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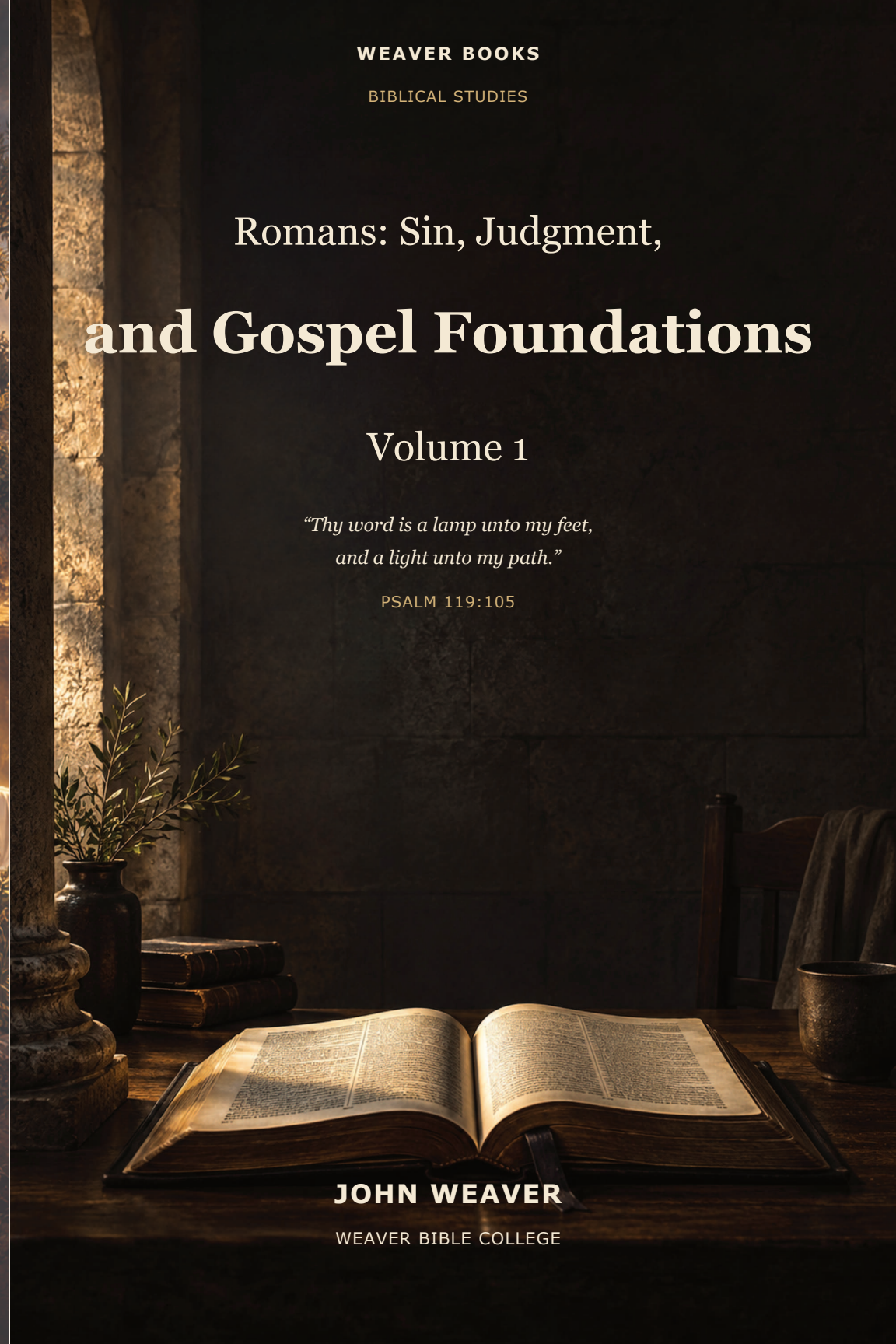
BIBLICAL STUDIES

Romans: Sin, Judgment, and Gospel Foundations

Volume 1

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

PSALM 119:105



JOHN WEAVER

WEAVER BIBLE COLLEGE

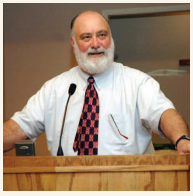
For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.

ROMANS 1:16, EXCERPT

These sermons draw on Romans and related texts to consider sin, judgment, salvation, and faith in Christ. John Weaver examines the gospel's claims and their implications for Christian conviction, conduct, and the church. Volume 1 is one of two volumes; the complete chapter sequence is preserved across the set. This volume contains corrected chapters 1-21.

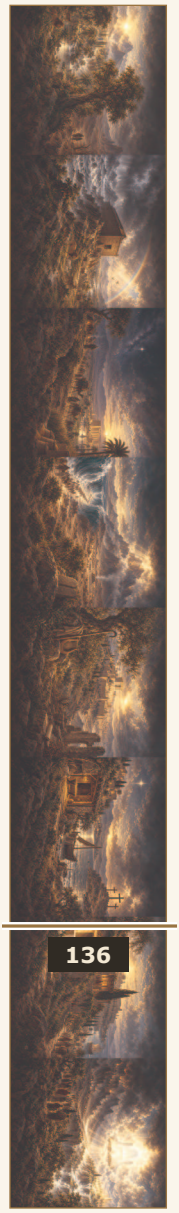
“So seeking the Lord then means, thirdly, that we must obey Him in every area of our lives.”

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.



136

BOOK 136

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Romans: Sin, Judgment, and Gospel Foundations

Volume 1

Corrected chapters 1-21

John Weaver

Weaver Bible College

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Romans: Sin, Judgment, and Gospel Foundations

Volume 1

John Weaver

Weaver Books
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Edited from the sermon corpus of John Weaver.

Corrected review edition - October 4, 2026. Repeated full sermons have been consolidated; chapter numbers, contents, indexes, and study-guide reading ranges follow this corrected edition. Original transcript variants remain preserved in the editorial archive. Final editorial and publisher approval is still required. This is Volume 1 of two, covering corrected chapters 1-21. Both volumes use one matching study guide.

Contents

Chapter 1: Christian Manhood 11

Introduction: A Man Sent from God 11

A Solitary Man: Willing to Stand Alone 13

A Strong Man: Lifting His Voice 16

A Separated Man 17

A Separated Man: In the Wilderness 17

A Straightening Man: Making Things Right 20

A Satisfying Man: Pointing to Christ 23

The Measure of a Man 24

Conclusion: A Call to Godly Manhood 25

Chapter 2: Perfect Love 27

Introduction: The Problem of Perfection 27

Biblical Demands for Perfection 28

Sinless Perfection Is Unattainable 30

The Danger of Denying Sin or Necessity of Sin 33

Understanding 'Perfect' in Scripture 34

The Foundation of Perfect Love (1 John 4:14–16) 35

Perfect Love Defined and Its Fruits (1 John 4:17–18) 39

Applications of Perfect Love 42

Chapter 3: Sinning Against God 45

Introduction: The Small Word with Great Consequences 45

Common Focus on Consequences of Sin 46

Joseph's Argument: Sin Against God 47

David's Confession: Against Thee Only 49

The Difference Between Joseph and David 50

Sin Is Always Against God 51

Sin's Attempt to Dethrone God 53

What Sin Does to God 53

Applications: Remembering God and Hating Sin 59
Chapter 4: How God Saves a Sinner 63
How God Saves Sinners 63
Introduction: Paul's Conversion as a Pattern 63
Salvation Is of the Lord and Involves Genuine Conviction 64
Paul's Enmity: The Sinner's Natural Hatred of God 65
The Sinner's Separation, Curse, and Wrath 66
Paul's Enlightenment: The Spirituality of the Law 71
Paul's Experience: Bowing to Christ's Lordship 75
Salvation Is from Sin, Not Just Hell 77
Conclusion: Every Knee Shall Bow 77
Chapter 5: Seeking Christ and Dying Lost 79
Introduction: The Astounding Truth of Seeking Christ and Dying Lost 80
Salvation Is Impossible Apart from God's Supernatural Work 80
The Phrase 'Die in Your Sins' and Its Implications 81
The Power of Sin: Enslavement and Bondage 84
The Penalty of Sin: The Curse of the Law 86
The Painfulness of Dying in Sin 88
The Painfulness of Dying in Sin: Realization, Recollection, and Hopelessness 88
Absolute Hopelessness 91
The Ultimate Punishment: Separation from God 92
Applications: Invincibility, Wrong Seeking, and the Sufficiency of Scripture . 94
Chapter 6: Little Aleck - Confederate Memorial Day 99
Introduction and Scripture Reading 99
Biographical Sketch of Alexander Hamilton Stephens 99
Stephens' Courage and Commitment to Principle 103
Stephens' Conscience and Honesty 106
Stephens' Constitutionalism 107
Stephens' Christian Faith and Death 109
Application and Call for Men of Character 109

Chapter 7: Is America A Lost Nation? 111

Introduction: The Potter and the Clay 111

Is America a Lost Nation? 115

The Loss of Recovery 116

We Have Lost the Means of Recovery 116

The Lost Message of Recovery 121

We Have Lost the Message of Recovery 122

The Loss of the Messengers of Recovery 124

We Have Lost the Messengers of Recovery 125

The Consequence of Rejecting God's Means, Message, and Messengers . . . 127

Conclusion: Our Duty to Repent 129

Chapter 8: Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf? 131

Introduction: The Big Bad Wolf of Fear 131

The Nature and Source of Fear 134

Common Fears and Biblical Deliverance 134

The Fear of Man and Its Dangers 135

Job's Example of Faith Over Fear 137

God's Sovereignty and Our Security 138

Exposition of Isaiah 51: The Mortality of Man 140

Exposition of Isaiah 51: The Might of God 145

The Root of Fear: Forgetting God 148

Applications: Trust, Not Fear 149

Chapter 9: The Sin Every Christian Commits 153

The Sin That Every Christian Commits 153

Introduction: The Sin Every Christian Commits 154

The Historical Nature of This Sin 155

Two Types of Hearing 156

Hearing Equals Obeying 157

The Problem Throughout Scripture 159

God's Drastic Measures to Get Attention 162

The Rechabites' Obedience vs. Israel's Disobedience 164
The King's Rejection of God's Word 167
The Marred Girdle: A Picture of Worthlessness 168
Applications and Call to Hear 170
Chapter 10: I Will Serve the Lord 175
Introduction and Review 175
David's Reasons for Loving the Lord 176
The Significance of the Accumulated Titles 177
God as 'My Strength' 178
God as 'My Rock' 180
God as 'My Fortress' and 'My Deliverer' 183
God as 'My God', 'My Strength', and 'In Whom I Will Trust' 185
God as 'My Buckler' and 'The Horn of My Salvation' 186
God as 'My High Tower' and Summary of Protection 189
Applications: Calling on the Lord and Gratitude 190
Chapter 11: The Lord as Deliverer 193
Introduction and Review 193
God's Rapid Response to David's Cry 194
The Nearness of God in the Old Testament 195
David's Deliverer 196
God's Wrath and Power in Creation 196
The Shaking of Temporary Things 197
Anthropomorphic Imagery of Divine Wrath 199
God's Righteous Anger Against the Wicked and His People 199
God's Swift and Concealed Judgment 201
The Terrible Artillery of Heaven 203
Deliverance in Plain Language 205
The Sovereign Grace of God's Delight 207
Applications for Believers 209
Chapter 12: The Essence of Biblical Godliness 211

Introduction: The Need to Understand Godliness 211
What Godliness Is Not 212
Godliness Is Not Ritualism 214
Godliness Is Not Feelings 216
Godliness Must Be Worked At 217
Godliness Must Be Added to Faith 219
The Essence of Godliness: Thinking and Acting Like the Father 220
Conformed to the Image of Christ Through Mind Renewal 221
Bringing Every Thought Captive to Christ 225
Biblical Mindset Determines Biblical Action 226
Applications: Ignorance Hinders Holiness; Grow in Knowledge 228
Chapter 13: The Supremecy of Christ in the Christian's Mind and Affections
The Supremacy of Christ over the Christian's Mind and Affections 231
Introduction and Context 231
The Duty Enjoined 233
The Duty Enjoined: Risen with Christ 233
The Duty Established: Seek Things Above 234
The Duty Emphasized: Where Christ Sits 237
The Duty Exercised: Set Affection on Things Above 238
Practical Outworking: Bringing Every Thought Captive 240
The Duty Explained: Dead and Hidden with Christ 243
Conclusion and Prayer 245
Chapter 14: The Supremacy of Christ Over the Christian's Mind 247
The Supremacy of Christ Over the Christian's Mind and Affections 247
Introduction: The Preeminence of Christ 247
The Duty Enjoined: Since You Are Risen with Christ 249
The Duty Established: Seek Those Things Which Are Above 250
The Duty Emphasized: Where Christ Sits at God's Right Hand 253
The Duty Exercised: Set Your Affection on Things Above 255
The Duty Explained: For You Are Dead and Your Life Is Hidden with Christ 258

Chapter 15: Hearing the Word of God 263
Introduction and Review of the Parable 263
Good Ground Is the Result of Preparation 264
Good Ground Is the Result of Preparation 265
Only Good Ground Hearers Produce Fruit 270
Varying Degrees of Fruit 272
Fruit Bearing with Patience 274
Fruit Bearing Must Be Accomplished with Patience 274
Applications of the Word 277
Applications 277
Chapter 16: Hope For The Southern Christian Cause 281
The Hope for the Southern Christian Cause (Last Man Standing) 281
Introduction and Scripture Reading 281
The Need for Hope 283
Hope Against Circumstances 284
The Wickedness of Ahab and Compromise of Jehoshaphat 285
The Distinctiveness of the Southern Christian 287
The Lone Prophet Micaiah 288
The Call for Courageous Men 293
Conclusion and Prayer 297
Chapter 17: A Method to Guage Your Love To Christ 299
A Method to Gauge Your Love to Christ 299
A Method to Gauge Your Love to Christ 300
Introduction: The Need for a Gauge of Love 300
The Setting: Jesus at Simon the Pharisee's House 301
The Parable of the Two Debtors 302
The Principle: Love in Proportion to Perceived Forgiveness 304
The Contrast: Simon's Lack of Love 305
The Greatness and Wickedness of Sin 307
Biblical Pictures of Sin's Depravity 307

Application: Gauging Our Love by Our Sense of Sin and Forgiveness 314
Chapter 18: Simon the Cyrenian 317
Introduction: The Many Simons of Scripture 317
Why Jesus Needed Help Carrying the Cross 318
An Unexpected Hour 321
An Unexpected Hour 322
An Unanticipated Honor 325
The Significance of the Names 327
Application: Taking Up Our Cross Daily 328
Chapter 19: Knowing the Will of God 333
Introduction and Command 333
Negative and Positive Commands 333
Doing God's Will from the Heart 334
General Answer: God's Will Revealed in His Word 335
Specific Clear Commands in Scripture 336
Five Ways to Know God's Will in Unclear Matters 339
Knowing God's Will by His Promise 340
Explanation of the Five Ways 340
Application of the Five Ways and Final Counsel 347
Chapter 20: Christian Manhood 353
Introduction: The World's Definition vs. Biblical Manhood 353
The Need for Character and Integrity 355
A Solitary Man: Standing Alone 359
A Strong Man: Crying in the Wilderness 361
A Separated Man: In the Wilderness 363
A Straightening Man: Make Straight the Way 367
A Satisfying Man: Pointing to Christ 370
Conclusion: The Call for God's Men 372
Chapter 21: How to Act in the Time of Judgment 375

Introduction: The Context of Judgment 375
The Question: What Should the Righteous Do? 377
The Context of Zephaniah 2:3: Judgment on Judah and the Nations 377
Two Problems in Recognizing God's Judgment 379
The Action Commanded: Seek the Lord 380
The Action Commended: Those Who Have Wrought Judgment 386
The Action Clarified: Seek Righteousness, Seek Meekness 387
The Action Consummated: It May Be You Shall Be Hid 391
Application: How to Act in the Time of Judgment 392
Topical Index 397
Scripture Index 405
Study Guide Link 423

CHAPTER 1

Christian Manhood

August 18, 2002

Introduction: A Man Sent from God

I want us to notice what the Word of God says in John 1:6: “There was a man sent from God whose name was John.” In verse 19, we read, “And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou?”

“And he confessed and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ. And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elijah? And he said, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No. Then said they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself? He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Isaiah. And they which were sent were of the Pharisees.”

Again, in verse 35: “Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples; and looking upon Jesus as he walked, he said, Behold the Lamb of God. And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.”

I brought this message several weeks ago at the memorial service in Memphis, Tennessee, and both our people and others who heard it there asked for it. It is imperative that we understand there is a vast difference between what the Word of God says about Christian manhood and what the world today says. If we look again at verse 6, the Bible simply says, “There was a man sent from God whose name was John.” In other words, we could look at that verse and see God looking at John the Baptist and saying, “There was a man.”

John the Baptist was certainly unique. He was certainly the subject of Old Testament prophecy. He was born by miraculous intervention, you will remember, and he was designated to be the forerunner of Jesus Christ. When the Jews sent people to ask him, “Who art thou?” he could have blown up his chest and said, “Well, don’t you know who I am?”

John could have said, “I am the forerunner of Christ.” He could have done all of that, but he did not. He simply said, “I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness.”

The point I want to make by way of introduction is this: just because an individual has bulging muscles does not necessarily make him a man. Just because an individual is 6'4" and weighs 250 pounds does not necessarily make him a man, at least not biblically speaking.

When we stop and think about our ancestors and forefathers, we have to admit there was something totally different about them. They certainly had more character, more common sense, and far more strength than we have today. There is a vast difference between people even of a hundred years ago and people of the present day, and between people of seventy-five years ago and people today.

The people who went through the Great Depression, as a whole, were honest and willing to work for food. If the same thing happened today, you would have riots and trouble, because everybody now thinks the government ought to give it to them. If the government does not, they will take it from whomever they can. There is a vast difference between the 1930s and 2003.

General Robert E. Lee often equated Christianity with being a Southern gentleman. He could not see any difference. If you were a

Christian, you were indeed a man, a gentle man, because they were one and the same. He did not separate them.

When God looked at John the Baptist, He said, “There was a man.” Let me show you from the Bible the characteristics of a biblical man. In John 1:23, when they asked him, “Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself?” the very first thing John responded was, “I am the voice of one.”

A Solitary Man: Willing to Stand Alone

God's man, first and foremost, is a solitary man: “I am the voice of one.” John was willing to stand alone. He was not ashamed to stand outside the crowd. Biblically speaking, Christian manhood is demonstrated first and foremost by being willing to stand for truth and for that which is right, even if we have to stand alone.

Most people are willing to do what is right as long as people are around them to encourage, help, and support them. But God's kind of man is willing to stand even if no one else stands. He is willing to take the heat even if no one else will, and to stand alone if absolutely necessary. He said, “I am the voice of one.”

One of the greatest reasons we do not stand today for truth and righteousness is simply that we lack character. We are so much weaker today than people were one hundred or two hundred years ago. It is absolutely pathetic. Everyone laughs at me because I can sleep in a freezer; I like it cold. Thirty degrees is short-sleeved weather for me. I have often wondered how Robert E. Lee, Stonewall Jackson, and all those men fought in wool suits. Can you imagine fighting in the summer in a wool suit? I have one made of light wool. I can wear it for four or five minutes, or fifteen or twenty minutes, take it off, and wring my shirt out.

They were made of a different caliber than we are today, I can assure you. The truth is that, biblically and comparatively speaking, people have no backbone, character, or intestinal fortitude—or, in South Georgia terms, no guts—compared to our forefathers, and certainly compared to John the Baptist.

You've heard the old saying, "A man who will not stand for something will fall for anything." That's true. God's kind of man is willing to stand, and willing to stand alone if necessary, because he has character.

Character is what a man is in the dark. If you tell me what you would do if you knew no one else would find out, I'll tell you exactly what you are. You say, "If I knew no one else would ever find out, I'd go down to that bank and take every dollar out of it." Well, you're a thief. "If I knew no one else would ever find out, I'd run off with so and so." Well, you're an adulterer. Character is what a man is in the dark.

Do you realize character today really doesn't mean too much to most people? I hate to think that character didn't mean anything to me. I want to do what's right, even if no one else does what's right. The test of your character is what it takes to stop you. If that is true—and it is true—most people may have very little character. All it takes to stop the average individual is to talk about them, make fun of them, ridicule them, or say something about it.

Then they develop this attitude: "If that's the way you feel about it, if that's the way you're going to talk, I'll just take my marbles and go home." And they quit because they have absolutely no character. Can you imagine how John the Baptist was mocked and ridiculed? Can you imagine how our forefathers were mocked and ridiculed? Yet they just kept on keeping on.

Circumstances never make or break a man; they just reveal him. Someone says, "That battle sure made a hero out of that fellow." No, he was already a hero in his heart; the battle just revealed him. Someone says, "The battle made a coward out of that man. Look how he ran." No, he was already a coward in his heart. The battle just revealed him.

You want to know what you are? Get in the fires of tribulation and persecution, and your real, genuine character is going to come out, because circumstances never make or break a man; they only reveal him.

Sin does not slip up upon an individual. It does not take him by surprise. Usually, we think about it and plan it before we ever engage

in it. The reason we continue to think about it and plan it is because we do not have the character to do what Barney Fife would say: “Nip it in the bud. Nip it, nip it in the bud.” We want to play around with it in our minds and think about it, and then the next thing we know, we are executing it. We are planning it.

Nathan Bedford Forrest was not a Christian during the war, and he used some bad language from time to time. But he did have character—he had a lot. When one of his staff officers was rumored to be having an adulterous affair, Forrest called him into his tent and asked him point blank whether it was so. The man laughed and grinned, then admitted it.

Nathan Bedford Forrest looked at him and said, “Sir, you will pack your bags and get out of my tent, off my staff, and out of my camp within the next few hours, or I will kick you out. I will never have anyone on my staff who will mistreat women and mistreat his oath to his wife the way you do. Sir, you are no longer welcome in my camp.” And he rang off.

The point I am trying to make is this: You look at a man like Daniel. They passed a law saying that no man could ask any petition to any God, save the king, for thirty days. Do you know what the Bible says? “Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he knelt and prayed three times a day as he did aforetime.”

Do you know how to pray effectually when you are in trouble? Be used to praying before you ever get into trouble. Daniel would rather face a den of lions than cease praying. He would rather disobey man than disobey God. Do you remember Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego?

Nebuchadnezzar had built that image in the plain of Dura, and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego would not bow. They could have tried to avoid standing out. Shadrach might have suggested that they sit down and rest, so the heathens would not know whether they were halfway up or halfway down. Abednego might have proposed lying on their stomachs and taking a nap, so the heathens would think they were prostrate before the false god. They could have done any of those things, but they did not. They stuck out like a sore

thumb, and when Nebuchadnezzar confronted them, they told him point-blank why.

