverseness therein is a breach in the spirit.” There is the contrast between the wholesome tongue and a perverse tongue.

Look in verse 5: “A fool despiseth his father's instruction, but he that regardeth reproof is prudent.” Here is the contrast between one who is willing to listen and be taught and one who is not listening and will not be taught. Then, in verse 6: “In the house of the righteous is much treasure, but in the revenues of the wicked is trouble.” Here is a contrast between the house of the righteous and the house of the wicked, which is a different sermon in and of itself. In verse 7, he says, “The lips of the wise disperse knowledge, but the

heart of the foolish doeth not so." Here is a contrast between the wise and the foolish in their speech.

The context of our message today is emphasizing contrasts or opposites. Some of these are going to be exceedingly clear; some may not be so clear. Usually, what we cannot see is right in front of us. For instance, hold Proverbs 15 and look in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 7. Beginning with verse 15, our Lord makes a statement twice. "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they're ravening wolves."

A false prophet or a wicked person will not necessarily always appear as a false prophet or a wicked person. He is saying that they will disguise themselves; they will conceal themselves. If it were possible for a wolf to put on a sheep costume and present himself as a sheep, he might look like a sheep. He might walk like a sheep. He could even blink like a sheep, but he is not a sheep.

"Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they're ravening wolves. You shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? No. 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. Wherefore, by their fruits ye shall know them." Twice in this short passage, our Lord says, "By their fruits ye shall know them."

Let us return to the illustration. That wolf may put on a sheep's uniform, cover himself like a sheep, walk like a sheep, and blink like a sheep. But he will still kill and eat a sheep. That is his fruit. You cannot hide the fruit. You can conceal the nature, but you cannot conceal the fruit. You can conceal the body, but you cannot conceal the fruit.

I have often lamented that most professing Christians are absolutely blind to this principle, especially in relation to politicians. Because we want people to be Christians so badly, whenever a candidate professes to be a Christian, and perhaps even uses the lingo of a Christian, we normally accept him as a Christian. Then, when he gets to the state capitol or to Washington, D.C., we find him

proposing and passing laws contrary to Jesus Christ, contrary to the Bible, and contrary to everything true and right.

Our Lord is saying in Matthew 7 that it is not your talk that demonstrates whether or not you are genuine. It is your walk; it is your fruit. If someone professes to be a Christian, we need to understand Luke 6:46: “Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say unto you?” The word “Lord” is kurios, meaning boss, owner, master, or sovereign. Why call Me Lord, Master, or Sovereign if you will not do what I say?

Obviously, a man who professes faith in Jesus Christ but does not obey Christ is one whom God calls a liar. “A corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit, neither can a good tree bring forth evil fruit”; by their fruits we shall know them.

In 1 Samuel chapter 15, Saul was anointed king by God, and God sent Samuel to him. Before Samuel went, God said: “Then the word of the Lord came unto Samuel saying, It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king, for he is turned back from following me, for he hath not kept my commandments.” How do we know that Saul had turned back? Because he had not kept his commandments. That is the fruit.

Saul may have professed to be God’s king and to have worshiped Him, but the truth is that he did not worship Him, for he disobeyed Him. Therefore, in 1 Samuel chapter 15, beginning with verse 26, we are told: “And Samuel said unto Saul, I will not return with thee, for thou hast rejected the word of the Lord.” “And the Lord hath rejected thee from being king over Israel.”

If you are going to disobey and reject the Word of God, you truly have no right to call yourself a believer. It does not matter whether you are a pastor, a politician, or a president. If you reject and disobey the Word of God, you have no right to call yourself a Christian. Our Lord said, “It's by their fruits we shall know them.” If someone professes to be a Christian, he should never call Jesus Christ Lord unless he is going to obey Him, because it would be a bald-faced lie. The word “Lord” means boss, owner, master, and sovereign. It means that Jesus Christ has the absolute right to tell us how to live and how not to live, what to say and what not to say, and how to act.

If we confess that He is Lord, He is our boss, our owner, and our master. Therefore, if we disobey Him, we have no right to call Him Lord.

Contrast in Worship: The Sacrifice of the Wicked vs. the Prayer of the Upright

In Proverbs chapter 15, verse 8, we see that worship is contrasted between the sinner and the saint: “The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is His delight.” It might surprise you to discover that the wicked worship. Yes, they do worship. Usually they worship themselves, and/or they do not know who or what they worship.

If you look very quickly to 1 Corinthians 10, verses 20 and 21, the Apostle Paul makes it clear that the wicked in reality worship the enemy. He says, “But I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice”—that is, the nations, the heathen—“they sacrifice to devils, and not to God. And I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils. Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of devils. Ye cannot be partakers of the Lord’s table and of the table of devils.” So obviously he is saying that the wicked truly worship the enemy. They do not worship God at all.

Secondly, in order to truly and really and genuinely worship the Lord, it is a requirement that one first be a saint. You must be regenerated. You must be converted, because it is impossible to worship God in the way that He demands without being a saint. How can we say that? Because John 4, verse 24, tells us, “God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.” It is impossible for an unsaved man to worship Him in spirit and in truth.

So, the truth is this: whenever the wicked seek to bring even that which God requires, that which God demands, even when they seek to do that, it is unacceptable. Like Cain, it is impossible for them to worship because they will not, do not, and cannot come in with God’s appointed way. Moreover, when they bring it with a wicked mind, that even makes it worse. Proverbs 21, verse 27, says, “The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination. How much more when he bringeth it with a wicked mind?”

The worship of an unsaved man, no matter how great, no matter how expensive, no matter how sacrificial, is nothing more than an abomination to God. The word “abomination” literally means a stench in God’s nostrils. The worship or the sacrifice of the wicked is simply an acting out of a lie. It is, to God, an insulting provocation.

It is not only vain; it is abominable. It is a work that does not flow from a lively or living faith, but from a polluted stream. That is why the Bible says, “Whatsoever is not of faith is sin.” Hebrews 11:6 says, “Without faith it's impossible to please God.” Proverbs 21:4 says, “An high look, and a proud heart, and the plowing of the wicked, is sin.”

We understand that a high look—an arrogant, haughty look—and a proud heart are sin. But what about the plowing of the wicked? Has not God ordained that we earn our living by the sweat of our brows? Has not God ordained that we work? Yes. How then is the plowing of the wicked sin? The answer is that he plows without faith. “Whatsoever is not of faith is sin.” You cannot worship without faith. You cannot pray without faith. If you do, it is sin.

I am simply pointing out that whatever is not of faith is sin. Therefore, when you compare the worship of the wicked with the worship of the saint, you will see clearly that the wicked cannot and will not bring forth true judgment or true justice. Proverbs 21:3 says, “To do justice and judgment is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice.” God would rather have you do what is right than sacrifice.

Matthew Henry writes, “God so hates wicked people whose hearts are malicious and their lives mischievous that even their sacrifices are an abomination to Him. God has sacrifices brought him even by wicked men to stop the mouth of conscience”—that is, to soothe their conscience—“and to keep up their reputation in the world”—that is, they are hypocrites—“as malefactors come to a sanctuary, not because it is a holy place, but because it shelters them from justice. But their sacrifices, though ever so costly, are not accepted of God, because not offered in sincerity, nor from a good principle; they dissemble with God”—that is, they play the hypocrite—“and in their conversations give the lie to their devotions, and for that reason they are an abomination to Him, because they are

They have made a cloak for their sin. Isaiah 66 and verse 3 gives an excellent picture of what it is like for the wicked to sacrifice to God. Look what he says: “He that killeth an ox”—which is an acceptable sacrifice—but when the wicked is doing it, “he that killeth an ox is as if he slew a man”; that is murder, a violation of the Sixth Commandment. “He that sacrificeth a lamb”—which is an acceptable sacrifice—“as if he cut off a dog’s neck,” which is not an acceptable sacrifice. “He that offereth an oblation”—and God required those in the Old Testament—“as if he offered swine’s blood”; swine’s blood is not an acceptable sacrifice. “He that burneth incense”—which was ordained in the Old Testament—“as if he blessed an idol. Yea, they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth in their abominations.” So he says they have not repented, they have not changed, and everything they do is condemned and certainly not acceptable unto God.

Look back to verse 8. The ways of the sinner are not the ways of God. That is why he says, “The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord.” It is not only unacceptable; it is an abomination. A wicked man cannot please God, period. Here is the contrast: “The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is his delight.”

Many people go out of their way to do things they say will please the Lord, when God says that the prayer of the upright pleases Him. That is simple: to have communion with Him, to honor Him, to consult Him, and to love Him. He says the prayer of the upright is His delight. So, if we really want to delight and please the Lord, first, we should be obedient, because it is the prayer of the upright; and the upright means those who are just, those who are righteous. Second, we should pray. We should acknowledge Him in every way.

Here is another contrast. Anything the wicked brings is an abomination, but even the simplest, most inexpensive, shortest prayer of the upright is a delight to the Lord. Look in verse 9: “The way of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but he loveth him that followeth after righteousness.”

Contrast in Walk: The Way of the Wicked vs. Following After Righteousness

The Hebrew word for “way” is derech. It means a way, a road, a walk, a journey, a manner of living, a direction of life, or the course of life. The way, manner of life, conduct, or conversation of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord. But God loveth him that followeth after righteousness. Verse 9 displays one of the great reasons why the sacrifice of the wicked is indeed an abomination to the Lord. One commentator said, “The sacrifices of the wicked are an abomination to God, not for some one of nice points of ceremony, but because their way, the whole course and tenor of their conversation is wicked and consequently an abomination to him.”

Sacrifices for sin were not accepted of those that resolved to go on in their sin and were in the highest degree abominable, if intended to obtain a connivance at sin and a permission to go on in it. Think about the indulgences that were sold in the medieval ages by the Roman Catholic Church. If you wanted to commit a sin, you could buy an indulgence, commit that sin, and be guaranteed forgiveness if you paid the right amount of money. This is one reason why these sacrifices are such an abomination to God.

The Scripture teaches us that the whole life of the wicked is lived in rebellion against God. Everything flows from a polluted fountain, and therefore everything the man does is polluted. It is absolutely astounding when you begin to think of what Scripture really says.

Romans 8, verse 6, deals with every unsaved man: "For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace."

There is a contrast right there. He explains it in verse 7: "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God"—that is, it is a strong hatred; it despises God. "For it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God."

There is not one thing that a sinner can do to please God. If you are in the flesh, if you are unsaved, there is not one thing you can do to please God. Some say, "The only thing a sinner could do to please God would be pray and ask for forgiveness." No, he cannot even do that unless God gives him grace and mercy, because faith is the gift

of God and repentance is the gift of God. He will not pray unless God gives him grace and mercy. There is not one thing that a sinner can do, because his way is contrary to God.

Psalm 1:6 simply says, “For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish.” Your ways are your walks in life. They are your conversation, your conduct, and your manner of living. Now look at verse 9. Here is the contrast: “The way of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but he loveth him that followeth after righteousness.”

What is the way of the saints? He is the one who follows after righteousness. He is the man who desires to be holy, who desires to be righteous, and who desires to please the Lord. Of course, he is not going to attain perfection in this life. Is the saint perfect? No. Does he want to be perfect? Yes, he might want to be. Does he seek perfection? He may try, but he understands that he is not going to have it in this life, that is for sure.

The phrase “he followeth after” means this: he stays on its trails. He seeks righteousness. He seeks holiness. He seeks obedience. His course of life is set on following after that which is right. The Apostle Paul, as great as he was, said this in Philippians 3:13: “Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended.” In other words, I have not made it. “I count not myself to have apprehended, but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forth unto those things which are before.” He goes on to say that he is pressing forward after the high mark of the calling of God in Christ Jesus.

What he has done in the past is in the past; he cannot correct it. I tell people from time to time, when I hear about people saying or doing things, I just shake my head and look at Alice and say, “I could never do that.” And she says, “But you used to.” I say, “What? I never did.” “Yes, you did.” Then I say, “Well, God has forgotten it, so should I.” Forgetting those things which are behind—that is what the Bible says. The man is the man who follows after. We are not going to be perfect in this life, but we are not going to stop seeking that which pleases God just because we cannot be perfect here.

John Gill said, “But he loveth him that followeth after righteousness, either after a justifying righteousness, not the righteousness of the law, which the carnal Jews followed after, but did not attain unto, nor is it righteousness to be had by the works of the law, nor any justification by it. Nor can a man be acceptable to God on account of it. But the righteousness of Christ, which He has wrought out and is revealed in the gospel, to follow after this supposes a want of one, a sense of that want, a view of the glory, fullness, suitableness, and excellency of Christ's righteousness, an eager desire after it, sometimes expressed by hungering and thirsting after it.”

What did David say? “As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God.” I hunger and I thirst for thee. What did our Lord say? “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.” Here is the man that follows after righteousness. So here is a comparison of the way of the saint and the way of the sinner. They are contrasted; they are completely, totally opposites.

In verse 8, there was a comparison and contrast between the worship of the saint and the sinner. In verse 9, there is a contrast between the walk of the sinner and the saint.

Contrast in Words: Thoughts and Speech of the Wicked vs. the Pure

Now, in verse 26, here is the third one: the words contrasted between the sinner and the saint. “The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord, but the words of the pure are pleasant words.” Where do we get words out of verse 26? It says “the thoughts of the wicked.” It is from our thoughts that our words, our works, and our conduct arise, and we cannot move without thinking. I can look at that basket and say, “Watch me, I'm going to pick up this basket.” But I thought about it before I ever did it. It is impossible to say and do things without thinking first.

Oftentimes we say that we speak without thinking. Usually that means we say things we wish we had never said because we never thought them through. We did think before we said it; we just did not care what we said. That is why the Bible says in Proverbs 23:7,

“For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he.” It is our thoughts that influence our words, and our words influence our walk. That is why the Bible says in Proverbs 4:23, “Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.”

Hold Proverbs 15, but look in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 12, beginning at verse 35. This may shock you, but here it is in black and white: “A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things.”

“But I say unto you that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give an account thereof in the day of judgment.” Think about that: every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give an account thereof in the day of judgment.

That is not the last verse I am going to read. Years ago, I read an article—whether it is true or not, I do not know—about words and how words are sounds put forth in the air. It is like the old adage: “If a tree falls in the wood and no one is there to hear it, does it make a sound?” There are sound waves. I heard it differently: “If a man says something in the woods and his wife is not there, is he therefore wrong?”

The interesting thing in that article was that, since our words are sounds and travel in the air, they always continue. We have recorders: I can push a button, record everything you say, push another button, and play it back to you. Would it not be interesting if, on Judgment Day, when we stand at the judgment seat of Christ, our Lord said, “Oh, by the way, here is what you said on February the 15th, 2019”? He does not need a recorder, but He says we are going to give an account of every idle word.

Look at the next verse, verse 37: “For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.” Our words proceed from our thoughts. Look back in Proverbs 15, at verse 2, in light of this: “The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright.” We have knowledge; our words proceed from our thoughts about knowledge. “But the mouth of fools poureth out foolishness.”

They just say whatever comes out of their mouths. Proverbs 15:28 says, "The heart of the righteous studieth to answer, but the mouth of the wicked poureth out evil things."

Proverbs 4:24 says, "Put away from thee a froward mouth, and perverse lips put far from thee." A froward mouth is a mischievous mouth; it is a sinful mouth. Proverbs 6:12 says, "A naughty person, a wicked man, walketh with a froward mouth."

Proverbs 10:11 says, "The mouth of a righteous man is a well of life, but violence covereth the mouth of the wicked." Verse 14 says, "Wise men lay up knowledge, but the mouth of the foolish is near destruction." Verses 31 and 32 say, "The mouth of the just bringeth forth wisdom, but the froward tongue shall be cut off. The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable, but the mouth of the wicked speaketh frowardness."

These comparisons and contrasts show the difference between the righteous and the wicked.

Proverbs 13:3 gives us a truth that we need: “He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life, and he that openeth wide his lips shall have destruction.” That is a contrast: he that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life, but he that openeth wide his lips shall have destruction. Proverbs 21:23 says, “Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles.” How many of us have said, “Man, I wish I’d never said that”? He that keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles.

We have seen three contrasts: the contrast between the worship of the sinner and the saint, the contrast between the walk of the sinner and the saint, and the contrast between the words of the sinner and the saint. Here is what we need to put together: if our words are unacceptable, if our walk is unacceptable, then our worship is unacceptable.

The Interconnection of Words, Walk, and Worship

You cannot really separate these things. When we come to worship the Lord and our words have been evil, wicked, wrong, angry, resentful, hateful, and bitter, and our conduct has not been right, it is impossible to worship, even if you are a saint. What did David say

in Psalm 66:18? “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.” Clearly, all of these things go together.

The conclusion of this chapter is found in Proverbs 15:29-33, in the contrast between the sinner and the saint: “The Lord is far from the wicked, but he heareth the prayer of the righteous.” That is a good contrast. “The light of the eyes rejoiceth the heart, and a good report maketh the bones fat.” That is true; it is all positive. “The ear that heareth the reproof of life abideth among the wise.” That is a positive. Here is a negative: “He that refuseth instruction despiseth his own soul, but he that heareth reproof getteth understanding. The fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom, and before honour is humility.”

Look in Proverbs chapter 19 at verse 16 and then Proverbs 21 and verse 30. Here is the real contrast. He said in verse 16, "He that keepeth the commandment keepeth his own soul, but he that despiseth his ways"—that is God's ways—"shall die."

People say, "I know what God says, but I'm going to do what I want to do, and I'm going to act the way I want to act." Understand this: "There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the Lord." You will not prosper. It is like butting your head up against a granite mountain. You will only beat your brains out. You will never succeed.

Our words, our walk, our way, and our worship are all tied together. That is why the wicked cannot really worship God, and sometimes why the saints cannot truly worship God. When our words and our walk are contrary to God, our worship is unacceptable.

When you look at the Bible, there are many contrasts. Ask yourself, What is God saying? What is God not saying, and how do I apply it to my life?

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we ask for your grace and your mercy, your goodness and your kindness. Lord, I pray that you would open our eyes, teach us, build us up in the most holy faith, and give us understanding of your word, that we may apply it to our lives. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 42

Humility And Revival

Introduction to 2 Chronicles 7:14 and the Priority of Humility

2 Chronicles 7:14 is a passage everyone knows. God says, "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land."

This may surprise you as we look at this text. I get amused sometimes when I see church marquees and church boards announcing, "Revival, July 7 through 10," or "Revival, March 8 through 15." It is almost as though we can choose a date and automatically have a revival.

Interestingly enough, when you look at the word "revive" in the Bible, David prayed, "Revive me, O Lord." That is a personal revival. He also prayed, "Revive us, O Lord," which would be a corporate or ecclesiastical revival. Then, in the book of Habakkuk, he prayed, "Revive thy work, O Lord, in the midst of the years." Thus, there is a personal revival, a corporate revival, and indeed a revival of God's work.

When you look at 2 Chronicles 7:14, it is a verse practically every Christian can quote. Many non-Christians can quote it as well, and those unable to quote it are at least familiar with the passage.

I have preached on humility a number of times. I have a message labeled "Biblical Humility," and another on "Humility and Obedience." There was also one on "The Humility of God" from Psalm 113:4-6:

"The Lord is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens. Who is like unto the Lord our God, who dwelleth on high, who humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven and in the earth?"

When you stop and think about the humility of God, consider how God condescends just to look at us and to look at his creation—humility on his part.

The thing I find fascinating about 2 Chronicles 7:14 is one word, and I will share a little later what brought my attention back to this verse. He said, “If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and heal their land.” It is absolutely astonishing that, when we look at this verse, humility precedes prayer. Humility precedes seeking God’s face. Humility precedes turning from our wicked ways. In other words, according to this verse, humility precedes each and every one of these aspects of spirituality and godliness; therefore, humility should be dominant in our lives.

There are a number of words in the Hebrew Old Testament and also in the Greek New Testament from which we get “humility,” “humble,” or “humbleness.” It just so happens that in 2 Chronicles 7:14, the Hebrew word for humility, or humble, is kana, which literally means to be humbled, to be brought low, to be brought in subjection, to be subdued, and to be brought down.

Old Testament Examples of Biblical Humility

Several Hebrew words used in the Old Testament refer to humbleness or humility. What I would like to do is show several passages where this same Hebrew word is used, so that we can draw

a biblical perspective on humility. Turn in your Bibles first to 2 Kings 22. Since most of us can quote 2 Chronicles 7:14, we do not need to hold it. Look in your Bibles to 2 Kings 22, and let us read verses 18 and 19.

This refers to Josiah, who happened to be a very godly king. The Scripture says, “But to the king of Judah, which sent you to inquire of the Lord, thus shall you send him. Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, as touching the words which thou hast heard,” that is, the law of God had been read unto him. God says, “Because thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thyself before the Lord, when thou heardest what I spake against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and hast rent thy clothes and wept before me, I have also heard thee, saith the Lord.” In this instance, biblical humility leads to what we would call godly sorrow or godly concern, as well as tenderness before the Lord and a demonstration of belief and faith in His Word.

God says, because you listened to me, I’m going to listen to you. Your heart was tender. There should be in each life what we would call a godly sorrow. The Apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians 7:10, “Godly sorrow worketh a repentance not to be repented of, but the sorrow of this world worketh death.” In real biblical humility, there is indeed a godly sorrow.

I believe this to be absolutely true, especially in any aged believer. Those of us who have been spared by the grace of God to live a good, long life, when we think back on all the sins we have committed and all the things we have done stupidly and wickedly, grieve over those things and wish a thousand times that we had never done them. I have often said, I would not mind living my life over if I could know then what I know now, because certainly we would have saved ourselves, I think, from a lot of error, sin, heartache, and trouble.

In this passage, humility is dealing with a godly sorrow, a tenderness, and a belief in God’s Word. Turn in your Bibles to 2 Chronicles chapter 12, verses 6 and 7. Again, we are looking at the very same word found in 2 Chronicles 7:14. We are now talking about King Rehoboam. The Bible says, “Whereupon the princes of Israel and the king humbled themselves; and they said, The Lord is righteous. And when the Lord saw that they humbled themselves,

the word of the Lord came to Shemaiah, saying, They have humbled themselves; therefore I will not destroy them, but I will grant them some deliverance; and my wrath shall not be poured out upon Jerusalem by the hand of Shishak." Shishak was the king, or pharaoh, of Egypt. Rehoboam had sinned against God. He was basically a tyrant, and the princes certainly sinned with him as well.

When the word of God came that they were going to be destroyed, they humbled themselves. They were not stupid enough to fight against God, and they were willing to acknowledge their sin. In fact, they said in verse 6, "The Lord is righteous." In other words, "We are wrong. We are wicked. We are the sinners. We have done that which is wicked and wrong and deserving of judgment. But God is absolutely and totally righteous." Biblical humility eagerly confesses and acknowledges our sin. Moreover, it leads to a declaration and confession of the justice and righteousness of God. In this instance, humility also led to a reprieve in the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem, as well as in the destruction of Rehoboam and these princes.

Remember also that Ahab was the most wicked king in Israel. I think it is 1 Kings 21. I am not sure exactly of the chapter right now, but when Elijah told him that God was going to clean his plow and kill him, he humbled himself before the Lord. The Bible says that God came to Elijah and said, "I'm not going to kill him right now because he has at least humbled himself before me." Thus, even for a wicked, ungodly reprobate like Ahab, God gave him a reprieve because of his humility.

Concerning Rehoboam, "And when he humbled himself, the wrath of the Lord turned from him, that he would not destroy him altogether. And also in Judah things went well." Through biblical humility, God gave Rehoboam a reprieve and continued to bless and help that nation, even though they had sinned against Him. Hezekiah was a godly man and king who tried to bring Israel back to the Lord through a biblical covenant, and the hand of God was upon him and upon some in the Northern Kingdom.

Hezekiah sent posts and writers throughout Judah, Jerusalem, and also into the northern kingdom, encouraging the people to come back to the Lord, return under a covenant, and keep the Passover.

Nevertheless, divers of Asher, Manasseh, and Zebulun—tribes in the northern kingdom—humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem. Also, in Judah the hand of God was to give them one heart to do the commandment of the king and of the princes by the word of the Lord.

Humility, according to this passage, prompted obedience to the point that these people in the northern kingdom were willing to endure mockery and ridicule to come down to Jerusalem and worship the Lord. Moreover, they were willing to disobey the king of Israel. Jeroboam was the king who made the two golden calves and said, "You should not go down to Jerusalem. You're going to worship right here. These be thy God, O Israel, who brought thee up out of the land of Egypt."

These people humbled themselves, the Bible says, and went down to Jerusalem anyhow. The interesting thing is that, in verse 12, "Also in Judah the hand of God was to give them one heart to do the commandment of the king and of the princes by the word of the Lord." In other words, the people from the northern kingdom as well as the southern kingdom were now willing to work together to worship God and honor Him.

It is very difficult today to find even preachers who are willing to work together. It is difficult to find Christians who are willing to work together, because there is no real, genuine biblical humility. It seems as if nobody is willing to do anything unless they can receive all the pride and all the glory. But the Bible tells us very clearly that if you have biblical humility, you will be willing to endure mockery and ridicule and do whatever is necessary to obey God.

In 2 Chronicles 32, we see Hezekiah when he lifted up himself, after God had healed him, and yet he did not give God sufficient glory. Verse 25 says, “But Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him; for his heart was lifted up: therefore there was wrath upon him, and upon Judah and Jerusalem. Notwithstanding, Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, both he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of the Lord came not upon them in the days of Hezekiah.”

Once again, we see that biblical humility is one reason why God gives a reprieve to a nation instead of destroying that nation right away. I hope you understand from this text that humility is the opposite of pride. Last week I brought the message "The Cure for the Sin of Pride," and I find it interesting that the Lord led me this week to bring "Humility and Revival," because pride and humility are indeed direct opposites.

The Consequences of Pride and the Absence of Humility

Let me show you. Hold 2 Chronicles, but turn in your Bibles to Proverbs chapter 6 and verse 16. The Bible says, "These six things doth the Lord hate: yea, seven are an abomination to him."

The word "abomination" literally means a stench in God's nostrils. He cannot stand it. Seven are an abomination unto him. What are they? The first one is a proud look: a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, a false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among the brethren. The first thing mentioned is indeed a proud heart.

Proverbs 16:5 has wonderful ramifications for today. The Bible says, "Everyone that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord"—that is, he is a stench in God's nostrils—"everyone that's proud in heart." Now watch this latter part: "Though hand join in hand, he shall not be unpunished." Stop and think about this. Look at all the arrogant, proud, haughty billionaires and trillionaires who are trying to give us a great reset, destroy humanity, destroy the earth, and everything else. Look at what God says: "Though hand join in hand, they shall not go unpunished."

You remember, I hope, hearing about Yuval Noah Harari—I guess that is how you pronounce his last name. He has come out and said that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is a myth and that the Bible is not the Word of God, and he is the chief advisor to Klaus Schwab. So, "Though hand join in hand, they shall not be unpunished." It does not matter how strong they are or how they try to strengthen themselves. God said they will indeed be punished. Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to God.

Now, look back in your Bibles, if you would, to 2 Chronicles chapter 33, and let us begin reading there with verse 21. Here is something that we need to put down and understand. In 2 Chronicles 33 and verse 21, we read about Ammon, who was the son of Manasseh. Just as Ahab was the most wicked king in the northern kingdom, Manasseh was the most wicked king in the southern kingdom. The Bible says, “Ammon was two and twenty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned two years in Jerusalem.” That is not very long. Watch, if you would, verse 22: “But he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, as did Manasseh his father: for Ammon sacrificed unto all the carved images, which Manasseh his father had made, and served them; and humbled not himself before the Lord, as Manasseh his father had humbled himself; but Ammon trespassed more and more.” I want you to note something.

The absence of biblical humility not only leads to pride, arrogance, and haughtiness, but also to all kinds of sin and wickedness. The Bible tells us that the reason Ammon trespassed and sinned more and more was because he did not humble himself. You remember what the Apostle Paul said in Romans chapter 3 and verse 18, when he was talking about the wicked: "There is no fear of God before their eyes." Since there is no fear of God, there is no humility in them. Consequently, they sin more and more. With a lack of biblical humility, there is nothing more than an abundance of sin.

Look at what is going on in our nation. Someone has proclaimed June as Pride Month. How can you have pride in that which is wicked, wrong, unbiblical, ungodly, hated by God, and even truly unlawful according to our own laws? Yet we are absolutely insane, and we do not understand that one reason we are deteriorating and falling apart in this country is a lack of biblical humility. That lack leads us into deeper and more sin.

Look now at 2 Chronicles chapter 36, beginning with verse 11. This is King Zedekiah, the man Nebuchadnezzar took down: "Zedekiah was one and twenty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord his God, and humbled not himself before Jeremiah the prophet speaking from the mouth of the Lord."

Here is another truth concerning biblical humility: Biblical humility listens to those who are preaching the Word of God. Biblical humility will always listen to the Scripture. Jeremiah preached to King Zedekiah, but Zedekiah believed he was above Jeremiah and above the Lord. He listened neither to Jeremiah nor to the Lord; therefore, he elevated himself above both of them. He was an idolater, and God destroyed him because of his pride and arrogance.

According to all of these verses, biblical humility involves tenderness, godly sorrow, concern for the Word of God, and a confession that God is righteous and just. Biblical humility is willing to endure mockery and ridicule. It is ready to disobey man that it might obey God. When you do not have biblical humility, how in the world can we expect to escape God's judgment? In each of these instances where God gave a reprieve to kings and nations, it was because they humbled themselves before God.

Think with me about 2 Chronicles 7:14: "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and I'll forgive their sin and heal their land." If there is no humility, there is no prayer. If there is no humility, there is no seeking the face of God. If there is no humility, there is not going to be any repentance whatsoever.

Jeremiah 44:10 – A Case Study in Unhumbled Hearts

Let me make this very plain: There cannot be any revival apart from biblical humility, because God said humility precedes everything.

The passage that got me started on 2 Chronicles 7:14 and the word "humble" was Jeremiah 44:10. I was reading through the book of Jeremiah, and this verse jumped out at me and almost hit me like a sledgehammer. Look what God said about the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem: "They are not humbled even unto this day, neither have they feared, nor walked in my law, nor in my statutes that I set before you and before your fathers."

Isn't that plain? Isn't that simple? God says they are not humbled because they have not humbled themselves. There is no fear of God before their eyes because they have not humbled themselves. They

are not concerned about walking in God's commandments or in God's statutes. God said, "I've given you my word, but you've not humbled yourself to obey that word."

SCRIPTURE READING - Jeremiah 44:1-12 (KJV)

"The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the Jews which dwell in the land of Egypt, which dwell at Migdol, and at Tahpanhes, and at Noph, and in the country of Pathros, saying, Thus saith the Lord God, the God of Israel; Ye have seen all the evil that I have brought upon Jerusalem, and upon all the cities of Judah; and, behold, this day they are a desolation, and no man dwelleth therein, because of their wickedness which they have committed to provoke me to anger, in that they went to burn incense, and to serve other gods, whom they knew not, neither they, ye, nor your fathers. Howbeit I sent unto you all my servants the prophets, rising early and sending them, saying, Oh, do not this abominable thing which I hate. But they hearkened not unto me, nor inclined their ear unto me to turn from their wickedness, to burn no incense unto other gods." In fact, they were burning incense to the queen of heaven. "Wherefore my fury and mine anger was poured forth, and was kindled in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem; and they are wasted and desolate, as at this day. Therefore now thus saith the Lord, the God of hosts, the God of Israel; Wherefore commit ye this great evil against your souls, to cut off from you man and woman, child and suckling, out of Judah, to leave you none to remain; in that ye provoke me unto wrath with the works of your hands, burning incense unto other gods in the land of Egypt, whither ye be going to dwell, that ye might cut yourselves off, and that ye might be a curse and a reproach among all the nations of the earth? Have ye forgotten the wickedness of your fathers, and the wickedness of the kings of Judah, and the wickedness of their wives, and your own wickedness, and the wickedness of your wives, which they have committed in the land of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? They are not humbled even unto this day, neither have they feared, nor walked in my law, nor in my statutes that I set before you and before your fathers. Therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will set my face

against you for evil, and to cut off all Judah. And I will take the remnant of Judah, that have set their faces to go into the land of Egypt to sojourn there, and they shall all be consumed, and fall in the land of Egypt; they shall even be consumed by the sword and by the famine."

"And they shall die, from the least even unto the greatest, by the sword and by the famine: and they shall be an execration, and an astonishment, and a curse, and a reproach." Judah and Jerusalem had been defeated by Nebuchadnezzar. People had been slain left and right, and a number of them had already been taken into captivity into Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar left the poorest of the land to till it and keep it from being overgrown. He also made Gedaliah governor of the land. Gedaliah told the people that they should not fear, but serve the king of Nebuchadnezzar, and all would be well. However, a man by the name of Ishmael came and murdered Gedaliah. He also murdered the Babylonian soldiers who were left there, as well as some other people. Then Johanan, the son of Kareah, and some of the other proud men went after Ishmael and tried to capture him, but he escaped, the Bible tells us.

Fear had now set in. They realized that Nebuchadnezzar would be extremely upset and would seek retribution upon them, although they had not done anything themselves. They were in trouble, and they realized they were in trouble. So they went to Jeremiah the prophet and made a proposition to him: "What we want you to do is this. We want you to pray and to seek God for us. And we are willing to do whatever he says, whether it be good or whether it be evil." They said, "Ask him to pray that the Lord thy God may show us the way wherein we may walk, and the thing that we may do." Then Jeremiah the prophet said to them, "I have heard you; behold, I will pray unto the Lord your God according to your words; and it shall come to pass, that whatsoever thing the Lord shall answer you,"

SCRIPTURE READING - Jeremiah 42:6-13 (KJV)

"I will declare it unto you; I will keep nothing back from you." Then they said to Jeremiah, "The Lord be a true and faithful witness between us, if we do not even according to all things for the which the Lord thy God shall send thee to us. Whether it be

good, or whether it be evil, we will obey the voice of the Lord our God, to whom we send thee; that it may be well with us, when we obey the voice of the Lord our God."

"And said unto them, Thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel, unto whom ye sent me to present your supplication before him; If ye will still abide in this land, then will I build you, and not pull you down, and I will plant you, and not pluck you up: for I repent me of the evil that I have done unto you. Be not afraid of the king of Babylon, of whom ye are afraid; be not afraid of him, saith the Lord: for I am with you to save you, and to deliver you from his hand. And I will show mercies unto you, that he may have mercy upon you, and cause you to return to your own land. But if ye say, We will not dwell in this land, neither obey the voice of the Lord your God, saying, No; but we will go into the land of Egypt, where we shall see no war, nor hear the sound of the trumpet, nor have hunger of bread; and there will we dwell: and now therefore hear the word of the Lord, ye remnant of Judah; Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; If ye wholly set your faces to enter into Egypt, and go to sojourn there; then it shall come to pass, that the sword, which ye feared, shall overtake you there in the land of Egypt, and the famine, whereof ye were afraid, shall follow close after you there in Egypt; and there ye shall"

SCRIPTURE READING - Jeremiah 42:17–19; 43:1–7 (KJV)

They shall die by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence: and none of them shall remain or escape from the evil that I will bring upon them. For thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; As mine anger and my fury hath been poured forth upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem; so shall my fury be poured forth upon you, when ye shall enter into Egypt: and ye shall be an execration, and an astonishment, and a curse, and a reproach; and ye shall see this place no more.

Verse 19: "The Lord hath said concerning you, O ye remnant of Judah; Go ye not into Egypt." No, certainly that I have admonished you this day. In other words, God made it very plain. The answer was clear and concise. If you go down into Egypt, you will die. That's all there is to it.

> In Jeremiah 43, beginning there verse 1: "And it came to pass, that when Jeremiah had made an end of speaking unto all the people all the words of the Lord their God, for which the Lord their God had sent him to them, even all these words, then spake Azariah the son of Hoshaiah, and Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the proud men, saying unto Jeremiah, Thou speakest falsely: the Lord our God hath not sent thee to say, Go not into Egypt to sojourn there: but Baruch the son of Neriah setteth thee on against us, for to deliver us into the hand of the Chaldeans, that they might put us to death, and carry us away captives into Babylon. So Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces, and all the people, obeyed not the voice of the Lord, to dwell in the land of Judah."

If you have not read through the book of Jeremiah recently, remember that Johanan and all these proud men kidnapped Jeremiah and Baruch, together with what was left of the people, and took them into Egypt. When they arrived, God told Jeremiah to take some stones and place them in a certain spot. After Jeremiah did so, God explained why: “Nebuchadnezzar is going to put his throne right here.” They were running from Nebuchadnezzar and ran right into Nebuchadnezzar. They were running from the sword and ran right into the sword. They were running from famine and pestilence and ran right into them.

God had told them, “If you stay in the land, I will have mercy upon you. I’ll check Nebuchadnezzar. I’ll build you and not tear you down. I’ll plant you and not pluck you up. Just obey me.” Now take note of several facts.

First, these people would not hear or heed God’s preacher; consequently, they would not hear God Himself, because God was speaking through Jeremiah. Second, they continued worshiping their false gods. They were making cakes for the queen of heaven, and they told Jeremiah that, when they got into Egypt, they would continue making cakes and worshiping her because, they said, “When we made cakes and worshiped the queen of heaven, we had plenty to eat and we didn’t have any problem.”

Jeremiah said, “What’s wrong with you? Are you folks stupid now?” I paraphrase that very obviously, but he asked whether they

understood that this was what they had been doing in Judah and Jerusalem, and that it was why God destroyed Judah and Jerusalem. They would do the same thing in Egypt, and God would destroy them there. Thus they did not cease from their idolatry at all.

Third, their sins and rebellion brought forth the righteous judgment of God. Fourth, they did not even consider the sins of their rulers, princes, themselves, or their wives. Their wives made the cakes for the queen of heaven, and the men worshiped the queen of heaven with them. Jeremiah 44:10 sums it all up: “They are not humbled even unto this day, neither have they feared, nor walked in my law, nor in my statutes that I set before you and before your fathers.”

The Hebrew Word 'Daka' and a Broken Spirit

The word "humbled" is from the Hebrew word "daka," and it literally means to be crushed, to be shattered, to be devastated. It means to be contrite, to be broken, to be humbled. Psalm 51 is one of the penitential Psalms that David wrote. In this Psalm, he is certainly confessing and acknowledging his sin, but he goes farther.

He says in verse 16, talking to God, "For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." A humbled heart is one that is genuinely broken over sins, wickedness, and rebellion. It is only a humbled heart that prays. It is only a humbled heart that seeks after God. It is only a humble heart that turns and obeys God.

Psalm 69, verse 32, says, "The humble shall see this, and be glad: and your heart shall live that seek God. For the Lord heareth the poor, and despiseth not his prisoners." It is interesting that when God is talking about biblical humility, it is always cast in 2 Chronicles 7:14 in reference to a revival.

New Testament Teaching on Humility

This is exactly the same in the New Testament. The New Testament demands humility, just as the Old Testament demands humility.

One of the Greek words that is very prominent in the New Testament is the word "tapeinoō."

It literally means to be devoid of haughtiness; it means to abase, to be made low, to assume a lower place, and to be humble. You are going to see this word in these passages. In Matthew 18:3–4, our Lord said, “Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” Note the words, “whosoever shall humble himself as this little child.”

Have you ever stopped and thought about and observed little children? I know most of you have had children, but the truth of the matter is this: a little child is so trusting and so believing. You can tell a little child that the moon is made of blue cheese, and he will smile and agree with you. They are just so humble. Not only that, they are so obedient. Look at a little four- or five-year-old child who has been raised correctly; they are always obedient. Usually, when they hit the teenage years, that is when they begin thinking, “Well, I’m an adult now. I don’t need to obey. I can do this.” But usually this is what we are talking about: a little child. He said, “If you don’t humble yourself,” you will not even receive the kingdom of heaven. This is a little child.

Look in Matthew 23:12. He said, “And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.” If we exalt ourselves, God is going to bring us down. He said, if we humble ourselves, God will lift us up.

Another passage is very interesting. In 2 Corinthians 12:21, the Apostle Paul, speaking of the Corinthians, said, “And lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and that I shall bewail many which have sinned already, and have not repented of the uncleanness and fornication and lasciviousness which they have committed.” But notice his words: “And lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you.”

It takes humility to reprove, rebuke, and exhort. All our rebuking, all our reproving, and all our exhortation should not be out of pride or arrogance. It should be out of a biblical humility. Remember that

passage in Galatians chapter 6? Turn to Galatians 6, beginning with verse 1.

He says, "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. For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself." God said we are to seek to restore someone who has fallen in a spirit of meekness. That is a spirit of humility, a spirit of brokenness, because we have to understand that, if it were not for the grace and mercy of God, it would be us who had fallen, and we would need rebuking, reproving, and exhorting as well.

In James 4:6, the Bible says, "But he"—that is God—"giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble." If we want more grace, God says He gives it only unto the humble. Verse 10 says, "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up." Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He shall lift you up.

Then 1 Peter 5:5 says, "Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another. Look at this: and be clothed with humility. Why? For God resisteth the proud. He fights against the proud, but he giveth grace to the humble." Verse 6 says, "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time."

There is not going to be any exaltation apart from humility. God says our humility should be something that we wear. In other words, we are to be clothed with humility. It is to pervade our minds, our bodies, our spirits, our attitudes—everything about us. If we humble ourselves, He will exalt us in due time.

This is the apex of humility: “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a

name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Jesus Christ humbled himself to obey. He humbled himself to suffer, bleed, and die. Wherefore God also highly exalted him. What have we been reading? He that exalteth himself shall be abased. He that abaseth himself shall be exalted.

What the New Testament is teaching us is this: Humility is the reception of truth as a little child. Humility is the avenue to receive more grace. Humility is the position in which one is to be lifted up. Humility is the place of subjection. Above all, humility is to have the mind of Jesus Christ, because the mind of Christ was a mind of lowliness and obedience, intent on obeying his heavenly Father. There will never, ever be a revival, either personally, corporately, or of God's work, without humility.

Applications: Humility as the Only Path to Revival

We may host all the revival meetings that we wish to host and hold all the Bible conferences that we desire, but there will never, ever be a revival or restoration apart from biblical humility. We have to learn to seek God with a humble mind and a contrite spirit, willing to acknowledge our sins, our wickednesses, and God's justice and righteousness. It was Jeremiah who said in Lamentations 1:18,

"The Lord is righteous; for I have rebelled against his commandments." In other words, all the judgment that God sent upon Judah and Jerusalem, Jeremiah is confessing, "The Lord is righteous, because I've rebelled. I've sinned, and so have all the other people."

Isaiah 57:15 goes right along with 2 Chronicles 7:14 and with everything taught on biblical humility: "For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." Who is God going to revive? The humble and the contrite. God says, "I dwell in the high and holy place, but I also

dwell in the hearts and in the lives of those who have a humble spirit and a contrite heart." We are never ever going to have a revival without biblical humility.

Pride sets us up for destruction. Everyone in this room can probably quote Proverbs 16:18: "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall." And it does. I think of Nebuchadnezzar. He was a proud, arrogant, haughty monarch. God sent Daniel to interpret his dream, and Daniel told him, "You're going to be driven insane for seven years. You're going to eat grass like an ox. The dew of heaven is going to fall over you. Your fingernails are going to grow like bird's claws. You'll be insane." After the seven years, when God restored him, he said in Daniel 4:37, "Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase." He had learned that God can bring a man down. All those that walk in pride, God will bring down, because pride is a stench in God's nostrils, and God hates it.

But if we want a genuine biblical revival in this land, it has to start with biblical humility. "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves"—that's the first. Without that humility, we will not seek God, we will not turn from our wicked ways, we will not cry unto Him, and therefore He will not forgive our sins and heal our land. Humility. Peter says, "Be clothed with humility."

Closing Prayer for Humility and Revival

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we ask for your help and your grace and your mercy. Lord, we confess the sin of pride in our lives so many times. We also confess, Father, the lack of real biblical humility, and the lack of real sorrow and contriteness over our sins and the sins of our leaders and others. We're not broken, crushed, or grieved, and we're in no state for a real, genuine revival. But we ask thee, O Lord, to prepare our hearts and give us a broken and contrite heart, that we may walk humbly before thee, to fear thee, to keep thy law and thy statutes, and to honor thee in all of our lives. In Christ's name we pray, amen.

CHAPTER 43

How Far Are You Willing To Go?

Introduction and Context

"But after two years, Porcius Festus came into Felix's room, and Felix, willing to show the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound." The title of the message is, "How Far Are You Willing to Go?"

You will understand the use of this text momentarily. The interesting thing is, it looks as if things are tightening down all over this country. I showed Steve a picture of an electric bill from England, the United Kingdom, for one month, and it was $10,000 U.S. dollars. It's gone outrageously high in Europe. They're saying that many people will die just of cold this year in Europe because the gas line has been shut down.

And you look around here in America, not only have electric bills gone sky high, but also food and all the droughts, all the famines. They're projecting that next year will be absolutely a hundred times worse, even than this year. Joe Biden recently made a speech and said that all of us were extremists who did not agree with him. And

then his black spokeswoman, who I understand is a sodomite as well, she defined an extremist as someone who did not agree with the majority.

So this is a very important question: how far are we willing to go ourselves? It's important for others to understand our positions, our stances, and our convictions. But I believe it's really and truly more important for each of us to understand our positions, our stances, and our convictions as well.

The Dual Nature of the Question

"How far are you willing to go?" can be asked in a good sense and in a bad sense. How far are you willing to go in that which is good and godly? How far are you willing to go in that which is evil and wicked? The interesting thing about both questions is that they are intricately related. Because how far you're willing to go in that which is good and righteous and holy will also define how far you're willing to go in that which is evil and wicked. And how far you're willing to go in that which is evil and wicked will also define how far you're willing to go in that which is godly and holy as well.

The Pleasure of Sin and Its Temporary Nature

Each of these answers affects the other. The truth of the matter is that, although we have been saved by the grace of God, we are not perfect. We have not yet been made perfect in glory. That is a fact. If each one of us were honest, we would admit not only that we are sinners, but also that there is a pleasure in sin. In fact, most Christians still want to please the flesh to a certain degree. They want to go just so far, but no further. They want to go far enough to get some pleasure out of sin, but they do not want to go so far that they bring the judgment, chastisement, and wrath of God upon themselves.

The same thing is true when it comes to social issues. When you look around at the socialism and governmental interference in this country, most people are willing to take all the benefits from socialism and communism. But whenever it is their turn to be confiscated from and taken from, they do not like that at all. In other

words, they are willing to receive, but they are certainly not willing to suffer and to be taken from.

So there is another question related to how far we are willing to go: What is our standard? Our standard will determine how far we are willing to go in that which is holy and godly, or how far we are willing to go in that which is evil and wicked.

The Standard That Determines How Far We Go

We have to understand that, first of all, there is indeed what you and I would call an objective standard, and that objective standard happens to be the law of God. But there is also a subjective standard, and that subjective standard happens to be our own desires and our own fulfillment of the flesh. These standards will basically determine how far we are willing to go in that which is right and holy, and how far we are willing to go in that which is evil and godly.

So here is a principle. I have mentioned this before, but I want to explain it and certainly apply it in this light, because there are going to be other connected principles. The first principle I want to point out is this.

Principles of Obedience: Forbidding the Steps to Sin

When God forbids any sin, at the same time He forbids any and everything that would lead up to that sin. Consider adultery, forbidden in the seventh commandment. At the same time, He forbids looking, lusting, thinking, desiring—anything that would lead up to violating that commandment. Certainly, this includes a condemnation of pornography and of anything that would be unclean or immoral. You must ask yourself this question: How far are you willing to go to obey the seventh commandment? Are you willing to forego the Hollywood movies? How about the movies that come on television? How about the internet sites that promote immorality? In other words, how far are you really willing to go in order to obey God?

Consider another illustration. When God said in the eighth commandment, “Thou shalt not steal,” at the same time He is also forbidding laziness and slothfulness, indolence. He is also forbidding

covetousness and desiring. At the same time, He is forbidding any thinking or any planning that would lead up to fraud, deceit, and theft. We have to ask ourselves, How far are we willing to go in order to obey the eighth commandment? Are we willing to do that which is right, to be honest and to be frank, and sometimes even to suffer ourselves, to make sure that we do not violate that eighth commandment?

Scripture tells us and teaches us that there are indeed pleasures in sin; however, those pleasures are exceedingly temporary. For instance, the Bible says in Hebrews chapter 11 and verse 25 concerning Moses, “Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.” The Bible is saying that, yes, there is pleasure in sin, but it also says that pleasure is temporary. It is simply seasonal, because the end is always death and destruction.

The interesting thing about Hebrews 11:25 is that Moses was the adopted son of Pharaoh’s daughter. That would actually have put him in the lineage to be a Pharaoh, or a king over Egypt. Stop and think about what Moses could have done had he remained in Egypt and become Pharaoh. Fleshly, sinful pleasures would have abounded in his life. He could have had anything he desired, anything he wanted. Yet he understood that no matter how many, how multitudinous, all of these pleasures were, they were still temporary. Of course, they would end in destruction and death.

And so he chose rather the affliction with the people of God. It is interesting also that, in the New Testament, our Lord says that the pleasures of this life choke the word. In Luke chapter 8 and verse 14, He said it like this: “And that which fell among thorns are they, which when they have heard go forth and are choked with the cares and the riches and the pleasures of this life, and bring forth no fruit to perfection.”

Here is an interesting thing. The word “pleasures” in Luke 8 and verse 14 is the Greek word hēdonē. Hēdonē is where we get our English word “hedonist.” A hedonist is someone who lives for pleasure, who wants pleasure, who seeks pleasure, and who will do anything he can to get pleasure other than hurt himself. He simply wants pleasure.

In Titus chapter 3 and verse 3, the Apostle Paul writes: “For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers' lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.” When you look at the word “pleasures,” it is the Greek word hēdonē. Literally, he is saying, “For we ourselves were sometimes hedonists.” When we were unconverted, we basically lived for our own pleasure.

With that understanding in mind, and with the title of this message, “How Far Are You Willing to Go?” here are two very important questions: How far are you willing to go to please yourself? Or how far are you willing to go to please the Lord Jesus Christ? Over and over in Scripture we are told that we are to please our Heavenly Father and the Lord Jesus. For instance, in Colossians 1 and verse 10, Paul wrote, “That you might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in

We are to walk unto Him in all pleasing. In 1 Thessalonians 4:1, Paul wrote, “Furthermore, brethren, we beseech you and exhort you by the Lord Jesus Christ that as you have received of us, how you ought to walk and please God so that you would abound more and more.” Paul said, “We taught you how to walk and how to please God.” In 2 Timothy 2:4, he says, “No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life, that he might please him who had chosen him to be a soldier.” Hebrews 11:6 says, “But without faith, it's impossible to please him. For he that cometh to God must first believe that he is, and secondly, that he is a rewarder of those that diligently seek him.”

In 1 John 3:22, we see how important obedience is and how pleasing God and obedience are connected to our prayers: “And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him.” Would it not be absolutely astounding that whatever you ask our Heavenly Father, you would immediately receive, or receive whenever it was needed and necessary? Why do we receive? “Because we keep his commandments and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.” What would be pleasing in His sight? Keeping His commandments—in other words, obedience to His Word and to His law. So you have to ask, how far are you willing to go to please the Lord Jesus Christ? Are you willing to keep His commandments?

Our Lord said in Luke 9:23, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” Then, in Luke 14:27, He said, “And whosoever does not bear his cross and come after me, he cannot be my disciple.” Here is another principle concerning how far you are willing to go in pleasing God and how far you are willing to go in pleasing yourself: It is impossible to please God and to please yourself at the same time. Impossible. In Galatians 5:16–17, Paul wrote, “I say, walk in the Spirit and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.”

The Impossibility of Pleasing Both God and Self

“For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh. And they are contrary, the one to the other. So that you cannot do the things that you would.” Literally, the flesh fights against the Spirit. Why? Because the flesh wants its own way, its own desires, and its own fulfillment. But then the Spirit fights against the flesh. Why? Because the Spirit wants us to obey God and to please Him. The flesh lusteth, or fights, against the Spirit, and the Spirit fights against the flesh. Thus, when you and I do that which is normal, when we do that which is natural to our flesh, we are sinning against God.

Because naturally and normally we are sinners, we want to satisfy our lusts and satisfy our flesh. We normally want to please ourselves. So how far are you willing to go? What is your standard? You must understand that you cannot please your flesh and God at the same time.

How far are you willing to go to retain your pride, your position, your power, your prestige, and your popularity? Are you willing to do that which is wicked and wrong and evil in order to retain the favor of the wicked? Are you willing to do that which is wrong, wicked, and evil in order to have a certain power or a certain position?

Felix and Festus: Willing to Show the Jews a Pleasure

Will you go along to get along? Are you willing to compromise your convictions, or compromise that which you know is truth, in order to retain anything or be popular? I am not just talking about peer

pressure. Look at Acts chapter 24 and verse 27. The Bible says, “But after two years, Porcius Festus came into Felix's room. And Felix, willing to show the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound.” Willing to show the Jews a pleasure.

I was actually shocked when I looked up the word “pleasure,” because it is the Greek word charis, which is translated “grace” 130 times in the New Testament. It is also translated “favor” six times and “pleasure” two times. So, when you read, “Felix, willing to show the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound,” in context it means willing to show the Jews a favor, to show them deference, to show them pleasure, to give them a benefit, to bestow a gift or a bounty upon them. He was willing to leave an innocent man in prison.

Now look at this: “Felix, willing to show the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound.” To whom was Felix willing to show a pleasure? The answer is the Jews. Who are, or who were, in this instance, the Jews? The Hebrew word for Jews is Yehudi; the Greek word is Ioudaios.

Both words refer particularly to a Judahite: someone either of the tribe of Judah, someone who lives in the land of Judea, someone of the nation of Judea, or someone of the house of Judah—anyone belonging to that tribe or land. Sometimes in the New Testament, the term refers to the religion of the Jews.

Not all the Israelites were Jews. You could be an Israelite and not be a Jew. You must remember there were the Northern Kingdom and the Southern Kingdom. The northern kingdom's capital was Samaria; the southern kingdom's capital was Jerusalem.

When you talk about the Judeans, the tribe of Judah had that land mass. They were the predominant tribe, and so it was called Judah or Judea. But there were two other tribes that had their inheritance along with Judah in that same land: Benjamin and Simeon. The Benjamites and the Simeonites still maintained their identity, although they lived in the land of Judea.

For instance, Paul said that he was an Israelite and a Benjamite. He could also have said that he was a Judahite because he lived in Judea, where his family had its inheritance. But he still claimed to be a Benjamite. The Simeonites would have done exactly the same.

Turn in your Bibles to 2 Kings 16:6. I will read it and then point something out: “At that time, Rezin, king of Syria, recovered Elath to Syria and drave the Jews from Elath, and the Syrians came to Elath and dwelt there unto this day.”

The Bible says that Rezin, the king of Syria, drave the Jews from Elath. The word “Jews” occurs here in 2 Kings 16:6. This is the first time the word occurs in the Bible. Abraham was not a Jew. Moses was not a Jew. There had not even been a nation formed at that particular time. This is the very first time the word “the Jews” is used.

If you read the context, especially verses 2 through 9, you will find that Israel, the northern kingdom, joined with Syria to fight against Judah and reclaim Elath. Judah was defeated, and the Jews were driven out. Elath was a port on the Red Sea that had formerly belonged to Edom. It was captured by David and held by Judah until the time of Joram, when Edom revolted against him. Then it was recaptured by Amaziah and rebuilt by his son Azariah, who is also named in the Bible Uzziah. You will find that in 2 Kings 14:21–22.

When the Bible says they drave the Jews out of Elath, it would have to refer only to those people in the southern kingdom. They were the Judahites, from the landmass of Judea. In all probability, it would include some Benjamites and Simeonites as well. If you had a king in Jerusalem, he was king over that southern kingdom, including the Benjamites and Simeonites as well as the Judahites. Undoubtedly, the Benjamites and Simeonites would have been helping the tribe of Judah. They were all driven out, but at this point they are referred to as Jews.

John Gill said that they were called Jews, but from the time the ten tribes were carried captive, and not before. That is where the term “Jews” arrived, describing some of these people in the southern kingdom.

Whenever you see the term “the Jews” in the New Testament, it does not always refer to a Judahite. It does not always refer to the landmass. It does not always refer to the nation or to the country. It does not always refer to the religion. The term “the Jews” is used a different way in the New Testament. Sometimes, and often, the term

"the Jews" refers to a cabal. It refers to a ruling elite, a controlling party.

The Identity of 'the Jews' as a Ruling Elite

For instance, in Acts chapter 26 and verse 21, the Bible says, "For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple and went about to kill me." Paul is saying that: "The Jews caught me in the temple and went about to kill me." Did all the Judeans catch him in the temple? Did the entire nation of Judah catch him in the temple? And the answer is no.

Who, then, were these Jews trying to kill Paul and the disciples and everyone else? If you look back in your Bibles to Acts chapter 5, verses 17 and 18, the Bible says, "Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, which is the sect of the Sadducees, and were filled with indignation, and laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison."

Now we have right here the Sadducees, the high priest, and all that were with him. The Sadducees controlled the religion in the New Testament. They had control of the temple. The Pharisees basically had control of the people, but the Pharisees and the Sadducees worked together. Thus, it was the high priest and all they that were with him—that little clique, that ruling elite—who were filled with indignation and laid their hands upon the apostles. Now, go back in your Bibles to Acts chapter 13. This is why we have to read our Bibles carefully.

Just because you see the same word does not mean that the word has the same meaning in the context or refers to the same people. For instance, in Acts chapter 13, beginning with verse 42, Paul has finished preaching. It says, "And when the Jews were going out of the synagogue," a group of Jews, whoever they were, "and when the Jews were going out of the synagogue, the Gentiles," that is, the proselytes and converts, "besought that these words might be preached unto them the next Sabbath. Now, when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God."

When Paul finished preaching, the Jews were going out of the synagogue. The Gentile converts, along with many of the Jews, said, “Paul, we do not have enough of this. Preach to us again.” The next Sabbath day, almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy and spoke against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming.

In verse 43, many of the Jews, as well as the religious proselytes, followed Paul and wanted more preaching and teaching. But in verse 45, when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy and began to contradict. Then verse 50 says, “But when the Jews stirred up the devout and honorable women and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coast.” Are the Jews in verse 50 the same group as those in verse 43? The answer would have to be no.

Who has authority to expel someone from a city or country? It would have to be someone with authority, someone in a position of power. May I remind you of Mark 12:37? Concerning Jesus Christ, the Bible says, “But the common people heard him gladly.” Thus, in verse 43, we see the common people; in verses 45 and 50, we see the ruling elite.

“But the Jews stirred up the devout and honorable women, and the chief men of the city,” an ordinary citizen could not do that, “and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coast.” It is exactly the same today. Whenever you have riots, whenever you have disturbances, whenever you have mobs, whenever you have violence, look for a government plant. Look for a government mole. Look at January 6. Look at the Black Lives Matter. Look at Antifa. You will always find someone with some power and authority to stir people up and to do things.

Read about the Whitmer supposedly plot. Who was it that set the whole thing up? It was the FBI. So whenever you see this, you can mark her down. There is someone with some power and authority to stir people up and to do things.

In Acts chapter 23, the term “the Jews” refers to an elite, a controlling elite, a power elite, and not to all Judeans. Some of the

Jews bound themselves with an oath that they were not going to eat or drink until they had murdered Paul. Verse 12 says, “And when it was day, certain of the Jews banded together.” Certain of the Jews: that is a particular group.

There were always those with the high priest and those who ruled. They banded them together and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul. “And they that were of the more than forty which made the conspiracy.” They came to the chief priests and elders and said, “We have bound ourselves under great curse that we will eat nothing and that we have slain Paul.” Perhaps they kept their vow and died, but I doubt they kept that vow. I believe they broke it and went back to eating and drinking. Verse 15 says, “Now therefore ye with the council signify to the chief captain that he bring him down unto you tomorrow, as though ye would inquire something more perfectly concerning him, and we, or ever he come near, are ready to kill him.” Paul’s nephew learned of this plot and told Paul. Paul said, “You go tell the chief captain.” And I want you to notice what he said in verse 20.

I had never thought to look this up until today, and did not have the wherewithal, but look in verse 20. Here is what he tells the chief captain: “And he said, The Jews, the Jews, the Jews have agreed to desire thee that thou wouldest bring down Paul tomorrow into the council as though they would inquire something of you more perfectly.”

Who are “the Jews”? They are the chief priest and the elders. Is there a definite article before the word “Jews”? It refers to a specific group. The word for God in the Bible is theos, but theos can refer to any god. When you have ho theos, it is “the God,” the one true and living God. So here are “the Jews”—the specific ones who are in control of everything. Notice also that they are to come to the council.

Acts 24 identifies who these people are: “And after five days Ananias the high priest descended with the elders, and with a certain orator named Tertullus, who informed the governor against Paul.” Those informing the governor against Paul were Ananias, the high

priest, the elders, and a particular orator. Thus, it was the ruling elite.

Without reading the entire chapter, because no one else is mentioned, skip down to verse 27: “But after two years Porcius Festus came into Felix's room, and Felix, willing to show the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound.” Who were the Jews? Go back to verse 1: the high priest and the elders. They were the ruling elite.