He said, “At what time you hear the sound of the sackbut, the dulcimer, the harp, and all manner of music, if you fall down and worship my idol—well, if not, what God is He who will deliver you out of my hand?” Their answer was, “Be it known unto you, O King, our God can deliver us. Whether He does or not, that is His business. But be it known unto you, O King, we will not bow down.”

They would rather be thrown into a fiery furnace because they had the character to realize that idolatry was wicked and wrong, that God had forbidden it, and that they were certainly not going to engage in it. You see, John’s attitude was this: “I’m going to stand even if I stand alone. If nobody stands with me, I’m going to stand for what’s right.”

Do you remember Sam Davis? Hanged at twenty-one as a spy, though he was not a spy; he was a Confederate scout captured in full uniform. He was hanged because he refused to divulge who his captain was. He would rather be hanged himself than be accused of being a traitor to his country, his captain, or his cause. At twenty-one years of age, the last time Levi Naron offered him his life for the information, he was sitting on his coffin.

He said, “You can hang me a thousand times and I'll never betray a friend.” You don't have character. Most of us today, especially with the new world order and homeland security, are being turned into a nation of informants. The people a hundred years ago, and the people in Bible times, had far more character than we have today. John said, “I'm willing to stand even if I stand alone.”

A Strong Man: Lifting His Voice

Look back in your Bibles to verse 23. John said, “I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness.” God's kind of man is not only a solitary man; he is also a strong man. He was crying in the wilderness. You know the Bible says in Isaiah 58:1, “Lift up your voice like a trumpet and show my people their sins and the house of Israel their transgression.” Not only was he willing to stand alone, he was not ashamed to lift up his voice, literally, and cry out.

Being strong is tied right in with being solitary—that is, having character to stand alone. If you're not strong, you're not going to stand alone. You can borrow brains, but you cannot borrow character. I'm not a veterinarian, but Doc is. If I have a problem with one of my horses or cows, I could call him, and he could tell me what to do. But if I don't have the character to go out and actually do what he tells me, all the information is useless and worthless. I could call Hobie and ask about a mechanical problem, but if I don't have the character to follow through, all the information is worthless. You can always borrow brains, but you can't borrow character.

God will use you on credit the first years of your life. After that, He's going to use you on character, and if you don't have any character, you can put it down, God will never use you. God's kind of man is a strong man. He's willing to stand. He's willing to do what's right. And He's willing to do it with all of His strength.

A Separated Man

A Separated Man: In the Wilderness

“I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness.” God's kind of man is a separated man. Where was John? He was in the wilderness. He wasn't in town at the dance halls, the saloons, the juke joints, and the liquor stores. No, he was out in the wilderness. He was not only willing to stand alone and lift up his voice against that which was wicked and wrong, but he was also willing to separate himself from sin.

Most people really don't want to go out and actually commit sin, per se, because we know that it is wicked and wrong. But we want to be excited and titillated by it, and we want everything that leads right up to it, thinking that we can experiment in all of this and then suddenly quit. The Bible says in Hebrews 7:26 concerning Jesus Christ, that He was “holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners.”

That is exactly the way we should be. We should be holy, harmless, and separate from sin. We must understand that when God forbids any sin, at the same time He forbids everything that leads up to it. That is why the Bible says in Romans 13:14, “Make no

provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof." God's kind of man is a separated man. What does the Bible say in 1 Corinthians 15:33? "Be not deceived, evil communications corrupt good manners."

If you play around with sinners and those who are wicked, you are not going to elevate them; you are the one who will be corrupted. You are not going to pull them up. They are going to drag you down. It is just that simple. It is impossible to live a holy, godly life, inwardly and outwardly, if we align ourselves with that which is wicked and wrong.

Do you remember Psalm 119:11? "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to thy word. With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments. Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee." I heard a long time ago about an extremely wealthy man who lived high up on a mountaintop, had a beautiful mansion, and whose buggy driver left him. So he placed an ad in the paper for a buggy driver. Since it was a good job, three men applied. The wealthy man said, "Look, I have to have the best driver."

He said, "I live on this mountain. You see that edge right over there?" "Yes." "A thousand-foot drop down to those rocks. I want to know how close you can come to that edge without going over, with the horses running. I want the best driver available."

The first man said, "Well, sir, I'm so good that I can have those horses running and spin that buggy around, come within a foot, and never go over the edge." The old man said, "Well, let me see you do it." The man got the horses running in the buggy. Sure enough, he spun that buggy around and came within a foot without going over.

He looked at the second man and said, "How close can you come to it?" He said, "Sir, I'm such a good driver, I can come within six inches and never go over." The man got the horses running. Sure enough, he spun that buggy around, came within six inches, and never went over.

He looked at the third man and said, "Sir, how close can you come without going over?" The third man said, "I don't know, and I ain't stupid enough to try to find out." The rich man said, "Sir, you're

hired. The man that drives my buggy, I want him to stay as far away from the edge of that cliff as he can."

I want you to understand something, folks. God wants us to be as far away from wickedness, sin, and ungodliness as we can be by the grace of God. God may use us some, but God will use us far more greatly the purer, more holy, and more godly we are.

Do you remember that passage in 2 Chronicles 16, verse 9? "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, that he might show himself strong in behalf of those whose heart is perfect toward him." God is looking for individuals with a perfect, or holy, heart. God's kind of man is a solitary man. God's kind of man is a strong man. God's kind of man is a separated man.

"Abstain from all appearance of evil." Stonewall Jackson, one of my favorite men, during the Mexican War was entertained by a Mexican family. The house was very beautiful, the food was delicious, and after a while Stonewall Jackson took the host aside and said, "I appreciate all your kindness toward me, all your courtesies, and all your hospitalities, but, sir, I just wanted to inform you that I will no longer be able to come back to your hacienda."

And the man said, "Well, why? Have I offended you? Have I done something wrong?" Stonewall said, "No, no, you've done nothing wrong. He said, your daughters are too beautiful. And I find myself too attracted, and it's time that I leave."

I want you to see something. Here was a man who was not too proud to admit his own weakness. Yet at the same time, he had strength enough and character enough to know what to do. He separated himself. What does the Bible say? "Flee youthful lusts." Instead of saying that, he simply took himself out of the way.

Now look in your Bibles at John 1:23. When they asked John, "Who art thou?" he said, "I am the voice of one," a solitary man, "crying," a strong man, "in the wilderness," a separated man. And then, fourthly, "Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Isaiah." God's kind of man is a straightening man. What do I mean by that? John basically was to straighten things out.

A Straightening Man: Making Things Right

He was to prepare for the coming of Christ. God's kind of man is an individual who makes crooked things straight. If things are wrong, he makes them right, and he does so gladly. One of our problems is this: we do not try to make things right. Look at all the ill feelings, heartache, bitterness, and resentment that have been built up simply because we do not make things right.

Look in your Bibles, first of all, to Matthew 5 and then to Matthew 18. Matthew 5:23: "Therefore, if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee,"—you do not have anything against your brother; your brother has something against you—"leave there thy gift before thine altar, and go thy way. First be reconciled to thy brother, then come and offer thy gift."

Now think about this. If you remember that your brother has something against you, whose responsibility is it to resolve it? Yours. Now look in Matthew 18:15.

Watch carefully: "Moreover, if thy brother shall trespass against thee," now he does not have anything against you; you have something against him. "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 shalt gain thy brother." If you have something against your brother, whose responsibility is it to straighten it out? Yours. If your brother has something against you, it is your responsibility to straighten it out. If you have something against him, it is still your responsibility to straighten it out. It does not matter how it started or who started it; it is your responsibility to make things right. So, if we have lied, straighten it out. If we have cheated, straighten it out. If we have stolen, straighten it out. Whatever it takes, straighten it out.

I have a shirt that I wear occasionally. A number of years ago, I was with Ron Wilson, who is now the commander-in-chief of the Sons of the Confederate Veterans. We were at a flea market, and the very first thing that caught my eye was a big, beautiful picture of Nathan Bedford Forrest on the back of a T-shirt. I said, "I must have that T-shirt." Ron said, "But look at what is on it."

I am going to quote what is on the T-shirt. I do not use this type of language, but I am going to quote it, and I am going to tell you what I did and why. Beneath the beautiful picture of Nathan Bedford Forrest was this quote from him: “No damned man kills me and lives.” When I read it, I told Ron, “Well, I’m going to buy it anyhow, because I know the story.”

Ron said, “You going to buy that T-shirt?” I said, “I surely am. Let me tell you why I’m going to buy that T-shirt.” I have worn it several times. I do not wear it often, but inevitably, invariably, someone asks me about that quote, and I get to tell them the story.

Now you have got to remember that Nathan Bedford Forrest was not a Christian during the war. He only became a Christian after the war. But Nathan Bedford Forrest had a young officer under his command who kept wanting to be promoted, and Bedford Forrest kept passing him over. On the last passover, he confronted Bedford Forrest when Forrest was at one of the headquarters buildings and asked him if he was going to promote him. Forrest said, “No, I’m not going to promote you.” He said, “Why?”

He said, “Because you don't have the character. You don't have the discipline. You are not qualified to be promoted.” The boy became so angry that he pulled out his pistol and shot Forrest in the stomach. Which, by the way, just proves Forrest's point: he didn't have the character or the discipline.

Forrest thought he had been killed. He reached into his pocket, pulled out his pocket knife, opened it, and swiped at the boy's stomach. That was when he made the statement, “No damned man kills me and lives.” In other words, you kill me, I'm going to kill you.

When the boy was cut, he turned and ran down the street, bleeding. Bedford Forrest, bleeding with a bullet stuck in his stomach, chased him down the street. Finally, the boy ran into a store, and Forrest overtook him. He knocked him down and got on top of him. By that time, the men had caught up and pulled Forrest off the boy.

Both were taken to the same hospital and placed in the same room. Forrest lived, but the boy developed peritonitis and was dying. General Forrest went to see the young man.

He said, “Son, it grieves me that I acted so irrationally and so wickedly.” The young man said, “Sir, it grieves me that I did what I did. You were right. I did not have the character or the discipline. Had I had such, I would not have started this fight. But, sir, for the cause of the Confederacy, I’m glad that it’s me who is dying and not you.” With that, Forrest bent over the young man and wept for him.

As wicked as Forrest was, and as wicked as we all are before our conversion, the least you could say is that it took character to forgive a man who had just tried to kill him. He was willing to straighten it out. How many times have you and I let opportunities go by? The Bible says in James 5:16, “Confess your faults one to another.” In other words, be willing to make things right and to forgive each other.

I was preaching in Panama City, Florida, at a Christian school. Chapel service began at 8:30 that morning, and during a week of special meetings, an hour had been allotted for me to preach. I dealt with this subject. Before I closed in prayer, I asked, “Is there anyone who has anything to say?” An eleventh-grade student stood up and said, “Yes, sir, I’ve got something to say.”

He said, “I wish to publicly apologize to my teacher”—and called her name—“because I have been spreading rumors and lies about her. There was a misunderstanding. I’ve said things about that woman, and I’ve said them to several people, and they’re not true. I want to ask the Lord to forgive me. I want to ask her to forgive me.” The woman stood up in tears and said, “Son, I want to ask you to forgive me because I knew that you were saying those things about me, and I never confronted you.”

She said, “I just let bitterness and resentment build up in my life.” When they met each other, they hugged and wept. Then another student and another teacher stood up. It was 12:30 in the afternoon before we ever got out of there. The whole morning, young people were getting right with each other and with their teachers. Some even went to the phone and called their parents.

You look at all the bitterness, resentment, and wickedness in our lives today, just because we will not straighten things out. The Word of God says in Leviticus 19:17, “Thou shalt not suffer sin upon thy

brother." We are not to allow sin to destroy us. God's kind of man is a straightening man.

God's kind of man is not only a solitary man, a strong man, a separated man, and a straightening man. He is also a satisfying man. "Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples; and looking upon Jesus as he walked, he said, Behold the Lamb of God. And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus."

A Satisfying Man: Pointing to Christ

What do I mean by that? This is what absolutely amazes me: John never had to cajole, beg, plead, or argue. He just spoke, and men followed Jesus. Isn't that amazing? Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could just speak, and folks would follow Christ? These things are intimately tied together.

In order to be a satisfying man, you must also be a straightening man, a separated man, a strong man, and a solitary man. They are all interconnected and go together. We can never be the last until we are the first four.

A northern soldier gave an actual account of his encounter with Robert E. Lee. He said, "Long after the war, a northern Grand Army man told of meeting Lee in the field at Gettysburg under circumstances which revealed the true heart of the southern commander. Here's what the federal officer said: I had been a most bitter anti-South man and fought and cursed the Confederates desperately. I could see nothing good in any of them.

"The last day of the fight, I was badly wounded. A ball shattered my left leg. I lay on the ground not far from Cemetery Ridge, and as General Lee ordered his retreat, he and his officers rode near me. As they came along, I recognized him, and though faint from exposure and loss of blood, I raised my hands and looked Lee in the face and shouted as loud as I could, 'Hurrah for the Union!' The General heard me, looked, stopped his horse, dismounted, and came toward me."

"I confess, I at first thought he meant to kill me. But as he came up, he looked down at me with such a sad expression upon his face that all fear left me. And I wondered what he was about. He

extended his hand to me, grasping mine firmly, and looking right into my eyes said, 'I hope you will soon be well.' If I live a thousand years, I shall never forget the expression on General Lee's face."

There he was, defeated, retiring from a field that had cost him and his cause almost their last hope, and yet he stopped to say words like these to a wounded soldier of the opposition who had taunted him as he passed by. As soon as the General had left me, I cried myself asleep there on the bloody ground. What do you think that Union soldier's estimation of Lee's Christianity was after he left him?

If we want to be a satisfying voice, we've got to be the kind of men that God ordained that we should be. Years ago, Billy Sunday preached a message entitled "The Measure of a Man." He said you can measure a man by five things. First, his character—what he is. Your reputation may be what folks hear about you and think about you, but your character is really what you are. The measure of a man, first of all, is by his character.

The Measure of a Man

Secondly, by his conduct—what he does. Your conduct in reality reveals your character. "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." You can measure a man by his character, what he is; by his conduct, what he does; and, thirdly, by his contribution, what he gives.

Some people are always takers. Some men are always givers. Fourth, measure him by his creed—what he believes; and fifth, by his companions—that is, whom he associates with. Fools always associate with fools, but as the word of God says, a wise man associates with wise men. How do you measure a man? By his character? By his conduct? By his contribution? By his creed? By his companions?

If you were alive in the days of John the Baptist, would you rather associate with him or with the Pharisees? If you were alive during the War of Northern Aggression, would you rather associate with Grant and Hooker or with Lee and Jackson? Remember that Grant was a drunkard. Hooker admitted the ladies of the night into the camp; they were first known as Hooker’s ladies, and then the

“ladies” was dropped, and they were simply known as Hookers. Fighting Joe Hooker.

Who would you rather associate with? Our attitude ought to be this: If no one else does right, we are. If no one else stands for what is right, we will. If no one else does what is right, we shall. If we are persecuted, prosecuted, hounded, and crucified for doing that which is right, so be it.

Conclusion: A Call to Godly Manhood

God looked at John the Baptist and said, “There was a man.” Wouldn’t it be wonderful if we could hear our Sovereign Lord say that concerning us? “There is a real man. There is a real woman. There is a real teenager—godly, holy, willing to do what’s right under every circumstance and in every situation, for My honor and My glory.” May God give us men.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee this day. We thank You for Your love, grace, and mercies. We confess and acknowledge our deficiencies of character, our lack of strength, our unwillingness to straighten things out, and the wickedness of our flesh. We pray that You would give us strength to be holy and godly, like our Lord, separate from sin, wickedness, and ungodliness. Give us grace to stand for Thee. Make us men and women willing to do what is right. We ask it for Your glory and for our good. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord, in whose name we pray, Amen.

CHAPTER 2

Perfect Love

January 18, 2004

SCRIPTURE READING - 1 John 4:14–21 (KJV)

Introduction: The Problem of Perfection

I will be reading or quoting a number of verses, because if I do not simply go ahead and quote them, we will be here for a mighty long time. I have a lot of verses and a lot of ground to cover. A number I will ask you to turn to, because I believe they are vitally important for you to see in light of what I will be teaching. Let us begin with 1 John 4:14.

"And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casteth out fear, because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. We love him because he first loved us. If a man

> say I love God and hateth his brother, he is a liar. For he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, that he who loveth God love his brother also."

In verse 17, we read, "Herein is our love made perfect." Verse 18 says, "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casteth out fear." Let me give you one word and ask for your reaction: perfection.

The word perfection usually horrifies most Christians. Why does perfection horrify most Christians? I am expressing a real truth, because we know that we are not perfect. Would it surprise you to find out that the word perfect occurs ninety-nine times in the Bible, forty-two of which occur in the New Testament? That count does not take into consideration the words perfected, perfecting, perfection, perfectly, and perfectness. If you count those words, then there are an additional twenty-nine occurrences, making a total of 128 times that the word perfect or its equivalent occurs. Since most of us know that we are not perfect, have never been perfect, and will never be perfect in this life, we have a problem.

Biblical Demands for Perfection

What is the problem? Matthew 5:48 delineates it plainly: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father who is in heaven is perfect." Our problem is that God demands perfection: "Be perfect, even as your Father, who is in heaven, is perfect."

The Bible tells us in Luke 6:40 that the disciple is not above his master, but everyone that is perfect shall be as his master. Is that interesting? In our Lord's High Priestly Prayer, in John 17:23, one of His prayer requests is, "I in them, and thou in me, that they may be perfect in one, that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, and that thou hast loved me." Note that He prayed that they may be perfect in one.

Paul's farewell to the Corinthians includes what he leaves them with: an admonition. In 2 Corinthians 13:11, the apostle Paul says, "Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace, and the God of love and peace shall be with you."

Isn't that a great admonition? “Finally, brethren, farewell, be perfect.” That is quite an admonition: you and I are to be perfect. When Paul wrote to the Philippians in Philippians chapter 3, verse 15, he said, “Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded. If in anything ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal it even unto you.” He said, “Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded.” It is interesting that the Apostle Paul is talking about perfection.

Look in your Bibles to the book of Colossians, chapter 1 and verse 28, because here you are going to see one of the aims of the ministry. When I read this and think that this is one of the goals in the ministry, sometimes it makes me cringe, but I want you to see what it is. In Colossians 1:28, the apostle is talking about Jesus Christ: “Whom we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.” One of my goals, one of my aims as a pastor, is to preach, to teach, and to warn. For what purpose? That we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.

If you go on in your Bibles to the book of Colossians, look there at chapter 4 and verse 12. The Apostle Paul reveals one of the prayer requests that Epaphras had for his brethren. Colossians 4:12 says, “Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you always, laboring fervently for you in his prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in the will of God.” That is, that you may stand perfect and complete in the will of God. So Epaphras prayed for the Colossians that they would stand perfect.

The Bible tells us in Hebrews chapter 13, verses 20 and 21: “Now the God of peace that brought again from the dead the Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.” Note this: “make you perfect in every good work to do his will.” So one of the apostle’s prayer requests for us is that we would be made perfect in every good work.

James 1, verse 4, is very clear: “But let patience have her perfect work, that you may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.” Patience

is to have her perfect work. Why? That we may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

In 1 Peter 5 and verse 10, Peter writes, “But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Jesus Christ, after that you have suffered a while, make you perfect, establish, strengthen, settle you.” So God then tells us that we are to be perfect.

Now, let me ask a question. Why did God give us the Scriptures? I am looking for a practical answer, and I can get that answer in 2 Timothy 3, verses 16 and 17. This is a proper use of the Scriptures. The Bible says that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God. Literally, the Greek word is theopneustos. That is, all Scripture is God-breathed. All Scripture is exhaled from the mouth of God. Why? Because Scripture is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. Why? That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. That the man of God may be perfect.

Now the question arises: How do we address all these verses? What is God demanding, and how do we apply these truths? When you look back at 1 John 4, which is our text, and which we are going to be looking at in detail in a little while, what in the world is the text talking about when it speaks of perfect love?

Let me ask you a couple of questions. Do you have perfect love? Let me make it a little more applicable: Do you have perfect love toward Christ? Do you love the Lord your God with all of your heart, with all your mind, with all your soul, with all your being? Let me go a little further. Do you have perfect love toward your husband or perfect love toward your wife, or perfect love toward your children? Can you truthfully and accurately say, “I have perfect love” now? These are the questions.

Sinless Perfection Is Unattainable

Perfection may indeed be our aim and our goal in this life. But sinless perfection in this life is unattainable. When God said in Matthew 5:48 that we are to be perfect, even as our Father in heaven is perfect, He gave us a standard toward which we should strive.

Consider the Apostle Paul. If we were asked who was the greatest apostle in the New Testament, all of us would probably say the Apostle Paul. Certainly, God used him to write most of the New Testament. Yet, in Philippians 3:12, the Apostle Paul had to confess this: “Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect.” He continued, “But I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which I am also apprehended of in Christ Jesus.” Notice this: “I have not already attained, nor am I already perfect.” Paul plainly admitted that he had not already attained and was not already perfect. So even the mighty Apostle Paul certainly was not perfect.

James gives us another reason why you and I cannot admit to being perfect. In James 3:2, James writes, “For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.” How many of us have never, ever offended in word? The truth is, all of us have. Many times, when we have spoken, we have been misunderstood. Sometimes we have spoken ignorantly, unknowingly, or unwittingly. Very obviously, based upon that, we cannot classify ourselves as perfect men, because we are not able to bridle even our tongues, much less the whole body.

The doctrine of total depravity dictates against perfection in this life. In 1 John chapter 1, verses 8 and 10, these two verses teach us very clearly the deception involved in seeking what you and I would know as sinless perfection in this life. Verse 8 says, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." Look at it carefully: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." Now look at verse 10: "If we say that we have not sinned, we make him," that is, God, "a liar and his word is not in us."

What is he talking about in verse 8 when he says, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us"? Did he not say the same thing in verse 10 when he said, "If we say that we have not sinned"? No, they are two different things. Verse 8 is talking about our sinful nature or our sinful propensity. If we say that we do not have a sin nature, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If I were to sit here today and say, "Look, folks, I'm

perfect; I just don't have the problems that you people have," I would be deceiving myself, says God, and the truth would not be in me.

But look at verse 10: "If we say that we have not sinned"—that is, if we have not committed actual acts of sin—we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. Why? For the Scripture says, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God. There is none righteous, no, not one. There is none that doeth good."

So in verse 8, we have someone who wants to deny his sin nature, sinful propensity, or the depravity of the flesh. In verse 10, we have individuals who want to deny their sinful acts: "Well, no, I don't do that. I have not committed sin. I do not commit sin." God says that anybody who says this deceives himself; he is a liar, and God's word is not in him.

Years ago, when Alice and I lived in a South Georgia city, there was a man who owned a dry-cleaning establishment. He was a professing Christian man, and I took my clothes there simply because he was a professing Christian man.

I walked in one day with a couple of suits for him to clean. He was behind the counter, and I knew that he was a Christian. As I threw the suits on the counter, I said, “Isn’t it a wonderful thing to be a Christian and have your sins forgiven?” He looked at me. God is my witness; here are his exact words.

He said, “I don’t know. I haven’t sinned in 20 years.” When he said that, my mouth fell open. I was stunned. It took me a moment to regain my composure. Then I said, “Well, you just broke your record, for you just did.” I quoted 1 John 1:10: “If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar and his word is not in us.” I said, “You shouldn’t have lied. You could have kept your record, you know.” It was ridiculous to think that he had not sinned in 20 years.

We may now be positionally perfect in Christ, and there is a difference, but we are not yet practically perfect. In Christ, in my position in Him, yes, I am perfect. But practically speaking, on this earth, in this day and in this time, I am not sinlessly perfect. Neither are you. Neither is anyone else.

Sinless perfection is unattainable in this life. If sinless perfection is a heresy—and it is—there is no man who is sinlessly perfect in this

life. I am not talking about Christ. Christ was the only One who was sinless. There is no man in this life outside of Christ who is sinlessly perfect. Now, if sinless perfection is a heresy, and it is, an equally dangerous heresy is that we have to sin. The fact is, we do sin, but many times we do not have to sin.

The Danger of Denying Sin or Necessity of Sin

Look at what John wrote in 1 John 2:1: "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not." Why did John give us 1 John? He said, "I'm writing these things to you so that you sin not." Then he says, "And if any man sin," because he knows we are going to.

"We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous, and he is the propitiation for our sins and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." Here is John's position: I am writing this to you because I do not want you to sin. You do not necessarily have to sin, but I know you are going to sin. And when you do, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous.

I am not necessarily fond of Dwight L. Moody or his theology, but Dwight L. Moody had something written in the flyleaf of his Bible that was true: "Either this book will keep you from sin or sin will keep you from this book." That is certainly true as you and I keep our minds upon Christ, in His Word and on His Word, and endeavor to live our lives obediently. We are not going to sin as regularly and as often as someone who totally disregards His Word and has no concept of the mind of Christ. But when we do sin, because we are not perfect, nor can we be perfect in this life, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous.

How in the world are we going to understand all of those passages that I read in my introduction about being perfect? We answer them by allowing Scripture to interpret Scripture. The Bible tells us in 1 Corinthians 2:13 that the Apostle Paul says we compare spiritual things with spiritual. One problem in biblical hermeneutics, the science or art of interpreting Scripture, is that we read something and say, "Oh, look at that. Here is what that says," while totally ignoring the rest of Scripture. No, the Word of God says we must compare Scripture with Scripture. We cannot make Scripture

contradict plain passages, nor can we make one passage contradict another. Another problem is this: simply because we read a word in the Bible today does not mean that the word had the same meaning in the Bible as it does in our day and time.

Understanding 'Perfect' in Scripture

The meanings of words change. For instance, consider the word flesh. Did you know that the word flesh has four distinct meanings in Scripture? You may think you know what flesh is, but that does not mean you understand how the word is used in Scripture. If I were to mention the word world, does everyone know what the world is? I can show you at least twelve different meanings for the word world in Scripture. Just because you think you know the meaning of a word does not mean that is the way that word is to be understood in Scripture. We must understand the scriptural usage and the scriptural meaning of the word. Moreover, we must consider the words in their context.

You will find the word perfect in the Old Testament just as you find the word perfect in the New Testament. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for perfect is shalem, which is usually interpreted or translated in our Bibles as whole, complete, finished, sound, or blameless. The Hebrew word means whole, complete, finished, sound, or blameless.

Consider Genesis 6:9: "These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations. And Noah walked with God." When the Bible says that Noah was perfect, does that mean that he was sinlessly perfect? Of course not. What happened in Genesis 9 and verse 21 to Noah? He got drunk.

Some people will try to defend his drunkenness and say, "Well, he didn't know that he would get drunk." Whether he did or didn't is immaterial. He got drunk, and drunkenness is a sin in the Bible.

When the Bible says that Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, it means that Noah was usually a blameless man. In other words, he lived his life more holily and godly than he did in evil, wickedness, rebellion, and sin. He was a mature man, a whole and complete man.

In the New Testament, the main word for perfect is the Greek word teleios, which primarily means having reached an end: complete, full, perfect, mature, or full-grown. You can go back to each of these verses that I read to you in the New Testament and interpret the word perfect as mature, complete, or full-grown; you will have a perfect understanding and a right application of that verse. When the Bible says, "But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire," what does it mean? That you may be mature and complete, full-grown, not a child tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine.

The word means that you and I are to be totally mature and totally full-grown. We are not to be children. The only way that you and I are to be children in the Bible, the Apostle Paul says, is in malice. Otherwise, we are to be mature and full-grown in the faith.

The Foundation of Perfect Love (1 John 4:14–16)

Let us go back in our Bibles to 1 John chapter 4, because it is not the term perfect or perfection in general that I really want to deal with today. It is the term or phrase perfect love.

Look in your Bibles at 1 John 4:17: "Herein is our love made perfect." Verse 18 says, "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear." How are we to experience, possess, and understand perfect love? Is perfect love attainable? What is it, and how do I know whether or not I possess perfect love? Let us begin by looking at 1 John 4:14–15, because those verses set the stage for what I want to share with you in verses 17, 18, and 19. Verse 14 says, "And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God."

Since faith in Christ works love to God, and love to God must tend to love to the brethren, the Apostle confirms the prime article of the Christian faith as the foundation of such love. He proclaims the fundamental article of the Christian religion, so representative of the love of God: "And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world."

In verse 14, first of all, you have our Lord's relationship to His Father: "And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son." That is, He is the eternal, begotten, unbegotten Son of God. He is the eternal, unbegotten Son of God. Therefore, He is referred to as the Son. He is the Son of God, as no one else is. His Sonship is oneness with the Father. His relationship to God the Father is that He is considered the Son.

Note His relationship in office toward us. He is the Savior. He is our Savior, not only by His death, but by His intercession and by the power that He has given us against all enemies. The ground by which He became so was that the Father sent the Son, the Bible says, to be the Savior of the world.

Look at John's assurance in verse 14: "And we have seen and do testify." In fact, that is what 1 John is about. Go back to 1 John 1 and look at verse 1: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled the word of life, for the life was manifested and we have seen it and bear witness and shown to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested unto us." John said, We have seen Christ, handled Christ, and touched Christ; we know that Christ is the Son of God. He is giving personal assurance: "And we have seen and do testify." We know this is the Son of God. Now look at verse 15.

He said, "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him and he in God." Let me deal with the word confess. It is a very important word. He said, if we shall confess Christ, or whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him. The word confess is the Greek word homologeo. Homo means one or the same, and lego, I say. So to confess means to say the same thing.

Look in 1 John 1 and verse 9: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." What does the word confess mean?

Suppose I went back to Luke, stuck my hand in his pocket, and stole a hundred-dollar bill from him. Then I say, "Lord, I stole $100 from Luke. Lord, please forgive me." Now I am going over to Heath

and trying to get $100 from him. Have I confessed that sin? No. I may have bragged about it, but I certainly have not confessed it.

Why? Because if I confess, I take the same attitude that God takes. I say the same thing that God says. If I stole a $100 bill from Luke and actually confess that sin before God, I have to acknowledge that it is wicked, wrong, ungodly, and deserving of death: “For the soul that sinneth it shall surely die,” and “the wages of sin is death.” I have to confess and acknowledge the awfulness of that sin, agree with God that restitution should be made, go back to Luke, give him that money back, and ask his forgiveness.

And then I ask the Father to forgive me. The word confess means that you say the same thing.

When you come to 1 John 4:15, “Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God,” you are agreeing with everything that God the Father says about God the Son. Whatever the Father’s attitude is about Jesus Christ, that is your attitude. Whatever the Father says about Christ, you say about Christ; you agree with the Father. It is only the grace of God that brings us to such confession.

Remember Matthew 16. Our Lord asked Peter and the other disciples, “Who do men say that I, the Son of man, am?” They answered, “Some say that thou art John the Baptist, or Elias, or one of the other prophets.” Our Lord said, “But whom say ye that I am?” Peter said, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And our Lord said, “Blessed art thou, Peter. For flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven.”

The only reason we know who Jesus Christ is, and that He is indeed the Son of God, is because the Father has been pleased to reveal Him to us. In Matthew 11:27, our Lord said, “No man knoweth the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him; neither knoweth any man the Son, save the Father, and he to whomsoever the Father will reveal him.” The Son must reveal the Father, and the Father must reveal the Son. Therefore, when we confess that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, we acknowledge that everything God says about Jesus Christ is true, and we agree with the Father in what He says about Christ.

The result of that saving confession is that God dwells in us and we in Him. We have been sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, so God dwells in us.

John is testifying that they knew. They had firsthand knowledge that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. They were agreeing with God the Father and with the apostles, who gave their testimony that Jesus is indeed the Son of God. Then verse 16 says, "And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God and God in him." Notice the two words know and believe: "We have known and believed the love that God hath to us."

In the Greek, these are perfect active indicatives. The impact of the statement is this: We have known and continue to know, and we have believed and continue to believe that God has sent this love to us. We have known and continue to know; we have believed and continue to believe the love that God has to us.

What is this love that God has to us, which we know and continue to know and believe and continue to believe? Look back at 1 John 4:9–10: "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

The love of God that we have known and continue to know, that we believe and continue to believe, is the love by which God sent His Son to be our propitiation. We know and believe that God the Father gave His only begotten Son. We know and continue to know and believe that Jesus Christ is our propitiation, our Passover, and our sacrifice. We know and continue to know and believe that Jesus Christ is salvation and that we live in Him. "And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love."

"And he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him." How in the world is love dwelling in God? We are talking about the love that God had in sending His Son, Jesus Christ. Therefore, if we have Jesus Christ, we dwell in God, and God dwells in us.

Perfect Love Defined and Its Fruits (1 John 4:17–18)

Verse 17 is the icing on the cake: “Herein is our love made perfect that we may have boldness in the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world.” Note the word herein. Herein is our love made perfect that we may have boldness in the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world. The Greek word herein is the little preposition en. Many times in our Bibles, it is translated as our English word in: “in this we know.” You could say “by this we know,” or “herein we know”; it is all the same thing. Thus, herein is our love made perfect that we may have boldness in the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world.

Now look at the two words made perfect. Those two words come from one word that is a perfect passive indicative. You may say, “I do not know what that means.” The perfect tense means it happened one time in time past, but it has a continuing result. It is passive, the opposite of active. When something is passive, you have nothing to do with it. Therefore, this may be read: “Herein is our love,” or, “Herein our love has been made perfect, and it continues to be perfect.”

Our love has been perfected once and for all. It has been perfected once and forever with continuing results. How can our love have been perfected once and for all with continuing results? In this context, what is our love? Our love is that love which God gave us in giving us Jesus Christ. Perfect love is when the Father gave His only begotten Son. We believed Him. We agreed with Him. We confessed that God was holy, just and righteous in giving His only begotten Son. And now in faith and through faith and by faith, we are abiding in this love.

What is our source of love? Look in 1 John 4 and verse 19. We love Him. Why? Where did we get our love from? From God. The Bible says in Romans chapter 5 and verse 5 that we are not ashamed. Why are we not ashamed? Because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost. Where does our love come from? It comes from God, and therefore it is perfect.

We may not be perfect, but He is perfect. The act of giving Jesus Christ was perfection par excellence. The sacrifice of Christ was

perfect. The atonement of Christ was perfect. The reconciliation of Christ was perfect. The salvation of Christ was perfect. We have confessed. We believe. We agree with the Father. We are now abiding in this perfect love.

What does that mean? The love has been perfected once and for all forever with continuing results in Jesus Christ. What are the immediate fruits of comprehending and understanding this perfected love? Look in verse 17: "Herein has our love been made perfect and continues, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment." The first fruit of having understood, grasped and comprehended this perfect love that we have in Jesus Christ is that we have boldness in the day of judgment.

When we think of our sins, our disobedience, and our wickedness, sometimes we shudder. Why? Because we know that we are guilty. We have violated the law of God, and we know that God is a righteous judge. One of the greatest things we can comprehend is that, when we see the perfected love we have in God the Father, that perfected love in Jesus Christ teaches us that God is not simply a righteous judge. He is also our loving, heavenly Father. Therefore, in the day of judgment, you and I are not going to face a harsh, strict, uncontrollable judge. We will be facing our Father.

And what does that give us? Boldness in the day of judgment. We know that our Father has loved us, does love us, and continues to love us. We know that our sins are forgiven for Christ's sake. I am going to show you the Scripture before I end today.

Look at verse 18, because it further expands the thought in verse 17. In verse 17, he said, "Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment." Then he explains it further in verse 18: "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love." If love has not been perfected—that is, if you have not grasped what God has done for us in Christ—there can be no boldness in the day of judgment. What is he saying? Fear is not only the opposite of faith; it is also the opposite of love.

Look in your Bibles at 2 Timothy 1:7: "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."

Love is the opposite of fear, just as faith is the opposite of fear. What has God not given us? God did not give us a spirit of fear.

If a man is fearful about judgment, he has not comprehended the work of Christ. In 1 John 4:18, he says, “There is no fear in love.” If you have comprehended the perfect love of God in Jesus Christ and the perfect sacrifice of Christ, there will be no fear in facing the Father. Why? Because perfected love casts out fear. The perfect love that casts out fear is the same perfect passive indicative used in verse 17: once and for all, perfected love casts out fear. It throws it out. Fear cannot dwell with a comprehension of the perfect work of Jesus Christ. “He that feareth has not been made perfect in love.”

So the one who fears has something wrong with him. He has not understood or confessed and acknowledged with the Father the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ, for had he understood the perfected love of God in Christ, there would be no fear. Perfected love casts out fear. Constant and continual fear demonstrates that we are not abiding in Christ.

Verse 17 says, “Herein is our love made perfect that we may have boldness in the day of judgment.” That is the first fruit. Here is the second fruit: “because as he is, so are we in this world.” The more we abide in Christ, the more we become like Christ.

You know the old adage, and it is true: the longer two people live together—the husband and wife—the more they look, act, think, and talk like each other. Alice got a birthday card the other day with a husband and wife standing together, and they began to look alike. Even little hairs began to poke out on the wife’s chin. Her beard is not quite as full as mine, but you understand. The longer you live together, the more you think and act alike, and sometimes look alike. If we are continually abiding in Christ, what is the natural result? As He is, so are we in this world. Our lives will be more and more conformed to Jesus Christ. When we comprehend this perfect sacrifice and this perfect love, we want to be more like Christ.

What did our Lord say in John 8 and verse 29? He said, “I only do always those things which please the Father.” And the man who is in Christ wants to please the Father.

Let me make some applications, because I believe that if we ever see this truth, it is going to give us the greatest comfort and the greatest courage. I understand, folks, about an embarrassment over our sins. There is a difference between being embarrassed over something and fearing something—a big difference. I would be embarrassed to tell you some things I did as a kid, and you would be embarrassed to tell me some things. But if we are in Christ, we have no fear of punishment because of those things, because Christ has suffered for our sins, the just for the unjust.

Applications of Perfect Love

The first application is this: perfect love should humble us exceedingly. Why? Because this perfected love is not ours initially or originally. I told you that this perfected love should humble us, because it was not ours initially or originally. It is God's love to us in Christ; therefore, we are forced to confess the truth of 1 John 4 and verse 19: "We love Him, because He first loved us." Has it ever dawned upon you that the only reason you are saved, converted, know anything about the Father, or have any love to God at all is because God first loves you? Where would we be, and what would we be, without the love of God? I surely do not want to ponder that one too long, because I can tell you very quickly where we would be and what we would be without the love of God in Christ.

Look in Jeremiah chapter 31 and verse 3, where God told the prophet, which also applies to all His people: "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." God said, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." You know what the word everlasting means: it means eternal. It had no beginning and therefore has no ending. You and I could never love God initially or originally, for God loved us from eternity. The Bible says in Romans 5 verse 1, "Therefore being justified by grace, we have peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ."

There is no war existing between the Father and the believer. We now have peace. The believer has thrown down his weapons of warfare. He is in submission and now wants to be in obedience. You know what the Bible says in Romans 8? "There is therefore now no

condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus." If there is no condemnation in us, why should we fear? If you understand perfected love, it will humble you because it is all because of God that you are what you are.

Secondly, by way of application, I must confess that while my love to the Father is not perfect, yet His love toward me is perfect. Even in the best and most holy acts of faith, there is still sin mingled with our worship, adoration, obedience, and service. Yet in returning His love, thankfully, He accepts the will for the deed. I am so thankful that God does indeed know our hearts, our wills, our desires, and our motives. The Bible says in 2 Corinthians 8:12, "For if there first be a willing mind, it is accepted according to that which a man hath, and not according to that which he hath not." I may not be able to love Him perfectly now, but I shall love Him perfectly in eternity.

The third application is this: a corollary of perfected love is that we also love the brethren. If we hold upon God's perfect love toward us individually, we cannot help but exercise that same love toward others. Do you realize that is precisely what Christ did for us? Hebrews 2:11–12 says, "For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all one, for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren. In the midst of the church I will sing praise unto thee." What did Christ do? He did for His brethren, that is, us.

First John 3:16 says, "Hereby perceive we the love of God," because "He laid down His life for us." Watch the corollary: "We ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." That is exactly what Christ did for us. Therefore, we must also love the brethren and sacrifice for them.

First John 4:21 gives us a commandment: "He that loveth God love his brother also." Here is my fourth and final application: it is useless, illogical, and unscriptural to declare our love to our Father while at the same time declaring hatred, enmity, and ill will toward our brethren. First John 4:20 says, "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?"

Look at First John 3:14–15: “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.” He who loves God will love his brethren. I cannot help but love the people of God if I understand the perfected love that God has for me in Jesus Christ, for Jesus Christ laid down his life for his brethren.

What does the Bible say in John 17? “Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.” Likewise, we must do the same. He who possesses the perfected love of God in Christ not only loves the Father, but the brethren as well. If you understand what God has done for us in Jesus Christ, there will be no fear and no torment, because perfected love casts out fear. We are not afraid to face our Father. We may be ashamed, but we are not afraid.

Knowing what you know now, if you could live your life over and go back and undo some things, would you not undo those sins that you committed? Of course you would. But those sins have been dealt with. The Bible says that He has put them behind His back, as far as the east is from the west, and He will never remember them against us anymore.

There's no fear in a perfected love. And in Jesus Christ, we have a perfected love.

Father, we thank you for the perfect love that we have from thee in and through Jesus Christ, our Savior. We give ourselves to thee and ask that you increase our love, our affection, our obedience unto thee. Thank you for Jesus Christ. Thank you for the Word of God. Thank you for the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Thank you for your so great salvation. In Christ's holy name we pray.

CHAPTER 3

Sinning Against God

February 15, 2004

Introduction: The Small Word with Great Consequences

Notice Genesis 39:9. Joseph says, “There is none greater in this house than I. Neither hath he kept back anything from me, but thee, because thou art his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?”

Let me use one simple word: sin. It is a small, three-letter word, yet, for a word so simple and easily spelled and pronounced, it carries great consequences. Sin is frequently committed, constantly denied, and strenuously rejected as the cause of our heartache, trouble, and helplessness. It is usually alluded to euphemistically in conversation and steadfastly denied as to its reality and consequences.

A euphemism substitutes a lighter word for a harsher one. One of my good friends was talking to an airline stewardess, and she told him that she was living with the pilot. He said, “What you mean is, you’re committing adultery with the pilot.” She did not want to use

that term, but that is a euphemism. We use such words so we will not face the harsh reality of the truth.

Men call sin an accident, but God calls it an abomination. Men call sin a blunder, but God calls it blindness. Men call sin a chance, but God calls it a choice. Men call sin a defect, but God calls it a disease. Men call sin an error, but God calls it enmity. Men call sin fascination, but God calls it a fatality. Men call sin good, but God calls it godlessness. Men call sin an infirmity, but God calls it iniquity. Men call sin a luxury, but God calls it lawlessness. Men call sin a trifle, but God calls it a tragedy. Men call sin a mistake, but God calls it madness. Men call sin weakness, but God calls sin willfulness.

Common Focus on Consequences of Sin

We always tend to water down our wickedness. Whenever sin is discussed, its consequences are usually in the forefront, especially consequences in relationship to man. Romans 6:23 says, “The wages of sin are death.” Thus, we speak of the wages or consequences of sin: death to self, friends, family, and society. Sin does indeed bring sufferings of all kinds—mental, emotional, financial, physical, spiritual, and eternal.

In the book of Ezekiel, chapter 18, verse 4 and verse 20, the Word of God declares, “The soul that sinneth, it shall die.” There can be no denial of the consequences of sin. One of the principles of Scripture is this: he who sins must suffer. Galatians 6:7–8 makes it exceedingly clear: “Be not deceived, God is not mocked. For whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” He who sins must indeed suffer.

Another aspect of sin frequently proclaimed is the fact that we have sinned and consequently are sinners. Everyone can quote Romans 3:23: “For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.”

The fall of man attests to the fact and reality of man's sinfulness. The Apostle Paul said in Romans 5:12, “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.” The fall of man does indeed attest to our wickedness and sin. Moreover, as we study Scripture,

the need and necessity of a Savior verifies that we are sinners. Paul said in 1 Timothy 1:15, “This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.” In Luke 19:10, our Lord said He came to seek and to save that which was lost. The very fact that we need a Savior verifies that we are sinners. God's demand for repentance and faith signifies the same truth.

In Mark 1:15, our Lord began to preach that men should repent and believe the gospel. Why should you repent unless there is something over which you must repent? And why must you believe unless you are an unbeliever?

It is not my intent to cover the whole range of the doctrine of hamartiology. Anybody know what the doctrine of hamartiology is? Hamartiology is the doctrine of sin, from the Greek word hamartia, which is sin. Soteriology is the doctrine of salvation. What I do want to do is dwell on one aspect of sin and demonstrate for you the awfulness and wickedness of sin.

Joseph's Argument: Sin Against God

In Genesis 39:9, Joseph says, "There is none greater in this house than I. Neither hath he kept back anything from me but thee, because thou art his wife." Then he asks, "How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" This is the question Joseph asks.