Look in chapter 25, verse 1: “Now, when Festus was come into the province after three days, he ascended from Caesarea to Jerusalem. Then the high priest and the chief of the Jews informed him against Paul and besought him, desired favor against him, that he would send for him to Jerusalem, laying wait in the way to kill him.” Verse 2 again says, “Then the high priest and the chief of the Jews” informed Festus against Paul.

Verse 7 says, “And when he was come, the Jews which came down from Jerusalem stood round about him, and laid many grievous complaints against Paul, which they could not prove.” What Jews? The high priest and the chief of the Jews. Then verse 9 says, “But Festus, willing to do the Jews a pleasure, answered Paul and said, Wilt thou go up to Jerusalem and there be judged of these things before me?” That was when Paul appealed to Caesar. Notice the words: “Festus, willing to do the Jews a pleasure.”

What Jews? The same ones mentioned in verse 7. Which Jews? The same ones mentioned in verse 2: the high priest and the chief of the Jews. In other words, you are talking about a cabal, the ruling elite. That is who you are talking about.

Look, if you would, at verses 14 and 15, the same chapter, Acts 25: "...about whom, when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, desiring to have judgment against me." Look at verse 17: "...therefore when they were come hither,"—who are the they? The chief priest and the elders of the Jews—"Therefore, when they were come hither without any delay on the morrow, I sat on the judgment seat and commanded the man to be brought forth." Once again, we understand that he is talking about this cabal, this ruling elite.

Now, in Acts chapter 26, beginning with verse 1, you will see it again: "Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth the hand and answered for himself. I think myself happy, King Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee, touching all things whereof I am accused of the Jews." In Acts 23, 24, and 25, what Jews have been accusing the Apostle Paul? The chief priests, the elders, the ruling elite. "Especially said I, because I know thee to be an expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews. Wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently." Paul then gives his defense.

You can read all these chapters, and this term "the Jews" refers to this controlling elite who have power over the people or religion. They are trying to murder the Apostle Paul. If you have any question as to who these people are, the answer is shown in 1 Thessalonians chapter 2, beginning with verse 14: "For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judea," the landmass, "are in Christ Jesus. For ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews." Who are the Jews? He tells you in verse 15: "Who both killed the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us, and they please not God, and are contrary to all men, forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles, that they might be saved, to fill up their sin always, for the wrath has come upon them to the uttermost." So who are the Jews? In verse 15, they are the ones who killed the Lord Jesus Christ.

Who had the authority to have this done? Those who had authority also killed their own prophets and persecuted the church. We know who pursued them. The Bible tells us it was the chief priests, the Sadducees, the controlling elite who forbade them to speak to the Gentiles. It was the same ones. It was the Jews.

Matthew 26:59 says, “Now, the chief priests and elders and all the council sought false witness against Jesus to put him to death.” So who are the Jews? They happen to be the chief priests, the elders, and the council. They are the cabal, the ruling elite.

In Matthew 27:17, Pilate said to them, “Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus which is called Christ?” Pilate knew “that for envy they had delivered him.” When he was sat down on the judgment seat, his wife sent unto him saying, “Have thou

nothing to do with that just man, for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him." But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas and destroy Jesus.

Think about this. Felix and Festus were willing to show the Jews a pleasure at the expense of an absolutely, totally innocent man. They kept Paul bound for all of those years until he appealed to Caesar. Pilate was willing to show the Jews a pleasure and released Barabbas instead of Christ, when he absolutely knew that for envy they had delivered Him. He knew that Jesus Christ was totally and completely innocent.

Do you see now how far some are willing to go to violate God's law in order to retain power and position and popularity? The questions we would have to ask are these: How far are we willing to go in cooperation with that which is evil and wicked to retain favor? How far are we willing to go in politics? How far are we willing to go in social issues? How far are you willing to go?

Application: Standing Against Wickedness Today

Are you willing to go along with political correctness, the cancel culture, and the blacklisting of people just because of their views? How far are you willing to go? Are you willing to see innocent people persecuted, prosecuted, and imprisoned just because they are classified as extremists because they do not believe as other people believe?

You remember Randy Weaver, years ago? They called him an extremist, and all he wanted was to be left alone. That is all. How far are you willing to go to see that God's justice is done and His righteousness upheld? How far are you willing to go in personal suffering and sacrifice to please the Lord and see that His laws are applied?

What does the persecution of the Apostle Paul and the persecution of Jesus Christ have to do with us today? Principles do not change. Principles do not die. Principles do not have funerals. Our society today, our legislative bodies, our executive branch, and

our judicial system are absolutely full of evil, injustice, unrighteousness, and wickedness.

Government has become a false god. Look in your Bibles to Psalm 94, beginning with verse 20: “Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with thee, which frameth mischief by a law?” It is a throne, so that is government, power, and authority. It is a throne of iniquity—a wicked government, power, and authority. Shall a wicked civil government have fellowship with God when that wicked civil government frames mischief by law? In the Bible, mischief is another word for sin.

Shall a wicked civil government have fellowship with God when that wicked civil government makes sin legal? It is legal to violate God’s law today in this country. You can murder by abortion. You can be a sodomite. You could steal as long as you are a politician. But look at verse 20 again: “Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with thee, which frameth mischief by law?”

Who in the world is the “they” in verse 21? It is the same ones in verse 20, the throne of iniquity: “They gather themselves together against the soul of the righteous and condemn the innocent blood.” The truth is, we must stand against wickedness, evil, and tyranny. I hear people say all the time, “But I have no power. I cannot do anything.”

We have more power and more might than we can ever conceive. You remember that passage in Luke chapter 18 where our Lord taught that men ought always to pray and not to faint. Then He told about a certain judge who had no fear of God and no regard for man. The widow woman kept coming to him, saying, "Avenge me of my adversary." He would not, but after a while he said, "Though I fear not God, nor regard man, yet I am going to avenge this widow woman, lest by her continual coming she weary me."

Our Lord Himself made the application: "Hear thou what the unjust judge said, and shall not God avenge his own elect, who cry on him day and night? Verily I say unto you, He shall avenge them speedily." The problem is not with God. It is not that God has no power or is unwilling to correct things. The problem is on our part.

We are not crying day and night for God to make things right. We are not asking Him for justice, righteousness, or to avenge us.

Our backs are not quite enough up against the wall. When they start coming for us, we might start crying and asking God to do something. But ignorance is no excuse. Proverbs 24:10 says, "If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small. If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death, and those that are ready to be slain, that is, if you don't do something, if thou sayest, Behold, we knew it not, doth not he that ponders the heart consider it? And he that keepeth thy soul, doth he not know it? And shall not he render to every man according to his works?"

God says, "Don't play ignorant with me. Don't play stupid. Don't play dumb. I know you. I know everything about you." May I remind you that just because Roe versus Wade has been overthrown and overturned does not mean aborticide has ceased in this country. Plenty of states still allow it. Some big corporations will pay their employees to flee to other states so they can have an abortion. May I also remind you of the children being trafficked in sex slavery.

Our own government has been involved, and CPS has been involved. Read Senator John DeCamp's Franklin Cover-up, written thirty years ago, in which he documents everything. Boys were being taken from Boys Town and given to big politicians, who are named in that book—presidents as well as Congress critters. I am simply saying that this is still going on. Look at all the political prisoners, the people in prison and suffering right now because of the January 6th insurrection.

And yet those who burned down cities, stole property, and even killed are running around free. We have political prisoners, just like China, Russia, and every other country, because they speak out against the wicked.

May I remind you also of the deterioration in our society? Our educational institutions basically stink. They are corrupt and as far left as they can be. There you have pride, drag queens, and transgenderism being pushed upon kindergartners as though it were normal and natural.

So I am asking: How far are you willing to go in standing up for truth and righteousness? Turn back very quickly to Psalm 94 and look at verse 16. I can quote it, but I want you to see it. Look at what God asks in Psalm 94:16. God asks.

"Who will rise up for me against the evildoers? Or who will stand up for me against the workers of iniquity?" Who will rise up? Who will stand up? How far are you willing to go to rebuke and reprove and expose sin and wickedness, injustice, and unrighteousness? The truth is, if you do that, you will be absolutely hated and despised.

Consider Amos chapter 5, beginning with verse 10: "They hate him that rebuketh in the gate." In the Old Testament, civil government took place in the gate. The king and the rulers sat in the gate; people came there, and that is where the law and cases were discussed. "They hate him that rebuketh in the gate, and they abhor him that speaketh uprightly."

"Forasmuch therefore as your treading is upon the poor," think about how the poor are being attacked, "you take from him burdens of wheat, you have built houses of hewn stone," speaking of the rulers. "But you shall not dwell in them. You have planted pleasant vineyards, which you shall not drink wine of them. For I know your manifold transgressions and your mighty sins. They afflict the just, they take a bribe, and they turn aside the poor in the gate of his right."

That pretty well describes where we are today. God says they are going to hate you if you speak the truth. If you rebuke them, they will despise you and abhor you.

How far are you willing to go to please the Lord Jesus Christ? How do we know what pleases Him? We have His Word and His law; we know because He tells us what pleases Him. Hebrews 13, beginning with verse 12, asks the question again: "Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood suffered without the gate." He went out and was numbered with the transgressors and gave His life for us. Verse 13 says, "Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp bearing his reproach."

Conclusion: Bearing Christ's Reproach

Mark it down: if you are willing to do that which is right, holy, and righteous, and if you are willing to rebuke and expose sin and wickedness, you will be hated, despised, denounced, criticized, mocked, ridiculed, and even persecuted.

You will be attacked by the left, the right, Democrats, Republicans, independents—by anyone and everyone. But you must make up your mind, because there is no middle ground. Our Lord Himself said, “He that is not with me is against me. He that gathered not with me scattereth abroad.”

Listen carefully to one last passage, Revelation 3, beginning in 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 spue thee out of my mouth.”

Those words were not spoken to the wicked, but to the church. Our Lord would rather have someone altogether against Him or altogether for Him; He does not want a fence-straddler. How far are you willing to go in obedience and in pleasing the Lord Jesus Christ? What is your standard for determining how far you are willing to go? Our Lord went without the gate, without the camp; therefore, we should be willing to go where He went, bearing His reproach, as the author of Hebrews said.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank Thee for Thy Word, truth, love, grace, and mercy. Give us backbones of steel and hearts full of courage and grace. May we determine in our souls to please Thee in all things, in every area of life and sphere of our being, that we might honor and glorify Thee. In the name of Jesus Christ we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 44

Foundations Are Important

Introduction: The Importance of Foundations

David says, "In the Lord put I my trust: how say ye to my soul, Flee as a bird to your mountain? For, lo, the wicked bend their bow, they make ready their arrow upon the string, that they may privily shoot at the upright in heart. If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do? The Lord is in his holy temple, the Lord's throne is in heaven: his eyes behold, his eyelids try, the children of men. The Lord trieth the righteous: but the wicked and him that loveth violence his soul hateth. Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest: this shall be the portion of their cup. For the righteous Lord loveth righteousness; his countenance doth behold the upright."

Look at verse 3, because it makes a strong truth in the form of a question: "If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" Certainly foundations are indeed important. The word "foundations" is plural because there is really and truly more than one foundation. If you do not believe that foundations are important, try building a house without one and see how long that house stands.

Our Lord Himself made a statement concerning the importance of foundations in Matthew 7: "Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock."

"And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it."

Without a proper foundation, everything sinks. There are many foundations that are needed and absolutely necessary—indeed, indispensable—in our lives. We could talk about the foundation of health, because clearly our health is first and foremost, and there is nothing that you can do any better than simply take care of yourself.

I know friends who will not eat certain foods. Even though those foods are nutritious and good for them, they simply will not eat them. I prefer to eat something that I know is good, filling, nutritious, and enjoyable rather than having to eat a bunch of junk. There is the foundation of health. We could also talk about the foundation of marriage between one man and one woman, an economic foundation, an educational foundation, a political foundation, and a theological foundation.

Foundations Form a Worldview

When we talk about foundations, I want you to understand that foundations actually form what you and I call a worldview. A worldview shows how you view the world and everything that happens to you and in your life. Your worldview determines and interprets your life experiences. The Word of God teaches us, and I am going to show it to you, that unless you have a biblical foundation and a biblical worldview, the only thing you have is a humanistic foundation, and you are going to be in a lot of trouble. Without a biblical foundation, you are not only deficient, but you will actually have constant and consistent devastation in your life.

In light of foundations, and in light of what I am going to be teaching you and showing you from Scripture, I want you to think about this statement: There is no such thing as a nervous breakdown. Someone is going to say, "But wait a minute, I know people who have had nervous breakdowns. Why, I even had one myself." No, when an individual falls apart, cannot cope, and has no control in his life, it is often referred to as a nervous breakdown.

Nervous Breakdowns Are Foundation Breakups

But when that happens, one's nerves have not broken down. They are working all too well. That is the problem. It is not a nervous breakdown; it is a foundation breakup. Because of the way you have handled problems all your life, you suddenly encounter something that you cannot resolve in the way you normally do. You do not know anything else, so you try to handle that problem in the same way you have handled everything else. It backfires on you, and you simply go to pieces. It is not your nerves breaking down; it is your foundation breaking up. It is your worldview going to pieces in front of you. It disintegrates, and therefore you can no longer function the way you normally do.

If we wish to avoid what the world calls a nervous breakdown, we need to know how to resolve our problems and interpret our life experiences in a biblical manner and framework. Everybody has problems. Problems do not disappear, go away, or vanish. They must be resolved, and they must be resolved in a biblical manner, or else they will never be resolved.

Usually, someone gets a problem, perhaps a pretty decent-sized problem, and keeps ignoring it. He keeps playing around with it, and the next thing he knows, it keeps growing and growing and growing. All of a sudden, it escalates, bursts right in front of him, and he goes to pieces. That is what we call a nervous breakdown.

But it is, in reality, a foundation breakup. If we want to avoid that, we need to make sure that our foundation is indeed biblical and scriptural.

In verse three, what is this question? "If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" He is going to tell you in

verses four through seven what will happen to those who have unbiblical foundations, especially the unsaved, and oftentimes even Christians. He says: “The Lord is in his holy temple, the Lord’s throne is in heaven: his eyes behold, his eyelids try, the children of men.” God does that. Yes. Then he says, “The Lord trieth the righteous”—He does test us—“but the wicked and him that loveth violence his soul hateth. Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest: this shall be the portion of their cup. For the righteous Lord loveth righteousness; his countenance doth behold the upright.”

There is quite a difference between those who have a biblical worldview and foundation and those who do not. Let me give you a good, clear illustration. The wicked and the nations that oppose God will discover themselves to be but mere men. This past week, I read where Klaus Schwab and his henchman Yuval Noah Harari said, and I am quoting, “God is dead, Jesus is fake news, and we have divine authority.” Stop and think about that. If we have divine authority, what does that mean? We are God. That is what they are claiming. They are claiming in this great reset that they are going to be the gods, and everyone else is extinguishable and dispensable, and no one else needs to even exist. You remember that passage in Psalm 82, verses 6 and 7, where our Lord said, “I said, Ye are gods.” And by the way, our Lord interprets this for us in the New Testament.

Foundations Are Important

God is speaking about the civil magistrates: “I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most High. But ye shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes.” So God says, “Your godhood does not mean that you are deity. It means you are in a position of authority and power, but you will die like men.” That is why Psalm 9:20 says, “Put them in fear, O Lord: that the nations may know themselves to be but men.”

When you talk about George Soros, Klaus Schwab, the Great Reset, and the New World Order, you have to understand that these men are simply tyrannical, blasphemous, and ungodly, and that they are going to fall into destruction. Just as Psalm 11:4–7 says, they are

going to receive the judgment of God, the righteous judgment of God. Their foundation certainly is going to crumble.

Let me say it again: foundations are important. Your worldview is important as well. You need always to examine your foundation and your worldview in order to make sure that it is biblical and right. You will see billboards on the interstate showing a wreck and saying, "Now is not the time to check your child's seatbelt or safety chair." I could say it like this: When you are in it up to your eyeballs, your foundation is cracking, and your worldview is falling apart, it is not the time to examine yourself. It is basically too late. You need to be examining your worldview and your foundation consistently and constantly. Why? Because foundations are not normally laid in a day. You have to build a foundation; therefore, there must be obviously and clearly a daily consideration of your foundation.

The Divine Foundation: Jesus Christ

Now I want to show you three foundations. These three are absolutely indispensable. The first deals with salvation, and the other two show their indispensability if you are going to live a constant and consistent Christian life. First of all, there is a divine foundation. Hold Psalm 11, but turn in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 3. Look at verses 10 and 11 at what the Apostle Paul said, and we will take it from there. Notice, beginning with verse 10.

Paul, speaking to the church at Corinth, says: "According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation"—that is, of that church—"and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." Paul laid the foundation of the church at Corinth. He began the work and built the church upon the person and work of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ alone, is the divine foundation. The doctrine of Jesus Christ in all of His person, offices, and work is the foundation of the Christian religion.

Consequently, these doctrines must be held entire, pure, and complete, because without Jesus Christ there is no salvation, no church, and no ministry. Without Jesus Christ, we are lost in our sins. Paul understood this: "I have laid the foundation," and no other

foundation can be laid for a church; that foundation is the Lord Jesus Christ.

When we say that Jesus Christ is the divine foundation, understand that this foundation is not open for debate, a second opinion, discussion, a vote, or argumentation. It is solid, fixed, and complete, and that foundation is none other than Jesus Christ. God the Father ordained and purposed His only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to be the stone, the cornerstone, and the foundation of His church. Through Jesus Christ we are drawn to God the Father by His Spirit. Consequently, He is indeed the foundation. The Bible says in Ephesians 2:20 that we "are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone."

Let me put it plainly: without Jesus Christ, there is no church. There are plenty of buildings and places where people meet without Jesus Christ, but they are not churches, because Jesus Christ is the foundation. Where Jesus Christ is not the foundation, there is no church. Where in the world did the Apostle Paul get this truth when he said, "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ"? Notice that he said, "that is laid."

That is, it is past tense. It has already been laid. Where did he get this idea? Where did he get this truth? Well, let me show you. If you will go back in your Bibles to the book of Isaiah, chapter 28, and look, if you would please, at verse 16. Notice, if you would, Isaiah 28:16. Look what the Scripture says: "Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste."

And interesting enough, this verse in Isaiah 28:16 is quoted twice in the New Testament and applied to the Lord Jesus Christ. So, if you will turn in your Bibles to the book of Romans chapter 9, I'll show you the very first time it is quoted in reference to Jesus Christ. In Romans chapter 9, let's begin looking there at verse 32. The Word of God says this: "Wherefore?"—oh, well, let's go back to verse 31.

Israel is involved: "But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness." In

other words, they are not righteous. “Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone; as it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.” This quotes Isaiah 28. There is also an allusion in 1 Peter chapter 2, beginning with verse 3: “If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious. To whom coming, as unto a living stone”—that is Him—“disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, 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.”

But note: “To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men.” Israel rejected Him totally, thoroughly, and completely.

Albert Barnes puts this truth together succinctly: “Christ is often called the foundation, the stone, the cornerstone on which the church is reared.” He explains: “The meaning is that no true church can be reared which does not embrace and hold the true doctrines representing Him, those which pertain to His incarnation, His divine nature, His instructions, His example, His atonement, His resurrection, and His ascension. The reason why no true church can be established without embracing the truth as it is in Christ is that it is by Him only that men can be saved. And where this doctrine is wanting, all is wanting that enters into the essential idea of a church. The fundamental doctrines of the Christian religion must be embraced or a church cannot exist. And where those doctrines are denied, no association of men can be recognized as a church of God.

“Nor can the foundation be modified or shaped so as to suit the wishes of men. It must be laid as it is in the scriptures, and the superstructure must be reared upon that alone.” Without Jesus Christ, you do not have a church. You may refer to yourself as the Mormon Church, the Church of Jehovah’s Witnesses, or the First Baptist Church; but if Jesus Christ is not the foundation, you do not have a church.

The church is not open for a vote. You cannot simply get a body of men together and agree that you are going to believe certain things and call yourselves a church. You can call yourself whatever you

want to, but that does not make you a church. The divine foundation is that which is laid, and that is Jesus Christ. If it is not built upon Jesus Christ, according to our Lord's own words, it is sinking sand.

The Doctrinal Foundation

There is a divine foundation, and secondly, because there is a divine foundation, there is also a doctrinal foundation. Doctrine is despised by most people and by many professing Christians. I genuinely believe that one reason there are so many failures, heartaches, divisions, strife, and ungodliness in our churches and among Christians is a lack of biblical doctrine.

Everyone has a worldview; the question is whether it is biblical or humanistic. Everyone has a foundation; the question is whether it is biblical or humanistic. Everyone has doctrine and believes doctrine; it matters whether that doctrine is biblical or humanistic.

We get our English word “doctrine” from two Greek words. The first is didache, referring to that which is taught, or the instruction given. There is a writing referred to as the Didache, the writings of the apostles. The second word is didaskalia, which means teaching, learning, and giving instruction, including precepts, principles, and doctrines.

Our doctrine forms our understanding and determines our choices and direction. It also determines, basically, our worldview. Scripture teaches that you cannot hide your doctrine, because it is your worldview and your foundation. Proverbs 23:7 says, “For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he.” What you think and believe is what you are and what you live. David said in Psalm 116:10, “I believed, therefore have I spoken.” Ultimately, you speak of that which you truly believe. You live it and speak it; this is how we know what is in an individual's heart.

You remember it was Peter who said to Simon the sorcerer, “Thy money perish with thee.” It is a strong word in the Greek. He literally said, “Your money go to hell with thee.” Why? “Because thine heart is not right in the sight of God.” How did Peter know that Simon’s heart was not right? Because of what he said and because of what he did.

So our doctrine is evidenced in our lives; that is for sure. Now, one of the great problems that I believe we have in Christianity today, in our churches today, is that most Christians simply do not know doctrine. They do not understand doctrine. They have no idea concerning the doctrines of the Word of God. As a general rule, most Christians do not read, study, listen, think, or apply truth. Very few Christians—listen carefully, and I might include some pastors in that as well—are able to discuss any doctrine with ease, understanding, insight, and clarity. I do not care what doctrine you want to talk about. I do not care whether we are talking about election, sanctification, salvation, reconciliation, or the church. Very few Christians can sit down and say, "Let me share with you this biblical doctrine." Very few pastors can do that as well.

In fact, let me go even further, because I have seen this so many times. Very few Christians know the books of the Bible. Very few Christians can even tell you how many books there are in the Bible. How many are in the Old Testament? How many are in the New Testament? There are sixty-six books in the Bible, thirty-nine in the Old and twenty-seven in the New. Many times I have asked people to turn to such and such a passage or such and such a book, and you see people thumbing through it. They do not even know whether the book is in the Old Testament or the New Testament. Let me tell you a very easy way to memorize this. You do not have to sit down and memorize all sixty-six books. Think about the numbers 5, 12, 5, 5, 12; those are the books of the Old Testament. When you get to the New Testament, it is 4, 1, 21, 1.

So, 5-12-5-5-12: what are we talking about? There are five books of the law, twelve books of history, five books of poetry, five major prophets, and twelve minor prophets. In the New Testament, there are four Gospels, one book of church history, twenty-one epistles, and then the book of Revelation, which, depending upon your eschatology, you will say is prophecy or already fulfilled prophecy. I am simply saying that 5-12-5-5-12 will at least tell you where the books are in the Old Testament, and 4-1-21-1 will basically tell you where things are in the New Testament.

But very few Christians can even do that. I never will forget preaching in Vidalia, Georgia, years and years ago. There was a

fellow in the front row, and the pulpit was fairly close to the front row, say, from here to Clay. I said, “Turn in your Bibles, if you would please, to the book of Numbers.” Then I said, “Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers. It’s the fourth book in the Old Testament.” The man kept turning and turning, then looked up at me and shook his head: “No.” I repeated, “Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers; it’s the fourth book in the Old Testament.”

He looked back down, then up at me. “No.” I stepped out of the pulpit and said, “Sir, give me your Bible. I’ll find the book of Numbers for you.” I turned Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy—it was a Sears and Roebuck Bible. The whole book of Numbers had been left out. He was right; I was wrong. It was not in his Bible, though it was supposed to be there.

I am simply pointing out the fact about most Christians: they do not know where the books are in the Bible. They guess; they just turn. Pastors and teachers responsible for delivering truth to the saints have basically failed miserably.

You have to understand something about preachers. Our calling is not to entertain people, coddle people, babysit people, or form a society where everyone can come together and have a good time. Our calling is to preach and teach the truth of God and present the whole counsel of God. Very few are willing to do that.

While I am thinking about that, let me show you some verses. Turn in your Bibles to Acts chapter 20. The Apostle Paul called for the elders, the pastors from Ephesus, and they came to Miletus. He was giving them instructions. Begin with verse 17: “And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church.”

“And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews.”

“And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house.” Paul looked at these preachers and said, “I have kept back nothing that was profitable unto you.” So how much of the Word of

God is profitable? Second Timothy 3:16 says, “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.” If Paul kept back nothing that was profitable, that meant he taught them the whole counsel of God.

A second truth is important. Paul told these preachers from Miletus, who were from Ephesus, “Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men.” How did Paul get pure from the blood of all men?

Remember the passage in Ezekiel 3 and Ezekiel 33, where God told Ezekiel, “I've set thee a watchman.” He said, “If you see trouble coming, if you see harm coming, and you warn the people, and they don't pay attention, their blood is on their own hand, but you've delivered your soul from blood. If you don't warn them, their blood is on your hand.”

I've had people tell me, “If you don't witness to every person you see, you've got blood on your hands.” Do you realize that is humanly impossible? If Alice said, “We're out of milk and I need milk to make a certain dish for supper tonight, would you please go to town and bring us back a gallon of milk?”

Had I taken time to witness to every person I saw, do you realize I would never return home—or at least not in time for supper? You see people over and over. How did Paul get pure from the blood of all men? Look at verse 26: “Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.” Paul said, “The only way I get pure from the blood of all men is by holding back nothing that is profitable. I preach and teach the whole counsel of God.” This means that the blood is on the hands of pastors who do not preach the totality of God’s Word.

There will be things in the Bible that you may not understand, things that you may not like, things that you may not appreciate, and things that you do not want to hear. That is beside the point. The totality of the Word of God is to be taught. One reason I really love our church is that I can open my Bible to any text and preach and

teach, and everyone sits there and receives it. They do not holler, rant, or rave. It is there in the Scripture, and they are willing to submit to it. They are willing to believe it.

Now let me show you something. Turn in your Bibles to the book of Deuteronomy, chapter 32. This is a very beautiful passage. I preached on this text many, many years ago. It tells us not only how to teach, in one sense of the word, but also how to hear. In Deuteronomy 32, beginning in verse 1, the Word of God says, "Give ear, O ye heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth." Now look at verse 2: "My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass: because I will publish the name of the Lord: ascribe ye greatness unto our God." Then he says, "My doctrine shall drop as the rain."

We are not talking about torrential flooding rain, which can come so quickly and harshly that it washes away everything. He explains it: "as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass." It is like looking out one morning and seeing that it is drizzling, just sprinkling. At dinner time it is still drizzling and sprinkling; at supper time, it is still drizzling and sprinkling. Do you realize that it is that slow rain that soaks into the ground? Fast, torrential rain runs off, but slow, consistent rain soaks into the ground.

"My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass." Teaching is to be like a consistent, constant, gentle rain that falls upon our minds and distils as quietly as the dew on our understanding.

So when we teach biblical doctrine, the name of God is published and greatness is ascribed unto Him. There is a good implication here: if our teaching is to be as consistent and constant as the small rain, the hearing and listening must also be as consistent and constant as the small rain. If I have an obligation and duty to teach consistently and constantly, you have a duty and obligation to hear consistently and constantly as well. Proverbs 4:2 says, "For I give you good doctrine, forsake ye not my law."

The Apostle Paul gave wonderful counsel to Timothy concerning doctrine. In 1 Timothy 4:12, he says, "Let no man despise thy youth." Timothy was a younger man, in his 40s when Paul wrote this. "Let no man therefore despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation"—that is, conduct—"in charity"—that is, love—"in spirit, in faith, in purity." How was Timothy to become an example of believers in his speech, conduct, love, spirit, faith, and purity?

Verse 13 gives the answer: "Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine." Reading, exhortation—that is being reproved, rebuked, and exhorted to do things or change your life—and doctrine, that is teaching. So let us ask some questions. Do you read the Word of God? Do you read theological books? Do you read Christian literature? Do you receive exhortation? Are you willing to be rebuked, reproved, and exhorted? Are you teachable? Are you willing to be taught?

In Colossians chapter 1 and verse 28, Paul is talking about Jesus Christ from verse 27: “which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” Now verse 28 says, “Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect”—or mature—“in Christ Jesus.”

If you want to know what it takes to mature a person in Jesus Christ, this is what you need to be mature. What does it take, then, to present a man mature in Christ Jesus? It takes preaching, warning—and the word there means nouthetic confrontation; it means rebuking, reproving, correcting, and exhorting—and teaching. These three things are absolutely necessary to mature an individual in Jesus Christ. So if you want to be mature in Christ, you have to have the preaching, the exhortation, and the teaching.

We are talking about a doctrinal foundation now. There is not only the divine foundation; there is the doctrinal foundation. In 1 Timothy 4:16, Paul says, “Timothy, take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine.” You had better make sure it is built upon the divine foundation. “Continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.” “Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine.” It is a warning: Paul says you had better pay attention to your doctrine.

In Titus 2:1, Paul tells Titus, “But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine.” How in the world can you speak things which become sound doctrine if you do not know sound doctrine? If you do not know doctrine, how can you speak those things? It is impossible. Our doctrinal foundation is to be built upon the divine foundation.

Now look in 2 Timothy 4, beginning with verse 1. Paul writes Timothy: “I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort”—there it is again—“with all longsuffering and doctrine.” Why?

"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears." We've reached that stage in America. We've reached that stage in Christendom, where sound doctrine will not be endured. Marxism will be endured. Communism will be endured. Progressivism will be endured. Socialism will be endured. Welfarism will be endured. But not sound doctrine. People do not want sound doctrine. People do not want to be taught. We have perverted God's command. I will tell you how difficult it is, to the point at which it has come in America.

You cannot give away the truth. You know what the Bible says in Proverbs 23 and verse 23? "Buy the truth, and sell it not." People aren't going to buy truth. "I can't go there because gas is too expensive." "I can't buy that book because I don't have the money right now," though they have money for other things. People don't want the truth even if you give it to them. If you give someone a book, they usually won't read it. Most people do not want to read at all. They want to watch TV, but they don't want to read. "Buy the truth, and sell it not."

So you can ask yourself: Where in the world are the Christians that hunger after truth? Where are the Christians who really and truly want a biblical foundation? Where are the Christians that want a biblical worldview? Where are the Christians that really and truly want to honor God and please Him? Our doctrinal foundation has to be built upon the divine foundation.