Joseph was a Christian, or a godly man, in a pagan household. His master's wife was ungodly and wicked. When the day came that she made her final play for Joseph, he endeavored to reason with her, and he based his arguments upon that which even a heathen ought to be able to understand.

Genesis 39:7-9 says, "And it came to pass after these things that his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph, and she said, Lie with me. But he refused and said unto his master's wife, Behold, my master wotteth not what is with me in the house. He hath committed all that he hath to my hand. There is none greater in this house than I. Neither hath he kept back anything from me but thee, because

thou art his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?"

First, Joseph speaks of the trust his master has placed in him. He says, "But he refused, and he said unto his master's wife, Behold, my master wotteth not what is with me in the house; he hath committed all that he hath into my hands." Joseph said, "I am in the place of trust. Everything that your husband has, he's placed in my hand. I am in a position where he has put his trust in me. Therefore, it would be wicked and wrong to abuse my place of trust."

I wish our politicians believed that. Joseph said, "I've been given a trust and I'm not going to violate that trust."

Secondly, he argues that he has been promoted to a place of authority in the house. Once again, it would be wicked and wrong for him to abuse or misuse that authority. He says in verse 9, "There is none greater in this house than I." Joseph said, "I'm in charge of everything. I'm the head honcho. I not only have a place of trust, I've been given a great deal of authority. And just like it would be wicked and wrong for me to violate my trust, it would also be wicked and wrong for me to abuse and misuse my office."

Thirdly, he argues based upon the liberty, freedom, and graciousness of his master. He says, "Neither has he kept back anything from me but thee." For Joseph to have been a slave, he had a great deal of liberty and freedom, and he could have whatever he wanted in that household. He says, "Now I've been placed in a position of trust. I cannot abuse it. I've been given authority. I cannot abuse it. My master has given me any and everything I want and any and everything I need."

Therefore, it would still be wrong for me to do this and demonstrate my ungratefulness and my unthankfulness. The fourth argument he uses is the sanctity of marriage: "Neither hath he kept back anything from me but thee, because thou art his wife."

He is saying that his master has rightly and righteously withheld her from him because she is married. She is his wife, his private property, and therefore should be rightly withheld from him.

Any heathen ought to understand those arguments. Yet, although he gives these forceful, logical, rational arguments to his master's

wife, when it comes to himself, he uses another argument. Look at verse 9: "How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" When it comes to himself, he uses the highest argument possible. If he does this sin, it would be a sin against God. In the Hebrew, this is extremely emphatic. The words are emphatic and literally mean, "this wickedness, this great one. How can I do this," he says, "and sin against God?"

Adultery was a great sin, and had Joseph committed it, it certainly would have been greatly aggravated by all the favors that his master had conferred upon him. It would have been a sin against himself, his soul and his body, but also against his master. Joseph says that, above all, it would have been a sin against God. It would have been something contrary to the nature of God, contrary to God's revealed will, and contrary to God's righteous law. All these arguments prevailed upon Joseph and caused him to refuse the offer. He said, "I cannot in righteousness and in honor comply with it."

Had Joseph complied with his master's request, he certainly would have sinned against himself, his master, his master's wife, his family, and their family. Yet none of those trespasses were entertained by Joseph. What was entertained by Joseph was this: "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?"

David's Confession: Against Thee Only

Now consider another individual who says essentially the same thing. Psalm 51 is one of David's penitential psalms, and in it David is confessing his adultery, his murder, and his wickedness. David says, "For I acknowledge my transgression, and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight, that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest." He then says, "Against thee, and against thee only have I done this evil in thy sight."

Did David not sin against Bathsheba? Did David not sin against Uriah? Did David not sin against his family, against her family, against the kingdom, and against himself? The answer to all those questions is yes—emphatically, yes. But then we must ask why David says, "Against thee, against thee only have I done this evil in thy sight."

The answer is this: David may have committed numerous trespasses against other people, but the real transgression was against God himself. God was the only one who could remove the guilt and remit the punishment. As great as David's sins were against all the others, the most awfulness and the most wickedness involved in those sins were, in reality, that they were against God himself.

Now we have a comparison between Joseph and David. What is the difference between them? Let me take you back to one of my favorite scenes from one of my favorite movies, The Outlaw Josey Wales. I have seen it forty times, and every time I watch it, Alice says, “You have seen that thing so often.” I said, “That does not matter. I still like that movie.”

The Difference Between Joseph and David

You remember when Clint Eastwood was talking with Chief Ten Bears. He said he had come to bring him life or had come to bring him death. Ten Bears replied, “There’s iron in your words.” Then he said, “It’s too bad. There’s no iron in the papers from Washington. Iron is in the soul of men.”

Why did Joseph not sin against God, and why did David sin against God? The difference is simple. The iron of truth had previously entered Joseph’s soul. Therefore, he could not sin against God, because his soul was filled with righteous fear. He called upon that fear, and upon the realization of God’s majesty, holiness, and sovereignty, to keep him from sinning. What did David do? David sinned without thinking about the magnitude of his sin. He did not think about God.

He only thought about himself. But it was only after he sinned that the realization of this truth sank deep into his soul. The irony of it then led him to repentance, confession of sin, and an acknowledgement of the awfulness of what he had done. Consequently, David wrote many penitential psalms saying, "God, I'm sorry, I've sinned against you."

Sin Is Always Against God

You and I fail to comprehend this singular fact: although we may trespass against others, our transgression in reality is always against God. Without taking the time to take you through the Scriptures, may I tell you that sin is always expressed in the Bible by names of enmity and hostility toward God. It is called walking contrary to God in Leviticus 26:21; rebelling against God in Isaiah 1:2; rising up against Him in Micah 2:8; striving and contending with God in Isaiah 45:9; and despising God in Numbers 11:20.

Sin makes men haters of God. It makes men resistors of God, as in Acts 7:51; fighters against God, as in Acts 5:39; blasphemers against God—in short, deniers of God. Psalm 14:1 says, "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God." Sin always tries to un-God God.

If we understood the awfulness of sin, we would not rush so willingly, readily, and headlong into it. Look in your Bibles to Judges, chapter 10, verse 10. The Bible says, "And the children of Israel cried unto the Lord, saying, We have sinned against thee, both because we have forsaken our God and also served Baalim."

Did they not sin against themselves? Yes. Their families? Yes. Society? Yes. Their culture? Yes. But ultimately they said, "Our sin is against thee." Look in 2 Chronicles 6:26.

Solomon is dedicating the temple, and of course he prays and asks for numerous requests in his prayer, but here is one of them. In 2 Chronicles 6:26, he says, “When the heaven is shut up and there is no rain.” Why? “Because they have sinned against thee.” They have sinned against thee. Verse 36 says, “If they sin against thee.” Verse 39 says, “Then hear thou from the heavens, even from thy dwelling place, their prayer and their supplication, and maintain their cause, and forgive thy people who have sinned against thee.” We have really not comprehended the singular fact that sin is against God.

Nehemiah prayed, “Let thine ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee now, day and night, for the children of Israel thy servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee. Both I and my father’s house have sinned. We have dealt very corruptly against thee, and have not kept thy

commandments, nor thy statutes, nor thy judgments, which thou commandest thy servant Moses." Note his prayer: "We have sinned against thee. We've dealt very corruptly against thee."

David says, "I said, Lord, be merciful unto me. Heal my soul." Why? "For I have sinned against thee." In Psalm 119, especially for our young men, one of my favorite passages says, "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to thy word. With my whole heart have I sought thee. Oh, let me not wander from thy commandments. Thy word have I hid in my heart." Why? "That I might not sin against thee." Young men, you ought to memorize this passage. What is the remedy for sinning against God? Hiding His Word in your heart—that is, having the iron of His truth already in your soul.

But note: sin is against God. Jeremiah says, "We acknowledge, O Lord, our wickedness and the iniquity of our fathers, for we have sinned against thee." I am pressing this point because there are explanations as to what sin actually does. In Daniel 9:7–8, once again, Daniel says, "We have sinned against thee." When we understand that sin is against God personally, it makes us stop and think.

We have an old saying: out of sight, out of mind. When we do not really think about something, it makes it easier to do. When we do not think about the one we are actually hurting, sinning becomes easier. However, when we realize that we are sinning against a personal God, our sin then becomes nothing less than high treason against Him.

Sin is contrary to the person and nature of God. I want you to turn back in your Bibles to Exodus chapter 15. I will let you look at one verse with me, and then I will quote another verse. But I have just told you that sin is contrary to the person and to the nature of God.

Do you remember the truth of the holiness of God? God is holy. His name is holy; as His name is, so is He. His nature is holy. Look in Exodus 15:11: "Who is like unto Thee, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like Thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" The Bible says that God is glorious in holiness. Did you know that in Revelation 15:4 the Bible says, "Thou only art holy. Who shall not

fear Thee, O God?" Thou only art holy. As God is holy, He is all holy, only holy, altogether holy, and always holy.

So sin is sinful, all sinful, only sinful, altogether sinful, and always sinful. As in God there is no evil, so in sin there is no good. Holiness is the attribute of God which frees Him not only from evil itself, but also from the appearance of evil. God is so holy that He cannot sin Himself, neither tempts anyone to sin. The Bible says in James 1:13, "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God. For God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man."

But did you know the Bible also says in Habakkuk 1:13 that "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity." In other words, God cannot behold evil approvingly, and He cannot look upon iniquity condoningly. Why? Because God is infinitely holy.

Sin's Attempt to Dethrone God

What Sin Does to God

How does sin affect our Father? The Apostle Paul wrote in Romans chapter 7 that he wanted sin to become exceedingly sinful. If we are going to see the exceeding sinfulness of sin, we must understand what sin does to our Father.

First, sin, if possible, would depose or dethrone God. Sin will not allow God to be on His own throne or govern and control His own world. Sin wants to rule and to dethrone God. In one sense, sin does rule over the ungodly. Romans 6:11 says, “Likewise, reckon ye yourselves also dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Then Paul says, “Let not sin therefore reign.” Why? Because sin thinks it is a king, and sin does reign in the ungodly. “Let not therefore sin reign in your mortal bodies, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin, but yield yourselves unto God as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.”

“For sin shall not have dominion over you,” that is, it shall not have kingship or lordship over you, “for ye are not under the law, but under grace.” Grace is our standard for justification. “What then?

Shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid." To whom we yield ourselves servants to obey, his servants we are to whom we obey, "whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness." When we sin, we are allowing sin, in one sense, to depose and dethrone God, because we are yielding our bodies to King Sin instead of King Jesus.

You and I have never really grasped the wickedness of sin. Sin is so vile, it would dethrone God and kick Him off His own throne. Sin carries the language of Pharaoh in Exodus 5:2. When Moses came to Pharaoh and said, "Thus saith the Lord, Let my people go," Pharaoh responded, "Who is the Lord that I should let Israel go? I know not the Lord. Neither will I let Israel go." His attitude was, I'm king. God's not king. Who is He? He's a usurper. He did not recognize the sovereignty of God. Those who are in rebellion to God use the language of Psalm 12:4: "With our tongue we will prevail. Our lips are our own. Who is Lord over us?" Jeremiah 2:31 records an even bolder statement: "We are lords. We will no more come unto Thee." Lord, You're not our sovereign. We're our own sovereign. We're our own God. In Luke 19:14 they said, "We will not have this man to reign over us."

Whatever we do to violate the law or will of God, when we choose sin over God, we are aiding and abetting sin to dethrone God. That is nothing less than treason against the sovereign God of heaven and earth. So sin, if possible, would dethrone God. Scripture declares that God is sovereign, and sin denies that fact. When we sin, we're sinning against a personal God. In our sin, we're denying His sovereignty, which is blasphemy and an insult to the holy, sovereign God of heaven and earth.

Sin is so wicked and vile, first of all, it would dethrone God. Secondly, sin is a denial of God as chief good. In Matthew chapter 19, the rich young ruler came running to Jesus, knelt, and said, "Good Master, what must I do that I may inherit eternal life?" Our Lord said, "There is none good but one, that is, God." 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. God is not only good; He is the chief good, the sum and substance of all good. As He is necessarily God,

likewise He is necessarily good. He is perfectly, immutably, essentially, infinitely, and necessarily good.

There is sufficient goodness in God to satisfy our every desire, our every longing, our every need. When we sin, we deny God as the chief good. Our attitudes and actions indicate that we do not really believe God is sufficient for us. In other words, when we sin, we are saying, "God, I need something else besides You. You are not big enough to satisfy my every need." Every prodigal who leaves the Father's house confesses that it is better to be somewhere else than with the Father. Every Achan who steals admits that God cannot satisfy him; he needs his own lust and desires to make him happy. Every Demas who forsakes God is saying that God is insufficient; he needs the world to make him happy. Ask yourself: Why do we need sin? The answer is, we really do not need sin. But many times we prefer sin over God.

Why do we do that? Because we believe God is incapable of supplying our needs and satisfying us, and therefore we turn to sin. We no longer confess God as our chief good; we are saying that sin is better than God. How insulting to the gracious, sovereign God. Sin would dethrone God. Sin is a denial of God as chief good. Thirdly, sin challenges the justice of God.

God says in Malachi 2:17, "You have wearied the Lord with your words. Yet you say, Wherein have we wearied Him? When you say, Everyone that doeth evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and He delighteth in them, or, Where is the God of judgment?" God says, "You weary me."

How are we wearying you? When you say that everyone that does evil is good, or whenever you say, "Where is the God of judgment?"

What are they saying? They're saying, "We're sinning and getting away with it. We're doing what we want to do. God's not judging us. Therefore, evil is good." Let me tell you something, folks: sin provokes God. Sin provokes God to justice. You know what sin does? Sin challenges God to do His worst. I don't know about you, but I surely don't want to challenge God. I've seen a lot of men in this world I don't want to challenge, but I surely don't want to challenge

God. Some of the men might put me in the grave, but the Lord can put me in other places.

Deuteronomy, chapter 9, verse 18. Moses says, "And I fell down before the Lord, as at the first, forty days and forty nights. I did neither eat bread nor drink water because of all your sins which you sinned, in doing wickedly in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger. For I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure wherewith the Lord was wroth against you to destroy you. But the Lord hearkened to me at that time also."

What are we talking about? You remember what God told Moses? "Moses, step aside. I will kill them all." And Moses said, "I fell down and intervened for you." The people provoked God in their sin, in that golden calf. They challenged God: "You won't judge us. You won't destroy us." Over and over, the Bible tells us that sin provokes God to anger. Why in the world would anyone wish to provoke God? I'll tell you why: because they really do not believe God, and they really do not believe that God is just.

Psalm 10:1: "Why standest thou far off, O Lord? Why hidest thou thyself in the time of trouble? The wicked in his pride doth persecute the poor. Let them be taken in the devices 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." The wicked man "hath said in his heart, I shall not be moved. 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." What is an ungodly man doing? He is

challenging God, saying that God is not omniscient, that God does not know, and that God will never judge him for his sin.

Psalm 50 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? Now look, when thou sawest a thief, then thou consentedst with him, and hast been partaker with adulterers. Thou givest thy mouth to evil, and thy tongue frameth deceit. Thou sittest and speakest against thy brother. Thou slanderest thine own mother's son. These things hast thou done, and I kept silent."

"Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself, but I will reprove thee and set them in order before thine eyes." God says you thought He was as forgetful as you are, but He is not. You challenged Him, and He will set your sins in order before your face.

Psalm 94 declares: "O Lord God, to whom vengeance belongeth, O God, to whom vengeance belongeth, show thyself. Lift up thyself, thou judge of the earth. Render a reward to the proud. Lord, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked triumph? How long shall they utter and speak hard things, and all the workers of iniquity boast themselves? They break in pieces thy people, O Lord, and afflict thine inheritance." The wicked challenge God because they do not believe in God's justice.

"They slay the widow and the stranger, and murder the fatherless. Yet they say, The Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it. Understand, ye brutish among the people, and ye fools, when will ye be wise? Now watch. He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? He that formed the eye, shall he not see? He that chastiseth the heathen, shall he not correct? He that teacheth man knowledge, shall he not know?" Do you think God is deaf and dumb? Do you think God is blind? God gave you hearing. Don't you think He can hear? God gave you sight. Don't you think He can see? You want to challenge God? Go ahead. You'll lose. Sin is an affront to God. It is to mock God to His face and challenge Him to do His worst. In essence, you are saying, "God, I don't believe you're going to do anything. I believe I can sin and get by with it." What a challenge to the sovereign, just God of the universe.

Fourthly, sin despises the riches of God's goodness. Look in your Bibles to Romans chapter 2, verses 4 and 5. "Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God."

You talk about ungrateful and unthankful. What is the goodness of God? It is that attribute of God in which God is good and provides for all His creatures. Psalm 52:1 tells us that the goodness of God endureth continually. God continues to be good and to do good to the wicked, and they continue to ignore Him. He continues to give all His gifts, yet wicked men despise them, take them for granted, and believe that God owes them.

Look at what God does for us every night and every day. He gives us sleep, rest, breath, food, clothing, family, friends, and all these things.

And what do we do? God says we despise them. That should be sufficient for God to slap down every sinner around. But God does not. When men despise His goodness, His forbearance comes into play. Instead of smiting them, God forbears with them a little longer. When His forbearance runs out, His longsuffering comes into play. Instead of smiting them instantly, God suffers even longer with them. And the whole time God is suffering long with them, what are they doing? They are treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath. God says, “When I smite them, they shall be smitten. They shall be destroyed.” It is the despisement of God's goodness, of God's forbearance, and of God's longsuffering that causes us to treasure up the judgment of God against ourselves.

Sin not only tries to dethrone God; sin also despises the goodness of God. It denies God as the chief good. But fifthly, note that sin despises God and His Word. It is not just a despising of His goodness; it is a despising of God.

Remember what Joseph said in Genesis 39:9: “How then shall I do this great wickedness and sin against God?” His master's wife had made a play for him. His argument was, “How then can I do this

great wickedness and sin against God?" David did do the great wickedness and sin against God. Therefore, in 2 Samuel 12:9, look what God tells David: "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."

God says in verse 9, "You've despised me" in verse 10: "Now therefore, the sword shall never depart out of thine house, because thou hast despised me." He not only despised God's Word; God says, "You've despised me." The Hebrew word for despise is bazah.

Sin means to hold contemptible, to disdain, to hold despicable, vile, and worthless, and to scorn. God said, "You have held me to be a vile, contemptible, despicable person." You have treated Him with contempt and disdain. Numbers 11:20 tells us how the Israelites despised God in their rebellion, and Numbers 15:30 tells us that sin is a despisement of the Word of God.

When we choose sin, we despise God. God has said, "Do not do this," and we say, "God, I am going to do it." In so doing, we despise His Word and Him. In short, sin is the dare of God's justice, the rape of His mercy, the jeer of His patience, the slight of His power, the contempt of His love, the upbraiding of His providence, and the scoff of His promise. Sin is the unbelief of His Word, the denial of His authority, the despisement of His person, and the reproach of His wisdom.

Sin is against God personally. I might steal from Henry, but I have sinned against God. I have not only trespassed against him, but I have sinned against God.

Applications: Remembering God and Hating Sin

What was it that kept Joseph from sinning? He remembered the august, majestic, and sovereign God of the universe. He understood that sin does destroy us, and we cannot deny its effects and consequences. But sin is far worse than merely doing something to us or having consequences in our lives. Sin is against God. It is an attack upon God's person, power, and position.

When faced with a choice of sinning, we must ask not only what this sin will do to me, my friends, my family, and my church, but what effect it will have upon my God. That changes the whole situation. The awfulness of sin can be seen in its hatred of God.

Romans 8:7 says, "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God." The passage continues, "For it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be, so that they that are in the flesh cannot please God." Because the carnal mind is enmity against God. You know what enmity is? Enmity is a strong word for hatred. Literally, he says, "For the carnal mind," that is, the fleshly mind, "is extreme hatred against God."

What a terrible anomaly for a Christian. On the one hand, we profess to love God. On the other hand, we sin and express our hatred and contempt for God. The best way to demonstrate our love to God is by obedience. God said in Jeremiah 44:4, "Howbeit, I sent unto you all my servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them, saying, O do not this abominable thing which I hate." He was talking about sin. God said, "I sent you my preachers. I sent you my prophets. I told you, do not do this abominable thing which I hate." God hates sin. But the feeling is mutual. Sin hates God.

Whose side are you on? If we love the Father, the best way to express that love is through obedience.

Can you learn to cry with Joseph, "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" I do not care what the sin is. I do not care what the temptation is. I do not care what the lust or the desire is. We ought to burn that question in our souls: "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against my God?" If we ever understood the awfulness and the sinfulness of sin, and if we ever realized that sin is against a personal God, we would be a whole lot slower to try to satisfy our lusts and our desires.

"Father, You're our chief good; there's enough in You to satisfy me. I need neither sin nor wickedness, only You."

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, push this truth into our souls. May it be iron for our persons. May we realize that sin is against the sovereign, holy, righteous, personal Heavenly Father. Give us grace to serve Thee acceptably with reverence and godly fear. But, Lord,

make us holy as Thou art holy. May we not do that abominable thing which Thou dost hate. In the name of Jesus Christ we ask it. Amen.

CHAPTER 4

How God Saves a Sinner

March 14, 2004

How God Saves Sinners

Introduction: Paul's Conversion as a Pattern

Two passages are needed to understand this message: Acts chapter 9 and 1 Timothy chapter 1. Acts chapter 9 records Saul's conversion, beginning with verse 1: “And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus, to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem. And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus, and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven.”

“And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest. It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he, trembling and astonished, said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto

him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do."

In 1 Timothy chapter 1, verses 15 and 16, the Apostle Paul says, "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting." Many of you ought to be able to quote at least verse 15, but verse 16 is important here.

Paul said that he obtained mercy so that Jesus Christ might show forth all longsuffering in him first, for a pattern to those who would afterward believe on Him to life everlasting. His conversion is a pattern experience. The word actually means something like a stamp, an etching, a formula, an example, or a pattern. Paul is telling us that his conversion is a pattern that God uses to save sinners.

Salvation Is of the Lord and Involves Genuine Conviction

The Bible says in Jonah 2:9 that salvation is of the Lord, and certainly salvation is indeed of the Lord. Please understand that salvation does not simply slip up on anybody. I was preaching in New Orleans one time, and a woman came to me after the service and said, "Brother Weaver, I have a problem. Maybe you could help me." I said, "Well, what is it?" She said, "A lot of folks don't think I'm saved." I said, "I wonder why. What would you tell me about your salvation experience?" She said, "Sure. I went to bed lost one night, and the next morning I woke up, and I was saved." I said, "No wonder folks don't believe you. I don't believe you either." Salvation simply does not slip up on people.