But unhappily, most of the time, folks don't even know the divine foundation; therefore, they don't have a doctrinal foundation. I read a quote this past week that I really like: "Most people really do not want the truth. They just want constant reassurance that what they already believe is truth." Which is not necessarily so. There is a divine foundation and a doctrinal foundation. You cannot have a proper doctrinal foundation unless it is built upon the divine foundation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

There are some people that I pray for every day. One of them is a young man who is so thoroughly confused that he doesn't know which end is up. It is mind-boggling. He even rejects the Word of God, yet he is willing to believe all kinds of junk that can't possibly be true. Our doctrinal foundation has to be built upon this divine foundation. Now there's a third one.

The Dutiful Foundation

There is the divine foundation, a doctrinal foundation, and, thirdly, what I am going to call a dutiful foundation: the foundation upon which your duty is based.

So let me ask you two questions. Number one, what is duty? And number two, how do you know what your duty is? Think about that. How do you know what your duty is? Suppose I told Clay, “Clay, it is your duty to give me a hundred bucks a day.” And I told Steve, “It is your duty now to give me a chocolate bar every hour on the hour.” And I told Gary, “It is your duty…” What? How can I make such a statement?

If you do not know what your duty is, and if you do not know where your duty comes from, I could lay all kinds of duties upon you. Whether they are biblical or not would be immaterial. Robert E. Lee said, “Duty is the most sublime word in the English language. Do your duty in all things. You cannot do more, you should never wish to do less.” Lee and Jackson said, “Duty is ours, consequences are God’s.” So let me ask that question again: What is duty?

Just as your doctrine is based upon the divine foundation, your duty is based upon your doctrinal foundation. You cannot possibly know what your duty is if you do not know doctrine, because duty is

based upon doctrine. Let me give you one simple example: Ecclesiastes chapter 12 and verse 13: “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.” Duty is based on doctrine. I can only know what my duties are based upon the doctrine of the Word of God.

Let me show you something else. Look in your Bibles to the book of Luke, chapter 17. Luke 17, and let us begin reading there with verse 7.

One of our problems is that everybody wants to be patted on the back and commended. But our Lord spoke about duty in Luke 17: “But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat? And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink? Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not.” Then He says, “So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.”

Isn’t that amazing? How many of us have actually done everything that has been commanded of us? No one. Everybody wants to be patted on the back, but you should not need to be patted on the back to do your duty. The word “duty” is from the Greek word opheilo, which means that which you owe. It is a debt. Your duty is based upon your doctrine; it is a debt that you owe to God.

Consider 1 Corinthians 15:58: “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.” The word “therefore” means that this is a conclusion or application made by the Apostle based upon the doctrine he has taught in 1 Corinthians 15.

What will keep you steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord? Is it because you receive a commendation from the President of the United States—which would not be a commendation in my book? Suppose you are praised by the Southern Poverty Law Center, which does not praise anybody unless

he is almost a Marxist. Suppose a newspaper wrote you up, or everyone in church patted you on the back and told you what a fine job you were doing. Would that keep you going? No.

"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord." Then he says, "forasmuch as ye know"—there is something you know—"that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." How do you know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord?

Read all of 1 Corinthians 15, because it deals with the bodily resurrection. Some in the Corinthian church said the resurrection had already passed, or that there would be no resurrection. The apostle Paul answered, "You don't know what you're talking about. If Jesus Christ has not been raised from the dead, then we're all lost in our sins anyhow." He shows that Jesus Christ was bodily raised from the dead and that we will be bodily raised from the dead. He was the firstfruits, and we follow after.

After teaching this doctrine of bodily resurrection, he says, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord." Why? "Forasmuch as ye know." How do you know it? Based upon doctrine. What will keep you steadfast, unmovable, and abounding in the work of the Lord? Doctrine. You know there is a bodily resurrection.

Your duty is based upon your doctrine, and your doctrine is based upon the Lord Jesus Christ. You will not live right until you believe right, and you will not do right until you believe right. This is why the psalmist said, "If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" We must understand the connection between the divine foundation, the doctrinal foundation, and our duty.

Applications and Conclusion

Now, let me make just a couple of applications. First: There are many who profess Jesus Christ but do not possess Him. I understand, and you know, that there are hypocrites in the church. Yet some in the church are genuinely deceived and do not know Jesus Christ. They know about Him. Many mistakenly think

intellectual or historical faith equals saving faith, though it does not. But you see, the answer is really very simple.

The chaff may be mixed with the wheat, but there is a foundation even in salvation. The Bible tells us in 2 Timothy 2:19: "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." Those who actually belong to Jesus Christ depart from iniquity. We may not be perfect, but when we find out something is wicked and wrong, we leave it. We do not attend it or stand with it; we leave it. There is indeed a foundation that God knows those who are His.

Let me point something else out. We will never be able to convince gainsayers, nor teach those who truly want to seek the Lord Jesus Christ, without doctrine. We not only must have doctrine, know doctrine, live doctrine, and speak doctrine. I want you to look in your Bibles to the book of Titus, chapter 1 and verse 9. Titus 1:9 says: "Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers." Holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught—that is, the Word of God—he may by sound doctrine exhort and convince the gainsayers. Without sound doctrine, we cannot do that; without having been taught the Word of God, we cannot do that. The foundation is, first of all, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The second foundation is doctrine based upon the Lord Jesus Christ, and the third foundation is duty based upon our doctrine. That is why the Bible says in Ephesians 2:20 that we "are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone." What's that mean? The foundation of the apostles and prophets is that which they taught concerning Jesus Christ. So do you know what the prophets taught concerning Jesus Christ? Do you know what the apostles taught concerning Jesus Christ?

If we do not know truth, we have no idea what our duty really is, because our duty is based upon our doctrine, and our doctrine is based upon the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Without the divine foundation, you are not saved and cannot be saved. But once you have that divine foundation, you must have a doctrinal

foundation in order to properly exercise and fulfill your duty. If you don't know truth, you cannot obey truth. If you don't know what God requires, you cannot fulfill your duty.

Duty is based upon doctrine. It is so important that we know the Word of God so that we will know how to live. Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee this day. We thank You for Your Word and Your truth. We ask, Lord, that You would be pleased to teach us. Open our eyes, open our minds, grant us understanding. Look upon us, O Lord, that we may call upon Thy name. Turn us, O Lord, and we shall be turned. Give us, Lord, Your grace and Your mercy, and help us to love Thee and live for Thee. Fulfill our duty. And Lord, know the doctrine that's based upon the Lord Jesus Christ. In Thy name we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 45

The Same Message

SCRIPTURE READING - Ezekiel 14:1-8 (KJV)

Introduction: The Need for Repetition

Ezekiel chapter 14, beginning with verse 1: “Then came certain of the elders of Israel unto me, and sat before me. And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their heart, and put the stumbling block of their iniquity before their face. Should I be inquired of at all by them? Therefore speak unto them, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God: Every man of the house of Israel that setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to the prophet, I the Lord will answer him that cometh according to the multitude of his idols; that I may take the house of Israel in their own heart, because they are all estranged from me through their idols. Therefore, thus say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord God: Repent, and turn yourselves from your idols; and turn away your faces from all your abominations. For every one of the house of Israel, or the stranger that sojourneth in Israel, which separateth himself from me, and setteth up his idols in

> his heart, and putteth the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to a prophet to inquire of him concerning me; I the Lord will answer him by myself: I will set my face against that man, and will make him a sign and a proverb, and I will cut him off from the midst of my people; and ye shall know that I am the Lord."
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> Oftentimes we need to hear the same message over and over. Many times repetition is used in the Bible, and many times it takes repetition to work in our lives in order for the truth to sink in. It truly does not matter how intelligent or studious one is when it comes to the Word of God, because unless the Holy Spirit of God opens your eyes and your understanding, you will never really perceive spiritual truth. However, repetition does indeed aid learning.

The Holy Spirit uses repetition. The Lord Jesus Christ used repetition. Usually speaking, the more you read, study, and hear upon a subject, the greater your understanding will be, and the greater your ability will be to handle that subject. Usually, most truth is mastered by repetition. That is why we start our children on phonics, the ABCs, and the times table, repeating them over and over, because that is simply the way to learn.

At times, repetition may be exceedingly painful. In my fifty-eight years of teaching and preaching, I have taught everything from the fourth grade through college. I remember the first time I taught fourth graders. I picked up our history book. It was a good book, but only about an inch thick, perhaps an inch and a half at most. I looked at it and said to myself, "Whoa, this book's not gonna last me two months. What am I gonna do for the rest of the year?" I covered the first four chapters in one week. Then I gave a quiz, and every student failed.

I had some very intelligent students in that class, and I knew it was not their fault; it was mine. I did not count the quiz. I had to return to chapter one and, very slowly and painfully, repeat those truths over and over and over. While it was good for them, it was absolute torture for me. But that was the way it was. You cannot teach fourth graders the way you teach college students or even

teenagers. It was that simple. Repetition, in that sense of the word, was painful for me.

Look at a passage very quickly. Hold Ezekiel 14, but look at Mark chapter 10 and verse 1. Since we are talking about repetition, consider what Scripture says concerning the Lord Jesus Christ: "And he arose from thence, and cometh into the coast of Judea by the farther side of Jordan: and the people resort unto him again; and, as he was wont"—or as he was accustomed—"he taught them again."

The word "again" occurs twice in this verse. In each instance, it is the Greek word "palin," meaning a renewal or repetition of an action. Thus, our Lord may have taught the same people again, and He may also have taught them the same truth again. The principle is simple: we need to hear truth over and over.

I heard about an elderly black preacher who was preaching on the eighth commandment week after week. Finally, some of the deacons asked him when he was going to preach on something else. He answered, "When you start obeying what I'm already preaching on, until then I'm going to keep preaching it." Well, that is certainly true. Repetition is needed. That is so obvious.

Here again is the same principle. Unless we can apply the truth, we really do not possess the truth. Unless we can make application of truth, we do not truly comprehend and understand truth. Our Lord said in Mark 4:23, "If any man have ears to hear, let him hear." We need hearing ears. 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."

Truth mastered is truth applied. The principle of Mark chapter 4 is very simple: If you do not use the truth, you will lose the truth.

I have never in my entire life taken our car motor apart. Steve has, I am sure. Steve can tell me how to do it, but that does not mean I have enough understanding to make application of it. I usually tell people I am pretty good at tearing things up; I am just not too good at putting them back together. But if I took fifty or sixty motors apart and put them back together, I would become pretty adept at it,

because repetition aids learning. You have to use the truth over and over for it to become a part of you and for you to master it.

"Why is it I cannot understand the Bible?" There are a number of answers. First, if you are unsaved, you are not going to understand the Word of God anyhow. But based upon Mark chapter 4, I would also say this: Unless you use the truth, you are not really going to have the truth. Why should God give you truth if you are not going to obey it? Why should He give you more truth if you will not obey the truth already given you? If there is no application of truth in your life, in reality you do not possess it.

Notice what He said in verse 25: "For he that hath, to him shall be given"—now watch—"and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath." In another passage, in Luke 8, and in several passages in Matthew, He said, "that which he seemeth to have." In other words, if you cannot make application, you really do not have it. You only seem to have it. If you do not use the truth, you are going to absolutely lose the truth.

The Unity of God and His Word

So many tend to think that the Old Testament is irrelevant. A brother told me this morning about a conversation with a man who had been listening to some of my sermons. The man said, "Well, Brother Weaver preaches a lot from the Old Testament." My friend replied, "The Old Testament is the Word of God as well." The man answered, "The Old Testament's been done away with." Roy said, "No, sir. It has not been done away with. It is the Word of God."

You have to understand that it is impossible to know the New Testament apart from the Old Testament. An old saying puts it this way: the new is in the old concealed, and the old is in the new revealed. Everything in the New Testament is concealed in the Old Testament, and Old Testament truth is brought to full light in the New Testament.

There are approximately 295 direct quotations from the Old Testament in the New Testament, some quite extensive, covering 352 verses. If you counted the allusions to the Old Testament, there

would be as many as 4,000 references. In the book of Revelation alone, there are approximately 200 allusions to the Old Testament.

The answer is very simple: We have one Bible, not two Bibles. The God of the Old Testament is the God of the New Testament. There are not two gods; there is only one God. Consequently, the burden of the Old Testament is on the unity of God. That is why Deuteronomy 6:4–5 says, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.”

You have one Bible and one God. God is one, and His Word is one. When you despise one, you end up despising the other. You can find this truth first of all in John 5:21–23, where our Lord said, “For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will. The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son.” Why? “That all men may honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him.”

You have one God, and His Word is one. In John 12:48, our Lord said, “He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him in the last day: even the word which I have spoken.”

I emphasize this before getting to Ezekiel chapter 14 because many people, without even thinking about it, either embrace polytheism or atheism. Polytheism is a belief in many gods. Some think that the God of the Old Testament is mean, while the God of the New Testament is merciful. No, there are not two gods. There is only one God.

And the God of the Old Testament is indeed the God of the New Testament. So we have one God and we have one word.

In 2006, a man by the name of Richard Dawkins published a book entitled "The God Delusion," contending that a supernatural creator does not exist and that all religious faith is nothing more than a delusion. Here is an exact quote from Richard Dawkins: "The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it, a petty, unjust, unforgiving control freak, a vindictive, bloodthirsty, ethnic cleanser, a misogynistic,

homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully."

Really? First, he said, and I quote, "the God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction." So he says the Bible is fiction. It is not even the Word of God to him.

Secondly, since Dawkins is an atheist, there is no way in the world that he can understand the Bible. There is no way that he can even sense God, because the Bible says in 1 Corinthians 2:14, "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." Fallen man does not have the ability in and of himself to perceive or understand the Word of God. In reality, when Dawkins describes his view of God, he is describing himself in the pride and arrogancy of his depraved and fallen heart.

God is immutable. God does not change. Hence, there is the same message in the Old Testament as in the New Testament. Since God is one, His message is one. When you look at Ezekiel chapter 14, you find that the message God gave to Israel in the Old Testament is the same message He gives to the church in the New Testament.

The Command to Remember (Ezekiel 14:1-5)

First, look at the first five verses, because here is a command to remember: “Then came certain of the elders of Israel unto me, and sat before me. And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their heart, and put the stumbling block of their iniquity before their face. Should I be inquired of at all by them? Therefore speak unto them, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God: Every man of the house of Israel that setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to the prophet, I the Lord will answer him that cometh according to the multitude of his idols; that I may take the house of Israel in their own heart, because they are estranged from me through their idols.”

Our Lord is commanding them to remember their rebellion, idolatry, wickedness, and sin. They despised Him, refused Him, disobeyed Him, and chose idols over Him. They were estranged from

Him. Now, in their trouble and desperation, they came to Ezekiel asking for help.

Ezekiel was a priest turned prophet in Babylon. These people were in the first captivity; they were already in Babylon. Now they came to Ezekiel wanting to know about God speaking to them. They were in trouble and desperation, and wished to inquire of God. God said, "Look, no, I'm not gonna be inquired of by you."

David enunciated this principle very clearly in Psalm 66:18: "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." These people certainly had iniquity, idols, and abominations. God said, "I'm not going to be inquired of by you."

It was not as though they had not been warned. They were warned by God Himself in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, and by the prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah preached to these people over and over, but they refused to listen. God sent messenger after messenger. Hold Ezekiel 14, but turn back.

SCRIPTURE READING - Jeremiah 25:4; 29:19; 32:32-33; 35:15; 44:4 (KJV)

Israel's Repeated Warnings and Refusal

Let me show you this. In Jeremiah 25, verse 4, the Bible says: "And the Lord hath sent unto you all his servants the prophets, rising early and sending them; but ye have not hearkened, nor inclined your ear to hear." God said, "I sent my servants the prophets and warned you, but you would not listen. You would not hear."

Look in Jeremiah chapter 29 and verse 19. Again, God says it like this: "Because they have not hearkened to my word, saith the Lord, which I sent unto them by my servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them; but ye would not hear, saith the Lord." You would not hear.

Look in your Bibles to Jeremiah chapter 32 and verse 33. In fact, let us read verse 32: "Because of all the evil of the children of Israel and of the children of Judah, which they have done to provoke me to anger, they, their kings, their princes, their priests, and their prophets, and the men of Judah, and the

> inhabitants of Jerusalem. And they have turned unto me the back, and not the face: though I taught them, rising up early and teaching them, yet they have not hearkened to receive instruction."
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> Look, if you would, at Jeremiah chapter 35 and verse 15. Here it is again: "I have sent also unto you all my servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them, saying, Return ye now every man from his evil way, and amend your doings, and go not after other gods to serve them, and ye shall dwell in the land which I have given to you and to your fathers: but ye have not inclined your ear, nor hearkened unto me."
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> One last passage: Jeremiah chapter 44 and verse 4. Again, God says, "Howbeit I sent unto you all my servants the prophets, rising early and sending them, saying, Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate."

How many times must an individual be warned? How many times must a nation be warned? God not only warned them himself in his law in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28; he also sent all of these prophets and messengers, and nobody listened to him. No one heeded. No one heard. How many times should a man be warned? How many times should a nation be warned? If that warning is coming from the one sovereign God of heaven and earth, one should be sufficient, because he possesses all authority and all power.

I believe in my heart that one of the truths that is going to haunt the unsaved throughout eternity, and if they are able to speak, they will be saying something like this: "If only I had listened. If only I had listened." How many times have people heard the Word of God preached and still refused to obey and listen?

Now God is calling them to remember their sins. He is also calling them to remember from where they have fallen. Jeremiah 2:1 says, "Moreover the word of the Lord came to me, saying, Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the Lord; I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown. Israel was holiness unto the Lord, and the firstfruits of his increase."

God is saying, “I remember what you were at one time. I remember how you loved me. I remember how you regarded me. I remember how you respected and honored me. I remember the kindness and the love that you have shown for me. I remember that. But now you have fallen into absolute idolatry.”

This is how stupidly insane these people became: “Saying to a stock”—a wooden idol—“Thou art my father; and to a stone, Thou hast brought me forth: for they have turned their back unto me, and not their face: but in the time of their trouble they will arise and say, Arise, and save us.”

Notice that God said, “They’ve turned their back unto me, and not their face.” He said the same thing in Jeremiah 32:33: “And they have turned unto me the back, and not the face.” How is it that a people who professed to love God and serve Him, who had His law and experienced firsthand His miracles and might, could turn their backs upon God? If you could answer that, I can help you to understand.

Look what America has done. Look at the faith of our Founding Fathers, our original charters and constitutions, and the courage, convictions, and character those people had. Then look where we are today. Everyone and everything is against God, against the Bible, against Christianity, and against morality. No one has any character or convictions any longer. I am simply pointing out the fact that we have done exactly what ancient Israel did.

In Ezekiel chapter 14, God commands Israel to remember—not only where they fell, but what they fell into. Why does God command them to remember? Because in verse 6 He commands them to repent: “Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord God; Repent, and turn yourselves from your idols; and turn away your faces from all of your abominations.” It is impossible to repent unless there is something specific from which to turn. God encourages them to remember their sins so they can turn from those sins. It is impossible to return to a former estate if you do not know what that former estate truly was.

The Command to Repent (Ezekiel 14:6)

Repentance means turning from their idols and turning from their abominations. Most modern-day Christians would kind of smile and say, “Well, you know, we don't have idols. I mean, we're not bowing down to a stock or to a stone. We're not kissing the toe—we're kissing the finger of an idol. We're modern. We don't do things like that.” Really? Well, let me show you something. Look at verse 3: “Son of man, these men have set up their idols” where? Where did they set them up? “In their heart.” “And put the stumbling block of their iniquity before their face.” Then skip down to verse 5: “That I may take the house of Israel in their own heart; because they are all estranged from me through their idols. Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord God; Repent, and turn yourselves from your idols.”

Idolatry as a Heart Issue

Where were those idols? In their heart. The idols were not external and physical; they were internal and spiritual. Now you're going to say, “I don't have an idol.” Do you understand that an idol can be anything that comes between you and your God? It can be a husband, a wife, or a child. It can be children, money, a job, or pride. It can be your own will, because you want your will more than the will of God. It can be your own way, because you want your own way. Their idols had estranged them from the Lord.

In Colossians chapter 3, verse 5, God says, “Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth.” The word “mortify” means to make dead or to count dead. “So mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth.”

Here is what he talks about: fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Actually, all of these things are idolatry, but all of them fall under the head of covetousness.

For instance, if I desire another man's wife, I am not only an adulterer; I am an idolater, because covetousness is idolatry. I am placing myself above, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." I am placing myself above, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." I am

placing myself above, "Thou shalt not covet." I am actually committing idolatry in the sense that I am dethroning God and enthroning myself. If I desire another man's money, I am not only a thief; I am an idolater, because I am despising, "Thou shalt not steal." If I am addicted to porn, I am not only a fornicator; I am an idolater.

How can that be? Pornography comes from two Greek words: "pornos," which is fornicator, and "grapho," the verb "I write." Pornography means fornication writing or fornication pictures. It is that which is written, pictured, or drawn that is unbiblical, contrary to God and His law, and consequently it is covetousness and idolatry. It is fornication. It is idolatry. In fact, it does not even have to be written or pictured.

You remember what our Lord said in Matthew chapter 5, verses 27 and 28? He said, "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." There was no picture. It was already in his mind and heart. There was no writing, but God said it was already adultery.

The truth is that our idols are in our hearts and minds. They may be secret to our spouses, family, and friends, but they are not secret to God. They are idols of our heart, known to God. He commands us, just as He did Israel, to remember and to repent. There must be repentance and remembrance, or else there will be a removal. Look back at Ezekiel chapter 14, beginning at verse 7: "For every one of the house of Israel, or the stranger that sojourneth in Israel, which separateth himself from me, and setteth up his idols

The Warning of Removal (Ezekiel 14:7-8)

He has put the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face and comes to a prophet to inquire of Him. The Lord says, “I the Lord will answer him by myself.” And watch what God says: “And I will set my face against that man, and will make him a sign and a proverb, and I will cut him off from the midst of my people; and ye shall know that I am the Lord.”

So, thirdly, if there is no remembrance, if there is no repentance, there is removal. There is removal.

Now look at what God said: "I will set my face against that man." Have you ever stopped to think about what that means? "I'll set my face against that man." I do not know whether any of you have watched UFC or boxing matches, or even wrestling matches, as fake as it is, but usually two men come out to fight. They are supposed to touch gloves or whatever, and they stand there scowling at each other, making faces. They are trying to face their opponent down and put fear into him. That is what it amounts to. God said, "Listen to this: I set my face against that man." How would you like to be faced down by God?

Not only that, look at what else He said in verse 8: "And I will make him a sign and a proverb." That is, He is going to judge you so strenuously that you will become a sign and a proverb. How would you like to be remembered like Pharaoh? How would you like to be remembered like Haman? How would you like to be remembered like Alexander the coppersmith? God said, "I'm going to set my face against that man. I'll make him a sign and a proverb." Watch the next: "And I will cut him off from the midst of my people." I will cut him off. How would you like to be cut down by the mighty, miraculous judgments of God?

Listen to what Matthew Henry said on this passage. He is speaking of these men who come to inquire of God with their idols in their hearts: "He shall have his answer, not by the words of the prophet, but by the judgments of God. And I will set my face against that man, which denotes great displeasure against him, and a fixed resolution to ruin him. God can outface the most impenitent sinner. The hypocrite thought to save his credit, nay, and to gain applause, but on the contrary, God will make him a sign and a proverb, will inflict such judgments upon him as shall make him remarkable and contemptible in the eyes of all about him."

His misery shall be made use of to express the greatest misery, and when the worst of sinners are said to have their portion appointed them with the hypocrites, God will make him an example. His judgments upon him shall be for a warning to others to take heed of mocking God. For thus shall it be done to the man that

separates himself from God and yet pretends to inquire concerning him.

The hypocrite thought to pass for one of God's people and to crowd into heaven among them. But God will cut him off from the midst of his people, will discover him, and pluck him out from the thickest of them. And by this, says God, you shall know that I am the Lord. By the discovery of hypocrites, it appears that God is omniscient. Ministers know not how people stand affected when they come to hear the word, but God does. By the punishment of hypocrites, it appears that he is a jealous God and one that cannot and will not be imposed upon.

No one is going to face down God. No one is going to deceive him, trick him, or slip by him.

In Ezekiel 14, God commands them to remember. He commands them to repent. And he says, if you do not, I will remove you. I want you to turn in your Bibles to Revelation 2, and read the first five verses, because I want you to see the same message in the New Testament that God gave to Israel in the Old Testament. Let us begin with verse 1.

The Same Message in the New Testament (Revelation 2:1-5)

"Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks." Revelation 1:20 explains the symbols: "The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels"—or the messengers, that is, the pastors—"of the seven churches"—"and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches." The stars are the pastors or messengers, and the candlesticks are the churches.

To the church of Ephesus he says, "I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: and hast borne, and hast

patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted." These are what you and I would call good works.

However, verse 4 says, "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent."

The very same message that God gave to Israel and Judah in Ezekiel 14 is exactly the same message that he gives to the church in Revelation 2, verses 1 through 5. As individuals, church members, and churches, we must remember from whence we are fallen. We have left, and yes, even lost, our first love of the Lord, as Israel did.

We have turned to the idols of our own hearts in our own covetousness. Our labor, our patience, and our works cannot and do not replace our love and our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. We must remember our first espousals—the joy, happiness, love, and thankfulness we had when we first turned to the Lord. We may still labor for Him, but we have lost our first love, our joy, our happiness, and what we possessed initially. That is why He calls upon us to remember, and then tells us to repent. We must turn back to Him in fullness of faith, love, joy, and service. We must become again happy and sacrificial, loving in obedience and thankful in service. We must remember, and we must repent. If there is no remembrance and no repentance, He said in verse 5, “Or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick”—that is, your church—“out of his place. That could be individually, except thou repent.”

It is people who make up the church, and God said, “I’ll just remove your ministry and I’ll remove you as individuals if you do not repent.” Remember Eli and his two sons, Hophni and Phinehas. Hophni and Phinehas were wicked boys, and although they were priests, they were exceedingly wicked. God told Eli that He was going to destroy both Hophni and Phinehas in one day because of their sins. There was a war with the Philistines, and Israel was not having the success they desired. So they sent for the ark and said, “Bring us the ark, that it may save us”—not God, but the ark. They put their faith in the symbol instead of the God of the symbol.

The Example of Ichabod (1 Samuel 4)

Of course, there was a great battle. The ark was taken, and Israel was defeated. One fled from the army. Old Eli was sitting down; he was old, blind, and heavy, and he heard the commotion and asked what it was. He was told that Israel had been defeated and the ark had been stolen or taken. About that time Eli fell backward and broke his neck. Phinehas had a wife, and she was pregnant. Now she had heard that the ark had been taken and that her father-in-law was dead,

Her husband is dead. In 1 Samuel chapter 4, beginning with verse 19, we read: “And his daughter in law, Phinehas' wife, was with child, near to be delivered: and when she heard the tidings that the ark of God was taken, and that her father in law and her husband were dead, she bowed herself and travailed; for her pains came upon her. And about the time of her death the women that stood by her said unto her, Fear not; for thou hast born a son. But she answered not, neither did she regard it. And she named the child Ichabod, saying, The glory is departed from Israel: because the ark of God was taken, and because of her father in law and her husband. And she said, The glory is departed from Israel: for the ark of God is taken.” Ichabod: the glory has departed. Do you realize that is exactly what God has done to most churches?

They continue to exist, but the Word of God is written over the door. Think about the Church of Jesus Christ today. Most of us have been removed from the sphere of influence, impact, and importance. At the founding of this country, nothing was done without pastors and the Word of God being inquired of concerning the issues of the day, whether political or economic. Today there is no impact from the church on government, politics, economics, or anything. The church still exists, but we are on life support. Therefore, He calls upon us to remember, repent, or else we will be removed.

Let me make a couple of applications. First, we are sinners; by nature we are sinners, and by nature we love our sins. We may be Christians, but we are still sinners. By nature we want what we want: our desires, our lusts, our wills, and our way. Yet we are commanded to remember and repent.

Applications: Remember and Repent

It is very easy for us to lose our first love and our respect and regard for the Word of God when we refuse to obey it because it gets in our way. When it steps in front of us and says, “Don't do this,” we say, “But I want this.” We simply go around the Word of God that is blocking the road and do what we are doing. And we lose.

We end up being removed. I could sit here today and tell you pastor after pastor, as well as husband and wife after husband and wife, who have lost their ministries, homes, and families because of fornication and adultery. It is just that simple. We have lost our first love. We have lost our infatuation with the Lord, as well as our respect and honor for Him. So He calls upon us to remember.

I tell people that if they came to our house and went into our bedroom, they would see a picture of Alice and me. It is an old picture. Since we have been married over sixty years, neither of us can remember whether we were courting or engaged at that time. But I do know this: I can look at that picture and see myself with a twenty-eight-inch waist, wearing a size fourteen shirt and a full head of black hair. I can see Alice weighing about ninety pounds and wearing a little tweed skirt.

I can look at that picture and think, “Man, that calls back memories.” It calls back all kinds of memories. We laugh at that, but you do not know how many times I have looked at that picture and said to myself, “I remember. I remember. I remember.” You know something? That is exactly what God calls us to do: remember what we had in Him when we were first converted, and how we loved Him.

We could not get enough of Him. We could not get enough of the Word of God, preaching, and teaching. We wanted everything we could get from Him. So He calls upon us to remember and repent.

Now here is the second one. It does not take serious sins such as adultery, fornication, theft, or murder to cause us to be set aside. It can be something as simple as complacency or a desire for comfort. We do not like to be disturbed, upset, or excited. You know what the Bible says in Amos 6:1? “Woe unto them that are at ease in Zion.” It is kind of like the bride in the Song of Solomon. She says, basically,

“I have put off my shoes. How can I put them back on? I have put off my dress. How can I put it back on? I am already in bed.”

We get comfortable. We like what we like. Amos 6:1 says, "Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and trust in the mountain of Samaria, which are named chief of the nations, to whom the house of Israel came!" Notice "the mountain of Samaria." Samaria was the capital of the northern kingdom. "Woe to them that are at ease in Zion," that trust in government. That is exactly where we are today. We have allowed the government to take over and to steal God's honor and God's glory in so many areas.

We gave it to them. We no longer want to take care of our own elderly parents; we want the government to do it. We do not want to take care of our sick family; we want the government to do it. We do not want to help those family members who have fallen on hard times; we want the government to do it. "Woe to them that are at ease in Zion," unconcerned about the truths of God, the justice of God, the judgments of God, and the mercy of God, and who trust in the mountain of Samaria.