It is not something that happens unbeknownst to them. God uses different circumstances in our lives, and we have different degrees of conviction, but basically the conviction is the same. Let me illustrate it. Suppose there is a woman in this congregation who has only two children and had a difficult time with each of them. Suppose she was in labor twenty or twenty-four hours with each child and had a very difficult time delivering them. Then she comes to my wife and says,

"Mrs. Weaver, have you ever been in labor twenty-four hours straight?" My wife says, "Why, no. The most I've ever been in labor is thirty or forty minutes." The woman says, "Well, in that case, you've never had a baby." The truth is, my wife has had twice as many children as she has.

It is not the degree or the length of the labor that counts. What counts is whether a real child has been born. God may convict someone for a long time or for a short time, but the degree of conviction is not what counts. What counts is whether there is a real, genuine child born.

The Bible tells us in Acts chapter 9 about Saul of Tarsus's conversion experience. He said that this is a kind of pattern, what God does when He saves sinners.

Paul's Enmity: The Sinner's Natural Hatred of God

Our conversion experience will not be exactly like the Apostle Paul's in every detail, but he shows basic principles that must be present in every individual who is genuinely and truly converted.

What does the Bible share with us? First, look at verses 1 and 2: "And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus, to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, that is, Christians, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem." The very first thing God reveals is Paul's enmity. Enmity is a very strong word for hatred. The Bible teaches that God is showing us how Paul actually hated God. He did not think he did, but he certainly hated Christ, Christians, and Christianity. Romans 8:7 says, "For the carnal mind is enmity against God. It is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be."

Man by nature has extreme hatred for God. He may not admit it on the surface, but the carnal mind is hatred itself. When God drove Adam out of the garden of Eden, He put there a seraphim with a flaming sword. God unsheathed that sword, making it manifest that God and man were now at war. That variance reveals itself in very many ways. Therefore, when God begins the work of grace in

anyone, the very first thing He does is show us our enmity—our strong hatred against Him.

Remember Isaiah 6, when God was going to call Isaiah and send him. Isaiah 6:1 says, “In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw also the Lord high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple.” God revealed Himself to Isaiah. But what did Isaiah say? “Woe is me, for mine eyes have seen the Lord of hosts. I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.” He was saying, “I saw my wickedness. I saw my sin.”

Remember the Pharisee and the publican in the temple in Luke 18. The Pharisee began to boast, saying, “I thank thee that I am not as other men are.”

The Pharisee said, “I fast twice a week and I give tithes of all that I possess. I'm not an adulterer and I don't do this.” But what did the sinner do? He would not even lift up his eyes toward heaven, but smote himself on the breast and said, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner.”

Do you remember in Luke chapter 15 when that prodigal son returned home? He said, “I'll go back and say, Father, I have sinned against heaven and against thee.” That's what the Apostle Paul said in 1 Timothy chapter 1, verse 15: “This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.” What's he saying? God is showing me my enmity.

Fallen man is separated from God. Sin not only conducted man to a great distance from God, but necessarily placed God at a holy distance from man. Man is separated from God, the fountain and giver of all blessings. He's cast out of his favor, severed from communion with him, cut off from the enjoyment of him, and devoid by nature of God's life, holiness, and love.

The Sinner's Separation, Curse, and Wrath

The Bible says in 2 Peter 2:4, “For God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness.” What did God tell Adam? “In the day that thou eatest

thereof, thou shalt surely die." And die he did. He not only died physically later on, but he died spiritually and covenantally.

There is more than one kind of death. Physical death is not annihilation; it is the separation of the soul from the body and expulsion from the earth, so to speak. Spiritual death is separation from God, an expulsion from God. Man, by nature, is depraved and separated from God. He is under God's condemnation, a criminal in chains, held fast until the day of his execution, unless pardoned by the king.

That is why the Bible says in 2 Thessalonians chapter 1 that when our Lord shall return, he shall return in flaming fire, taking vengeance on those who know not God and obey not the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let me show you something that most people have never thought about. When God created Adam, he created him with original holiness and righteousness. But when man sinned, he not only was cast out from God's favor, he was not only kicked out of the garden, but man by nature actually became an object of God's abhorrence. You may say, "You'll have to show me that in the Bible." Well, I will. The Bible says in 1 John 1:5 that God is light and in him is no darkness at all. But the Bible tells us also in Ephesians 5:8, talking about believers, "For ye were sometimes darkness." You are not just in darkness. You were darkness. Now, God is holy, and man, by nature, is absolutely, totally depraved.

God is our rightful King and Lord, and man is an insurrectionist and a rebel against God. God is immaculately holy. The Bible says in Habakkuk 1:13, "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity." In other words, God is so holy that he cannot approve sin; he cannot condone iniquity in any way whatsoever. The Bible also tells us in Isaiah 1:6 that man is as a loathsome leper: "from the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment."

Now, look in your Bibles. Turn there with me, if you would please, to Psalm 5. I could multiply these passages, but I want you to see this passage and try to be honest with it. It is true, and I know, and you

know as well as I do, that God loves sinners. In fact, the Bible says in Romans 5:8 that “God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” I understand that. But you realize there is another side of that coin as well. Even God's own people, even God's elect, even God's chosen, were hated as they were in their sins. Notice Psalm 5, beginning with verse 4. Look what God says: “For thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell with thee. The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity. Thou shalt destroy them that speak leasing: the Lord will abhor the bloody and deceitful man.”

Psalm 7:11 says that God is angry with the wicked. How often? Every day. God is angry with the wicked every day.

The Bible says in John 3:18, “He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” John 3:36 says, “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.”

Psalm 5:4 says, “For thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness.” God has no pleasure or delight in wickedness, or in the wicked, in that sense of the word. “Neither shall evil dwell with thee.” Wicked men have no standing with God; they cannot stand in His presence.

Verse 5 says, “The foolish shall not stand in thy sight.” Then notice this: “Thou hatest all workers of iniquity.” It is not merely the works of iniquity that God hates; it is the workers of iniquity whom God hates. Therefore, verse 6 says, “Thou shalt destroy them that speak leasing.”

The Lord will abhor the bloody and deceitful man. Let me show you this in the Bible. Look in your Bible at Psalm 73. This is the awfulness of eternal judgment, and it ought to shake your tree.

Do you realize that, even if hell does not exist—if there are no fires and no torments in hell—when a man dies, this alone happens to him? In Psalm 73, Asaph has a problem. He says, “Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart. But as for me, my feet

were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped." Why? "For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked." Asaph had a problem that many people have.

Here we are trying to live holy and godly lives and do what is right, suffering as we do so. Yet we look around at the wicked, and they have more than their heart could desire. They have money; they have it made. Asaph began to look at the prosperity of the wicked. "For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men." What is the result of that?

"Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment. Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish. They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily. Look, they set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth." They do not mind cursing God or man. "And they say, How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the most High?"

"Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches." Then he says, "Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency. For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning." He does not understand it. He is trying to do what is right, and all he gets is chastening, while he looks at the wicked.

They're prospering everywhere they turn. Now watch verse 16: "When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me." He just could not stand to think about it. Verse 17 says, "Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end."

Now look what he says about the wicked: "Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when one awaketh; so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image." Can you imagine what it would be like to be eternally hated and despised by the sovereign God of heaven and earth? You talk about a perfect hatred and a perfect despisement.

If there were no pains in hell—and there are—and if there were no suffering in hell—and there is—the horror of it would be to have a clear understanding that you would be eternally hated by God. “Thou hatest all workers of iniquity,” he said.

Spurgeon said it like this: “It is not a little dislike, but a thorough hatred which God bears toward the workers of iniquity.” To be hated by God is an awful thing. Let us be faithful in warning the wicked around us, for it is a terrible thing for them to fall into the hands of a righteous God. What does the Bible say in Hebrews 12:29? “Our God is a consuming fire.”

You see, God shows us our enmity. What was Saul doing? He was breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the Lord and against the disciples of the Lord. Fallen man is not just separated from God, nor merely hated by God in that sense of the word. Fallen man is under the curse of God. Galatians 3:10 says, “For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.” If you do not obey God's law, you are under the curse of the law.

The law demands three things from every individual: personal obedience, perfect obedience, and perpetual obedience. Therefore, to avoid being under the curse of the law, you must be personally, perfectly, and perpetually obedient. This shows that no one can be saved by keeping the law. Even if you were perfect from this moment on and never sinned again, internally or externally, what about all those things you committed before you became perfect? God's law demands personal and perfect obedience.

James 2 says, "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." There must be perfect obedience, and it must be perpetual obedience, else you are under the curse of the law. The curse of the law, of course, is death. Proverbs 3:33 says, "The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked." In Deuteronomy 28, God says that if we do not obey Him, "Cursed shalt thou be in the city, and cursed shalt thou be in the field. Cursed shall be thy basket and thy store." In Malachi 2:2, He says, "I will curse your blessings: yea, I have cursed them already." In Matthew 25:41, when our Lord looked at the wicked, He said,

"Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."

Fallen man is under the curse of God because we have not rendered to Him the perfect, personal, and perpetual obedience that His righteous law demands. Moreover, fallen man is under the wrath of God. Ephesians 2:3 says that, by nature—that is what we were before God saved us—we were children of wrath, even as others. Ephesians 4:18 tells us that fallen man is alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in him. Proverbs 28:9 says that whoever turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination. Do you understand that we have no stolid and insensible God to deal with? He can be angry; indeed, the Bible says He is angry every day with the wicked. The best day that ever dawned upon a sinner brings a curse with it.

Sinners may have many feast days, but they never have any safe days. From the beginning of the year to its ending, there is not an hour in which God's oven is not burning hot against the wicked. God constantly, the Bible says, puts his sword on the revolving wheel of rebellion. If the sinner does not turn, then God will use that sword to the destruction of the enemy. You see, dear friends, God shows us our sinfulness.

Paul's Enlightenment: The Spirituality of the Law

Man, by nature, does indeed hate God. The Bible says in Romans 8:7, “For the carnal mind is enmity against God.” That is a strong word for hatred. The carnal mind strongly hates God. It is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. Men hate God—not only as the sovereign God, but as the provider God and the protector God. Men hate God as the moral governor of the universe. They abominate His laws and His truth. They abhor Him as judge. Man basically hates God.

You want to know why there are so many sodomite marriages going on? Because man hates God. You want to know why there is so much adultery and fornication? Because man hates God. Do you want to know why there is so much rebellion and wickedness? Because man hates God. You say, “Brother Weaver, come on, man hates God.” Sure he does. What did our Lord say? “If ye love me,

keep my commandments." If we do not keep His commandments, it means we do not love Him. If we do not love Him, then we hate Him. That is very obvious and very plain.

Have you ever considered the fact that man by nature is so depraved that he hates God? Remember Romans chapter 3. What does the Apostle Paul say? "There is none righteous, no, not one. There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way."

She was singing, "I found Him, I found Him," and I sat there and listened for a moment. Finally, when she stopped, I said, "You know, that's a beautiful song you're singing. There's only one thing wrong with it." She said, "What's that?" I said, "It's unscriptural. You didn't find Him. You weren't even looking for Him. The Bible says, 'There is none that seeketh after God.' So you weren't seeking Him. The Bible says that He seeketh the lost sheep until He finds it."

"Oh," she said, "in that case then," and she started singing, "He found me." I said, "Now sing it like that, and it's right. He found us. Why? Because we by nature certainly do not want Him."

Let me tell you how absolutely in denial we are when it comes to our own depravity, our own wickedness, and our own enmity against God. I was preaching in North Carolina, and a dear lady came every night of the service. She would sit out there and weep. When she left, she was a royal mess. Her mascara had run, her makeup had run; she would sit there and weep and weep and weep, and leave the church building weeping.

I thought, "Lord, please work in that lady's heart." The woman called the pastor and asked if he and I would go visit with her because she wanted to talk to us. I said I would be glad to. We went to her house, and she immediately started weeping. I thought to myself, "Lord, this is so wonderful. At least it looks like here's one who is really under conviction." So I said, "Ma'am, did you call me out here to talk about the Lord?"

She said, "Yes, I did." I said, "Before we get into what the Lord does for sinners, let me take the Bible and show you what God says about sinners." I went through the Bible and began to show her every picture of sin in the Bible. I showed her Isaiah 1: "From the

sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment." I showed her Isaiah 64:6: "For all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags." I showed her from Romans 7 where we were dead and rotting body. I showed her where we were nothing but the vomit of the dog and the wallowing in the mire.

I showed her every horrible picture in the Bible about sin and sinners. Just as I finished, she dried up her tears, wiped her eyes, and said, "Well, I may be bad, but I'm not that bad." I looked at the pastor and said, "Neither is she a candidate for salvation either. We're wasting our time. Let's go back home."

Paul said, "I'm a pattern." What did Paul think? He said, "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." When Paul was convicted, he was so thoroughly and totally convicted that he believed he was the worst sinner who ever lived.

When God convicts a man of sin, he will argue with the Apostle Paul over that position, because every genuinely convicted man believes he is the worst, most lost, most wicked, and most ungodly sinner. What does God do? When He begins to convict us, He shows us our enmity, our rebellion, and our wickedness. But that is not all. Secondly, I want you to see Paul's enlightenment. In fact, in verses 3 and 4, you do not have to turn back there; go to Romans 7. But here is the point from Acts 9, verse 3.

As he journeyed toward Damascus, he came near the city, and suddenly a light from heaven shone round about him. He fell to the earth and heard a voice saying, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" Saul was enlightened. All of a sudden, he realized, "I am persecuting Christ. I am sinning against Christ."

Now look in Romans chapter 7; this is very important. You have to remember Paul's pedigree, which you can read for yourself in Philippians chapter 3. Paul was of the tribe of Benjamin, the Hebrew of the Hebrews, and a Pharisee of the Pharisees. As touching the law, he was a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. Paul was such a

Pharisee that he thought he was keeping God's law perfectly. He thought he was personally righteous and that everybody else was a sinner, but not Paul.

Look at what he says in Romans 7:12: “Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good.” Now go back to verse 9. He says, “For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.” He continues, “And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death.” What in the world did Paul mean when he said that he was alive without the law once?

The commandment came, sin revived, and he died. What does he mean? Paul had been a Pharisee of the Pharisees, but the Pharisees had their perversions of God's law, their misinterpretations, and their misapplications. They had watered the law of God down to externals. They believed and taught that unless a man literally took a knife and thrust it into someone's heart, he was not a murderer; unless he had physically lain with another woman, he was not an adulterer.

But what does the law of God say? In Matthew 5, our Lord said, “He that hateth his brother in his heart is a murderer.” He also said, “Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.” The Pharisees had watered everything down to externals. Therefore Paul said he was alive without the law: when he did not see the spirituality of God's law, when he did not see its biblical application, he possessed his own self-righteousness.

Paul knew that he had it. He was a Pharisee of the Pharisees, as touching the law blameless. But when the commandment came—when God showed him the true intent of His Word and law, that it was spiritual, not merely physical or external, but had a spiritual, internal application—he understood that God's law, which forbade adultery, also forbade lusting and coveting. The same law that forbade murder also forbade hatred; the same law that forbade stealing also forbade covetousness, greed, and selfishness. When that law came, sin revived and he died. Paul found out that he was a horrible sinner, that what he thought he had was nothing. He was lost and undone. The commandment came, and he died.

God's law shows us, first, that we are sinners: “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” Secondly, it shows us that we cannot save ourselves, because none of us can render to God's law what it demands: personal, perfect, and perpetual obedience. Thirdly, it shows us that there is a great chasm between God and the sinner. God is holy, man is a sinner, and man cannot cross that chasm on his own. Fourthly, the law shows us that if we are ever converted and saved, it must be by the merits of another, none other than Jesus Christ Himself.

Jesus Christ is our only salvation because He kept the law of God perfectly. He worked out and earned a perfect righteousness, and then died as our substitute, paying the penalty for our sins. Paul now sees his enmity and is enlightened to the spirituality of God's law. When God's Word comes in its fullness, and we see truth and light through the convicting power of the Holy Spirit, we acknowledge our sins, our wickedness is, and we also acknowledge the righteousness of Jesus Christ. We acknowledge that He is God's salvation.

Paul's Experience: Bowing to Christ's Lordship

In Acts 9, verses 1 and 2 show Paul's enmity; verses 3 and 4 show his enlightenment; and verses 5 and 6 show his experience. He said, “Who art thou, Lord?” And the Lord said, “I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.” Trembling and astonished, he said, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” And the Lord said unto him, “Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.”

Saul of Tarsus is on his way to Damascus to persecute Christians and throw them into dungeons. God knocks him off his feet and takes the wind out of his sails. A bright light shines from heaven. Saul does not yet know what is happening, but he knows this: whoever did this to him is greater and mightier than he is, and he must be the Lord. So he asks, “Who art thou, Lord?”

There is an important reason why Paul asked that question. We miss it many times when simply reading it in our Bibles. The Greek word for Lord is kurios. That word literally means boss, owner, master, sovereign. Paul was asking, “Who art thou, boss? Who art thou, master? Who art thou, sovereign?” He did not exactly know

who He was yet, but whoever He was, He was the sovereign God of heaven and earth. Then our Lord said, “I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.” Paul’s next question was, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?”

What was he saying? “I now submit to You. I now recognize You. I now bow to You as Lord, boss, owner, master, sovereign.” The word Lord, in reference to God or Christ, occurs 747 times in our Bible. The word Savior, in reference to Christ, occurs only 24 times. You say Jesus Christ is my Savior first and foremost. He is to be your Lord. The lordship of Christ and the Saviorhood of Christ cannot be divided or separated. He is one Person. It is true that He is the Savior, but He is pre-eminently the Lord of heaven and earth.

When Paul asked, “Who art thou, Lord?” and, after hearing, “I am Jesus whom thou persecutest,” replied, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” he was recognizing that Jesus Christ is the rightful Lord of heaven and earth, and therefore our rightful Lord.

Jesus Christ has the right to tell you how to dress and how not to dress, where to go and where not to go, what to believe and what not to believe, and how to act and how not to act. Why? Because He is Lord. He is the Sovereign, the Boss, the Owner, and the Master.

Many people want to use Jesus Christ as a fire escape. They want to say, “I’ll submit to You as Savior, but I’ll deny Your Lordship.” That will not work. Jesus Christ is Lord.

Let me give you an illustration. Suppose I am a king. Here you are as a rebel. You have tried to overthrow me, steal my kingdom, and take everything from me. Our forces have fought, and it is obvious that you are on the losing side. You know you are about to lose, and you know the penalty for being a traitor is death. So you come into my palace, where I am sitting on my throne, carrying your AK-47, with grenades hanging around your neck and explosives on your hips. You are popping your chewing gum as you walk up to me and say, “Well, Kingy-wingy, old boy, kind of looks like you’re winning. It looks like I’m losing. I just kind of felt maybe you’d give me a pardon. Have mercy upon me.”

If you want my mercy and pardon, throw down your weapons of rebellion and warfare, and cease fighting against me. That is exactly

where most people are today. They want their sin and salvation, but it does not work like that. If you come to Christ, you bow to Him as Lord and throw down your weapons of warfare. Remember what our Lord said in Matthew 1:21: "Thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins."

Salvation Is from Sin, Not Just Hell

May I shock you? Salvation is not from hell. Being saved from eternal punishment is a by-product of salvation. What Christ came to do was save us from our sins, which send us to hell. What did the Apostle Paul say? "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"

Do you remember in John 8 the woman taken in adultery, when our Lord knelt down and wrote on the ground? They, being convicted in their hearts, went out from the eldest to the youngest. He looked at that woman and said, "Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee?" She said, "No man, Lord." He said, "Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more." Do you remember the thief on the cross? He said, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." He said, "Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise."

The Apostle Paul said that he was a pattern. When God saves sinners, in some degree He shows every sinner his enmity against Him. He enlightens that man not only to the wickedness of his sin, but also to the fact that Jesus Christ alone is salvation. When God saves a man, to whatever degree He convicts him and in whatever circumstances He uses, He brings him to bow and kneel to Jesus Christ.

Conclusion: Every Knee Shall Bow

Philippians 2:5–11 says: "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."

Every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall confess. It is not a question of whether you will bow to the Lordship of Christ; it is when you will bow—in salvation or damnation. You will bow every knee, because Jesus Christ is Lord.

He is the rightful owner, boss, sovereign, and ruler—not only of this universe, this church, and this family, but of your life and every life. All power and authority in heaven and earth have been given to Him.

Now, three questions. Have you seen your enmity against God? Have you been enlightened as to the spirituality of God's Word, the true application of it, and that Jesus Christ indeed is God's only salvation? Have you bowed to and acknowledged the Lordship of Christ in your life?

If you have bowed to Christ, you will not argue with Him. You will have nothing to say to Him but, "Yes, sir," because He is Lord.

Father, we thank You for Jesus Christ. We thank You for Your so great salvation. Help us, Lord, to bow to the knowledge of Your sovereignty, Your greatness, and Your mercy. In Christ's most holy and blessed name we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 5

Seeking Christ and Dying Lost

April 11, 2004

SCRIPTURE READING - John 8:20-30 (KJV)

"These words spake Jesus in the treasury as he taught in the temple. And no man laid hands on him, for his hour was not yet come. Then said Jesus again unto them, I go my way, and you shall seek me, and shall die in your sins. Whither I go, you cannot come."

"Then said the Jews, Will he kill himself? Because he said, Whither I go, you cannot come. And he said unto them, You are from beneath, I am from above. You are of this world, I am not of this world. I said therefore unto you that you shall die in your sins. For if you believe not that I am he, you shall die in your sins. Then said they unto him, Who art thou?"

"And Jesus said unto them, Even the same that I said unto you from the beginning. I have many things to say and to judge of you. But He that sent me is true, and I speak to the world those things which I have heard of Him. They understood not that He

> spake to them of the Father. Then said Jesus unto them, When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then shall you know that I am He, and that I do nothing of myself, but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things. And He that sent me is with me. The Father hath not left me alone, for I do always those things that please Him." As he spake these words, many believed on him.

Introduction: The Astounding Truth of Seeking Christ and Dying Lost

> It is indeed an astounding truth that men can be so close to Christ and yet so far from Him. Our text tells us of men who had close personal contact with Jesus Christ, and yet, for all of His miracles, all of His words, and all of His marvelous works, they did not believe upon Him. In fact, they even plotted His death. If you look in verse 37, our Lord tells them, "I know that you're Abraham's seed, but you seek to kill Me because My word hath no place in you."

These actions demonstrate the depravity and wickedness of man by nature. Apart from regeneration and conversion, and apart from a supernatural work of God's grace, men will not repent and will not believe. Scripture indeed teaches us that repentance and faith are gifts of God. Without these gifts, men do not turn from their sins.

Salvation Is Impossible Apart from God's Supernatural Work

The episode with the rich young ruler had just taken place, and the Bible tells us that he had gone away sad because he had great possessions. Our Lord said, “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.” The disciples “were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, Who then can be saved?”