The average Christian today really knows nothing about trusting the Lord. That may be one reason we are facing such hard times. Probably we will face much harder times, so that we can learn once again to trust in the Lord with all our heart, lean not to our own understanding, and in all our ways acknowledge Him. But He calls upon us to remember and to repent, or else He will remove us.

We have one God. We have one law. We have one Bible. It is the same message from Genesis to Revelation: Remember and repent.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank You for Your word and for Your truth. We pray, Lord, that You would help us to remember. Help us to repent. Help us, Father, to turn from our covetous hearts unto Thee, to trust in Thee. And, Lord, call us back to our first love. May, Father, You hold first place in our lives. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 46

For The Lord's Sake

SCRIPTURE READING - Daniel 9:12-19 (KJV)

Introduction and Review of Daniel's Solemn Beseeching

Daniel 9:12: "And he has confirmed his words, which he spake against us, and against our judges that judged us, and by bringing upon us a great evil: for under the whole heaven hath not been done as hath been done upon Jerusalem. As it is written in the law of Moses, all this evil is come upon us: yet made we not our prayer before the Lord our God, that we might turn from our iniquities, and understand thy truth. Therefore hath the Lord watched upon the evil, and brought it upon us: for the Lord our God is righteous in all his works which he doeth: for we obeyed not his voice. And now, O Lord our God, that hast brought thy people forth out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and hast gotten thee renown, as at this day; we have sinned, we have done wickedly."

"O Lord, according to all thy righteousness, I beseech thee, let thine anger and thy fury be turned away from thy city

> Jerusalem, thy holy mountain: because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and thy people are become a reproach to all that are about us."
>
> "Now therefore, O our God, hear the prayer of thy servant, and his supplications, and cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord's sake. O my God, incline thine ear, and hear; open thine eyes, and behold our desolations, and the city which is called by thy name: for we do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousnesses, but for thy great mercies."
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> "O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for thine own sake, O my God: for thy city and thy people are called by thy name."
>
> Last week I brought a message concerning where we should begin as a nation. Daniel was in captivity in Babylon, and Babylon had been captured by the Medo-Persian Empire. Daniel understood by the reading of the book of Jeremiah, and probably other prophets as well, that the captivity was supposed to last 70 years. He perceived that the captivity was pretty well near its ending, and so he set himself to pray and supplicate the Lord God and seek to get out from under the tyranny they had been under for 70 years. Under tyranny there are many, many injustices. For instance, Daniel's three friends were thrown into the fiery furnace because they would not bow to the king's image.

They are in the book of Daniel. Daniel was thrown into the den of lions because of the jealousy of all the other presidents there. There were many injustices under tyranny. Babylon was not a godly country, and once it was captured by the Medo-Persian Empire, that was not a godly country either. Daniel was therefore eager to see the captivity and the tyranny ended.

Two truths were especially important. First of all, there was a very serious and solemn beseeching of God for the end of the captivity and the end of the tyranny. Daniel not only fasted and supplicated, but the Bible also says that he was with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes as well. He was very serious and very solemn. All of those things

exhibited an inward desire that would be holy and would be for God's honor and God's glory as well.

Joel 1:14 says, "Sanctify ye a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the Lord your God, and cry unto the Lord." Joel 2:12-13 says, "Therefore also now, saith the Lord, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: and rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil."

There had to be, first of all, a very serious and solemn beseeching of the Lord.

Secondly, I pointed out that there was a genuine confession. In that confession, there was an acknowledgement and there was also an admission. The acknowledgement had to do with the righteousness, holiness, and justice of God. In other words, God was absolutely right in afflicting them and judging them because they were sinners. That is why Daniel said confusion of face belonged to them, but righteousness belonged unto God.

Then, in the admission, as we look through Daniel chapter 9, we see over and over that they had sinned and rebelled. They refused to listen to the prophets, and they refused to hear the Word of God. So I want to continue with this thought, but develop it from a little different perspective: Daniel was beseeching the Lord, confessing, admitting, asking, and beseeching all these things for the Lord's sake.

The Centrality of God's Honor and Glory

That is simply for God's honor and God's glory. Everything revolves around God. Man is not the center of the universe; God is the center. It is true that many times—in fact, all the time—God does indeed do things for our good, yet primarily and objectively, He does things also for His own honor and glory. So let me give you a couple of verses to begin with.

The first one is Revelation chapter 4 and verse 11. There the Word of God says, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour

and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created."

Now, the word "pleasure" is the Greek word thelema, from which we get the word "will" many times, or "purpose" sometimes as well. So literally, all things were created for God's honor and glory, according to His will and according to His purpose.

Now, there is another verse that will help tie this together for us, and that is Romans chapter 11 and verse 36. In that passage the Bible says, "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen." So, of Him—that is, originally; through Him—that is, providentially; and to Him—that is, ultimately—are all things. In other words, all things are so that God may be glorified.

Now, God is not only good; God is the chief good. You might ask the question, Why are all things done for God's honor and God's glory? The answer is, because God is the chief good. Since He is the chief good, He has to live for Himself, because if He did not, since we are not good—"there is none good, no, not one," says the Word of God—then obviously He would not be living for the chief good.

In Mark chapter 10, the rich young ruler came running to the Lord Jesus, knelt before Him, and said, "Good Master, what must I do that I may inherit eternal life?" Jesus Christ said, "Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is, God." Our Lord was saying, "If I'm good, then I'm God. And if I'm God, you don't come running into my presence demanding something of me." Truly, then, God is indeed the chief good. That is for sure.

There are many terms in the Bible that are synonymous in their meanings. You will find them all through the Bible: "for the Lord's sake," "for his name's sake," "for thy great name's sake," "for thy truth's sake," and "for thy honor's sake." They may be different terms, but they refer to the same principle. At times, you can read Scripture where these terms are not used, but you can see the same principle in those passages.

Biblical Examples of Praying for God's Sake

Psalm 138 and verse 2 gives an example. David said, "I will worship toward thy holy temple, and praise thy name for thy lovingkindness and for thy truth: for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name." Thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name. In other words, here is the truth's sake; here is God's honor, for His honor's sake. If the Word of God ever failed, then God would basically cease to be God. He has magnified His word above His name.

Now, hold Daniel chapter 9, but turn back in your Bibles to Exodus chapter 32. I want to show you how this works out in Moses's prayer. Although he does not use any of these terms, you can see the same principle in this prayer. Israel had sinned against God, made the golden calf, and worshiped it. Moses came down from the mountain, broke the law of God that had been given unto him, and was very upset. So God basically tells Moses, "Step aside."

The Lord said unto Moses, “I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiffnecked people: Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation.”

Moses besought the Lord his God, and said, “Lord, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people, which thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt with great power, and with a mighty hand? Wherefore should the Egyptians speak, and say, For mischief did he bring them out, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou swarest by thine own self, and saidst unto them, I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have spoken of will I give unto your seed, and they shall inherit it for ever.” And the Lord repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people.

Note this prayer. Nothing in it uses the terms “for the Lord’s sake,” “for the truth’s sake,” or “for his honor’s sake.” Yet that is exactly what Moses is talking about. He is saying, “Lord, you brought this people out. Your honor and your glory are involved. You cannot just drop them or kill them, because the Egyptians will say, ‘You

brought them out, but you were not able to bring them in.' Moreover, Lord, here is your word. You said to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; you promised." Thus Moses is once again asking for the Lord's sake.

This term is used many times in different ways. For instance, in 2 Chronicles chapter 6, Solomon is dedicating the temple and offers a prayer. In verses 32 and 33, he says:

"Moreover concerning the stranger, which is not of thy people Israel, but is come from a far country for thy great name's sake, and thy mighty hand, and thy stretched out arm; if they come and pray in this house; then hear thou from the heavens, even from thy dwelling place, and do according to all that the stranger calleth to thee for: that all people of the earth may know thy name, and fear thee, as doth thy people Israel, and may know that this house which I have built is called by thy name."

Note that the stranger comes into the land and into the temple for thy great name's sake. He also speaks of God's mighty hand and stretched-out arm. That would be for God's almighty power as well.

Before turning to Daniel 9, consider how this phrase is used in Joshua chapter 7. The children of Israel had been defeated at Ai, and I think 36 Israelites had been killed. Joshua is praying in verse 9:

"For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land shall hear of it, and shall environ us round, and cut off our name from the earth: and what wilt thou do unto thy great name?"

In other words, "Lord, we're in trouble. We need your help, and we need your protection, but Lord, if you don't help us, what will thou do for thy great name? Lord, you're the one that brought us out. You're the one that promised us this land. What will you do for thy great name?" The phrase is therefore used in these passages in connection with God's name, power, protection, and the purpose for which He acts.

This promise in 1 Samuel 12:22 should affect our prayer life very greatly: "For the Lord will not forsake his people for his great name's sake: because it hath pleased the Lord to make you his people." That is an amazing promise. God is not going to forsake us for his great name's sake, because it hath pleased him to make us his people. The

Lord has made us his people, and this promise rests upon his great name's sake.

Notice how “for his sake,” “for the Lord's sake,” and “for his great name's sake” are used over and over. In Psalm 25:11, David prays, “For thy name's sake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity; for it is great.” Isn't that amazing? He is asking the Lord to forgive his sin for his name's sake. David does not appeal to the greatness of his own righteousness, but to the Lord's name.

Again, in Psalm 109:21, David says, “But do thou for me, O God the Lord, for thy name's sake: because thy mercy is good, deliver thou me.” The Lord is asked to do it for his name's sake, because his mercy is good. Then, in Psalm 115:1, David says, “Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake.” The glory is not to belong to us, but to the Lord's name, for his mercy and for his truth's sake.

The Theocentric vs. Anthropocentric Principle

Now, I want you to understand a very important principle. This universe and everything in our lives should be theocentric and not anthropocentric. Of course, theos is the Greek word for God. That means we should be God-centered and not man-centered. Anthropos is the word for man. So everything is to revolve around God and not necessarily to revolve around us. In fact, our Lord taught this very truth.

In Matthew chapter 6 and verse 33, He said, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." In other words, God must come first. That's why our Lord taught us to pray in Luke 11, "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth." In other words, God is to be first.

Ezekiel chapter 20 and verse 44 says, "And ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I have wrought with you for my name's sake, not according to your wicked ways, nor according to your corrupt doings, O ye house of Israel, saith the Lord God."

“And ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I have wrought with you for my name’s sake.” In other words, what God is going to do to

you in judgment and chastening, He is going to do for His name's sake. Ezekiel 36:22 declares the same truth: "Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord God; I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for mine holy name's sake, which ye have profaned among the heathen, whither ye went."

Whatever God does in redemption, in providence, or in judgment, He does for His name's sake. He does it for His own honor and glory. Now, does He not also do things for our good? Obviously He does. Clearly, He does. Romans 8:28 says, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." Yet although God works things out for our good, primarily and objectively He is working them out for His honor and glory.

Here is where we mess up in our prayer life so many times: our prayers normally center upon ourselves, our needs, our wants, and our desires. Here is a good question: When is the last time you asked anything for the Lord's sake—for His truth's sake, for His own honor and glory?

Contemporary Tyranny and the Wrong Motivation for Liberty

Let me put this in the context of Daniel chapter 9. Daniel was tired of the tyranny. He wanted the captivity to come to an end, and he set himself to beseech God in a very serious and solemn way. He made his confession, with acknowledgement and admission in that confession.

Are we at that state yet? Are we where we should be, in the sense that we have become tired of tyranny, wickedness, and injustice? Are we tired of tyranny, inflation, bureaucrats, bureaucracy, three-letter agencies, and rules and regulations over which we have no control, and over people whom we never elected? Now they are ruling and reigning over us and demanding things that are not only unscriptural but unconstitutional.

I am fixing to give you three quotes, and I want you to think about this. Last week, I talked about economic tyranny, and then personal, or government and political, tyranny. This first quote is from Robert

E. Byrd, who was Speaker of the House in 1910. You know the Federal Reserve Act was enacted in 1913. It was being tossed around in 1910, and Robert Byrd gave this warning of what would happen if Congress did indeed pass the Federal Reserve Act.

So here's what he said: "Our hands from Washington will be stretched out and placed upon every man's business. The eye of the federal inspector will be in every man's counting house. The law will of necessity have inquisitorial features. It will provide penalties. It will create complicated machinery. Under it, men will be hauled into courts distant from their homes. Heavy fines imposed by distant and unfamiliar tribunals will constantly menace the taxpayer. An army of federal inspectors, spies, and detectives will descend upon the state."

Well, he pretty well saw what was going to happen, and that is exactly what has happened, only I would say worse. Now, Thomas Jefferson said it like this: "To compel a man to subsidize with his taxes the propagation of ideas which he disbelieves and abhors is sinful and tyrannical." Now, to compel a man to subsidize with his taxes the propagation of ideas which he disbelieves and abhors is sinful and tyrannical. When you stop and think about your property tax, which I believe is one of the most unbiblical taxes there is, why?

Because "the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein." God made everything. I don't know when the state claimed ownership of God's creation, but now they think that they have the power to tax property that belongs to God. And one of the things I despise about property tax is about 90% of it goes to support government education. My wife and I had four children, not one ever went to one day of public or government school in their entire life.

And yet, all these years I have to pay for other people to be indoctrinated in ideas that I believe are unconstitutional, unscriptural, and ungodly. If I do not, they come and steal my property. I am simply pointing out that this is what Thomas Jefferson was saying, and what Robert Byrd was saying. One more quote is from John Whitehead, a constitutional attorney who heads the Rutherford Institute.

“This is what comes from a 1.2 trillion spending bill. Someone must foot the bill for the government’s fiscal insanity, and that someone is the US taxpayer. The government’s schemes to swindle, cheat, scam, and defraud taxpayers have run the gamut from wasteful pork-barrel legislation, cronyism, and graft to asset forfeiture, costly stimulus packages, and a national-security complex that undermines our freedoms while failing to make us safer.

“Americans also pay through the nose for endless wars, subsidization of foreign nations, military empire, welfare state, roads to nowhere, bloated workforce, secret agencies, fusion centers, private prisons, biometric databases, invasive technologies, arsenals of weapons, and every other budgetary line item contributing to the fast-growing wealth of the corporate elite at the expense of those barely making ends meet—that is, we the taxpayers.” These quotes are true and accurate.

But I have a question to ask you, and I am asking this question in light of Daniel chapter 9. Why should we desire liberty? Why should we desire freedom? Should we desire our liberty and freedom merely to be out from under an unbiblical, unconstitutional scheme of taxation? Should we desire liberty and freedom, and be out from under tyranny, just so that we can do what we want, unrestrained?

And the answer to both questions is no. According to Daniel chapter 9, we should desire liberty and freedom, and an end of tyranny, wickedness, and injustice, for the Lord's sake. We should desire it for His great name's sake. We should desire it so that we would be free to worship Him, honor Him, and do that which He has commanded us without interference. In other words, we want liberty and freedom that we might serve Him more efficiently and more effectively.

Now, I want you to look at one other passage before we go back to Daniel 9. Turn in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 7, verse 23. Here is a powerful verse. Look at what the Word of God declares.

Daniel's Prayer Analyzed: For the Lord's Sake

"Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men." The word "servants" is doulos, I'm sure: "Be not ye the slaves of men." You are

bought with a price. That is what he said. First Corinthians chapter 6, verses 19 and 20, says, "What? know ye not that... ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." We are not to be slaves of men because we are His property. He bought us.

Now go back to Daniel chapter 9 and look at verses 16 through 19. I will come back and emphasize these, but consider them based upon what I have just been telling you and what he is saying. Daniel 9, beginning in verse 16: "O Lord, according to all thy righteousness, I beseech thee, let thine anger and thy fury be turned away from thy city Jerusalem, thy holy mountain: because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and thy people are become a reproach to all that are about us."

“Now therefore, O our God, hear the prayer of thy servant, and his supplications, and cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord's sake. O my God, incline thine ear, and hear; open thine eyes, and behold our desolations, and the city which is called by thy name: for we do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousnesses, but for thy great mercies. O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for thine own sake, O my God: for thy city and thy people are called by thy name.”

Do you see the impact of Daniel's prayer? He was asking for restoration, forgiveness, and mercies. He was asking for an end of tyranny for the Lord's sake. When is the last time in prayer you've asked a specific request for the Lord's sake? When is the last time you've asked something in prayer that His great name would be honored? When is the last time you've asked anything in prayer for His Word's sake or for His truth's sake?

Daniel wanted freedom and liberty, but he didn't want them just because he wanted to do what he wanted to do. He wanted to be out from under Babylon and Persia. Daniel wanted truth, freedom, and liberty for the Lord's sake. I would want liberty and freedom so that God's law would once again rule our land, and God could be honored and glorified.

Whatever God does, either in redemption, providence or judgment, he does for his name's sake.

God's Judgment as Sanctifying His Name

Yes, it is always for our good, but primarily and objectively, it is for his honor and for his glory. Here is a question: What did God do to Judah and Jerusalem? He judged them. Why did he judge them? Because they were sinners and had sinned. That is true, but there is more than simply because they sinned. God judged them to restore the honor of his word, his righteousness, and his holiness, which they had profaned.

Look back in Daniel chapter 9. We are going to cover just a little that we covered last week, but not much. Daniel says, “We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments.”

“Neither have we hearkened unto thy servants the prophets, which spake in thy name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land.” “O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces, as at this day; to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and unto all Israel, that are near, and that are far off, through all the countries whither thou hast driven them, because of their trespass that they have trespassed against thee.”

Again, he says, “because we have sinned against thee.” “We have rebelled against thee.” “Neither have we obeyed the voice of the Lord our God, to walk in his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets.” “Yea, all Israel have transgressed thy law, even by departing, that they might not obey thy voice.”

“As it is written in the law of Moses, all this evil is come upon us. Yet made we not our prayer before the Lord our God, that we might turn from our iniquities.” In other words, we did not want to repent. We did not even think of repentance.

“Therefore hath the Lord watched upon the evil, and brought it upon us: for the Lord our God is righteous in all his works which he doeth: for we obeyed not his voice.” That is, we have sinned. “And now, O Lord our God, that hast brought thy people forth out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and hast gotten thee renown, as at

this day; we have sinned, we have done wickedly." We have become a reproach to all those round about us, a reproach to all the nations.

So, in light of all the sin and wickedness and rebellion, and a failure to listen and to hear the preaching of the Word of God, here is my question: What else could God do but judge them?

He brought upon them the evil that he had promised them. Daniel 9:12 says, "And he hath confirmed his words, which he spake against us." He told us what He was going to do to us when we violated His covenant, and now He has confirmed these words "which he spake against us, and against our judges that judged us, by bringing upon us a great evil: for under the whole heaven hath not been done as hath been done upon Jerusalem."

Verse 13 continues: "As it is written in the law of Moses"—read Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28—"all this evil is come upon us. Yet made we not our prayer before the Lord our God, that we might turn from our iniquities, and understand thy truth." Wow. "Therefore hath the Lord watched upon the evil, and brought it upon us: for the Lord our God is righteous in all his works which he doeth: for we obeyed not his voice."

What I want you to see is this: God brought His judgment upon Judah and Jerusalem for His name's sake. He is righteous, even if we are not. He is faithful, even if we are not. God did exactly as He said He was going to do.

Zechariah 1:4 says, "Be ye not as your fathers, unto whom the former prophets have cried, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Turn ye now from your evil ways, and from your evil doings: but they did not hear, nor hearken unto me, saith the Lord." "Be ye not as your fathers." Do not be rebellious, stubborn, or hard-headed like them. The former prophets cried, "Turn ye now from your evil ways, and from your evil doings," but they did not hear or hearken unto the Lord.

Then verse 5 asks, "Your fathers, where are they? and the prophets, do they live for ever?" No. But verse 6 says, "But my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not take hold of your fathers?" And they returned and said,

"Like as the Lord of hosts thought to do unto us, according to our ways, and according to our doings, so hath he dealt with us."

In other words, God did exactly that which He said He was going to do. He did. In Ezekiel 36, verse 23, God says, "And I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen, which ye have profaned in the midst of them; and the heathen shall know that I am the Lord, saith the Lord God, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes." How did God sanctify His great name? He judged them. God said, "You've lived a horrible life. You've profaned my name. You're supposed to be my people. You've profaned my name. And now," said God, "I'm going to sanctify my name. I will judge you. I will let them know that I am not like you."

Now, let us try to put some things together. What do you think about Daniel chapter 9? I hope you understand this principle: God is concerned with His honor and His glory, even if His creatures are not. Let me say this another way: God is concerned with His honor and His glory, even if His people are not. God is going to be sanctified. God is going to be glorified either in redemption or in judgment, because God's great name is at stake.

In Isaiah chapter 5, verse 16, we read, "But the Lord of hosts shall be exalted in judgment, and God that is holy shall be sanctified in righteousness." God's name is exalted in judgment. God is sanctified in His righteousness when He judges those who are wicked and wrong. So Daniel is praying in Daniel chapter 9 for an end of tyranny and injustice—for the great name's sake.

The Consequence of Failing to Sanctify God

Let me ask you a leading question: Do you know why Aaron and Moses were not allowed to go into the promised land? The answer is because they failed to sanctify the Lord. Turn back in your Bibles to Deuteronomy chapter 32, and you will see where God says this specifically. Moses got to see the land from the mountain on which he was going to die, but he never got to enter it. Aaron had already died on Mount Hor. Notice Deuteronomy 32:48: "And the Lord spake unto Moses that selfsame day, saying, Get thee up into this mountain Abarim, unto mount Nebo, which is in the land of Moab, that is over against Jericho; and behold the land of Canaan, which I

give unto the children of Israel for a possession: and die in the mount whither thou goest up, and be gathered unto thy people; as Aaron thy brother died in mount Hor, and was gathered unto his people: because"—here is the reason he could not go in—"ye trespassed against me among the children of Israel at the waters of Meribah-Kadesh, in the wilderness of Zin; because ye sanctified me not in the midst of the children of Israel."

God said that Moses could see the land, but could not enter it. What in the world did they do? God told Moses and Aaron to speak to the rock, and the rock would bring forth water. Moses was so aggravated with the people that he took the rod, smote the rock, and said, "Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock?" No, you failed to sanctify me. You failed to obey me, to honor me, and to honor my word. I told you to speak, and you smote.

Now you say, "Oh, that's Old Testament." Really? The same exact principle is in the New Testament. Turn to 1 Corinthians 11. Here we are talking about the Lord's Supper, and how it is oftentimes abused. Beginning with verse 27—in fact, we will read verse 27 so you can see that the Lord's Supper is involved—he said, "Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord."

“But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.” Are you listening? “For this cause”—for what cause? For a failure to sanctify the Lord in celebrating his person and work—“for this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.” Some are dead, some are weak, some are sick.

“For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.” Notice that it is the same principle: a failure to sanctify the Lord. So where should we begin as a nation? We should begin with that solemn and serious beseeching of the Lord, and with an acknowledgement and admission in our confession.

Application: Praying for the Lord's Sake Today

But it should be beyond that. We should want what we are asking for the Lord's sake—not just so we can be free from unjust taxation, and not just so we can be free to do what we want to do. No, so we can honor the Lord and worship the Lord. This is His world. We are His people. Everything in this life belongs to Him. “The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.” He is to be honored and sanctified in the totality of His world and in the totality of our lives. We need to learn to pray for the Lord's sake, for his great name's sake, for his truth's sake, for his word's sake, and for his honor's sake. In other words, our prayer, our worship, and our desires need to revolve around Him, not merely around what we want and what we think.

God is the center of the universe, not man. His glory is more important than our needs. O Lord, deliver us, as Daniel prayed, for Thy great name's sake. Whatever God does, in redemption or in judgment, it is for His great name's sake.

Father, we do ask you in the name of Jesus Christ that you would teach us and help us, Lord, to see the importance of sanctifying thy name and learning to ask for thy sake, for the Lord's sake, for thy honor, for thy glory. You take precedence over each one of us. You take precedence over all of us. Thou hast commanded us to seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these other things shall be added unto you.

The truth is, Lord, we're so carnal, we're so fleshly, we're so faithless that we fail to see how great thou art. We acknowledge that thou art not only the good, but the chief good and the only good. And we ask, Lord, that you'd be pleased to work in our hearts and lives for thine own sake, for thy great name's sake and thy truth's sake. Give us, I pray, Father, your mercy through the Lord Jesus Christ, so that he might be honored and glorified. Amen.

CHAPTER 47

Is it Possible to Know Jesus and Not Be Saved

Is It Possible to Know Jesus Christ and Not Be Saved?

Introduction: The Question and Three Groups

Open your Bibles, if you would please, to the book of James, chapter 2, and we are going to be looking at verse 19. I am going to give you the title of the sermon, although the title of the sermon is not a question. I think you are going to find it answered in Scripture. Here is the title: Is it possible to know Jesus Christ and not be saved? Think about that. Is it possible to know Jesus Christ and not be saved? James 2:19 says, "Thou believest that there is one God. Thou doest well. The devils also believe and tremble."

The question I am asking is really an exceedingly important question, because your eternal destiny depends upon the answer. Is it possible to know Jesus Christ and not be saved?

Look upon the mass of professing Christians who attend church faithfully and regularly. Then look upon the mass of those who

profess to be saved, yet never ever darken the doorway of a church. Then there is a third mass, the mass of the unsaved. Why are there no discernible differences between these three masses?

I know there are exceptions, especially among those who are lost. I am not referring to the murderers and the rapists. I am simply talking about those lost folks whom the world would call moral, upright, and honest, who work and try to do what they can, according to the best of their limited knowledge.

Here are a couple of things to consider. Why not go into a restaurant and watch people? How many people do you see who actually pray before they eat? How many are in control of their children and expect them to be obedient? If you go into a mall, just stand around and watch people. How many are careful with the items they inspect? How many are concerned about the property rights of others? How many try to deceive and defraud the owners, and how many will return money when it has been miscounted? We could ask any church member who professes to know Jesus Christ and carefully listen to the answer: “Do you really know the Lord Jesus Christ?” Ask any church member how his life differs from that of the unsaved, how the law of God has made a difference in his life, and how he applies the law of God to every area of life. You can also ask any church member to explain biblical doctrine—any biblical doctrine.

If he stutters and stammers and cannot think of any, perhaps you could suggest the doctrine of justification by faith alone or the doctrine of the imputation. The point I am trying to make is rather obvious. Obviously, the unsaved usually cannot answer any doctrinal questions. The truth of the matter is that most professing Christians, whether those who are regular attenders at church or those who simply profess, usually cannot answer any of the questions either.

The Meaning of 'Believe' and 'Know'

When I ask this leading question, “Is it possible to know Jesus Christ and not be saved?” you have to understand that there are definitions of the word “know.” There are different ways that word is used. There is also a difference in the way the word “believe” happens to be

used. Unhappily, most people cannot discern the differences even in Scripture concerning how those terms are used.

Look back at James 2:19. Look what he said: “Thou believest that there is one God. Thou doest well, the devils also believe and tremble.” The interesting thing is that the word “believe” both times is the same Greek word, pisteuo. It means to think to be true, to be persuaded to be true, or to place confidence in, and it is used both in a moral and in a religious sense.

So here is the crux of the matter. The word may be used to convey a saving belief in the Lord Jesus Christ, and it can also be used simply as a mere acknowledgement of some fact or facts or some event, which is nothing more than an intellectual faith.

There are even what I would call degrees or intensities in intellectual knowledge. Let me give you a good illustration. Everyone in this room knows for an absolute fact that he is going to die. You do not know when, but you know for a fact that you are going to die. The truth is, most people hardly ever think about dying, and most of us do not want to think about dying, that is for sure. But although we know that we are going to die, if you knew absolutely for sure that you were going to die within the next ten minutes, I think your knowledge of death would be intensified. I think the degree of that knowledge would be heightened, or jacked up. You would realize that you simply do not have much time left. So the word “believe” in this passage in James 2:19 can be used of true saving faith, but it can also be used of mere intellectual knowledge.

A Demon's Faith (James 2:19)

Now, the interesting thing is in verse 19, God says, "Thou believest that there is one God. Thou doest well. The devils or the demons also believe and tremble." Now, the Greek word for "tremble" is the word phrisso. So it literally means to shudder. It means to be struck with fear. It literally means to be horrified. So the Bible is telling us they believe and they are absolutely horrified.

So, first of all, I'm going to give you three things today. But first one, in verse 19 is what I'm going to call a demon's faith. Surely and clearly there is such a thing as a demon's faith. For he said in verse

19, "Thou believest that there is one God. Thou doest well. The devils or the demons also believe and tremble." So they're absolutely assured of the fact that Jesus Christ is God. They know it. They confess it. And they tremble at that knowledge.

Now, we have to discern the difference in the meaning of the word "know." We also have to discern the difference in the meaning of the word "believe." And certainly the demons know and they believe that Jesus Christ is God. And yet at the same time, they are unsaved.

Now, I want you to hold James chapter 2. We're coming back there. But I want you to go in your Bibles, if you would, first of all, to Matthew, chapter 8. Matthew, chapter 8. And look, if you would please, beginning there with verse 28. Matthew, chapter 8, verse 28. Look at what the Bible says: "And when he was come to the other side into the country of the Gergesenes, there met him two possessed with devils or demons, 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?" So here the demons recognize that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. They recognize the fact that they are condemned, and they realize that their time is absolutely short. If you would turn right over in your Bibles to the book of Mark chapter 1, Mark chapter 1, and look if you would please at verses 23 and 24.

Mark 1:23–24 says, “And there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, a demon, and he cried out, saying, 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.” Look at that confession and what he knows. He knows absolutely that Jesus Christ is indeed the Holy One of God. Verse 34 says, “And he, that is Jesus Christ, healed many that were sick of diverse diseases and cast out many devils, and suffered not the devils or the demons to speak, because they knew him.” They knew that Jesus Christ was God in the flesh.

Mark 5:1 says, “And they came over to the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gadarenes. And when he was come out of the ship, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit, a demon, who had his dwelling among the tombs, and

no man could bind him, no, not with chains. Because he had been often bound with fetters and chains, and the chains had been plucked asunder by him, and the fetters broken in pieces, neither could any man tame him. And always night and day he was in the mountains and in the tombs, crying and cutting himself with stones. But when he saw Jesus afar off, he ran and worshipped him, and cried with a loud voice and said, 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. For he said unto him, Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit."

And he asked him, "What is thy name?" And he answered, "My name is Legion, for we are many." But the point is this: here the demon is saying, "We know who thou art. We know that thou art the Son of the Most High God."

In Luke 4:33-34, "And in the synagogue there was a man which had a spirit of an unclean devil, and cried out with a loud voice, saying, Let us alone. What have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? Art thou come to destroy us?" And then this statement: "I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God." I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God.

Again, in Luke 8:28: "And when he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell down before him and said with a loud voice, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God most high? I beseech thee, torment me not."

Here is the interesting thing. In each of these passages where the word "know" is used, it is the Greek word oida, which simply means to know, to perceive, to look at, or to behold. It is merely an intellectual knowledge that is confessing facts, that is confessing reality.