The subject is salvation. The question is dealing with salvation: Who then can be saved? Notice our Lord's response: “And Jesus, looking upon them, said, With men, it,” that is, salvation, “is impossible. But not with God: for with God all things are possible.”

Apart from a supernatural work of God's grace, salvation is indeed impossible.

In John chapter 8, there is a phrase that is very intriguing. As I was reading through the book of John again recently, this phrase burned literally in my mind. The phrase occurs three times in four short verses: in verse 21, and twice in verse 24. “Then said Jesus again unto them, I go my way, and ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins.” Then, in verse 24: “I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.”

The Phrase 'Die in Your Sins' and Its Implications

Each of us has undoubtedly read and heard messages preached on confessing our sins, acknowledging our sins, forgiveness of sins, and remission of sins. We have even heard messages preached on how Jesus Christ is the propitiation for our sins. But how many have ever heard a message on dying in your sins?

I believe this subject is awesome to contemplate. I am absolutely sure that you and I cannot comprehend, even to the minutest degree, the absolute horror of dying in your sins. The very thought sends chills to my heart. How awful it would be to die in your sins and face an absolutely holy God with all your sins and rebellion.

When our Lord confronted His enemies, the Bible tells us that He was in the treasury. In verse 20, it says, "These words spake Jesus in the treasury, as he taught in the temple. And no man laid hands on him; for his hour was not yet come."

No detail of Scripture is insignificant. The treasury was where people often resorted and where they gave their offerings. Mark chapter 12 and verse 41 tells us that Jesus Christ was sitting over against the treasury, watching the people cast in their offerings, when the widow woman came and cast in her two mites. Then He said, "Verily, this woman hath cast in more than all the others, because they cast in of their abundance, but she of her penury and of her want." He was sitting over against the treasury.

The point is that this was a public place. John chapter 10 and verse 22 gives another detail: "And it was at Jerusalem, the feast of

the dedication, and it was winter." Thus, the treasury was in Jerusalem in winter, during the feast of dedication. There were plenty of people around; the place was thronging with people. Our Lord's enemies tried to confront Him in a public forum. Look in verse 19: "Then said they unto him, Where is thy father? Jesus answered, Ye neither know me, nor my father: if ye had known me, ye should have known my father also. These words spake Jesus in the treasury, as he taught in the temple." In verse 21, our Lord begins to answer His enemies and His critics.

He pronounces their condemnation upon them. What I want to concentrate on today is one little phrase: dying in your sins. Our Lord said in verse 21, "I go my way and you shall seek me, and shall die in your sins." Then in verse 24, "I said, therefore, to you that you shall die in your sins, if you believe not that I am He, you shall die in your sins."

Now, let us ask a question and try to answer it: What in the world are the implications of dying in your sins? It would be an astounding thing for a preacher to tell a man that he is going to die in his sins. But when the Lord of Glory, Jesus Christ Himself, says that to a group of men, that ought to be chilling: "You shall die in your sins."

What does that phrase indicate? First of all, it indicates the presence of sin. Let me explain this very simply. Sin is reality. Sin is here and now. There are many individuals who endeavor to deny sin, but they cannot escape its consequences. The Bible says, "For the wages of sin is death." It is phenomenal how many people in this world deny the reality and presence of sin.

One of my favorite stories is about the Christian scientists. I am not talking about a Christian man who happens to be a scientist, but the religion of Christian scientism. They deny the reality of sin. They even deny the reality of sickness. I heard the story about a little boy who ran into his house, where his mother, a professing Christian scientist, was. He said, "Mother, mother, you know that lady down the street that's been sick so long?" She said, "No, no, Johnny, you mean the lady that thinks she's been sick?" He said, "Well, now she thinks she's dead." You can deny all you want to, but you cannot escape the reality that sin is here, and the wages of sin is indeed death.

There are two main words in our Greek New Testaments for sin. One of them is hamartia, and hamartia literally means falling short, or missing the mark. If I had a bow and arrow and shot at a target, and the arrow fell fifteen feet in front of it, you would say, "Preacher, you fell short of the mark. You missed the mark. You did not hit the target." Hamartia, when it speaks of sin, speaks of the fact that someone has fallen short, that he has missed the mark. In other words, we have not been personally or perfect or perpetually obedient.

We lack that perfection that the law of God demands. That is why, in Romans 3, the Apostle Paul says, "There is none righteous, no, not one. There is none that doeth good. There is none that seeketh after God. They're all gone out of the way. There is none righteous, no, not one." Because we've all basically missed the mark. That's hamartia. But then there is another word, and that is the word anomia.

I want you to look in your Bibles, if you would, to 1 John 3 and verse 4. Many of you can quote this verse. In fact, you've heard me quote it innumerable times. But I want you to look at it because it's vitally important. I want you to understand that sin is more than just the falling short of. Sin is more than just the missing a mark.

Everyone in this room and everyone probably in the country would be willing to admit that they're not perfect. We'd always admit that we have our shortcomings, we have our faults, we do make mistakes, we do trip up every now and then. We're all willing to say that. But look what the Bible says in 1 John 3 and verse 4: "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law, for sin is the transgression of the law." The Greek word for law is nomos. When you put an A or an alpha in front of it, you negate it. So anomia means lawlessness.

Sin is more than just a mere falling short of. It's more than just a mere missing the mark. It is indeed lawlessness. It is sin which produces lawlessness in individuals. All you've got to do is look around and look in the lives of individuals, in families, in churches, in states, even in the nation. All you can see on every hand is lawlessness. It's in our government. It's in the judiciary. It is everywhere. Why? Because sin is lawlessness.

What do you think Judge Myron Thompson did when he said that the state of Alabama could not acknowledge God? If you cannot acknowledge God, you cannot acknowledge God's law. What is that? That is lawlessness. That is sin. Sin is lawlessness.

So when our Lord says to these people, "You shall die in your sins," the very first implication of that phrase is that sin is real and present. Anyone who denies the presence or reality of sin is, in essence, calling Jesus Christ a liar. How can you die in your sins if sin is not real, if it is not a present reality? When our Lord looked at these Pharisees and said, "You shall die in your sins," the first implication was the presence of sin. Sin is present. It is real.

The Power of Sin: Enslavement and Bondage

Secondly, when our Lord said, "You shall die in your sins," it also implied the power of sin. What do I mean by the power of sin? The Scripture teaches us that sin enslaves. In John chapter 8, verses 32 through 34, our Lord says, "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." They answered Him, "We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man. How sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?" Jesus answered them, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin." Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.

Underline the little word servant, because the Greek word servant is doulos, and literally it means slave. Whosoever commits sin is the slave of sin. What does sin do? Sin enslaves. It binds us. It has strength and power. Our Lord is saying that no one in his own strength can ever escape the bondage of sin.

In Romans chapter 6, the Word of God imputes kingship, dominion, or rulership to both sin and death. "Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord." Why should we count ourselves dead indeed unto sin? "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof."

If something is reigning, that means it is a power, a king, a ruler; it has dominion. He says sin is not to reign in your mortal

bodies—that is, in the body of a believer. It does reign in the bodies of unbelievers.

Look in verse 13: "Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin." What is he saying? When sin is ruling and reigning, you give a practical obedience to sin. He says neither yield your members as instruments of unrighteousness and sin, but yield yourselves unto God as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. Now skip down to verse 16: "Know you not that to whom you yield yourselves servants to obey," watch, "his servants or his slaves you are to whom you obey, whether of sin unto death or of obedience unto righteousness."

So sin does enslave, and sin therefore demands a practical obedience. Sin binds individuals so that it is impossible to escape on their own. It is almost hilarious to hear sinners talk about their own sin. They usually boast, "Well, I can stop anytime I want to. I can quit whenever I get ready. This doesn't control me; I control it. I'm in control." Isn't it interesting? They never want to quit or stop. They brag about the fact that they can do it, but they never want to. Why? Because they can't do it on their own. Sin binds us, enslaves us, and holds us down.

Look in your Bibles to Luke chapter 11. Our Lord says, beginning with verse 21, "When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace." But when a stronger than he shall come upon him and overcome him, "he taketh from him all his armor wherein he trusted and divided his spoils." Here is an illustration: You are sitting in your home with your little .357 Magnum pistol, saying, "I'm guarding all my goods. No one's going to bother me. I've got my pistol, and I'm going to take care of whoever tries to steal my possessions."

And then I show up outside your house with a .50 caliber machine gun. I do not even try to come in the door; I simply fill your house full of .50 caliber rounds. The next thing you know, you are dead, and your .357 is lying beside you. I go in, pick up that .357, take whatever I want, and walk out. Why? Because someone stronger or more powerful has come in.

Our Lord is saying this: when a man is enslaved with his sins, there is no way he can escape unless someone more powerful than the one who enslaves releases him. That is why our Lord said in John 8:36, "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." The only way to really be free from sin is through Jesus Christ.

So when our Lord looks at these people and says, "Ye shall die in your sins," first, it implies the presence of sin; second, it implies the power of sin; and third, it implies the penalty of sin. The curse of dying in your sins would be pointless unless there were a penalty attached. In the Bible, whenever there is a threat, a promise, or a curse, these things are always backed up with sanctions—that is, something really happens.

The Penalty of Sin: The Curse of the Law

A curse, threat, or promise is useless unless it has sanctions. Consider mamas and daddies who look at their mischievous, sometimes downright mean and ugly little boy and keep saying, "I'm going to whip you if you don't straighten up," yet never whip him. The child knows they are not going to whip him, and once he realizes it, he keeps right on doing it. A threat, a curse, a warning, or a promise is useless unless sanctions are attached to it—unless you can really bring it to bear.

In Galatians chapter 3, beginning with verse 10, we read: "For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse. For it is written, Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all the things which are written in the book of the law to do them. But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident. For the just shall live by faith. And the law is not of faith, but the man that doeth them shall live in them."

Verse 13 says, "Christ hath redeemed us," that is, the believers, "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us, for as it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." Only those who are in Christ have been redeemed from the curse of the law.

Returning to verse 10, why are those who are of the works of the law under the curse? “For it is written, Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all the things which are written in the book of the law to do them.” What does the law demand? It demands three things: a personal obedience, a perfect obedience, and a perpetual obedience. If you cannot render to the law that personal, perfect, and perpetual obedience, then you are under its curse. If you are under the curse of the law, you must face the wrath of that broken, violated law. The law will not accept any half-hearted or occasional obedience. It must be perfect, personal, and perpetual.

James wrote in James 2:10, “For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.” If you were enabled to keep the law of God perfectly except in one tiny area, all your obedience would be worthless. You would still be under the curse of the law. Do you realize that one breach of the law is sufficient to secure its curse? Just one breach. And every one of us has broken the law more than once.

The word curse in verse 10 is the Greek word katara, which literally means a curse or an imprecation.

It is similar to the Hebrew word in the Old Testament, which refers to a malediction or an execration. It implies being set aside and marked out for punishment and destruction. There is a term that we use, Maranatha, which refers to the fact that the Lord is coming. But Maranatha anathema means, “Let someone be accursed when our Lord comes.” In Galatians, chapter one, the Apostle Paul talked about someone preaching another gospel. He said, "If we, or an angel, preach any other gospel than that which you have received, let him be accursed." The word accursed is anathema. Literally, let him be set aside, marked out for certain and sure destruction and punishment.

When the Bible in Galatians 3 and verse 10 says, "For as many as are of the works of the law are under its curse," it is teaching far more than any civil punishment. It is a distinction between wrath and blessing, and between condemnation and justification. If you are under the curse of the law, you are under the wrath of God and condemned by God. You are not blessed, saved, or justified. You have been set aside and marked out for certain and sure punishment

and destruction. Anyone who tries to be saved by works, good deeds, or obedience—anyone who tries to be saved other than through the Lord Jesus Christ, His perfect substitution, and His perfect obedience—is marked out by God for certain and sure destruction. The phrase “the curse of the law” is the divine sentence against all those who are outside of Jesus Christ. When our Lord looks at these Pharisees and says, "You shall die in your sins," it implicates not only the presence and power of sin, but also the penalty of sin.

The Painfulness of Dying in Sin

The Painfulness of Dying in Sin: Realization, Recollection, and Hopelessness

There is a fourth thing that dying in sin implies: the painfulness of dying in sin. I cannot even conceive of what I am about to try to explain to you, and by God's grace, I shall never know what it is like to die in my sins. Yet some people will. That is an awesome and sobering reality.

I want to point out three things under this. I want you to concentrate with me and allow these thoughts to take place in your heart. What is the painfulness of dying in your sin? First of all, consider the realization of such a death. Do you realize that most people never think about dying? They never think about judgment. They never even think about their sins. They never think about their wickedness.

They simply go on with everyday life—living, making money, being married, trying to have a good time, and enjoying the pleasures of life—and all of a sudden, they die.

You know what the Bible says in Proverbs 27:1? “Boast not thyself of tomorrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring.” Boast not thyself of tomorrow. God has not promised any of us a tomorrow. The Bible says in Proverbs 29:1, “He that being often reproved,” that is, often warned and rebuked, “and hardeneth his neck,” that is, he stiffens his neck, “shall suddenly be cut off, and that without remedy.” God says when a man has been warned, reproved, exhorted, and admonished over and over and over, and he still will not hear, he will be cut off quickly, and that without remedy.

It is like Luke 16, which we will look at in just a minute. You remember that the Bible says in Luke 16:23 about the rich man who died: "And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments." Can you conceive in your mind of being alive one moment—unrepentant, not even thinking of your sins, not even thinking of your wickedness, not even thinking of Christ—and all of a sudden, you die? Can you imagine being alive without Christ and then suddenly dying? There is the eternal horror that one will experience when he realizes he has died in his sins. Can you imagine what it would be like to have to answer and give an account for every sin that you have ever committed? At last, the man who has never been sensible to Christianity, the Word of God, or Christ is sensible to what it means to lose his own soul.

He who had never taken any thought for his sins now at last understands what it means to die in his sins. He who had never thought of repentance now understands what it means to die unrepentant. Even if there were no pains or torments in hell, do you realize it would be an awful torment simply to realize that you are eternally lost? You are cut off from all saints, all good, all holiness, all righteousness, and all blessings. You are just lost.

There was one time in my life when I was lost—not spiritually, but physically. I was a child, going to my grandfather's farm with my cousin and a big black man who had worked for us all his life. The truck broke down. My cousin was older, stronger, bigger, and meaner. He looked at me and said, "One of us has got to walk back home and get help, and it's going to be you." I said, "Okay." We were only four or five miles from home, and I knew the way, so that was no problem.

But we passed a chain gang. A convict driving a jeep stopped and offered me a ride. They were working alongside the road. I said, "No sir, I'm just going right up here. I don't need a ride." I was not about to get in that jeep with that man; I was only ten or eleven years old. When he drove off, I cut through the woods. When I reached a dirt road and a crossroads, I knew where I was, but I could not remember how to get where I wanted to go. I took the wrong road. Finally, about an hour down that road, I met a man and asked, "Sir, could you tell me where Frank's store is?" He said, "Oh, yeah."

He said, “You got to go way back up that crossroad and turn left.” I said, “Which is the quickest way to that store?” He said, “Right straight across those woods.” I jumped that fence and started running. By the time I got there, my parents had already called the law. They were looking for me everywhere. I was lost, and I wasn’t lost. I knew where I was, but you just can’t get there when you’re a kid.

I found out that I had run across some of the most rattlesnake-infested woods in that part of the country. That had to have been quick to bite me, because I was running. I was scared until I found that place.

William Albert Munsey, who has been dead many, many years, was a preacher who wrote a book on what it means to be lost. He asked, “Can you fathom for just one moment what it means to be lost and to realize that you’re lost?” He pointed out that, if there were no pains or torments of hell, if God in His sovereign power simply took your soul and flung it beyond the sun, beyond the moon, and beyond the stars into the outer regions of darkness, where you did nothing but careen, lost, without contact, without hope, without blessing, without anything, for eternity—just the realization: You are lost and will never be found.

If you and I could ever conceive what it is like for a man to be alive one moment and then open his eyes in eternity, realizing that he has died in his sins and is eternally lost—what a realization, what a horror. The painfulness of dying in your sins, I suppose, is one of the greatest pains: realizing that you have died in your sins.

The second truth is this. Look in your Bibles at Luke chapter 16. I am not going to take time to preach from Luke 16, but I have already told you that in this passage the Lord talks about the rich man who died, and in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torment. Look at verses 23 and 24, and then take one phrase from verse 25: “And in hell, he lift up his eyes being in torments and seeing Abraham afar off and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy

lifetime receivest thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things. But now he is comforted, and thou art tormented."

Go back to those two words in verse 25: "But Abraham said unto him, Son, remember. Son, remember." I have often said that many people have a peace of mind that comes only from their own forgetfulness. However, when one dies in his sins, he must give an account of each and every sin. He will remember each and every sin in vivid detail. He cannot deny them, and he cannot forget them. The memory of each and every sin will curse him and haunt him throughout eternity. He will berate himself and call himself a fool. Yet, for all of his self-condemnation, he will never be able to forget his sins. His memories will linger. He cannot get release. He cannot get forgiveness. He cannot forget. The one who previously had no conscience of his sins, whose sins never bothered him at all, will suddenly become conscious of each and every sin that he ever committed.

Let me tell you what I believe, and I believe I can prove this to you from Scripture. I believe there will be an additional harm. Adding to his consternation, he will also remember every Scripture he has ever heard read, every sermon he has ever heard preached, and every witness he has ever heard given. He will remember all the admonitions, all the exhortations, and all the opportunities to hear the Word of God, but they will be to no avail.

Absolute Hopelessness

All they will do is torment him and haunt him. It will be like adding fuel to the fire, because he will be saying, "Would to God I'd listened, would to God I'd heard, would to God I'd repented." But it is too late. He will remember not only his sins, but every lost opportunity.

I surely do not want to remember every one of my sins, especially remembering them the way God would remember them. It will not be merely, "I stole one time," or, "I lied one time," or, "I coveted one time," or, "I lusted one time." Oh, no. We will remember them in detail, but we will also remember and see the awfulness of them, the wickedness of them, the rebellion of them, the curse of them, the judgment of them, and the desert of them. We will understand them and see them the way God does.

That makes a big difference. The painfulness of dying in sin is not just the realization, but the recollection of those sins. And the third truth is this: in the painfulness of dying in your sins, consider the reduction to absolute hopelessness. In Dante's Inferno, the words written over the gates of hell were these: "Abandon all hope, ye who enter here." Dying in your sins casts you into a state of absolute hopelessness.

The Apostle Paul said it best in 1 Corinthians 15:19: "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable." Do you realize that the one who dies in his sins dies without hope? He has no hope in life, no hope in death, no hope in Christ, and no hope in eternity. He is altogether hopeless. One can endure almost anything if he has hope—if he thinks there is some way out, or that soon it will end. Even one of my sermons, you see. But when there is no hope, it is nothing but sheer agony.

The Bible says in the book of Job, chapter 8 and verse 13, "The hypocrite's hope shall perish." What hope does the hypocrite have? None. When he dies, his hope is gone. He hopes that his works will save him and that God will be far more lenient than His Word demands. But his hope is gone. He has no hope. The Bible says in Proverbs 11, verse 7, "When a wicked man dieth, his expectation shall perish, and the hope of unjust men perisheth." There is no hope when one dies in his sin. It is absolute hopelessness. Proverbs 14:32 tells us, "The wicked is driven away in his wickedness, but the righteous have hope in his death." We who are righteous in Jesus Christ have hope in Christ, but the wicked is driven away and has no hope. Abandon all hope, ye who enter here. Can you imagine what it will be like when one realizes that he has died lost?

He recollects all of his sins in vivid detail, understanding them the way God understands them. And then, thirdly, he is utterly, completely, totally hopeless. He can never do anything about it. He is just lost. Even if there is no fire in hell and no torment in hell, dying lost will be horror enough.

The Ultimate Punishment: Separation from God

Look back to John 8. There is one other point: the punishment for dying in your sins. John 8:21 says, "Then said Jesus again unto

them, I go my way, and ye shall seek me, and ye shall die in your sins." "Whither I go, you cannot come." Our Lord gives us the ultimate punishment for sin in graphic detail. He said to those who did not believe on Him, "Whither I go, you cannot come." Do you realize the greatest punishment for sin is total separation from God? Our Lord's offers of reconciliation were rejected. His person was despised. He was not wanted. He even withdrew Himself from these people and said, "Look, where I am going, you cannot come." One of the saddest and yet most profound judgments that God gives is when He withdraws Himself.

I have had people tell me, "Brother Weaver, I don't want to be bothered with the Gospel. I don't want to be bothered with the Bible. I don't want to be bothered with preaching. I don't have to go to church and live right." I have even had some of my own family members tell me that. I had an uncle tell me that one time.

He told me very pointedly that he wanted nothing to do with Christ. He wanted nothing to do with the gospel, and he did not want me witnessing to him or preaching to him. The next week, he dropped dead—the very next week. Let me tell you something, folks: sinners who want nothing to do with Christ, sinners who want to be left alone, one day shall be. Our Lord says, "Whither I'm going, you cannot come."

Look at the mockery and insolence in these people. In verse 22 we read, "Then said the Jews, Will he kill himself? Because he says, Whither I go, you cannot come." They were ignorant and full of insult and mockery. Yet our Lord says there will come a time when all the mocking and insults shall cease, because where He is, they cannot and will not come. The ultimate punishment for sin is separation from God.

Now let us make some applications. Go back to John 8 and look at verse 20: "These words spake Jesus in the treasury as he taught in the temple. And no man laid hands on him for his hour was not yet come." The first thing to notice in this passage is the invincibility of Jesus Christ until His work was finished.

Applications: Invincibility, Wrong Seeking, and the Sufficiency of Scripture

How many times did the Jews try, want, and plan to kill Him? Yet they could not. Why? His time had not yet come. Here is clear comfort for the child of God. We, as God's children, are immortal and invincible until God has ordained the day of our death. Our enemies cannot do one thing to us until God has ordained for us to die. Isn't that amazing? What does that mean? It means this: We might as well stand for truth, stand up and be counted, and obey, because no one can touch us until God ordains it.

Spurgeon had a little couplet: “Shafts and arrows around me fly till he please, I cannot die. Not a single shaft can hit till the God of love sees fit.” His enemies hated Him, yet they could not do one thing to Him, for His hour had not yet come. Until our hour comes, our enemies can do nothing to us.

Here is the second application: “Then said Jesus again unto them, I go my way and you shall seek me and shall die in your sins. Whither I go, you cannot come.” Wicked men do seek Christ occasionally, albeit not always for the right reasons.

The word seek is the Greek word zeteo. It has a good sense and a bad sense. The good sense is that you seek someone to honor him and worship him. The bad sense is that you seek him to destroy or discredit him. In John 7:25, some of the people of Jerusalem said, “Then said some of them of Jerusalem, Is not this he whom they seek to kill?” Even the people knew the leaders were trying to kill Christ. They were seeking Him, but not for the right reasons. In John 8:40, our Lord says, “But now you seek to kill Me, a man who hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God.” “This did not Abraham.” They were seeking Him, all right, but not to honor Him, but to kill Him.

John 11:55 says, “And the Jews' Passover was nigh at hand and many went out of the country up to Jerusalem before the Passover to purify themselves. Then sought they for Jesus and spake among themselves as they stood in the temple. What think ye that he will come to this feast?” Both the chief priest and the Pharisees had given a commandment that if any man knew where he were, he should

show it. Why? That they might take him. The Pharisees sought Him only to discredit and destroy Him.

Many seek Christ, but wrongfully. The common people seek Him wrongfully as well. After our Lord had fed the multitude, those who saw the miracle said, “This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world.” Yet John 6:24 says, “When the people therefore saw that Jesus was not there, neither His disciples, they also took shipping and came to Capernaum seeking for Jesus.”

"And when they had found Him on the other side of the sea, they said unto Him, Rabbi, when camest thou hither? And Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, you seek Me not because you saw the miracles, but because you did eat of the loaves and were filled." Some wanted to see a miracle; others wanted a free meal. They were seeking Christ, but for the wrong reasons.

Even King Herod sought Christ, according to Luke 23:8. Why? He hoped to see some miracle done by Him. He thought Christ was a clever magician and wanted to be entertained. Wicked men sometimes seek Christ, but not for the right reasons. They seek Him to discredit Him or to destroy Him.

Look back at John 8:21. Here is the third application: "Then said Jesus again unto them, I go my way, and you shall seek Me, and you shall die in your sins." "Whither I go, you cannot come." There will be a time when Christ will not be found by sinners, however much they seek Him.

Hold John 8, but go back in your Bibles to Proverbs chapter 1. This passage should upset and concern the unconverted. Beginning in verse 24, God says, "Because I've called and you refused. I've stretched out my hand and no man regarded." "But what did you do? You set at nought my counsel. You would have none of my reproof."

Now God says, "Since you wouldn't listen to me, I also will mock. I will laugh at your calamity. I will mock when your fear cometh. And when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you, then shall they call upon Me, but I will not answer them. Then shall they seek Me early, but they shall not find Me. Why? For that they hated

the knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord, they would have none of My counsel."

"They despised all My reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way and be filled with their own devices." Salvation is not in the hands of sinners; it is in the hands of God. A man either repents and trusts Christ when Christ calls and when Christ gives grace, or he does not repent and believe at all. Salvation is not in man. It is in Christ. You do not have Christ in your hand to try to manipulate Him whenever you please. You are in Christ's hand. You will either listen to Him or perish. Salvation is of the Lord. Jonah 2:9.

The practical reason why men die in their sins is that they refuse to believe in Jesus Christ. John 8:24 says, "I said therefore that you shall die in your sins, for if you believe not that I am He, you shall die in your sins." They do not believe that Jesus Christ is the Messiah. They do not believe that Jesus Christ is God in the flesh. They do not believe that Jesus Christ is the sent One, the Redeemer, the Savior. The only alternative to believing in Christ is dying in your sins. Why? Because there is not another Savior.

There is not any other salvation. The Bible says in Acts 4 and verse 12, "There is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved." In other words, we are either saved by Christ or we die in our sins. It is that simple. One last application: after our Lord tells them three times, "You shall die in your sins," look in verse 25.

"Then said they unto him, Who are you? Who really are you? Who are you?" Look at what our Lord says: "And Jesus said to them, Even the same that I said to you from the beginning." Our Lord had already told them who He was. He wanted to reveal to them who He was. No other revelation would be given except what He had already given. People have said all their lives, "What I want is a vision. I want a trance. I want a dream. I want feelings. I want my hair standing on end. I want something supernatural." Let me tell you something: the revelation of God is supernatural, and Christ will not condescend to give a man anything other than that which He has already given.

In Luke 16, the rich man is in hell. He says, "I pray thee therefore, Father, that thou wouldst send him," that is, Lazarus, "to my father's house. For I have five brethren, that he may testify unto them, lest they come to this place of torment." In other words, he does not want his brothers to come where he is.

"And Abraham said unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them." The rich man answered, "Nay, father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent." Abraham replied, "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded that one rose from the dead." If you will not take this Book, nothing else is going to convince you. By the way, someone did rise from the dead: Jesus Christ. And the world is still unconvinced.

They said, "Who are you?" He answered, "Even the same as I said from the beginning." This Book is sufficient for our faith and our practice. If we do not want to die in our sins, if we want Jesus Christ, it is this Book that reveals Him. That is why He said in John 5:39, "Search the Scriptures, for there they which testify of me." John wrote in John 20:31 that these are written "that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name." Isn't it amazing? Some men seek Christ and die lost. Why? Because they will not believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the Savior and the Redeemer. Father, we ask in the name of Jesus Christ today that You would indeed help us.

O Lord, may we understand, see, and realize the awfulness of dying in sins. Speak to every heart in this room, and press upon the mind the importance of repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. For if the Son therefore make you free, you shall be free indeed. We thank Thee that our sins have been paid for in the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ: “His blood for me shall plead.” Thank You, Father, for Your grace. In Christ’s name, Amen.

CHAPTER 6

Little Aleck - Confederate Memorial Day

April 24, 2005

Introduction and Scripture Reading

1 Corinthians 16:13 says, "Watch ye, stand ye fast in the faith, quit you like men, and be strong." We welcome you here to historic Fort Jackson on this Confederate Memorial Day in April 2005, and let's bow for prayer. Father, we're so thankful today for the Lord Jesus Christ, for His grace and mercy, for the history and heritage that you've given unto us, and we ask your blessings, Lord, upon this day and upon the services that are to follow. In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

Biographical Sketch of Alexander Hamilton Stephens

Now, the reason I read 1 Corinthians 16:13 is because the message today is on one of the most notable men in our southern history: Little Aleck. Those who have studied history would automatically understand that Little Aleck is the nickname for Alexander Hamilton Stephens, the vice president of the Confederacy. Congressman

Abraham Lincoln said, "A little, slim, pale-faced, consumptive man just concluded the very best speech of an hour's length I've ever heard in my life," referring to Alexander Hamilton Stephens. Of course, most of you know that he wrote not only a history of the United States, but also a two-volume set of the Constitutional View of the Late War Between the States.

Alexander Hamilton Stephens was Vice President of the Confederate States, a man of eminent natural abilities, intellectual training, statesmanship, and moral virtues. He was the grandson of a soldier under General George Washington and one of that body of men who stood very firmly for the independence of the South in 1861. Little Aleck was born in a log cabin on February 11, 1812, the son of Andrew B. and Margaret Grier Stephens, a poor farm family. Shortly after his birth, his mother died. His father continued as a farmer and school teacher, and at age 14, his father died as well. But Alexander Hamilton Stephens had a very brilliant mind, recognized by a handful of mentors who paid for his education at Franklin College, which became the University of Georgia. He graduated from the very top of his class, became an attorney, and eventually owned the plantation here in Georgia that he named Liberty Hall. Alexander Hamilton Stephens was five feet, seven inches tall, about average for a man in his time, but he never weighed more than a hundred pounds his entire life. Hence, he got the nickname Little Aleck.

The word most usually used to describe him was "cadaverous"—he almost looked like a dead body. So "cadaverous" described this pale, odd-bodied man with dark, lustrous eyes. He was a young man sickly from birth, and later in life, because of his sickliness, he always wrapped himself in an abundance of coats and clothes. He described happiness as simply to be warm. His sickliness was caused by various disorders that affected him throughout his entire life: angina, bladder stones, colitis, migraine headaches, pneumonia, pruritus, rheumatoid arthritis, and sciatica. So he was indeed a very sickly man.

He was admitted to the bar in 1832 and served as Georgia state legislator as a senator from 1836 to 1842, then as a United States congressman from 1843 to 1849. After the war, he was elected a

United States Senator but was not allowed to take his seat. He served in Congress from 1873 to 1882 until he became governor of Georgia, and he was governor when he died in 1883.

Robert Toombs, another famous Georgian, declared that Alexander Hamilton Stephens carried more brains and more soul for the least amount of flesh that God Almighty had ever made. So he understood very clearly that here was a man who had a great mind. It was the imperialist Yankee leader, Abraham Lincoln, who knew Little Aleck from when they were in Congress together. They met at the Hampton Roads Conference, and remember that Little Aleck always dressed extremely warmly. At the conference, Abraham Lincoln saw Little Aleck taking off coat after coat and wrap after wrap. Then he walked over to Little Aleck with his hands stretched out to shake his hand and said, "Never have I seen such a small nubbin come out of so much husk." Certainly he was indeed a little man.

After the War of Northern Aggression, when Aleck went back to Congress in his wheelchair, someone described him as nothing but lungs and brains. On another occasion, another individual described him as that little irrepressible steam engine with a big brain and scarcely any body.

One of my favorite stories about Alexander Hamilton Stephens is that in 1835 he left Georgia for a while seeking to improve his health and visited an uncle living in Pennsylvania. After he'd been there a while, his uncle asked him—remember, here's a sickly, small, frail man—what he did for a living. Little Aleck replied, "I'm a lawyer."

At that point, his uncle sat very quietly for a few moments, perplexed. Then he looked at Little Aleck and said, "Aleck, but don't you have to tell lies?" Obviously, he did not know his nephew. For Little Aleck answered, "The business of a lawyer is neither to tell lies nor to defend lies, but to protect and maintain right, truth, and justice." Wouldn't it be wonderful if the American Bar Association believed that today? Wouldn't it be wonderful if the lawyers in our Congress believed that today? The business is not to tell lies nor defend lies, but to maintain truth and right and justice.

His earliest course in public life foreshadowed his career, and he got the title, basically, the Great Commoner, because he was always fighting for what he believed right and for the common man. His first entry in the United States Congress was in 1843, and he served 16 years with distinction, constantly increasing, until in 1859 he returned to private life by his own choice. Now, I've said this repeatedly and I want to continue to emphasize it because you're going to see how it comes through in his life, but Alexander Hamilton Stephens had one of the brightest minds of his time. During his career in the United States Congress, he gained fame as an orator despite having a high-pitched voice. Alexander Hamilton Stephens was a noted authority of the United States Constitution.

In 1843, he was nominated by the newly organized Whig Party to fill a vacated seat in Congress. He began to campaign all around Georgia, campaigning against the Democrats at that particular time, flipping them left and right. They could not stand up to his oratory or his debating skills. Finally, the Democrats decided they were going to put Little Aleck in his place. They called in their biggest gun to shoot him down: Walter T. Colquitt, a veteran debater and also a judge.

Now, I want you to try to picture this, because the debate took place in Noonan, Georgia. Here is Little Aleck, sickly, frail, and here is enormous Judge Walter T. Colquitt, not just in size particularly, but also in reputation and in size. When that debate began, Judge Colquitt arose and began to address the audience. He spoke very sneeringly of the size of Little Aleck, making fun of him and saying, "I could swallow him whole and never know the difference." Then he proceeded to make out that Alexander Hamilton Stephens was unpatriotic and made fun of his voting record. Well, although the audience erupted in laughter when he said, "I could swallow him whole and never know the difference."

All of a sudden, his time was ended and Little Aleck was on his feet. He was still sickly and frail, that is for sure, but his eyes sparkled with brilliance. And then what Little Aleck said was this: Georgia should not pay the debt of a nation when Georgia was already contributing to that debt as an individual state. As far as Judge Colquitt making fun of his voting record, he took the Senate

Journal and showed that Judge Colquitt voted identically the way he voted in the Senate. Then he said, "If Judge Colquitt should swallow me whole, there'd be far more brains in his belly than he ever had in his head." Naturally, he won the debate, and he also won the election.

Little Aleck believed that the only hope for liberty was to stand by the Constitution. He believed it was the representative's duty to have knowledge of the Constitution and integrity to stand by it. Before the Georgia legislature in 1860, and again in the state secession convention in 1861, Alexander Hamilton Stephens opposed secession. Some try to say he was a strict unionist, but he was not, not in the deepest sense. When he opposed secession, he was not opposing the principle or the right of secession; he was opposing immediate secession. He was simply saying, "I believe in secession. I don't necessarily think it is the time to do it right now." But when Georgia seceded, he threw himself with the South and fought for its liberty and independence.

To illustrate this truth, listen carefully to a statement he made concerning secession. Alexander Hamilton Stephens said: "The real object of those who resorted to secession, as well as those who sustained it, was not the overthrow of the government of the United States, but to perpetuate the principles upon which it was founded. The object in quitting the Union was not to destroy, but to save the principles of the Constitution." He was simply saying that since the North did not want to abide by the Constitution and the South did, we would withdraw from the Union and then sustain those very principles upon which our country was founded.

Stephens' Courage and Commitment to Principle

Alexander Hamilton Stephens, like other men of that time, understood that separation was sometimes necessary to maintain the principles upon which our union was begun. His attitude, and that of many others, was that if the northern states did not wish to fulfill their covenantal oath, they would depart in peace and secure their liberties for themselves. It is not my intention today to give a full biographical sketch of Little Aleck; I certainly could not do that in the time I have this morning. But what I do wish to do is

demonstrate some of the principles that guided his life and the lives of the men of his time. We must understand that these men were men of principle and character. Their lives were ruled, governed, and controlled by principles founded upon biblical Christianity. To these men, honor, right, justice, equity, obedience, and duty were just some of the principles to which they held absolutely tenaciously. It is those principles that made these men stand out, that demonstrate why they were great and we do not have great men today, and that separate the men of that time from the men of this time. Listen to what Alexander Hamilton Stephens said: "Times change and men often change with them, but principles never." In other words, he preferred death over compromise because the principles were not going to change. Now, let me give you at least four things this morning. Very quickly, I want you to understand that he was courageous. You say, "Brother Weaver, you're using the term courageous to describe a man who never weighed more than 100 pounds in his life." That's correct. Let me give you an illustration of his courage and also a demonstration of his commitment to principle. On September 3rd, 1848, Judge Francis Cone ran into Alexander Hamilton Stephens at the Thompson Hotel in downtown Atlanta. A feud between the two had previously erupted over a quarrel of the Clayton Compromise. Words were exchanged, name-calling ensued, and animosity boiled over. Judge Cone attacked Little Aleck, and he not only jumped on this little man with his fist, he attacked him with a knife. He stabbed Alexander Hamilton Stephens six times, and one time the puncture wound was near the heart.

Stephens was cut so terribly and was bleeding so profusely, it looked as if he was going to die. Judge Cone had that knife and said to Stephens, "Now you retract or I'll cut your throat." To which Alexander Hamilton Stephens says, "Never cut." When the judge came down with that knife, Little Aleck took his hand and brushed the blow away that saved his life, but never was he able to write with that right hand clearly again. Here was a man of courage, a man who'd rather give his life than compromise principle. We have forgotten that there were men who believed death was preferable to compromise, and that there are some things worth dying for.

Stephens was certainly no warmonger, and neither was President Jefferson Davis. Stephens concurred with Jeff Davis when the President spoke to the reassembled Congress in April of 1861: "We seek no conquest, no aggrandizement, and no concessions from the free states. All we ask is to be left alone, that none shall attempt our subjugation by arms. This we will and must resist to the direst extremity. The moment this pretension is abandoned, the sword will drop from our hands, and we shall be ready to enter into treaties of amity and commerce mutually beneficial." All we want to do is simply be left alone. You drop your weapons, we'll drop our weapons. We'll be together in peace and have commerce that will be mutually beneficial. But if you maintain to subjugate us by your arms, we will fight.

Neither Davis nor Stephens were compromisers, especially when truth was at stake. If the North wanted to fight, then they're going to have a fight and a handful with the South. Alexander Hamilton Stephens himself laid this out before Congress, asking and demonstrating the necessity for peace, yet at the same time delivering a warning to the North who wished to subjugate the South by force. Here's just part of his speech to Congress: "Have you formed a fixed, firm, and inflexible determination to carry your measures in this house by numerical strength and then to enforce them by bayonet? If so, you must be prepared to meet the consequences of whatever follows. The responsibility will rest upon your own heads. You may think that the suppression of an outbreak in the southern states will be a holiday job for a few of your northern regiments. But you may find to your cost in the end that seven million people fighting for their rights, their homes, and their hearthstones cannot be easily conquered. I submit the matter to your deliberate consideration."

I have told you sincerely and honestly that I am for peace and the union upon any fair and reasonable terms. It is the most cherished sentiment of my heart. But if you deny these terms, if you continue deaf to the voice of that spirit of justice, right, and equality, which should always characterize the deliberations of statesmen, I know of no other alternative that will be left to the people of the South, but sooner or later to acquiesce in the necessity of holding you, as the rest of mankind, enemies in war and in peace, friends."

Listen to what that little man said. You may think it'll be a picnic to attack the South. You may think just a few of your northern regiments will wipe us out. But, he said, you're going to be in for a real surprise. Because when you find seven million people who are going to be fighting to protect their lives, their liberties, and their homes, you're going to be in for a rude awakening.

You see, the courage of Alexander Hamilton Stephens is very clearly made manifest in a statement that he made in Augusta, Georgia in 1855. He had been campaigning against all odds, and here is what he said in his campaign: "I am afraid of nothing on earth or above earth or under the earth except to do wrong. I'd rather be defeated in a good cause than triumph in a bad cause." Can you imagine that? Would to God we had men today that had that courage. Men that would stand up to politicians and to congressmen and to presidents and everyone else and said, "No, we will not do wrong. We will do what's right." Here this sickly, pale, cadaverous man had more courage probably in his little finger than the average man has today. So he was indeed a man of courage.

Stephens' Conscience and Honesty

Secondly, he was also a man of conscience. By that I mean he was extremely conscientious. Stephens was painstakingly honest in every area of his life. After his father's death, he went to live with his uncle in Warren County. While under his uncle's charge, he met Charles C. Mills, who was a man of wealth. And after five months in school, he was offered a home in Washington, which is Wilkes County, Georgia, and also a place there in the high school that was being taught by the Reverend Alexander Hamilton Webster, who was a Presbyterian minister. And by the way, Alexander Hamilton Stephens took his middle name Hamilton from Reverend Alexander Hamilton Webster. So Mr. Mills and some of the others then were paying for young Stephens then to attend schools. He regarded this charity as a loan and afterwards he repaid the full amount. He did not just simply accept it.

Later, when the Presbyterian church wanted to send him to college with a view to the ministry, he accepted their loan with the understanding that if he did not enter the ministry, the loan would

be paid back in full. When he graduated and did not enter the ministry, he earned money by teaching and repaid the Presbyterian board in full. He was true to Romans 13:8, "Owe no man anything." He made sure that he paid what he owed.

It is understandable that Stephens and President Davis had their differences, but there was no personal animosity between them. Stephens defended President Davis until his death. In fact, Stephens said, "These differences, that is between himself and Jefferson Davis, however wide and thorough as they were, caused no personal breach between us." Jeff Davis confirms that statement. There was no animosity, no bitterness, and no resentment between these men. Alexander Hamilton Stephens defended Jeff Davis against all malicious attacks as long as he lived. One of the most cruel and vicious charges against President Davis was his treatment of prisoners. Stephens promptly condemned that as "the boldest, baldest attempt at outrage upon the truth of history which has ever been essayed, not less so than the infamous attempt to fix upon him and other high officials on the Confederate side the guilt of Mr. Lincoln's assassination." So he said, if you think that Jeff Davis mistreated prisoners or had anything to do with the assassination of Lincoln, you're mistaken.

Stephens' Constitutionalism

Here's a man who was not only courageous, he was conscientious. Thirdly, he was also constitutional—a constitutionalist. His policy was to preserve the constitutional government of the South. While trying to preserve that, he was also trying to strengthen the anti-war party in the North by demonstrating that the North had indeed left the Constitution. One of the reasons he said we must stick with the Constitution was because there dwells no good in the human heart. In other words, Alexander Hamilton Stephens believed in total depravity. What he was saying is this: it's absolutely necessary that we have the rule of law rather than the rule of men. And by the way, I hope you see what we have today under the rule of men. But he knew that a good statesman must understand the fallen nature of mankind. He attempted to stand by the principles of the Constitution and the law of the land, even when he understood that most people in the North had left those principles and basically had

left the Word of God. He was one of the authors of the Georgia Platform of 1850.

Listen carefully to his first resolve: "That we hold the American Union secondary in importance only to the rights and principles it was designed to perpetuate." Did Alexander Hamilton Stephens love the Union? Yes, but he said it is not the Union first. We hold first those principles that union was set up to perpetuate—principles of liberty and freedom. Stephens understood that if those principles were denied, it would be only a matter of time before the North was under the tyrant's heel as well as the South. Hence he said, "It is our true policy while struggling for our own independence, to use every possible means of impressing upon the minds of the real friends of liberty in the North the truth that if we should be overpowered and put under the heel of centralism, that the same fate would await them sooner or later." He was prophetic. When the South lost, the North lost; when the South lost, the East and West lost. He said it would be only a matter of time before every section of the country would be subjugated by centralism and controlled from a centralized bureaucracy.

Here was a man who was a constitutionalist. In the formation of the Confederate Constitution, his statesmanship and profound acquaintance with the principles of government were of great value. He believed that the Confederate Constitution was a great improvement over the Constitution of the United States, and he said concerning it: "The whole document utterly negatives the idea which so many of the active in endeavoring to put in the enduring form of history that the convention in Montgomery was nothing but a set of conspirators whose object was to overthrow the principles of the Constitution of the United States and the erection of a great slave oligarchy instead of the free institution thereby secured and guaranteed. This work of the Montgomery Convention and that of the Constitution for a provisional government will ever remain not only as a monument of the wisdom, foresight, and statesmanship of the men who constituted it, but an everlasting refutation of the charges that have been brought against them." What does he say? The Confederate Constitution, if you will read it, demonstrates that we were not trying to set up some type of oligarchy, but we were trying to secure our liberty and our freedom.

Stephens' Christian Faith and Death

So here was a man of courage, a man of conscience, a constitutionalist. And fourthly, he was a Christian. It is an undisputed truth that Stephens professed to be a Christian.