Demons know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. They know that Jesus Christ is the Holy One of God. They know that Jesus Christ has power over them. They know that they are defeated. They know that they will be tormented. They know they have a limited amount of time. They do not even know, but they tremble. They are very, very horrified.

Most professing Christians do not even have the faith of a demon. For even though they may know facts, they do not tremble before such a holy, righteous, sovereign God. In other words, our Lord said, "Thou believest in one God, thou doest well. The devils also believe and tremble." Most people are not afraid of a holy, sovereign, righteous God who holds their soul in life. They do not tremble over His sovereignty. They do not tremble over His authority. They do not tremble over His power. He is indeed the omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, sovereign, majestic, eternal, immutable God. And we know this as facts, but no one trembles like the demons do. There is a demon's faith.

Is it possible to believe on Jesus Christ and not be saved? The answer is certainly true, because demons believe, the Bible says, and yet they tremble and they are not saved. So there is not only a demon's faith, but there is also a dead faith.

A Dead Faith (James 2:14-26)

In James chapter 2 and verse 17, James writes, "Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead being alone." In its context, he asks, "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith and have not works, can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you say to them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled, notwithstanding you 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."

First of all, James is not teaching salvation by works. What he is teaching is that real saving faith works. It is never alone. The clarification is found in the context, back in verse 14.

So James asks, “What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith and have not works, can faith save him?” Add three little words to understand exactly what he is saying. Look at it again, verse 14: “What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith and have not works, can that kind of faith save him?” James is talking about a specific kind of faith—a dead faith. He is talking about faith without works, faith that is nothing more than an empty profession.

Now listen to me. This dead faith may be based upon facts. It may be based upon scriptural reality and scriptural truth, yet at the same time it is dead faith because there are no works. Here is the passage that ties this together, or at least it should: Titus 1 and verse 16.

Consider Titus 1:16: "They profess that they know God, but in works they deny him, being abominable and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate." On the one hand, they profess that they know Him; on the other, their works deny Him. Their life, how they live, is totally different from their profession—a total contradiction to what they profess. God says they are abominable. That means they are a stench in His nostrils. They are disobedient and unto every good work reprobate.

The Scripture teaches that works do not save a man. A man cannot be saved by works, and works do not even help save him. I could give you Scripture after Scripture, but Galatians 2:16 should be sufficient. The Apostle Paul said, "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we believe in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Jesus Christ and not by the works of the law. For by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified." It is impossible to be saved by your works.

This is why, in Titus 3:5, the Apostle Paul wrote again, "Not by works of righteousness, which we have done, but according to his mercy, he saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost." He said, "Not by works of righteousness, which we have done." There is no contradiction between the teachings of the Apostle Paul and the teachings of the Apostle James. James is showing that a real, genuine, saving faith works.

James has already pointed out a demon's faith; now he is pointing out a dead faith. In James 2:17–18 he says, "Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works. Show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works." It is absolutely true that God knows our faith and sees our faith. But man does not see faith. I could say, "Gary, please show me your faith right now." You cannot pull your faith out and show it to me. The only way you can show me your faith is by the evidence of that faith, by producing good, godly,

and biblical works. James gives us two examples in this passage of how works demonstrate faith.

First of all, he mentions Abraham. In James 2:20, he says, “But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?” Then comes the illustration: “Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled, which said, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness, and he was called a friend of God.” I will come back to that word “justified.”

We know that Abraham had faith because the Bible teaches clearly that he is the father of the faith. Read Romans chapter 4. God called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees, and he left in obedience to God. When God asked Abraham to sacrifice his son, his only son Isaac, the Bible says that he immediately obeyed.

The Lord stopped him and provided a ram tangled in the thicket. He said, “I know that thou fearest me, Abraham, do not by any stretch of the imagination harm that child.” How do we know that Abraham believed God, trusted in God, and followed God? The answer is by his obedience. His works demonstrated and manifested that he had faith in the one true and living God. That is why it says, “And it was imputed to him for righteousness. And he was called a friend of God.” Very clearly, then, faith and works verify each other.

The second illustration is in James 2:24–26: “Ye see then how that by works a man is justified and not by faith only.” We will come back to that. “Likewise, also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers and had sent them out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.” James gives us a clear illustration of what he means. I do not care how many dead bodies you look at; the one thing common to every dead body is this: there is no spirit in it. When the spirit leaves, the body is dead. Without the spirit, the body is dead.

Now he is talking about Rahab, and I want you to see her confession of faith. It is a tremendous confession. She had already hidden the spies on the roof. Here is what she told them: "And she

said to the men, I know"—there is that word—"I know that the Lord has given you the land and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did unto the two kings of the Amorites that were on the other side of Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed." As soon as they heard these things, their hearts melted, and there was no more courage in them because of Israel. Then look at her confession: "For the Lord your God, he is God in heaven above and in earth beneath."

Then she says, "Now, therefore, I pray you swear to me by the Lord, since I have showed you kindness, that you will show kindness unto my father's house and give me a true token." Here is her confession: "I know, I know the Lord your God, he is God in heaven above." She knew because of what He had done. He had delivered them out of Egypt, dried up the Red Sea, and taken care of Sihon and Og. She said, “I know that,” and that He was giving them the land.

So my question is, how did she manifest her faith? By hiding the spies and sending them out a different way. That is exactly what James is talking about. The Bible says concerning Abraham, in verse 21: "Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered his son Isaac upon the altar?"

This same word is used in reference to Rahab. Verse 25 says, “Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works?” The Greek word is dikaioō, and it simply means to show, to exhibit, or to evidence that one is righteous, that one is truly what he declares himself to be. It is not saying that the works save them. It is saying that the faith they had was evidenced by that work. It was real and genuine. It was not hypocritical, nor was it merely a dead intellectual faith. It was real.

Look in verse 22: “Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?” The word “wrought” is the Greek word synergeō. It means to work together, to help in the work, to be a partner in it, and to put forth power together and assist. His works assisted and made evident that his faith was real and genuine as well. You have to remember that works cannot save us.

Here is a good illustration of exactly what James is talking about. Go back to verse 14 and look at the question: “What doth it profit my brethren, though a man say he hath faith and have not works? Can that kind of faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you say to them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled.” “Notwithstanding, you give them not those things which are needful to the body. What doth it profit?”

Suppose Steve comes along saying, “I’m in bad, bad straits.” I ask, “What’s wrong with you, Steve?” He says, “I haven’t had any food in two weeks, and I haven’t had any water to drink in two days.” You can go three days without water and be in danger of dying. You can go forty days without food, but he is hungry. I look at him and say, “Steve, I want to pray for you. The Lord bless you and the Lord keep you, and be ye warmed and filled as you walk down that road. Go and look for some other help.” What does that profit? I have given him nothing to eat or drink. If he came cold and shivering and needed a coat or blanket, what would it profit to say, “Brother, may the Lord warm you. A good way to get warm is for you to jog the next two miles down the road”?

The Role of Good Works

Your profession without the evidence of works is a dead faith. It is not real; it is hypocritical. It is indeed a false faith.

The Word of God says that works do not save us, nor do they help save us, but they manifest and demonstrate our faith. In Titus chapter 2, verse 7, God says, “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.”

“In all things showing thyself a pattern of good works.” A pattern is not something up and down, off and on. What did God tell David and Solomon when they were talking about building the temple? “See that thou make it according to the pattern which I gave thee in the mount.” That is what He said to Moses as well when He was speaking about the tabernacle.

A pattern is something that you can go by, something you can depend upon. A lot of you ladies have made dresses. You buy a pattern, lay your material on that pattern, or the pattern on the material, and cut it out. The pattern is something true and accurate, something that you can go by. God says that we are to have a pattern of good works. In other words, I want to be able to look at Gary and say, "Yes, he has been doing this for twenty-five years now, or thirty years, or whatever."

It is not only a pattern of good works. Titus 2:13-14 says, "Looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." We are not only to have a pattern of good works; we are to be zealous of good works. It should be our zeal. A good work is that which is holy, godly, right, and biblical. It is not merely what someone says or what someone makes up in his mind. No.

Paul says in Titus 3:8, "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." He adds, "These things are good and profitable unto men." We are not only to have a pattern of good works and to be zealous of good works; we are to be careful to maintain good works, because these things are good and profitable to men. They are not profitable to God. God sees our faith and knows our faith, but men do not. Then, in verse 14, he says, "And let ours also learn to maintain good works for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful." God says that we are to learn to maintain good works.

In 2 Timothy 3:16–17, we read that all scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness: "That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto every good work," or "unto all good works." Our Lord said in Matthew 5:16, "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify my Father which is in heaven." The same thing is saying: have a pattern of good works, be zealous of good works, and maintain good works.

Everybody can quote Ephesians 2:8–9, and probably verse 10 as well: “For by grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves. It’s 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 foreordained that we should walk therein.” God has ordained good works for our lives if we are his people. If we have been saved by grace through faith, we are created unto good works in Jesus Christ, and he has ordained that we walk in those works.

Any good thing in us, and any good work done by us, is only because of the grace of God in us, God using us and working through us. One of my favorite passages is Isaiah 26:12: “Lord, thou wilt ordain peace for us, for thou hast wrought all of our works in us.” Our flesh hates God, and its wickedness and sinfulness are great; therefore, when we do something righteous, holy, and godly, it is because God is working in us. He calls a dead faith a faith that has no works, a faith that cannot manifest or demonstrate itself.

So is it possible to believe on Jesus Christ and not be saved? Yes. If all you have is a demon’s faith, you have a dead faith. You may have all the facts accurately, but your faith is a dead faith.

A Divine Faith: Salvation as God's Work

There is indeed a divine faith. A divine faith is that which is wrought by God. Salvation is indeed the act of God. It is when God regenerates us and converts us. Salvation is an act of God alone, for only God can accomplish it. Man does not help God. He does not work with God. Man does not take the first step. Anything and everything in biblical salvation is of God. The only thing that man could do is furnish the sinner.

In Mark chapter 10, the rich young ruler came running to Jesus Christ, kneeled before Him, and said, "Good master, what must I do that I may inherit eternal life?" Finally, when our Lord told him one thing, "You're like, go and sell everything you have. And give to the poor, take up your cross and follow me," the Bible tells us the young man went away exceedingly sorrowful, for he had great riches.

The point is found in Mark 10:22: "And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved, for he had great possessions." Jesus looked round about and said unto His disciples, "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God." The disciples were astonished at His words. But Jesus answered 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, which is impossible, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." They were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus, looking upon them, saith, "With men it is impossible, but not with God. For with God all things are possible." Look specifically at the question in verse 26: "They were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, Who then can be saved?"

Our Lord responded, “With men it”—salvation—“is impossible, but not with God, for with God all things are possible.” With man it is impossible. Years ago, I was preaching and dealing with the doctrine of repentance. Afterward, a man came up to me and said, “Brother Weaver, you make it so hard for a man to be saved.” I looked at him and said, “Well, please forgive me because I have made a very grievous error.” He looked at me with a halfway grin. I said, “Sir, I did not intend to make it hard for a man to be saved. I meant to make it impossible.” That is what our Lord said: with men, it is impossible. You cannot save yourself; you cannot help save yourself.

There is a divine faith, and it differs greatly from a demon’s faith and from a dead faith. In Matthew chapter 11, verse 27, the Word of God teaches us that salvation is indeed a revelation. Our Lord says, “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.”

Isn’t that amazing? Our Lord says no man knows Him except His Father, and no man knows His Father except Him and those to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him. The word “reveal” is the word apokalyptō. It is the verb from apokalypsis, which we talk about in the book of Revelation. That is the apokalypsis—the unveiling, the revealing of Jesus Christ.

He says no one can know the Father except the Son reveal Him, and no one can know the Son except the Father reveal Him. In this passage, we are being told that salvation is impossible without a revelation. It is like when our Lord asked His disciples, “Whom say ye that I the Son of Man am?” Some said He was Elijah, John the Baptist, or one of the prophets. But whom did they say that He was? Simon Peter answered, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And what did our Lord say? “Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven.” The only way Peter knew who Jesus Christ was was because God revealed it to him. There are only three illustrations of salvation in the New Testament.

Each of these illustrations demonstrates conclusively that salvation is the work of God and the work of God alone. In John chapter 3, Nicodemus came to Jesus by night, and Jesus said, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, a man must be born again, or he cannot see the kingdom of heaven,” or “the kingdom of God.” Then in verse 7 He said it again: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a man be born again of the Spirit and of water, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

Each time the word “again” is used, it is the Greek word anōthen, which means from above. Literally, our Lord said, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a man be born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” In other words, he has to be begotten by God.

Here, spiritual birth is compared to physical birth. None of you contemplated, “Well, here’s what I think. I think I’ll get my mother and father to come together tonight, and I will be conceived, and then I’ll be born.” You did not get your father and mother to come together, and you had nothing to do with it. You were born at the pleasure and will of someone else. You were born that way physically, and you are born that way spiritually.

The Bible says in James 1:18, “Of his own will begat he us,” that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. The word “begat” is apokyeō, and it literally means to cease being pregnant—to bring forth from the womb. Of his own will He brought us forth from the womb. In other words, He begat us.

The very first illustration is that of birth. You had nothing to do with your physical birth, and you really had nothing to do with your spiritual birth: “Of his own will begat he us.”

The second illustration given in the Bible is that of creation. You’ll find that in 2 Corinthians 4:6, where the Bible says, “For God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” When God created, what did He do? God sovereignly, omnipotently said, “Let there be light.” And the next verse says, “And there was light.” God spoke it into existence. The apostle Paul says the same God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness hath shined in our hearts. In other words, He spoke in our hearts, and He has shined and given us the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

No man births himself, and no man creates himself. If we have a divine faith, it must be that God birthed us; He brought us to pass. If we have a divine faith, it is because God created in us the knowledge of God in the face of Jesus Christ, and He gave us the grace and mercy to receive Christ.

The third illustration used in the Bible is that of resurrection, in Ephesians 2:1: “And you hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and in sin.” May I remind you of what he said in James 2:26: “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead.” A dead man is a dead man. Why is he dead? He has no strength, power, or spirit. He has nothing. You have never seen a dead man raise himself from the dead, with the exception of Jesus Christ. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is ascribed to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. No one else has ever raised himself from the dead, because he is dead and has no strength or power.

You do not go by a cemetery and hear something down below saying, “Move foot, wiggle toe, dig with your arms, body.” No, he is dead. He is not saying or doing anything. If a man is raised from the dead, it must be a power from outside that exerts power upon him, for he has no power. That is why Jesus said, “Lazarus, come forth.” God gave him life in that tomb, which enabled him to walk out. Had Lazarus not been given life, he would never have walked out.

Eternal Life as Intimate Knowledge

Clearly then, Jonah 2:9 says it like this: “Salvation is of the Lord.” And that's true. We cannot birth ourselves, we cannot create ourselves, and we certainly cannot resurrect ourselves.

John 17 records the high priestly prayer of our Lord and shows the difference in the word “know.” This is not merely head knowledge; I want to explain it. Jesus said, “Father, the hour is come. Glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee.”

He continued, “As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him.” Here is eternal life: “And this is life eternal, that they may know thee”—ginōskō—“the only true God and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.”

Eternal life is an intimate, personal relationship with God the Father through the Lord Jesus Christ. In the Septuagint, this is the same word used when Adam knew his wife and she conceived, which was a personal, intimate act. It is also the word used when he said, “The only have I known of all the families of the earth.” Did God know all the other families? Of course. But he said, “You only have I been intimate with. You only have I given my law to. You only have I given my ordinances and my ceremonies to. You're the only one.” That's what he's saying. Eternal life is not simply living somewhere forever.

The unsaved are going to do that. But eternal life is a personal, intimate knowledge of God the Father through the Lord Jesus Christ. If you do not have it here on earth now, you are certainly not going to have it in eternity. “This is life eternal, that they may know thee, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.” So here is my question: Is it possible to know Jesus Christ and not be saved?

The answer is yes, if all you have is a demon’s faith or a dead faith. Unless you have a divine faith, you can know all the facts and still be lost. A mere head knowledge, an intellectual knowledge, a knowledge of facts, is not salvation or saving faith. Although our intellect is involved in salvation, salvation is more than a mere

intellectual act. Demons have a very accurate intellectual knowledge, but they are unsaved.

Applications and Conclusion

There are people who can recite Scripture left and right. There are people who have been taught all their lives and know exactly what they have been taught. You may know the facts and have a dead faith if there are no works demonstrating that you have a living faith. Stop and think about this. Unless Jesus Christ has shown you the Father, and unless you have a personal, intimate relationship with God the Father through Jesus Christ, you are not saved. Someone may profess faith all day long, but unless his works demonstrate it, he is merely a hypocrite and has a dead faith.

Salvation is more than a knowledge of facts, more than a knowledge of accurate facts, and more than a knowledge of accurate scriptural facts. You can be accurate and scriptural and still not be saved, because all you have is a dead faith.

Paul was defending himself before King Agrippa. In Acts chapter 26, he said, “Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth his hand and answered for himself. I think myself happy, King Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews. Especially because I know thee to be an expert in all the customs and questions which are among the Jews.”

"Wherefore, I beseech thee to hear me patiently." Paul then said, "Especially because I know thee to be an expert in all the customs and questions among the Jews." King Agrippa knew all about Judaism, the customs, and the ceremonies. He had what you and I would call a perfect intellectual knowledge because he was an expert in that area. Yet when Paul got through, Agrippa said, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." Agrippa had all the facts and knew all the truth, but he was lost.

You may be an expert in the truths of the Bible. You may know all the words and phrases, and you may speak the language of a Christian, but unless you have been begotten of God, you are not

saved. Remember Revelation 2:9 and Revelation 3:8, where our Lord talked about those who claimed to be Jews, or Judahites, but were nothing more than the synagogue of Satan. He said in Revelation 3:9, "Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews and are not, but do lie. Behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet." So you could read that basically of all the church members: we're not saved.

There is a verse that sums up this entire message: 2 Timothy 2:19. "Nevertheless, the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal." First, "The Lord knoweth them that are his." Second, "Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity." The foundation of God stands sure, having a seal: the Lord knows who are his; and if you are his, let everyone that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity. In other words, your works will demonstrate that you are indeed one of his. Your life will manifest that you are indeed one of his.

Because there is a demon's faith and there is a dead faith. But thankfully, by the grace of God, there is a divine faith. That divine faith always works, always wants to be obedient, and is pleasing unto the Lord.

So stop and think about this question: Is it possible to believe on Jesus Christ and not be saved? The answer is yes. If all you have is a demon's faith or dead faith, it is quite possible. But it is impossible to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ with a divine faith and be lost. For our Lord said, "All that the Father giveth me shall come unto me, and him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." In his high priestly prayer, he prayed, "Father, all those that thou hast given me, I pray that they will be with me forever."

Thankfully, there is a divine faith, and it is a faith that produces obedient, godly, holy, and biblical works.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to thee this day. We thank you for your word. We thank you for your truth. And we ask, Lord, that you would speak to our hearts and help us and teach us. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 48

Are You Blameless?

Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ; that in everything ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge; even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you: so that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

Introduction: The Problem of Blame

Have you ever heard a conversation that went something like this? If you have more than one child, you usually have. Sometimes husbands and wives engage in such a conversation as well. The

question is, "Why did you do that?" The response is, "Well, you made me do that."

Then comes the answer, "No, I did not make you do that." "Yes, you did. It's all your fault." "No, it's not my fault. It's all your fault." Therefore, the title of this message is, "Are You Blameless?" That is a legitimate and appropriate question, simply because we are to blame for many things.

I have often joked about marriage, saying that one good thing about marriage is that you always have someone on whom to blame things. It's her fault, and she can say it's my fault. The truth is that we are often responsible for the things that happen to us, whether faults, failures, or sins. Usually, we seek someone else or something else on which to place the blame and shift it. Blame-shifting, of course, is the result of our depravity.

Remember that Adam and Eve in the garden each blamed someone else. When our Lord asked Adam, "Where art thou? What hast thou done?" Adam said that he had hidden himself because he was naked. The Lord asked, "Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree?" Adam answered, "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat." In other words, "Lord, you're really responsible for all this because you made the woman, and had you not made her and given her to me, I would have never eaten."

Then the Lord asked Eve, "Well, Eve, what have you done?" She answered, "The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat." Thus, "Lord, it's still indirectly your fault because had you not made the serpent, I would have never been beguiled and I would have never eaten as well."

The three hardest words in the English language are "I have sinned" or "I am wrong." Very few people want to admit their sins or admit that they are wrong. We fail to take responsibility for our actions, and when we fail to take responsibility, we are blame shifting. We blame someone else or something else, or deny our responsibilities. Probably the most frequently spoken words in the English language are, "It's not my fault."

Pause for a moment and think about the sins, failures, faults, and episodes in your life of which you are now absolutely ashamed. Were those sins, faults, failures, and episodes your fault, or someone else's fault? It is easier to blame others than to accept responsibility for our own desires and conduct. But here is an interesting truth: even if someone else began the problem, assisted in the fault, or encouraged us in the fault or sin, the sin is still ours.

The Hardest Words: 'I Have Sinned'

How could it be ours if someone encouraged or assisted us? The answer is that we fail to keep our hearts. Proverbs 4:23 says, "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." When we fail to keep our heart, we are the ones who have sinned. It does not matter what someone else does or whether they encourage us or begin something. We are still responsible to keep our hearts and do that which is right before God.

Since we are to blame for all the evil and sin in our lives, how are we to be blameless? Look again in 1 Corinthians chapter 1. Notice what the Word of God says in verse 8: “Who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.” If we are responsible for all our sins, faults, and failures, how in the world are we to be blameless? We are the blame for all the evil in our lives.

God's Choice and Command to Be Blameless

Let me show you something. Hold 1 Corinthians 1, but look in your Bibles to Ephesians chapter 1 and verse 4. Here is a very interesting Scripture. The Word of God says, speaking of God the Father, “According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.” God has chosen us in Christ that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.

The Greek word, of course, is *amōmos*, and it means to be without rebuke, without blame, unblameable, without spot or blemish. This is one of the words used in reference to the sacrifices. They had to be spotless and without blemish. So we are told that God

the Father has chosen us in Jesus Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.

How in the world is that a fact? How can that be true when we are to blame for all our sins, faults, failures, and rebellion? God not only chose us to be blameless; He commands us to be blameless. Turn to Philippians chapter 2, verses 15 and 16. The Word of God says, “That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain.” Note especially verse 15: “That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world.”

Very obviously, we have the word “blameless.” It is the Greek word *amemptos*, and it means to be blameless, to be faultless, one that does not deserve censure whatsoever. It also means to be free from defects.

But in this same verse, in verse 15, he tells us that we are not only to be blameless, but also harmless. When we hear the word “harmless,” we think of someone who is nonviolent, someone who does not want to hurt another. That is not what this word means at all. *Akeraios* is the Greek word, and it means one that is unmixed, one that is pure, such as being unmixed in regard to wine or metals. If I took a glass of wine, filled it half full, and then filled it with water, it would not be pure, because it had been mixed with water. If I took gold and mixed it with tin or copper, it would no longer be pure. The word “harmless” here actually means that we are free from mixture. We are free from evil, and free from that which would be considered guile and deceit. We are to be innocent in that sense.

He tells us, then, that we should be blameless and harmless, the sons of God. In 1 Thessalonians chapter 5 and verse 23, we read: “And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Through sanctification of the Spirit, we are to be preserved blameless unto the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. The word “blameless” here is the same exact Greek

word used in Philippians 2:15. So the question has to be asked: Are you blameless?

Blamelessness Required for All Believers

Are you sanctified in spirit, soul, and body? According to this Scripture, that is what makes us blameless through sanctification. We are talking about being blameless. A few more passages will show us this truth, including 1 Timothy chapter 3, verses 1 and 2.

"This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach." Before going farther, note that he says a bishop must be blameless. An elder, a bishop, and a pastor are all one man. They are simply three descriptions of the individual or of his work.

When he is referred to as an elder, the word is *presbyteros*. The Hebrew word is *zaqen*, and it literally means a bearded one, someone who is of age. That is why they are called elders. That is why Scripture says, "Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil." The elder is the man. The bishop is his office. The word pastor comes from shepherd; that is the description of his work. They are one and the same: one describes the man, one describes his office, and one describes his work.

The bishop, the elder, and the pastor must be blameless. Now skip down to verse 10, because we are talking about deacons, not just pastors. He says, "And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless." Turn over to 1 Timothy chapter 5 and verse 7. This is in regard to widows: rebuking not an elder, entreating elder women as mothers and younger women as sisters, and honoring widows that are widows indeed. Verse 7 says, "And these things give in charge, that they may be blameless." Those are people who are in the church. He is giving direction: "I want you to be blameless. So you must do what I am telling you in these things, that you may be blameless."

In Titus chapter 1, verses 6 and 7, the reading begins with verse 5. The Word of God says: “For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou

shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee: if any be blameless"—notice, this is the same qualification of the bishop—"if any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly. For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre."

So he talks about an elder and a bishop in the same breath because they are one and the same, but they must be blameless.

Now, here is my question, and I would like you to answer it: do you know personally of any pastors or any deacons that are blameless? Well, I am just asking, do you know of one? I would really love to be able to say that I am blameless. But if I said that, I would be lying. There is absolutely no pastor or any deacon that happens to be blameless. We all have error, we all have faults, we all have sins, and we have all failed either in our profession, our ministry, or in our actions, conduct, or words.

Now there are a few who erroneously, and I would also say heretically, think that they are blameless and that they are sinless.

The Apostle Paul, remember, in Philippians chapter 3 was giving his pedigree. He said, "Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless." Of course, he also talked about persecuting the church. But was the Apostle Paul blameless? The answer is, of course not.

He was consenting to the death of Stephen. He persecuted the church, hauled men and women away, and threw them into dungeons. How then could he say he was blameless? He was a Pharisee of the Pharisees, and the Pharisees looked only at the external, never the internal. They believed that if they had not taken a knife and plunged it into a man's heart, they were not guilty of murder. They said, in effect, that they had not done these things physically, and therefore were blameless. They discounted the

spiritual application of the law of God, which Paul teaches in Romans chapter 7. Paul certainly was not blameless, not by any stretch of the imagination.

When you come to the life of Zacharias and Elizabeth, the parents of John the Baptist, the Bible tells you in Luke chapter 1, verse 6, "And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless." Were they blameless? No; you must look at the context. They were sinners like everyone else.

But remember that Zechariah was a priest. He knew the ordinances and the commandments concerning them, and he and Elizabeth kept those ordinances as they should be kept. That does not mean that he was perfect or that he had no sin. He was sinful, and much blame was placed upon him because of his sins. But as far as the ordinances were concerned, he kept them the way they should be kept.

It is not only pastors or deacons that God commands to be blameless; it is every Christian. The Bible tells you in 2 Peter chapter 3 and verse 14, "Wherefore, beloved..."

We are talking to Christians: “Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things”—the dissolution of the old world and a new heaven and a new earth—“seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.” Without spot and blameless. Scripture after scripture shows that we are all to be blameless. Scripture after scripture shows that God chose us to be blameless in Christ before the foundation of the world. God has commanded us to be blameless over and over in Scripture.

The Paradox: We Are Blameworthy

Here is my problem, and your problem: God has chosen us to be blameless, and God has commanded us to be blameless. But are you blameless? Are there sins in your life? Are there things of which you are guilty? Have you done things in times past that are worthy of censure, rebuke, or reprimand? The answer, of course, is yes. How,

then, do we become blameless, as God has chosen and commanded us to be?

Turn back in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 1, beginning with verse 4. The Apostle Paul is thanking God for these Corinthians and for the grace given to them: “I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ.” The grace of God has been given to them by and through Jesus Christ. Then, in verse 5, he says, “That in everything ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge.” Everything that we have and everything that we are is only by the grace of God given to us in, through, and by His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. We have been enriched in all utterance and knowledge; everything we have is by the grace of God through Jesus Christ.

That is why Ephesians 1:3 says, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.” Everything that we have, we now have in the Lord Jesus Christ. There is another thing we have in Him that you have probably never thought about: Jesus Christ is the depository of our confirmation.

Look in your Bibles, if you would, to verses 6 through 9. I am going to read this, and then come back and pick out each verse. Look in verse 6: “Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you: so that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Have you ever heard of confirmation? You will probably say, “Yes, I’ve heard of confirmation. I like to confirm things. I like to confirm my business deals. I like to confirm gossip. I like to confirm dates. I like to confirm meetings.” That is wonderful, but it is not the confirmation that I am talking about.

When you and I hear the word “confirmation” used in a religious context, it refers to a rite, ordinance, or ceremony performed either in the Roman Catholic Church or the Lutheran Church. They have

what is known as a confirmation service. It is something done by the church; it is nothing more than a ceremony, an ordinance, or a rite.

The Biblical Doctrine of Confirmation

I want you to listen. I am going to read to you very quickly the confirmation ceremony in the Roman Catholic Church, and then the confirmation ceremony in the Lutheran Church. After I show you the religious doctrine of confirmation, I am going to show you the biblical doctrine of confirmation. Here is what the Roman Catholic Church teaches: “In the Roman Catholic Church, Confirmation is a sacrament of initiation that completes the sacrament of baptism. It is a public profession of faith and a sealing of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The sacrament of confirmation is typically administered by a bishop and involves the laying on of hands and the anointing of the forehead with the oil of chrism. The recipient must be a baptized person at least seven years of age.” This, then, is just a ceremony performed by a bishop and called confirmation.

In the Lutheran Church, confirmation differs slightly: “Lutheran confirmation is a significant rite of passage in the Lutheran Church marking a young person's transition from childhood to adulthood. It is a public profession of faith where the individual affirms the promises made by their parents and sponsors at their baptism.” Thus, they were baptized as a baby, their parents made promises for the child, and someone sponsored the child at baptism. Confirmation is now intended to affirm these promises made by the parents.

“Confirmation is a time of preparation, education, and spiritual growth culminating in a public ceremony where the individual publicly affirms their faith and commitment to live as a Christian. The preparation for confirmation typically begins in the seventh or eighth grade and involves a two-year program of study, discussion, and spiritual growth. During this time, young people learn about the Christian faith, the Lutheran catechism, and the Bible.”

“They also participate in worship services, small group activities, and community service projects. The confirmation ceremony is a public event where the individual publicly affirms their faith and commitment to living as a Christian. The ceremony typically involves

a sermon, prayer, and the recitation of the Apostle's Creed. The individual is also given a Bible verse or a special blessing from the church."

So, in the Roman Catholic Church and in the Lutheran Church, confirmation is a rite, a ceremony, if you want to call it an ordinance. It is something that the church does and places its approval upon the one who goes through that confirmation service. They are saying that they agree to live as a Christian. But, of course, you cannot live as a Christian unless you are a Christian. This is viewed as a religious ceremony.

Now look in 1 Corinthians chapter 1 and verse 6. Here is the biblical doctrine of confirmation. The Bible says, "Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you." Confirmation is not something done by the church. It is not something done by a bishop or a preacher. It is something done by God, the Holy Spirit, even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you. First of all, the word "confirmed" is the Greek word *bebaioō*. It means to confirm and to establish.

Secondly, this word is an aorist passive indicative. An aorist means it happened one time. The passive voice represents the subject as the recipient of the action; he is not doing the action. The indicative means it is a fact and is true. We could say, "The boy was hit by a ball." The boy was passive. He was just standing there, and the ball hit him. He was the recipient of the action.

So here, in verse 6, you have, "Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you." We Christians were the recipients of the action: God the Holy Spirit confirming the testimony of Christ in us. Look in Ephesians chapter 1, verses 13 and 14. In this passage you have the work of God the Father in salvation, the work of God the Son in salvation, and the work of God the Holy Spirit in salvation. Ephesians 1:13 says, "In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise."

"Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory." Now go back to 1 Corinthians 1:6: "Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed

in you." Who confirms the testimony of Jesus Christ in us? The Holy Spirit. How does He confirm the testimony of Christ? He seals us. He is the earnest of our redemption. We know that our Lord is going to return and receive us to Himself because He has given us of His Spirit. Clearly, then, it is the Holy Spirit who does the confirmation. It is not man, and it is not the church.

Look again at 1 Corinthians 1:6: "Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you." Now watch verse 7: "So that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." The Holy Spirit's confirmation in us completes us, so that no believer is behind in any gift. That does not mean that everyone has all of the gifts—not at all. It does mean that each one does indeed have a gift.

The words in our Bibles, "come behind," are actually from the Greek word *hystereō*, which means to fall behind, to lack, to come short, to be inferior, to be devoid, or to be wanting. So, what he says is that you have not come behind; you have not fallen behind, you are not deficient in any gift, waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is the Holy Spirit who sovereignly gives us the gifts that He ordains that we should have.

When you read through the writings of the Apostle Paul, he will say something like this: "But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way." Then he goes on to show that love is the greatest gift as well. Notice, there is nothing wrong with desiring the best gift. But the truth of the matter is, the gifts do not come to us through desire.

If you will turn in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians chapter 12, I believe personally that these gifts are no longer in service. That does not mean I am tying God's hands. God can do whatever He wants to do. These gifts initially were given for the confirmation of the truth that the apostles were preaching. Now we have the completed Word of God.

To show that we are talking about the gifts, he said in verse 4, "Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all."

He continued, “But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.” He lists gifts: “For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit.”

People today claim to have the gifts of healing. If I had the gift of healing, there would not be a patient in the hospitals. I would go to every hospital I could get to and clean them out. No, he said that was just one of the gifts, which I believe is gone by the wayside now. It has been fulfilled not only in Christ, but in the word of God as well. In verse 10 he says, “To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy,” and so forth. In verse 11: “But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.”

So the Holy Spirit is God, the third person of the Godhead, and He divides the gifts severally to every person as He will. My gift is not necessarily my choice or my desire; it is whatever the Holy Spirit of God sovereignly decides to give me. The word “severally” in verse 11 is the Greek word *idios*. It has nothing to do with being an idiot or with idiocy. It is a special word meaning peculiar to a person, belonging to a person, something personal. For instance, Alice is my personal, my peculiar wife, because she is the only one I have. She is my wife, and I am her husband.

She is peculiarly and privately mine. I'm peculiarly and privately hers. That's all this means. So when he divides, to every man privately, personally, as he wills, that means, therefore, that whatever gift you have, the Holy Spirit gave it to you sovereignly to fit you. I never woke up wanting to preach and spend my life teaching; it did not happen like that. God gave me the gift and the ability to preach and teach, but that was his particular gift. I don't have any other gift. Our confirmation is not a simple ceremony.

It is not a religious rite. It is initiated by God, the Holy Spirit, and carried forward by God, the Holy Spirit. When he seals us, when he confirms the testimony of Jesus Christ in us, he severally—that is, individually—gives us the gift that he sovereignly ordains for us, so that we are not falling short or coming behind anyone else. I may not have what Gary has. Gary may not have what Steve has. Steve may not have what I have.

The truth is: We are not behind each other. We have whatever God has sovereignly given to us. You can't be short when God gives you something. You can't be behind when God ordains something for you.

Confirmation Leads to Blamelessness

In 1 Corinthians chapter 1, verse 6: "Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you." We have the confirmation; the Holy Spirit sealed us. Notice, "so that ye come behind in no gift." We are not behind. We have what God has ordained, waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, so we can exercise these gifts until our Lord returns. Verse 8: "Who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." Wait a minute: "Who shall confirm you unto the end."

Our confirmation is something that has happened, is happening, and will continue to happen. In verse 6, it is an aorist passive; in verse 8, it is a future active indicative, which means continuation until a certain point in time or in the future: “Who shall also confirm you unto the end?” The word “end” is *telos*, meaning the end or termination point by which something is finished or completed. How long will the Holy Spirit continue our confirmation? Until everything is completed, until everything is totally full and fulfilled. He will continue unto the end.

Look at verse 8 again: “Who shall also confirm you unto the end.” Why will He confirm us to the end? “That ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Here is the problem: God has chosen us to be blameless, and God has commanded us to be blameless. Yet, when we are absolutely honest with ourselves and with each other, we are blameworthy. There are things in our lives that deserve censure, rebuke, correction, and even chastisement. How, then, can we be preserved blameless?

The truth is the fulfillment of our earnest expectation, and this truth should thrill our souls. The Greek word means blameless—those who cannot be called into account, against whom no accusation can be laid. It means that we are unreprovable; that is, we do not deserve or merit reproof, rebuke, or censure. This is what

God has chosen and commanded us to be, although we know that our lives contain things deserving of correction.

“Who shall also confirm you unto the end?” Why is He doing that? “That ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Our confirmation will issue forth into blamelessness. We will not be reproachable. We will not be blameworthy. We will not stand accused. We will be blameless before our heavenly Father and before His law. Hold 1 Corinthians 1 and turn back a few pages to Romans chapter 8, verses 33 and 34.

"Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect?" That is a good question. "It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth?" No one, since God justifies us. "It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." So who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? If we were blameworthy as we stood before God, there could be charges laid against us. But if we are blameless, there is no one who can bring a charge against us.

Look in Colossians 1 and verse 22: "In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreproveable in his sight." Look what our Lord has done: "In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreproveable in his sight."

The word "unblameable" in Colossians 1:22 is exactly the same Greek word found in Ephesians 1:4: "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love." "Without blame" is the Greek word *amōmos*, meaning to be without rebuke, without blame, unblameable, without spot, or without fault.

Hold 1 Corinthians 1, but turn back to Ephesians 5. Gary, I wish you'd pay attention to this, because I did not look at the Greek on it; I want you to look at it. I do not know whether the words are the same without checking. I thought of this passage, and it would be interesting. In Ephesians 5:25, God says, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not

having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." "Without blemish" is the word *amōmos*.

All right, but notice it is the same exact truth. God is saying that we are going to be without blame. The word “unreproveable” in Colossians 1:22 is exactly the same word found in our text, 1 Corinthians 1:8: “Who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.” We are going to be blameless. We cannot be reproved or censured.

Now consider the biblical doctrine of confirmation. It is indeed a biblical doctrine. It is absolutely sure and absolutely certain. We are going to be confirmed until the day of our Lord Jesus Christ—that is, until the time of judgment. When judgment comes, our confirmation will issue us forth into absolute blamelessness. We will be without blame, fault, censure, and rebuke because we will be standing in the absolute perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ. He propitiated and expiated our sins, kept the law of God perfectly, and gave us a robe of absolute righteousness. We are standing in Him; we have nothing in and of ourselves. We have nothing by ourselves.

The fact is that we are sinners, disobedient, and recalcitrant. But in Jesus Christ, we are perfect. Therefore the Apostle Paul said in Philippians 3:9, “And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.”

Now consider what I am going to call the grand finale. Go back to 1 Corinthians chapter 1 and look at verse 8. Then we are going to read verse 9. Verse 8 says, “Who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Watch this: “God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.”

God's Faithfulness Guarantees Blamelessness

I do not know if you see what I just saw or understand what I just read. Who is going to guarantee our blamelessness? “Who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ? God is faithful.” The same God who called us unto the fellowship of Jesus Christ will faithfully make sure that we

are confirmed until the end, and our confirmation will issue forth in blamelessness.

The faithfulness of God is at stake. If you and I are not issued forth in blamelessness, then God is unfaithful. If God is unfaithful, then God is not God. The Father guarantees that we will issue forth in blamelessness. Philippians 1:6 says, "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." Why are we confident? Because God is faithful. What God has started, God is going to finish.

Since he chose us in Jesus Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love, and since he has commanded us to be blameless, God in His faithfulness, through the person and work of Jesus Christ, is going to guarantee our blamelessness in the day of judgment. Of your sins, and of all the censure and rebuke that you deserve, God is going to have you standing before him blameless, without rebuke.

That should motivate us for two things. First, it should motivate us for the day we will be blameless. When you think about your sins and your sinful nature, it grieves me that I am a sinner. But eventually we will not be sinners. Second, God has chosen us to be blameless. If God has commanded us to be blameless, it ought to motivate us to be as blameless as we can while we can, by the grace of God.

That we should be holy and without blame before Him in love. Everything may be our fault, and we may be full of blame and censure, but the confirmation of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit will bring our lives forth before Him in blamelessness. We will stand before Him in righteousness, and God's faithfulness guarantees this: “But who shall confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ? God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.” Our blamelessness is because of God's faithfulness.

“Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect?” No one, because we will stand before Him in the absolute righteousness of Jesus Christ.

Father, we bow to Thee and thank You for Your Word and truth; for the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, our propitiation, who expiated our sins; and for the work of the Holy Spirit, who confirms and seals us and works in us, through us, and by us. We thank You for Your faithfulness, guaranteeing that You, who began a good work in us, will perform it until the day of the Lord Jesus Christ. We give Thee praise and honor in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

CHAPTER 49

Preaching That Will Get You Killed

Today is normally recognized as Mother's Day, although I am not going to be preaching a Mother's Day sermon. One of my favorite stories that I read a long time ago was about a little boy. He was in school, and the teacher was teaching math. She asked Johnny, "Johnny, there's you and your sister, mother and dad, and your mother has a pie and she cuts the pie into eight pieces. Now Johnny, how many pieces are you going to get?" The little boy answered, "Three." The teacher looked at him and said, "Johnny, you don't know your math." He said, "Yes, ma'am, I do know my math, but you just don't know my mother, because she would get two pieces and then she would say she only wanted one just so I could have three."

That's the way mothers are, and I am thankful. The title of the message is "Preaching That Will Get You Killed."

Luke chapter 4, verse 15: "And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all. And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read. And there was delivered

unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears."

"And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. And they said, Is not this Joseph's son? And he said unto them, Ye will surely say unto me this proverb, Physician, heal thyself: whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in thy country. And he said, Verily I say unto you, No prophet is accepted in his own country."

“But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; but unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian.”

“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.”

Introduction: The Danger of Preaching

The title of the message is “Preaching That Will Get You Killed.” We hardly ever consider what you and I would call the dangers of preaching. In fact, most professing Christians and most preachers would give a very hearty laugh at even the thought of preaching being a dangerous occupation. However, it was certainly dangerous for a number of preachers in the Word of God, as well as for our Lord.

Before we look at Luke chapter 4, let me show you what I am talking about. Look back in your Bibles to Jeremiah chapter 18, verse 18, and see how they were plotting and conniving against Jeremiah the prophet. You remember that Jeremiah is known as the weeping prophet, for he wept constantly for his people. In Jeremiah 18:18, the people said: "Then said they, Come, and let us devise devices against Jeremiah." They planned and schemed however they could to stop him. They said, "For the law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet," although Jeremiah said that was what was going to happen. Then they said, "Come, and let us smite him with the tongue, and let us not give heed to any of his words." In other words, we will lie about him, slander him, and gossip. We will say things that are absolutely false. But one thing we are not going to do is listen to any of his words.

Jeremiah was preaching that God was going to destroy Judah and Jerusalem. In Jeremiah 26:11, the priests and the prophets said to the princes and all the people, "This man is worthy to die; for he hath prophesied against this city, as ye have heard with your ears."

Then Jeremiah answered, "The LORD sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city all the words that ye have heard. Therefore now amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the LORD your God; and the LORD will repent him of the evil that he hath pronounced against you."

He continued, "As for me, behold, I am in your hand: do with me as seemeth good and meet unto you. But know ye for certain, that if ye put me to death, ye shall surely bring innocent blood upon yourselves, and upon this city, and upon the inhabitants thereof: for of a truth the LORD hath sent me unto you to speak all these words in your ears."

Biblical Examples of Preachers Killed

They wanted to kill him because of his preaching. In Jeremiah 38:4, the princes said unto the king, "We beseech thee, let this man be put to death: for thus he weakeneth the hands of the men of war that remain in this city, and the hands of all the people, in speaking such words unto them: for this man seeketh not the welfare of this people, but the hurt." Jeremiah was telling them that, if they wanted to live,

they should surrender to the king of Assyria. But they said, “Oh, he deserves to die. He’s weakening the hands of the people.”

In the same chapter, Jeremiah is speaking to Zedekiah the king: “Then Jeremiah said unto Zedekiah, If I declare it unto thee, wilt thou not surely put me to death? and if I give thee counsel, wilt thou not hearken unto me?” In other words, “If I tell you what is going to happen, you will kill me. And if I tell you what is going to happen, you will not listen to me.”

Notice verse 16: “So Zedekiah the king sware secretly unto Jeremiah, saying, As the LORD liveth, that made us this soul, I will not put thee to death, neither will I give thee into the hand of these men that seek thy life.” Yet when the men who wanted Jeremiah to die came to the king, after the king had promised that he would not put him to death, Zedekiah said, in effect, “Who am I to resist you? You are the ones in control, and not me.” Of course, they did not get to put Jeremiah to death, but I am simply pointing out the fact.

You have to remember that, I think in Jeremiah 26, Uriah the prophet, who was preaching and teaching the very same truths Jeremiah was preaching, was sought for and fled to Egypt. King Zedekiah sent Elnathan and several other men to bring him back. They captured him, brought him back, and then the king slew him with a sword himself.

So we know that Jeremiah was threatened with death, and we know that Uriah was put to death. Did you know that Isaiah was also put to death? Tradition says—and I understand that this is tradition—that Isaiah was sawn asunder. I cannot prove that Isaiah was sawn asunder, but I can prove that a lot of people were sawn asunder.

Hebrews 11, beginning with verse 32, says: “And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, 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. The tradition is that they put Isaiah in a hollow tree trunk and then sawed the trunk apart with Isaiah in it. That is how they did the sawing of people in two back in those days.

Modern Dangers and Church Security

The truth is this: Keith Graves is a retired thirty-year cop, twenty of those years with SWAT, and he has taught interrogation techniques. His main ministry is now teaching Christians church-security teams. Every week, he gives you, free of charge, everything happening in this country among the preachers and churches, and also out of the country. You would be absolutely astounded to read what is happening.

In fact, he recently put out a video where a man walked into a church while the preacher was preaching, pointed a pistol at him, and pressed the trigger. Thankfully, the weapon malfunctioned. The preacher took behind the pulpit, and some of the men jumped the assailant and held him down until the police came.

What many people do not know, and what I just read on Christian Warrior Training, is that Pastor William Shoneman, seventy-six years of age, pastor of New River Bible Chapel in Arizona, was found murdered in his own home. He had been there for over twenty years, well respected and well thought of. They found him on Sunday, a week ago, May 4th; his hands were pinned to the wall, or nailed to the wall somehow, in crucifixion style. This was just last week.

When you stop and think, preaching is a dangerous occupation because you can make people so angry with the truth. It is absolutely unbelievable. Even today we have preachers who are being murdered for various reasons.

Have you ever thought about the preaching and teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ? Have you ever thought what it must be like to sit under His preaching and teaching? Jesus Christ is presented unto us as meek and mild, as the Lamb of God that taketh away our sins. The Bible teaches us very clearly that He was patient and kind, and if you did not understand the truth, then He would graciously teach it again. One of my favorite passages is found

The Uniqueness of Christ's Teaching

In Mark 10:1, the Bible says, “And he 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.” He taught the same people again, and probably taught them the same truths as well. Moreover, if you still did not understand, Mark 4:34 tells us, “But without a parable spake he not unto them: but when they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples.” If you did not understand, you could simply get along with the Lord Jesus Christ, and He would expound it over and over.

None could compare to the teaching and preaching of the Lord Jesus Christ—absolutely none. He was, and He is, God in the flesh, which means that His teaching was very powerful and instructive. There is not a preacher who has lived, is living, or will ever live who can compare with the Lord Jesus Christ. All the preachers who have lived, are living, or shall live in the future still cannot compare to Him. The Bible tells us plainly in Job 36:22, “Behold, God exalteth by his power: who teacheth like him?” There is absolutely no one who can teach like God; and Jesus Christ, being God in the flesh, none can teach like Him. Now my life—and my wife can attest to this—has basically been a life of study.

I read and have read for years and years and years. What makes this really so hilarious to me—though it might not be to you—is that when I was in the eleventh grade in high school, the only book I carried home was my chemistry book. When I was in the twelfth grade, I never carried a book home at all. When I graduated, I made a promise to myself that I would never read another book again.

Boy, did the Lord pull that one over my eyes! My life has been a life of study. Alice used to get angry with me when we would go

somewhere and all I wanted to do was sit in the motel and read, while she wanted to explore, go shopping, or do something else. But that was my life, and it still is my life.

When you stop and think about the Lord Jesus Christ, He did not have to study. He knew everything instantly and perfectly, and He could teach as no other individual could teach. Our Lord could explain creation because He is the Creator; providence because He is the Provider; and authority because He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He could explain submission and obedience because He came as the Father's servant to do the will of the Father. He could explain love because He is indeed the love of our souls; sacrifice because He is the sacrifice; victory because He is the victor; power because all power in heaven and earth is given unto Him; and rest, for He is indeed the giver of rest.

When our Lord taught, it was so unique that the people understood. They said in Mark 1:22, "He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes." The Pharisees did not have authority, for He was God in the flesh. Our Lord spoke the truth. There are many people who really do not want truth. They want what they have been taught all their life, or they want their traditions, but they truly do not want truth.

Why the Religious Leaders Hated Jesus

For instance, the Pharisees hated the Lord Jesus Christ. Why did they hate Him? They hated Him because He did not follow their traditions or their misinterpretation of God's law. Look in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 15, verses 1 and 2: "Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying, Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders?"

The Pharisees asked why His disciples transgressed the tradition of the elders by washing not their hands when they ate bread. He answered, “Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?” Then He gave them an illustration and said, “Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias 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 they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.”

No wonder the Pharisees hated and despised Him. They could not handle His truth. But it was not only the Pharisees; the Sadducees opposed Him as well. In Matthew 22, He destroyed their heresy and their worthless logic. The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. Someone says that is why they were sad, you see. Well, that is true.

They said, “The same day came to him the Sadducees, which say that there is no resurrection, and asked him, saying, Master, Moses said, If a man die, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother.” This was the levirate law. In those days, a man possessed the property divided to him by his family. They continued: “Now there were with us seven brethren: and the first, when he had married a wife, deceased, and, having no issue, left his wife unto his brother: likewise the second also, and the third unto the seventh. And last of all the woman died also. Therefore in the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven? for they all had her.”

They thought this a brilliant ploy with which they had outsmarted the Lord. Jesus answered, “Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God.” In other words, where is your error? You do not know the Word of God, and you do not know the power of God.

He says, "For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven. But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." So now he has not only shut up the Pharisees, he has also shut up the Sadducees, because they were ignorant of the word of God and did not know the power of God as well.

Together, all of these rulers hated him. In John chapter 11, the Scripture tells us that the common people heard Jesus Christ gladly. They rejoiced in his teaching. But look what the rulers say. "Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, What do we 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." The chief priests were the Sadducees; they had control of the temple. The Pharisees had

control of the people. So now they had come together, and they were more concerned about their place than they were the nation.

That is exactly the way it is today. I don't care if you're Republican, Democrat, or what you are. Once you get in power, once you get a position, you're going to fight to do everything to maintain and control your power and your position. That's exactly what these people were doing. Out of all the people that hated Jesus Christ, they hated him freely.

In John 15:25, our Lord says, “But this cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated me without a cause.” The phrase “without a cause” comes from the Greek word dorean, which literally means “they hated me freely.” There was absolutely nothing in Jesus Christ that could merit or draw forth their hatred. He was the innocent, sinless Son of God, the perfect Lamb of God. There was nothing in Him that merited their hatred. They hated Him without a cause; literally, they hated Him freely. Therefore, whenever hatred was spewed forth against Jesus Christ, it was because there was no cause in Him. They hated Him deliberately, premeditatedly, and freely.

Jesus' Sermon in Nazareth (Luke 4:16-30)

Now look back at our text in Luke 4. In verses 16 through 20 we read: “And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written.” He deliberately turned to a specific passage: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.”

“And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him.” When our Lord took the scroll, He deliberately and premeditatedly opened this passage to Isaiah 61. Isaiah 61:1–2 is where this passage is quoted from:

"The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn."

Our Lord then quotes Isaiah 61:1–2. Look primarily at verse 21, after our Lord read this passage: "And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears." In other words, you may not receive this truth in your heart, but you are hearing the truth. This day is this passage fulfilled in your ears.

All the scholars in Israel believed that Isaiah 61 referred to the Messiah. Our Lord's claim was nothing less than a declaration that He was indeed the promised Messiah. The Spirit of the Lord was upon Him. He had been anointed to preach the gospel, and He did all those things prophesied by Isaiah, demonstrating that He was indeed the Messiah.

This was an amazing statement and proclamation, and the people of Nazareth were very quick to see the claim to Messiahship. By making this statement, our Lord meant that the true year of Jubilee had really come because He was the Messiah. Now look at verse 22: "And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. And they said, Is not this Joseph's son?"

They marveled at the gracious words, or words of grace, proceeding from His mouth. They were marveling at His exposition and explanation of that passage of Scripture, and they also marveled at the application, because He said, "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears."

Matthew Poole says, "All that heard our Saviour in the synagogue bare him witness of what? Not that he was the Messiah, much less the Son of God, but they praised his discourse in opening the prophecy. They did not believe in him, but they admired the wisdom and piety of his discourse. They admire the effects of the grace of God in him, his gracious words.

“But see,” he says, “the wickedness and wretchedness of carnal hearts in their proneness to take no prejudices, to choke the beginning of any convictions in themselves. They do not admire the power of divine grace that it could so far influence one of so mean an education as they took Christ to have had, but dreaming that the kingdom of God must come with observation, which it does not, and that the coming of Messiah must be in great outward splendor and glory, they stumbled at his parents, even though they were of the house of David, they were of so mean a visible quality.”

Luke 4:22 says, “And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. And they said, Is not this Joseph's son?” Verse 16 tells us, “And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up.” They were saying, “Why, this is our hometown boy. We've known him all of his life. We know his parents. Is not this Joseph's son? He's the son of a carpenter. We know him.”

Matthew 13:54-58 gives the same response: “And when he was come into his own country, he taught them in their synagogue, insomuch that they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things? And they were offended in him. But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house. And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief.”

In Luke 4:22–24 we read: “And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. And they said, Is not this Joseph's son?” How could this young man have all this wisdom? This young man was a carpenter's son. He did not have a university degree, and he had not been sitting at the feet of Gamaliel. He was, after all, a carpenter's son.

In response, our Lord said, “Ye will surely say unto me this proverb, Physician, heal thyself: whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in thy country. And he said, Verily I say unto you, No prophet is accepted in his own country.”

The word “physician” is the point of comparison. You will find this recorded in the Gospels, but Luke, the physician and author of the book of Luke and of Acts, is the only one who includes this proverb, “Physician, heal thyself,” because Luke was a physician.

The Proverb 'Physician, Heal Thyself'

What in the world does “Physician, heal thyself” mean? The proverb simply means that the physician was expected to take his own medicine and heal himself. He would not only take his own medicine and heal himself; he would also take that medicine to his family and friends. In other words, he was going to start his medical career by ministering to himself, his family, and his friends.

What was the implication when our Lord said to these people, “Ye will surely say unto me this proverb, Physician, heal thyself”? They meant: “You owe us. We helped raise you. You are our hometown boy. That means you should do more for us than for anybody else. We are your family and your friends, and we should have greater access to your favors, benefits, and miracles than anyone else.” Thus, the point is found again in verse 23: “And he said unto them, Ye will surely say unto me this proverb, Physician, heal thyself: whatsoever”

“Whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in thy country.” They had heard of Him doing these mighty works and miracles in Capernaum and elsewhere. The proverb actually revealed the heart of the people of Nazareth. They condemned Jesus Christ because of His mean parentage, His low parentage. Joseph was a carpenter. “Is not this the carpenter’s son? We know His family. We know His brothers. We know His sisters; they are all with us.” They challenged Him: “We have heard what You have done in Capernaum. We want You to do that here in this country, in Your own country, among Your own family and Your own friends.”

Capernaum was not far from Nazareth. It was on the northwest corner of the Sea of Tiberias, or the Sea of Galilee. In all probability, some individuals who were in that synagogue, or certainly in Nazareth, had been to Capernaum and perhaps had seen some of the miracles that Jesus Christ performed there. Jesus Christ stayed at Capernaum quite frequently. It was there that He cured the centurion’s servant of palsy. It was there that He cured Simon

Peter's wife's mother of a fever, another man sick of the palsy, the woman who had the bloody issue, and the man with a withered hand. It was there that He raised Jairus' daughter from the dead.

So He said, "Ye will surely say unto me, Physician, heal thyself: whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in thy country." Our Lord is telling us a truth that we use in another way. Our adage is not "Physician, heal thyself." Our adage is "Familiarity breeds contempt." Familiarity breeds contempt. The more familiar you are with a person, sometimes the easier it is to hold contempt for that individual. Familiarity breeds contempt.

So they asked, "Is not this Joseph's son?" His father was a carpenter. Where did He get this knowledge? Where did He get this wisdom? Where in the world did He get this power? Who could expect this of Jesus? They had known Him all His life. Our Lord did something very unique. Look, if you would, at verses 25 through 27. Our Lord reminds them of two Bible stories that they had known all their lives. He had said in verse 24, "No prophet is accepted in his own country." No words.

Elijah and Elisha: God's Sovereignty in Mercy

It was simply not going to happen. Then He said, "But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; but unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow." She was a Phoenician. "And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian."

Here are two Bible stories that everyone knew. Our Lord used them to show that, in these instances, God sent two of the most well-known and prominent prophets out of the country. The term "Physician, heal thyself"—start with yourself, your family, and your friends—did not apply in these instances. Jesus Christ was saying that Elijah was sent to Sidon, and that Elisha healed Naaman of Syria.

Why did God choose a widow in Sidon to take care of Elijah, and for Elijah to take care of? You can read about Elijah and the widow in 1 Kings 17. Why did God send Naaman the Syrian to Elisha? You can read about that in 2 Kings chapter 5. God sent Elijah and Elisha to foreigners, not to their own people. Why did God do that? The answer would be to put a disgrace upon Israel. There is a good reason for that.

Go back in your Bibles one more time to Matthew 13. Look again at Matthew chapter 13, verse 54, through verse 58. “And when he was come into his own country, he taught them in their synagogue, insomuch that they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter’s son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things? And they were offended in him.”

God speaking through a carpenter’s son? God speaking through somebody they had known all their lives, someone they had helped raise? This was bewildering—an impossibility.

Now consider the application. Our Lord spoke the truth. He told them about Elijah and Elisha, and they caught the implication. Look at verse 28: “And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath,”

The People's Violent Reaction

“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.” How did that sermon work out? It went quickly from marvel to murder, from wonder to wrath and wickedness, and from admiration to anger. What was so upsetting about our Lord’s preaching? Why were they ready to take someone they had raised, someone they had known all his life, and murder him?

Application: God Owes Us Nothing

The first truth they understood from our Lord’s preaching and teaching was that God was absolutely sovereign. God took Elijah and

sent him to Sidon, to the city of Zarephath, to a widow woman there, a Phoenician. The only leper healed during the time of Elisha was Naaman. Since God is sovereign, here is what we are being taught: God does not give the same aid to one as He does another. God does not even give the same grace to one as He does another. God does not even give the same knowledge to one as He does another. God is not bound by anything. God does as He pleases.

I thought about this many times. When I was a teenager, I could not wait to get away from home. Not that I had any problems; I did not. I love my father. I love my mother. My father told me to work, and I am so thankful for that. But I was chafing at the bit to get away so that I could do what I wanted to do. Then Alice nailed me, and I got married. I found out I did not ever have time to do what I wanted to do because I had to do what I had to do. No. Only God can do as He pleases. No one else. You know what the Bible says in Psalm 115, verse 3? “But our God is in

Our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased. And then, of course, you have to think about Matthew chapter 20. Our Lord told about the householder who went out and hired men to work in his vineyard early in the morning. He came back mid-morning and hired some more, then at dinner time hired some more, and again in the mid-afternoon. Finally, one hour before quitting time, he hired some more. When it came time to pay them, he began with the last and went back to the first, and each man received a penny.

Those who had worked all day began complaining: "You have made us bear the heat and the burden of the day, and you've made these last people equal to us." And the Lord of the vineyard said, "Didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?" Cannot I do with my own what I please?

A lot of people would love to bind God and not let Him do as He pleases, even though they like to do as they please. If Steve happened to be a multi-millionaire—and Lorraine tells me he's not—but if Steve happened to be a multi-millionaire and wanted to give me a million dollars, he could do so. If he wanted to give me five million,

he could do so. But is he obligated to give me any? The answer is no, not at all. God says, "I can do whatever I want to do."

Now, this is what I want to sink down into your hearts. This is what angered those people in Nazareth. When our Lord used these two illustrations of Elijah and Elisha, He was saying that God does not owe you anything. God does not owe you salvation, life, health, or success. God does not owe you a husband or a wife, children or family, or friends. God does not owe you anything.

God is not our debtor; we are his debtors. The Apostle Paul says:

“O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.”

You cannot first give to God. You cannot bring God into obligation to you. God does not owe you anything except justice, and I can assure you, you do not want that. You are in debt to him; he is not in debt to you.

Therefore, God is free to save one and not another, and to bless one and not another. He did not owe the people of Nazareth anything. He does not owe the people of America anything. He does not owe Russia anything, China anything, or anybody anything. Everyone owes him.

Here is the second truth: The lack of miracles and blessings in Nazareth was the result of the people there. They did not believe. They did not limit God; they limited themselves. They were incapable of receiving his blessings.

Application: Unbelief Limits Blessing

Stop and think about this. He talked about Elijah and Elisha. God sent Elijah to that widow woman in Zarephath in Sidon. I wonder why he did not send him to a widow woman in Israel. Ahab and Jezebel were on the throne at that particular time, and they were too busy—and all the people of Israel were too busy—worshiping Baal, murdering God's prophets, throwing them in prison, and having

some put in a cave and fed with bread and water. They were not interested in Elijah. They were not interested in his preaching or his truth. All they wanted was Baal.

How many lepers out of Israel sought healing from Elisha? None. Only Naaman the Syrian. Let me tell you something, folks: When we are too busy worshiping false gods and doing things contrary to the Word of God, God is just as free to disgrace us as he did Israel by sending his word and his prophets to another country. Thus our Lord frankly implies that if the people of Nazareth had received him, believed him, and not been offended in him, they might have seen some of the same miracles as Capernaum.

They did not receive any of his blessings because of their contempt of him and their unbelief. The fault was in them and not in Jesus Christ. What the people of Nazareth wanted was this: they wanted to see and believe instead of believing and then seeing. So God did not allow those miracles to be worked there.

The apostle Peter in Acts chapter 10, verses 34 and 35, said this: "Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him." God has no respect to this country or to that country. He sent Elijah to the Sidonians, and Elisha healed a Syrian, while he neglected the disobedient and ungrateful Israelites.

Yes. Jesus Christ is sent to his sheep. In John chapter 10, verses 15 and 16, our Lord says, "As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd." Wherever his sheep are, that is where he sends truth.

Conclusion: Preaching That Provokes Hatred

Let me put it to you very plainly: if you want a small ministry and the hatred and dislike of the people, and folks who really would like to kill you, all you have to do is preach that God does not owe you anything. They tried to push Jesus Christ over a cliff, but they failed. In John chapter 10 and verse 31, they picked up stones to stone Him.

Of course, they did not succeed because it was ordained by God the Father that He die a sacrificial death on the cross.

When you stop and think about this, God is so gracious, kind, and loving. He has given us life and health. He has preserved, protected, and provided for us. We have all these multitudinous blessings, and we do not even stop to think or observe one of them.

What did Jacob confess in Genesis 32? He said, "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant." God does not owe us; we owe Him. He is our Creator, and we are His creatures. Therefore, we owe Him respect and honor. He is our Father, and we are His children; we owe Him obedience. He is the Master, and we are the servant. Yes, we owe Him obedience and must work as He commands us. We are sinners, and therefore we owe Him repentance.

In John chapter 15 and verse 18, we often become concerned that we cannot influence the world. Seemingly, the world hates us. Well, it does. 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."

Have you ever stopped to thank God for all the blessings that He has given you? Realize that He does not owe you any of them. Scripture tells us that God left Himself not without witness, in that He did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness. So I have to confess, Lord, You have been so gracious, so good, so kind, and I do not deserve the least of Thy mercies.

Then I have to remember that God does not owe me; I owe Him. Without Him, I would have no life, no breath, no ability—absolutely nothing. Therefore, we owe Him honor, glory, praise, and worship. We are indebted to Him; He is not indebted to us.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank You, Father, for all that You have given us. We know that this kind of preaching is not acceptable to most folks. They did not like it when Jesus Christ preached it, or when the Apostle Paul preached it, and they will not like it now. But those who hear, believe, and receive will like it, because they recognize Your sovereignty, graciousness, kindness, and mercy. We recognize our sins and can say with Jacob, "I do not deserve the least of Thy mercies." Help us, Lord, to love Thee, live for Thee, and honor Thee. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 50

What Does it Mean to Forget God

Introduction: The Question of Forgetting God

Let us turn to Jeremiah 2:32. The title of the message is a question, and, Lord willing, I am planning to answer it: What does it mean to forget God? Some time ago, I preached a message on forgetting God and pointed out that when you forget Him, you forget His covenant and a number of other things as well.

Our text begins with a question and ends with a statement: “Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire? Yet my people have forgotten me days without number.” Look at that again. It is absolutely astounding and amazing how much we forget.

Oftentimes we overlook what you and I would call the most important things, or even the most important people, to us. Yet this text reveals a few things that are very difficult to forget. Hardly ever will a young woman forget her jewelry, and I do not think there has ever been an occasion when a bride forgot her attire—her wedding

dress, veil, or whatever else is there. And yet the Word of God says that His people had forgotten Him days without number.

I am sure that probably the two most frequently spoken words in the English language are “I forgot.” Certainly, we do forget, and we have to say those words quite frequently.

Illustrations of Forgetting Leading to Forsaking

Years ago, we had a good friend, Roger Bird, who was a state representative from Hazlehurst, Georgia. He told us about another state representative who was a friend of his, and, so help me, I cannot remember that man's name. They had to be in Atlanta on Monday morning for a conference and a vote. Roger went up early, but his friend did not even attempt to leave until after church on Sunday evening.

On the way up, he had to stop and get gas. His wife was traveling with him, but she was asleep in the back seat. He went in to pay for the gas, and she woke up, found herself at the gas station, and went to the bathroom. The state representative came back, got in the car, never checked on his wife, and drove off. This was before the time of cell phones, or at least before anyone had those bag phones. The woman knew where they were staying and had Roger's number, so she called Roger and told him that her husband had left her at the filling station. When the man arrived in Atlanta late on Sunday evening, Roger was there to greet him.

After greeting his friend, Roger heard how tired he was and how much he was looking forward to getting into bed for a few hours of sleep before the morning conference and vote. Roger said, "Well, I'm sorry." He said, "You can't do that." His friend asked, "Why?" Roger answered, "Well, where's your wife?" The man had totally forgotten that his wife was with him. He then had to drive two hours back to get his wife and another two hours back to Atlanta. Needless to say, he did not get any sleep that night whatsoever. The truth is, he has never lived down the fact that he forgot his wife.

Years ago, we had a family with four or five children in our church. It was Sunday night, and the baby went to sleep during church, so they laid the child down on a pew. After church, everyone

was talking and fellowshipping. When it was time to go home, we turned up all the lights and locked the church building. When the family got home, they realized they had forgotten their child. They had to drive all the way back to the church building, unlock it, and pick up the baby. The fact is, she never woke up. I was really thankful for that, because she would have awakened in a darkened building without anyone around.

Let me point out something about these illustrations—actually, the three illustrations, since Lorraine mentioned that Steve forgot her. Here it is, and I am going to show it to you from the Bible: when you forget, you forsake. It may be a temporary forgetting and a temporary forsaking, but that state representative not only forgot his wife; he forsook her—he left her in the filling station. The parents not only forgot their child; they forsook the child, leaving the child alone in the church building.

So it is interesting that the same thing is true in reference to God. When we forget God, we forsake Him. We would normally think that it would be impossible to forget someone like God, for instance, because He is so loving, so kind, so gracious, so generous, and so protective. He is the one who holds our souls and lives; and life and our times, the Bible says, are in His hand. And yet we tend to forget Him.

Oftentimes, when Christians get into a vast amount of trouble and are experiencing things that they do not even think they have ever experienced, there is a question that they ask, and you will find this question in the Bible: "Where is God?" The answer is, He is right where you forsook Him. He is right where you left Him.

Now it is interesting, as you read through the Bible, that warning after warning is given over and over. God says, "Do not forget Me. Do not forget My commandments." Morning after morning, God has warned, "Have I not warned you? Did I not send My prophets, rising up early and sending them unto you, and yet you would not hear?" Let me show you how this works together. Hold Jeremiah chapter 2—we are coming back there—but look in your Bibles, if you would please, to the book of Deuteronomy chapter 8. Deuteronomy chapter 8, and we are going to begin reading there with verse 11. I want you

to notice, please, verse 11 to begin with. There is a warning right at this juncture. Here it is, Deuteronomy chapter 8.

Biblical Warnings Against Forgetting God

Deuteronomy 8, verse 11: "Beware that thou forget not the Lord thy God, in not keeping His commandments, and His judgments, and His statutes, which I command thee this day: lest when thou hast eaten, and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; and when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the Lord thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage; who led thee through that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water; who brought thee forth water out of the rock of flint; who fed thee in the wilderness with manna which thy fathers knew not, that He might humble thee, and that He might prove thee, to do thee good at thy latter end; and thou say in thine heart, 'My power and the might of my hand hath gotten me this wealth.' But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God: for it is He that giveth thee power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day. And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the Lord thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish."

If you look back to verse 11, He says, "Beware that thou forget not the Lord thy God, in not keeping His commandments, His judgments, His statutes, which I command thee this day." Then, in verse 19: "And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the Lord thy God," and do what else? "And walk after other gods, and serve them." In other words, when you really forget God, what He is saying is that you forsake Him. This truth is evidenced over and over, especially in the book of Jeremiah.

God said, “My people have forgotten Me days without number.” I want you to go back to Jeremiah, because I am going to interpret that by showing you a number of Scriptures. When you forget God, you forsake God. This is not only the immediate context but the

remote context as well; it continues throughout the next number of chapters. Jeremiah 1:16 says, “And I will utter My judgments against them touching all their wickedness, who have forsaken Me, and have burned incense unto other gods, and worshiped the works of their own hands.” They forgot God, and once they forgot Him, they forsook Him. In this passage, they burned incense unto other gods.

Jeremiah 2:13 says, “For My people have committed two evils. They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water.” The Word of God teaches us that when we forget God and forsake God, we actually become insane, stupid, and foolish. Who in the world is going to forsake a fountain of living water and hew out a cistern, a broken cistern that can hold no water? It is like leaving a fresh, bubbling stream for a bucket with holes in it to carry stagnant water. God says that they have forsaken Him.

Jeremiah 2:17 asks, “Hast thou not procured this unto thyself, in that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, when He led thee by the way?” All His leadership and all His providence were forgotten; they forsook Him. Verse 19 says, “Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee: know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, and that My fear is not in thee, saith the Lord God of hosts.”

They had also forsaken His commandments. He says, “My fear is not in thee.” Look in Jeremiah chapter 5 and verse 7. We are looking at the remote context.

Forgetting ends up in forsaking. In Jeremiah 5:19, the Bible says, “And it shall come to pass, when ye shall say, ‘Wherefore doeth the Lord our God all these things unto us?’—why is this happening to us?—‘Then shalt thou answer them, “Like as ye have forsaken Me, and served strange gods in your land, so shall ye serve strangers in a land that is not yours.”’” Like as you have forsaken Me.

Jeremiah 9:13 says, “And the Lord saith, ‘Because they have forsaken My law which I set before them, and have not obeyed My voice, neither walked therein.’” Notice the reason: “Because they have forsaken My law which I set before them.” There are a few more passages, but pay close attention to this one. In Jeremiah 15:6, God

says, “Thou hast forsaken Me, saith the Lord, thou art gone backward. Therefore will I stretch out My hand against thee, and destroy thee; I am weary with repenting.” “Thou hast forsaken Me, saith the Lord.”

Then Jeremiah 16:11 says, “Then shalt thou say unto them, ‘Because your fathers have forsaken Me, saith the Lord, and have walked after other gods, and have served them, and have worshipped them, and have forsaken Me, and have not kept My law.’” Jeremiah 17:13 declares, “O Lord, the hope of Israel, all that forsake Thee shall be ashamed, and they that depart from Me shall be written in the earth, because they have forsaken the Lord, the fountain of living waters.”

Mark this truth down. I am going to explain it a little more fully during this message, but here is the absolute truth: when you forget God, you forsake Him. It does not matter whether you are a Christian or a non-Christian. When you forget God, you forsake Him. Now I am going to show you why. Turn back in your Bibles to Psalm 10. We are going to read verses 2 through 11, and when we read this passage, I have some questions to ask you. Look at this. Psalm 10, beginning with verse 2: “The wicked in his pride doth persecute the poor.”

The Root Cause: God Not in Our Thoughts

“Let them be taken in the devices that they have imagined. For the wicked boasteth of his heart's desire, and blesseth the covetous, whom the Lord abhorreth. The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts. His ways are always grievous; Thy judgments are far above out of his sight: as for all his enemies, he puffeth at them.

“He hath said in his heart, ‘I shall not be moved: for I shall never be in adversity.’ His mouth is full of cursing and deceit and fraud: under his tongue is mischief and vanity. He sitteth in the lurking places of the villages: in the secret places doth he murder the innocent: his eyes are privily set against the poor. He lieth in wait secretly as a lion in his den; he lieth in wait to catch the poor: he doth catch the poor, when he draweth him into his net. He croucheth, and humbleth himself, that the poor may fall by his

strong ones. He hath said in his heart, 'God hath forgotten: He hideth His face; He will never see it.'"

Why are the wicked so wicked? Why is it that in verse 2 the wicked in his pride doth persecute the poor; in verse 3 he boasteth of his heart's desire and blesseth those whom God hates; and in verse 5 his ways are always grievous, while God's judgments are far above him? As for all his enemies, he makes fun of them; he puffeth at them. How can the wicked say in verse 6, "I shall not be moved: for I shall never be in adversity"? How can his mouth be full of cursing and deceit and fraud, with vanity and mischief under his tongue? How can he continually persecute the poor, steal, and lie? And then, in verse 11, say so stupidly, "God hath forgotten: He hideth His face; He will never see it"?

How can the wicked do all these things? The answer is clear: he is not regenerated, does not have a new heart, and is void of the Holy Spirit. All those answers are true, but that is not what the Bible tells us. Look back at verse 4: "The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God." Look at this: "God is not in all his thoughts."

What is the result, or what are the consequences, of not having God in your thoughts? Proverbs 23:7 says, "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." The heart, you remember, is the mind. If your mind is void of thoughts of God, void of God's law, and void of biblical principles, then your conduct and actions are automatically going to be wicked and vile and contrary to God.

When the wicked, according to Psalm 10, forget God, they forsake Him. They also forsake God's commandments, His worship, and their responsibility to hear and obey. They forget their responsibility to confess God and worship Him. They forget that God has sovereign authority and power, that He is the absolute sovereign and supreme ruler of the universe. They do so not merely by forgetting God's person, but also by forgetting God's law.

John Trapp, an old Puritan, said, "God is not in all his thoughts. God is neither in his head nor in his heart (Psalm 14:1), nor in his words (Psalm 12:4), nor in his ways (Titus 1:16). He is wholly without God in the world (Ephesians 2:1-3). He studies atheism, as

all his thoughts are, 'There is no God,' and there is no reason to think of God."

Like the wicked, many times Christians never have any serious thoughts concerning God. We never contemplate or meditate upon His perfections, attributes, person, power, or position. There may be a few times, especially when we are in need and desperate trouble, when we briefly think about and meditate upon His promises. But very seldom do we meditate upon His commandments, warnings, power, punishment, or chastisement. Our minds are always on the world—our world—and on our desires.

Our minds are on our events and our works. I have seen people sitting in church; I can see their eyes and the expression on their faces, and I know for sure they have no idea what I just said, what I am saying, or where they are. In their minds they are thinking about what they have to do tomorrow or next week. Their minds are not on God or on the Word of God. So most people have flippant thoughts, if any, about God—no serious thoughts.

Stephen Charnock wrote: "Trifles possess us, but God is not in all of our thoughts, seldom the sole object of them. We have durable thoughts of transitory things, and flitting thoughts of a durable and eternal good. The covenant of grace engages the whole heart to God, and bars anything else from engrossing it. But what strangers are God in the souls of most men? Though we have knowledge of Him by creation, yet He is for the most part an unknown God in the relations where He stands to us, because He is a God not delighted in. Hence it is, as one observes, that because we observe not the ways of God's wisdom, conceive not of Him in His vast perfections, nor are stricken with an admiration of His goodness, that we have fewer good sacred poems than any other kind. The wits of men hang on a wing that is flying away when they come to exercise their reasons and fancies about God. Lord, we're not intent to think about God, nor content to think about God. We have our thoughts fly away somewhere else."

Forgetting God Is Forsaking God

When a Christian forgets God, he forsakes God. It may be a temporary forgetting and it may be a temporary forsaking, yet at the same time it is a forgetting and a forsaking God.

Consider this illustration in a family setting. A father tells his son, “Son, do not do such and such act. I do not want you to do that. I don’t want you to go anywhere near where that is being done. It’s wicked. It’s wrong. If you do that, son, you’ll get in trouble. If you do that, I will punish you. Son, do not do that act.” The father has given the son a commandment and warned him. Yet the son still wants to do what his father has forbidden and warned against, and so he plans and schemes in order to do what he wants to do.

And he does it. What has he just done? The first thing he has done is forgotten his father. This does not mean that he has wiped him out of his mind, but that he has forgotten to honor, respect, and obey him. Then, in committing that sin, he forsook his father—his father's authority, headship, and position. When the child disobeyed, he not only forgot his father, but also forsook him.

Here is what we must understand: when we as Christians sin, we are not only forgetting God, but ultimately forsaking Him. Forgetting God does not necessarily mean wiping everything about God out of our minds. That's not what I am talking about. Rather, many times we conveniently forget certain things in order that we may do what we want to do. We conveniently lay aside truth so that we may engage in what we should not.

Suppose I am guilty of theft. Before I can actually steal, I have to forget, “Thou shalt not steal.” When I actually steal, I am forsaking God as my sovereign authority. If I commit adultery, I have to forget, “Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s wife.” In order to commit that act, I must forget God's law. At the same time, I must forget God's sovereign authority to give me direction for my life and tell me how to live my life. If I engage in idolatry, I have to forget that God said, “Thou shalt have no other gods before Me,” and then forsake Him as the only one true and living God, and afterward forsake Him in His sovereign authority.

Here is another truth we must understand in light of this truth: when we forget and forsake God, it is only that we may worship other gods. As we saw in the book of Jeremiah, every time they forsook Him, they went into vanity. They went into idolatry.

Idolatry: Dethroning God and Enthroning Self

You may say, “I’m not going to bow down before an idol. I know better than that. I’m not going to bow down before a totem pole. I know better than that.” Understand this, and let me point it out from Scripture: when we forget God and forsake God, we may not bow down to an idol. We may not go into a hall for incense or sacrifice to some strange god. But what we are doing is dethroning God and enthroning ourselves. We say, “Lord, I don’t like what You say. I like what I want. Lord, I’m going to disobey You because I desire to do this, and I’m going to do this right now.” And so we have dethroned God, idolized ourselves, and put our desires, our will, and our way ahead of and above God.

Jeremiah chapter 18 shows us this. I have shown you this many times, but I want to show it to you again. Beginning with verse 13: “Therefore thus saith the Lord; Ask ye now among the heathen, who hath heard such a thing? The virgin of Israel hath done a very horrible thing. Will a man leave the snow of Lebanon which cometh from the rock of the field? Or shall the cold flowing waters that come from another place be forsaken? Because My people have forgotten Me, they have burned incense to vanity, and they have caused them to stumble in their ways from the ancient paths, to walk in paths, in a way not cast up.”

God said, “My people have forgotten Me.” What did they do when they forgot Him? They forsook Him, burned incense to vanity—that is, to idols—and stumbled from the ancient way. They walked in a path not cast up.

There were no precautions, no safety measures, nothing that would keep them from falling over the edge, so to speak. In other words, God is saying that every time they forget Him, they forsake Him and go into idolatry.

Remember 1 Samuel chapter 15, verse 23, and what Samuel told King Saul: "Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, He hath also rejected thee from being king." Samuel said it plainly: "For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft." What was the punishment for witchcraft? Death. "Stubbornness is as iniquity and

idolatry." What was the punishment for idolatry? Death. When you stubbornly refuse to obey Me and refuse to recognize My sovereign authority, God says, that is idolatry.

It is not merely bowing down to an idol, nor merely preferring your own lusts and desires. You are stubborn, and God says that is idolatry.

Here is where most modern-day Christians have gone wrong. We limit idolatry to foreign idols and foreign gods, and we cannot imagine ourselves bowing down to those dumb idols. But consider 1 Corinthians chapter 10. The first fourteen verses show what is being done and said, and it is important that we see it. Verse 1 begins: "Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea"—divine deliverance and leadership—"and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea"—divine fellowship—"and did all eat the same spiritual meat"—divine provision—"and did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ." Yet verse 5 says: "But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness."

Paul says, “But with many of them God was not well pleased.” How many of those who came out of Egypt was God not well pleased with? All but two—Joshua and Caleb. The rest died in the wilderness. Notice why: “But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, ‘The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.’”

The eating and drinking was before idols, especially those of the Moabites, and “rose up to play” refers to fornication. The next verse says, “Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer.”

“All these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.” There is no temptation taken us but such as is common to man; God is faithful and will not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able, but with the temptation will make a way to escape, that we may be able to bear it. Therefore Paul concludes, “Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry.”

What is idolatry? It is not merely worshiping other idols. It includes fornication, tempting Christ, murmuring against Christ, and testing Him. All these things are included under idolatry. There are many ways we can commit idolatry, and one of them is simply being stubborn. Now look in your Bibles to Colossians chapter 3.

Turn there if you would. Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians. And look in Colossians chapter 3 and see this same truth stated again. Colossians 3 verse 5. Look at this: "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth." Now, you know what the word "mortify" means—it means to make dead. When someone says, "Well, I was mortified," what they mean by that is, "I was scared to death" or "I was so scared I couldn't move." When he says, "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth," it's the same truth in Romans 6 in verse 11 where he says, "Likewise reckon ye yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, and alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord." But look at this now: "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth." What members is he talking about?

"Fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry." So he's actually classifying everything in verse 5 as idolatry: fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry. I suppose probably the most frequently quoted sin or committed sin, and those easily committed sin, is that of covetousness. All I can do is look around and say, "Wow, I'd like to have a new car the way Ron has a new car. I like that car. I'd like to have that car." What am I doing? I'm coveting his car.

I could covet someone's ring. I could covet someone's money. I could covet someone's wife. Women could covet someone's husband. You covet in your mind, you covet in your affections, you covet in your heart, and God says all of this is idolatry. Wow. Now I want to show you something. I hope you remember this. When God says, "Beware lest thou forget the Lord thy God, in not keeping His commandments, His ordinances, His judgments, and His statutes."

The Inseparable Link Between God and His Word

And I just got through showing you: you cannot sin without forgetting God. You cannot sin without forgetting God's law. It's just that simple. When we sin, we normally forget God. We forget His Word. We normally forsake God. We forsake His Word. So I want to show you two passages. I want you to turn, first of all, to Psalm 138, and then we're going to go to John chapter 12. OK, we're going to Psalm 138 first. If you look in verse 2, you know this passage—I've quoted it many times—but Psalm 138 verse 2, look what David says: "I will worship toward Thy holy temple, and praise Thy name for Thy lovingkindness and for Thy truth: for Thou hast magnified Thy word above all Thy name." So God has placed His Word above His name. So let me put it to you very plainly: if God's Word ever fails, then God is not God. Moreover, that entails us this: that you cannot separate God from His Word. God's Word is the revelation of His will for our lives.

Steve could look at me and say, “You know, Brother Weaver, I really love you, but I hate your wife. I despise her. I don’t even want to be around her.” Well, wait a minute. The only John Weaver who exists is the one married to Alice, and Scripture says we are one. So how could he love me and hate her?

You cannot say, “Lord, I love You, but I hate what You have commanded me to do. I hate what You are telling me how to live.” Neither can you say, “Lord, I love Your Word, but You sure do make me angry. You sure do grieve me.” No, it is impossible to take one attitude toward God and a different attitude toward His Word. You cannot divide God and His Word. If you despise God, you despise His Word. If you despise His Word, you despise God.

In John chapter 1, verse 1, the Bible says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things were made by Him; without Him was not anything made that was made. In Him was life.” Verse 14 says, “And the Word 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.”

“In the beginning was the Word”—the Logos—“and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Then, “the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.” Jesus Christ is the living Word of God. He is called the Word many times in Scripture. If Jesus Christ is the living Word of God, then the Bible is the written Word of God.

Our Lord states in John 12:48, “He that rejecteth Me”—that is the living Word—“and receiveth not My words”—that is the spoken or the written Word—“hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.” Our Lord is saying you cannot separate Me from My Word. If you reject Jesus Christ, you are rejecting the Word of God. If you reject the Word of God, you are rejecting Jesus Christ. You cannot divide God and His Word. You cannot divide Christ and His Word.

In Psalm 10:4, that which made the wicked man so wicked was simply this: “God is not in all of his thoughts.” His thoughts are mainly, “There is no God,” or, if there is one, “He’s not going to see me. He’s not going to hear me. He’s not going to judge me. I can do what I do and get away with whatever I want to get away with.” God is not in all of his thoughts.

If the Word of God is dear to you and close in your heart, so is God. If God is near to you and close in your heart, so is His Word. When you forget God, you forget His Word. When you forget His Word, you forget God. If you have His Word, if you have Him in your life, you have not forgotten Him. When you forsake His Word, you forsake Him.

Let me try to tie all this together by making some applications. I hope you remember the message I have preached many times through many years on keeping the heart. From Scripture, I demonstrate that the heart is the mind; it is the understanding. If you keep your mind upon the Word of God, you will be obeying the

Word of God. If you keep your mind upon the Word of God and obey the Word of God, you will be serving and worshiping God, because you cannot separate God from His Word or the Word from the one true and living God.

We are an affectionate people, but look in your Bibles at Colossians chapter 3. Beginning with verse 1, God says, “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.” Set your affection on things above, not on things of the earth.

There are multitudes of men and women who can tell you more about the stats of baseball players and football players than they can ever tell you about the Bible. You major on what you delight in. If you delight in God, He said, “Set your affection on things above, where Christ is at the right hand of God.”

The Consequences of Forgetting God

Consequences of Forgetting and Forsaking God

What I want to show you is the end result, or the consequences, for the wicked first and for the child of God secondly in forgetting and forsaking God. Go back in your Bibles to Jeremiah chapter 23. Before I give you the passage, remember that which is known as the lex talionis, the law of retribution. That is where God makes the punishment fit the crime, or the punishment fit the sin. Psalm 10 shows why the wicked do what they do: they forget God and forsake God.

Now look in Jeremiah 23:39–40. God says, “Therefore, behold, I, even I, will utterly forget you, and I will forsake you, and the city that I gave you and your fathers, and cast you out of My presence: and I will bring an everlasting reproach upon you, and a perpetual shame which shall not be forgotten.” God said, “Look, you forgot Me and forsook Me. Fine. I’ll forget you and forsake you. And there will be a perpetual shame upon you, everlasting reproach upon you.” That is for the wicked. That is exactly what God will do.

When the child of God, when the Christian, forgets God and forsakes God, certainly he is not punished the way the wicked are punished. But that does not mean that we escape chastisement. Our chastisement can be very easy, very gentle, or it can be very difficult.

Most of you know that Alice and I have identical twins. When those little girls were little, I had to stay on top of them. I had to whip them all the time, because one was always egging the other and encouraging the other. That is just the way it was, and they got plenty of whippings. Our baby daughter, to be honest, I do not ever really remember whipping her. I may have once or twice, but I do not remember it.

The reason I never, or hardly ever, whipped her is that when she would do something wrong, I would look at her and say, "Rebecca," and she would drop her head and start sobbing. "Oh, Daddy, I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Please forgive me, Daddy. I'll never do this. Please." She was broken just because I looked at her and spoke to her harshly.

What do you want when you discipline a child? You want humility and obedience. Why would I whip that child when I got what I wanted without whipping him? God deals with us the same way. Some of us He may have to take to the closet and wear the living daylights out; others He can simply say, "Whoa," and we are broken. And God says, "That's what I want: a broken and contrite heart, I will not despise it."

When a Christian forgets God, he forsakes God. It may be temporary, but he still forgets and he still forsakes. What are some of the consequences? Remember what David said in Psalm 66:18: "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." Think about that. What does the word regard mean? It means thinking highly of iniquity, liking it, wanting it in your heart, holding it there, and enjoying it. "If I regard iniquity in my heart," what is God's response? "The Lord will not hear me."

In other words, we have forgotten God. We have forsaken His Word. We have forsaken His law. We are regarding in our hearts that which He said, "Don't regard in your heart." And He says, "The Lord will not hear me." Sometimes, when God chastens us, He gives

us a taste of our own medicine. When we are needy, when we truly want Him, and when we cry to Him, the heavens seem to be brass, and we cannot get through. We think we have been forgotten and forsaken. God says, “Yep, that’s exactly the way you treated Me.”

Isaiah 54:7–8 says: “For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid My face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer.”

Do you remember when David had sinned? He wrote seven penitential Psalms; Psalm 51 is the most famous. In Psalm 51, while he was praying to God and confessing his sin, he said, “Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation.” Oftentimes our chastisement is that our prayers are not only unanswered; we lose the joy of our fellowship with the Lord.

Think about parents whose grown children have nothing to do with them, who will not even speak to them, much less visit them. Think about grandchildren who refuse to have anything to do with their grandparents, and sometimes with their parents as well. As a father and grandfather, it would grieve and hurt me to no end if that were done to me. It would grieve and hurt you if it were done to you. If it grieves us on a human level and breaks our hearts, what in the world does it do to our Heavenly Father when we forget Him and forsake Him?

Those who forget and forsake the Lord for sin will realize forgetfulness and forsakenness when the Lord does not hear and answer their prayers, and when they do not have the joy of their salvation. Heaven will seem to be brass for a while, but God said, "I will have mercy upon you. I will forsake you, but for a moment, just so you realize what it means to forget and forsake Me."

Practical Application: Fill Your Mind with God's Word

I want to encourage you to make sure that you read the Scripture every day. Do not merely read the Scripture; concentrate and meditate on at least a paragraph, a passage, or a verse—something. I would much rather read one chapter and understand it than read twenty chapters and not understand what I read.

Here is a challenge: take a small book of the Bible, such as Galatians, with six chapters; Ephesians, with six chapters; or Philippians, with four chapters. Read through that book completely every day for thirty days. I can assure you that I have done it, and it works. You will be amazed at what will happen if you faithfully read through that entire book every day for thirty days.

You say, "What's going to happen?" First of all, your Bible is going to automatically open in that book the next time you open it. More importantly, you will begin to see the theme of that book. You'll see the purpose for its writing, and you will understand everything about it.

Third, if you pay attention to what chapter and verse you are reading, and read the same thing every day for thirty days straight, you will be astounded that you memorize Scripture without even trying. You will know where the Scripture is located because you have read it over and over so many times. You will be putting the Word of God in your mind, so you can keep your thoughts filled with His Word.

When God's Word is in your mind, God is in your mind. When your heart is near His Word, your heart is near Him. I've often thought about this when God said, "But My people have forsaken Me days without number." It undoubtedly grieves the heart of our Father when we fail to remember Him, love Him, and fellowship with Him. Don't forget Him. The way we normally forget Him is by forgetting His Word. Our thoughts are not filled with His truth. Fill your mind with the Word of God.

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