His world and life view was steeped in the Scriptures. Truth was the starting point for Alexander Hamilton Stephens. A world and life view means simply this: everything you see, perceive, and understand is guided and directed by the principles of the Word of God. Here was a genuine Christian who sought to govern his life by those principles, and not only lived by them but died by them as well. His death came in the performance of his duties for the South. Governor Stephens had attended and addressed the sesquicentennial celebration in Savannah, commemorating the 150th anniversary of Oglethorpe's landing. He took sick there, and this was the last public duty he was ready to perform for the people of Georgia. Afterward he went home and worked in his own bedroom as a makeshift office for the state. While sick for two weeks, he did not lose contact with the affairs of the governor's office until he became delirious. For seventy years his mind had been clear and sharp, but now it slipped back to the era prior to the war. Maybe it was this way that he was to die indeed in peace. The doctor told his family and friends that he could not last long, and certainly his death led to an eternal beginning. Toward the dying days, Stephens said, "I've made it the rule of my life to live each day as if it were to be my last. I have no special preparations to make and no special pleas to offer." Isn't that an amazing statement? He said, "I've lived every day just like I was going to die. And now that I'm dying, I have no special preparations to make. I have no special pleas to offer." Everything was settled between him and Christ. He lived in obedience and he was going to die in obedience. When the doctor saw that his death was imminent, he prompted his family and friends to draw closer to his bedside to hear the words of the dying man. Finally, he uttered his dying words: "Get ready, we're nearly home."

Application and Call for Men of Character

And soon he was there. It was the year of our Lord, March the 4th, 1883. Alexander Hamilton Stephens could say with Job, "I know that

my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God." We must remember his final words: "Get ready." "Get ready." It be my desire that God would be pleased to raise up men like Alexander Hamilton Stephens. He was a man, small in stature, weak in constitution, sickly by frame. And yet, he was a man of courage and conviction, a constitutionalist, a thoroughgoing Christian. I had much rather be saddled with the body of Alexander Hamilton Stephens and have his character and faith than to have the body of a he-man and no character and no faith. God said of John the Baptist in John 1:6, "There was a man." And when you look at Alexander Hamilton Stephens, you can say, "There was a man." He was a man of integrity, a man of truth and principle and right. May God give us men like that. May we be men like that. May we get ready because our time is coming, not just to die, but to live and to stand and to do what's right for God's honor and glory and for our Southern heritage and culture. Let's pray. Our Father, we are so thankful today for Jesus Christ. We're so thankful for men like Alexander Hamilton Stephens.

Who were indeed men of courage? Men of conscience. Men of the Constitution. And yet Christian men who held truth preeminent. Give us grace, Lord, that we may serve thee acceptably with reverence and godly fear. In the name of Jesus Christ we ask and pray, Amen.

CHAPTER 7

Is America A Lost Nation?

July 31, 2005

SCRIPTURE READING - Jeremiah 18:1-13 (KJV)

Introduction: The Potter and the Clay

The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying, Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause thee to hear my words. Then I went down to the potter's house, and, behold, he wrought a work on the wheels.

And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it. Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying, O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the Lord. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel.

At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; if that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation,

> and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; if it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them.
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> Now therefore go to, speak to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the Lord; Behold, I frame evil against you, and devise a device against you: return ye now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good. And they said, There is no hope: but we will walk after our own devices, and we will every one do the imagination of his evil heart. Therefore thus saith the Lord; Ask ye now among the heathen, who hath heard such things.
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> 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.

"To make their land desolate, and a perpetual hissing; every one that passeth thereby shall be astonished, and wag his head." Is America a lost nation? Let me ask you a question concerning that which, I am sure, you have experienced. Have you ever wondered how people get themselves in the messes that they are in constantly and continually? Maybe you do not hear what I hear or receive the phone calls that I receive.

I am absolutely amazed. I came home last night, and there were twenty-three messages waiting for me, all important. Some were from people I have known for years, getting a divorce, involved in sin, and involved in wickedness. I have been flabbergasted over and over at the situations into which people get themselves. An additional shock comes when you realize that, once they have gotten themselves into these situations, they expect you and everyone else to help get them out, regardless of the time, expense, and effort required.

Then comes the knockout blow: most people in those situations who want your help do not really want to do what is necessary, from

a biblical perspective, to extricate themselves from their problems. They do not want a biblical remedy; they want a humanistic remedy. They want help, but only on their terms. They do not want to acknowledge their sins, repent, make restitution, or obey God.

The truth is that most of them would rather remain in their sins and face the judgment of God than do what is right and holy. Do you realize that nations are exactly the same? Just as people are born, live, and die, so do nations. Think of the great nations and civilizations of the past and ask yourself: Where are they? Why did they disappear from history, sink into oblivion, or get destroyed? The answer comes back: They sinned against God, refused to repent, and met His judgment.

Jeremiah 18 explains why nations are judged: they forget God and forget God's law. It teaches us that, just as God is capable of building, planting, and molding nations, He is also quite adept at plucking up, pulling down, and destroying them. In verse 7 God said, "At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy." Then verse 9 says, "At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it." God can either build and plant, or He can pluck up and destroy.

Sinful attitudes and unscriptural actions lead to desolation. That is true not only in the individual, family, and ecclesiastical realms, but also in the national realm.

In Jeremiah 18, God sends Jeremiah to the potter's house to learn a particular lesson: “Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause thee to hear my words.” Jeremiah says, “I went down to the potter's house.” There he saw the potter working on the wheels: “Behold, he wrought a work on the wheels. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it. Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying,”

The simple lesson Jeremiah learned is that men, families, churches, and nations are all in God's hands. He is the potter; we are the clay. It is God's sovereign prerogative to make us either a vessel of honor or a vessel of dishonor. God is in absolute and total control.

The Apostle Paul learned this same lesson from Jeremiah and repeats it in Romans 9: “What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid,” that is, perish the thought. Do not even let that thought enter into your mind. “For he saith to Moses,” what did God tell Moses? “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.” In other words, it is totally, completely, solely, and absolutely up to God.

Paul concludes: “So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.”

Then comes the objection: if God is sovereign and does not please us, “Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?” The answer is: “Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?”

"Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory?" Note what the Apostle Paul says: God is sovereign, and it is God's prerogative to make a vessel of honor or a vessel of dishonor.

Too few people have really learned and understood that it is God who is in absolute and total control. He is the Master, the Creator, the Sovereign, the Lord, and the Judge of all the Earth.

As individuals are lost without God and His Word, equally so are nations lost without God and His Word. There is no man who is able to be saved apart from Jesus Christ or apart from the Word of God. Likewise, there is no nation that is able to be saved apart from Jesus Christ and apart from the revelation of His Word. Nations are lost for exactly the same reason that individuals are lost: they do not

know God or His Word. It is either their ignorance or their rebellion and stubborn refusal to bow to Him and submit to His divine revelation and His Word that demonstrates their wickedness and their sin. Most often, it is not ignorance that condemns the nations, but their stubborn refusal to submit and bow to the sovereign God of the universe. Jeremiah chapter 18 can be applied to individuals, families, and churches.

Is America a Lost Nation?

But note something in the context: the primary reference is to nations. Look at verse 6: "O house of Israel," so he is talking to a nation. "Cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the Lord. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel," the nation.

Watch verse 7: "At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom." Verse 8 says, "If that nation"—and in verse 9, "And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom." Look at verse 10: "If it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them." The "it" in verse 10 refers back to the nation or the kingdom.

Then, in verse 11, God says, "Now therefore go to, speak to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying." Why, if he is talking about nations, does he say in verse 11, "Speak to the men of Judah and men of Jerusalem"? Because individuals make up nations. In the context, however, he is basically referring to a nation.

Now consider verse 11. We could sit here all day talking about wicked Washington politics, an ungodly and corrupt judicial system, and filthy, corrupt legislative systems. But here God is not demanding top-down repentance; he is demanding bottom-up repentance. He begins with the men, with the people of Judah and Jerusalem.

When people change, they will demand changes in their rulers. The reason we have such wicked, unbiblical, and unconstitutional rulers in our country is that, by and large, we have a wicked, unbiblical, and unconstitutional populace. When we repent and turn

back to God as individuals, families, and churches, then we will have ground to demand that our leaders repent, or we will have the moral fortitude to replace them. Until we repent, we cannot expect them to repent.

I want to give you three principles from Jeremiah chapter 18 and let you examine what is happening in our land today in light of them. Draw your own conclusion from the Word of God. I realize there are exceptions to these principles in some areas, but I am speaking generally as a nation. Is America lost? Look at verses 11 and 12.

The Loss of Recovery

We Have Lost the Means of Recovery

The first point is this: we have lost the means of recovery. God says in verse 11 to Jeremiah, "Now therefore go to, speak to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the Lord." Jeremiah tells them, "Thus saith the Lord; Behold, I frame evil against you, and devise a device against you: return ye now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good." And they said, after Jeremiah told them what God demanded, "There is no hope: but we will walk after our own devices, and we will every one do the imagination of his evil heart."

Stop and think with me. We do not realize how important this truth really is. How in the world can you possibly recover anything if you do not have the means to do so? What are the means of recovery?

Listen carefully: for individuals, for families, for churches, for nations, what is the means of recovery? Here it is: repentance and faith. Look in verse 11.

"Now therefore go to, speak to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the Lord; Behold, I frame evil against you, and devise a device against you: return ye now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good."

What is God saying? God is saying, "I have devised evil against you. I'm going to come hard upon you in judgment." There is only

one thing that will thwart that judgment, and that is repentance. Every one of you, says God, turn from your evil way and from the evil of your doings, repent, and do good works.

You see, this is the same truth revealed in 1 Thessalonians 1:9. The Apostle Paul, speaking about those Thessalonians, said, "and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God." What do you do? You repent of your idolatry and turn to God, and the evidence that you have turned to God is that you serve the living and the true God.

Now, let me cover two thoughts under this. It is the second one that is really scary. Here are the two thoughts. Number one: we have lost the duty of repentance. We have failed to understand that repentance on our part is a duty. It is a duty simply because God commands it. Hold Jeremiah 18, but look in your Bibles to Acts 17, verses 30 and 31. I can quote this passage, but I want you to see it.

The Apostle Paul has been preaching on Mars Hill, and he makes this conclusion: "And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent." God commands all men everywhere to repent. Why? "Because he hath appointed a day, in the 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 hath raised him from the dead."

Why does God command people to repent? First, because God is God, and He has a right to do whatever He wants to do. He commands people to repent because He has appointed a day of judgment in which He will judge the world in righteousness by Jesus Christ. God has given assurance to all men everywhere that He will do this, in that He has raised Jesus Christ from the dead.

Just as surely as God has raised Jesus Christ from the dead, just as surely God is going to judge me. And God says, therefore, I command you to repent. The Bible tells us in Mark 1:15 that when our Lord began His ministry, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel."

It is our responsibility to repent. Since God is our Creator, we owe Him honor and glory. Since we are sinners, and since we have rebelled against Him and disobeyed Him, we owe Him repentance.

Many people become confused about this. Repentance is a duty. God commands it, but simply because repentance is a duty does not mean that we have the ability to repent. Repentance may be our responsibility, but it is not within our ability. Let me give you an illustration. Here is a man who is a drunkard. You say, “God commands you to repent; repent right now.” Yet he does not have the ability to repent. He cannot stop being a drunkard any more than a man can stop being an adulterer, or stop being a liar, or stop being a sinner. He may have the responsibility to repent, but repentance is a gift of God, just as faith is a gift of God.

Look in your Bibles to Acts 5:30–31. Let me show you three passages very clearly that teach repentance is a gift of God. In Acts 5, the Bible is speaking about how God raised up Jesus Christ and seated Him at His own right hand. The apostle Peter said, “The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree.” Then the Bible says, “Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.” In other words, repentance is a gift. Christ must actually give it.

Look at Acts 11:18. After Cornelius and those in his house repented and turned to God in faith, look at the expression of the believers in Jerusalem: “When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.”

Who gave them repentance? God did. It was His gift. If you look in your Bibles to 2 Timothy chapter 2, beginning with verse 24, notice how plainly this is stated: “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.”

When do men acknowledge the truth? In verse 25, when they repent. When do men repent? When God gives them repentance. In other words, repentance is God's gift.

Repentance is our duty. It is our responsibility. But we cannot repent savingly in and of ourselves. It is the gift and the grace of

God. What does that mean? It means that we are obligated to seek God for His grace and His gift to turn us from our sins. That is why, all through the Bible, the psalmist and many of the prophets say, “Turn us, O God, and we shall be turned. Heal us and we shall be healed.” In other words, to God belongs the ability; to us belongs the responsibility. We are duty-bound to seek God for repentance and faith. We owe Him repentance because we have sinned against Him and violated His Word.

Under the means of recovery, we have lost the duty of repentance. Do you realize the sad truth today? Very few people, and very few preachers, deal with repentance. Do you know what the attitude of the average church is? We want to be non-confrontational. We want to provide a place of safety, comfort, and repose for sinners. We pacify sinners and coddle wicked men. In our evangelism, we try to ease sinners into a confession of faith without their ever experiencing painful conviction. We want to make becoming a Christian as easy and painless as possible. Why? All that is required in the average church is to raise a hand, walk down an aisle, say a little prayer, or join the church. The truth is simple: There is no salvation without repentance, no matter how many churches you join.

I don't care how often you've been baptized, how many times you've prayed the sinner's prayer, or how often you've raised your hand. If you've never repented, you've never, ever been saved. It's just that simple. Remember Luke chapter 13. When men came to our Lord and said, "Lord, did you hear about those individuals upon whom the tower of Siloam fell and killed those eighteen men?" our Lord asked, "Do you suppose that they were sinners exceedingly, that is, above everyone else?" He answered, "I tell you, nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."

They also asked about the men whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices. They were sacrificing, and Pilate had them killed. Our Lord said, "Do you think they were sinners exceedingly? I tell you, nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." What is our Lord saying? No one can be saved unless he repents.

There is no painless way to become a child of God. We have to be honest with our sins and deal with our sins. No one can savingly

believe upon Jesus Christ who has not repented of his sins. Repentance and faith are the two sides of one coin. The man who has savingly repented has also savingly believed on Jesus Christ, and the man who has savingly believed on Jesus Christ has also savingly repented. You cannot have real saving faith without repentance.

How can we expect our nation to repent when the duty of repentance is not laid upon sinners? How can you perform your duty if you don't even know what your duty is? How can you seek God for His gift of repentance if you're ignorant of His requirement to seek Him for repentance? In our age of political correctness and religious toleration, we are told that it really doesn't matter what you believe, just so you believe it sincerely.

Let me be kind in saying this: that's a bald-faced lie. What did our Lord say in John 14, verse 6? "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." The Bible says plainly in Acts 3, verse 19, "Repent ye therefore, and be converted." The only God there is is the God revealed in Scripture. The only God that there is has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ. The only salvation there is is in Jesus Christ. It is our duty and responsibility to tell men that they have a duty and responsibility to repent.

How can you recover if you have lost the means of recovery? Look back in Jeremiah chapter 18, because this is the second thing, and it is really frightening. It is not simply that we have lost the duty of repentance; we have also lost the desire for repentance.

Look at verse 11. God says, "Now therefore go to, speak to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the Lord; Behold, I frame evil against you, and devise a device against you." God says, I am fixing to give you a knockout blow. Here is the only thing that will stop it: "Return ye now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good."

Remember, God spoke to the nation. God said, I am going to take you out unless you repent. Now watch the answer in verse 12: "And they said, There is no hope: but we will walk after our own devices, and we will every one do the imagination of his evil heart."

The frightening thing is that we have not merely lost the duty of repentance; we have lost the desire for repentance. We do not want

to change. Why was there no hope? Because "we will walk after our own devices, and we will every one do the imagination of his evil heart." There was no desire to change or repent. Men loved darkness rather than light, and they loved evil more than good and sin more than righteousness.

In essence, this is what they were saying: God may take His way, and we will take ours. He has devised evil against us? Let Him bring it to pass if He pleases. We have devised sin, and we will go on in it. No one is stopping us. Whatever our hearts suggest to us that is pleasant and agreeable, that shall we do. Let the issue be what it will; we are going to do what we want to do.

You do not have to voice those words for them to be true, because they are expressed in attitudes and actions. According to verses 11 and 8, it was not that there was no hope in the grace and mercy of God. God had declared that upon their repentance and reformation, He would turn from His stretched-out judgment.

The problem was that they were so hardened in their sins, so fixed in their wicked courses, and so determined to go on in them that there was no room for Jeremiah to believe his preaching would ever reclaim them. Preaching, exhortation, and admonition were useless. Whether Jeremiah preached to them or not, and whether God judged them or not, they were going to continue exactly as they were. In Jeremiah 18, the people had no desire to change, repent, or honor God. Thus, they refused Jeremiah and refused to submit to God's law. When one will not repent, truly all hope is lost.

The Lost Message of Recovery

These men rightly expressed the situation that they were in naturally. They said in verse 11, “There is no hope.” The reason there was no hope is that they did not have a single desire to repent and obey God.

When one loses hope, all is lost. When people die, they lose hope. When nations die, they lose hope. When one thinks that he can do absolutely nothing, that is exactly what he will do: nothing. When one thinks that the situation is useless, that is exactly what he will be—useless. When someone thinks the situation is hopeless, that is

exactly what he will be—an individual without hope. When one will not repent, there is no hope and there is no help.

Nations, like individuals, lose hope. When a nation loses the duty and the desire to repent, all hope of recovery is gone. Now, the question that you must ask yourself is this: Have we in America, like the nation of Israel in Jeremiah's day, lost the means of recovery? Have we lost the duty and the desire to repent?

We have also lost the message of recovery. Look in verse 13: "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?"

We Have Lost the Message of Recovery

"Because my people have forgotten me, they have burned incense to vanity," that is, to idols, "and they have caused them to stumble in their ways from the ancient paths, to walk in paths, in a way not cast up."

In verses 16 and 17, God says His judgment upon them will be to make their land desolate. They will be a hissing; everyone will pass by and be astonished. God says in verse 17, "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 reveals how unbelievable and preposterous it was for Israel to do what it had done. By the same token, we can see how unbelievable and preposterous it is for America to do what she has done. Who in their right mind would leave cold, clear, fresh water to drink from a scum-filled, swampy, stagnated pond? God says that is exactly what His people have done. It is unbelievable. It is preposterous.

They have left the one true and living God and turned to idols. Why would anyone exchange the one true and living God for a false god? Why would anyone exchange the one true gospel for a false gospel? That is exactly what Israel did in Jeremiah 18. That is exactly what America has done. Consequently, we are walking as they did, in

uncharted paths. Look at verse 15: “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.” In other words, God says, you are walking on a slippery footpath. It is unproven, uncharted, and a way in which you should not be walking.

Turn to Jeremiah 6 and look at verse 16. Jeremiah preached to the people, and I want you to note what he proclaimed and what their response was. One of the saddest verses in the Bible says, “Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see; and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.” But they said, “We will not walk therein.” God, we do not want to obey You. We do not want Your Word. We do not want to honor You. We do not want the old way.

If one will not walk in the true path, the only paths left open to him are false paths. If one will not walk in the true gospel, the only gospels left open to him are false gospels, which lead to death and destruction. That is why Paul said in Galatians 1, verses 8 and 9, “But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.” The word “accursed” means to be set apart and marked out for certain and sure death and destruction. If anyone will not preach, believe, and follow the one true and living gospel and that one true path, let him be marked out for certain and sure destruction.

In Jeremiah 18:15, the latter part, because they have left God, He says, "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," that is, they are not following those old paths, "to walk in paths, in a way not cast up." Since they are walking in uncharted and previously unsailable waters, look what is going to happen:

"To make their land desolate, and a perpetual hissing; every one that passeth thereby shall be astonished, and wag his head. 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."

What is God saying? I will destroy them. Why? They have left the old paths. They do not want My ways. It amazes me how we have left our history, our heritage, and our God. How far we have fallen! The true gospel of Jesus Christ, His law, and His sovereignty are ignored, despised, and rejected in this country. Stop and think: this nation was begun to honor Him and to glorify Him, and we have ingloriously and wickedly turned our back upon Him and upon His truth.

It is like Zechariah 13:6. Someone asked the Messiah, "What are these wounds in thine hands?" Then He shall answer, "Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends." We who began in this nation as the friends of justice, righteousness, holiness, and obedience have now turned our backs upon the very One who gave us life and holds our lives in His hands.

How can we ever be recovered if we have lost the means of recovery, and if we have lost the message of recovery? As we obey God, we are never left without direction. Isaiah 30:21 says, "And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left." As we obey God, He does not leave us directionless, lost, or without hope. God says, "This is the way, walk ye in it."

The Loss of the Messengers of Recovery

If we are left without directions, if we are left without the true way, how can we be recovered as a nation? That is the question. What have we lost in this country? First of all, we have lost the means of recovery: repentance and faith. We have lost the message of recovery, because only a very few really, truly want the Word of God. But thirdly, we have even lost the messengers of recovery.

Look in verse 18. Jeremiah is preaching what God has told him to preach: "Then said they, Come, and let us devise devices against Jeremiah; for the law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet. Come, and let us smite him with the tongue, and let us not give heed to any of his words." Here is a man who has been preaching, praying, and crying.

We Have Lost the Messengers of Recovery

They said, in effect, "Since God has said he is going to devise devices against us, we are going to get rid of this preacher. We will do the same thing to Jeremiah. We will teach him. We will show him."

Do you remember the passage in Acts chapter 8? Philip approached the Ethiopian eunuch in the chariot and asked him, "Understandest thou what thou readest?" He was reading from Isaiah 53. What was the eunuch's response? "How can I, except some man should guide me?" Then Philip got into the chariot with him and began to preach and teach Jesus Christ to him.

Now let me ask you, generally speaking, where are our guides in this country who lead us and teach us in the way of God according to His Word? How many honest, faithful, and true preachers can you name who live in Florida? How many can you name who live in Georgia? One of the problems I have everywhere I go is that people ask me, "Can you tell me where a good church is in Montana? Can you tell me where a good church is in Canada or New York?" Where are our preachers? Where are our messengers? We have plenty of preachers, but the sad truth is that most of them could not preach their way out of a wet paper bag. They do not know the truth, and they cannot preach the truth. The average pastor stays at the average church—help me out now—do you know how long? Two years. How can you teach the Word of God in two years?

It takes me almost that long just to clear my throat. I was in the book of Hosea for a year and a half. But the average preacher stays at the average church two years and then moves on. When he goes to the next church, instead of studying and continuing to study, he simply preaches the same two years' worth of messages. When he leaves there, he goes to the next church and does the same thing. I am assuming that other denominations are like the Baptist. But if you go to a fundamental, Bible-believing Baptist church, usually you will hear a sermon either on sin, salvation, separation, or soul winning. And that's it. Most Baptist preachers, when they leave those four fields, do not have anything to preach. Where are our messages? And where are our messengers?

Do you realize that very few pastors ever deal with doctrinal issues? They never teach doctrine. Let me take that back. They do teach doctrine, but not biblical doctrine. Every time you teach, you are teaching some doctrine; it is simply not always biblical doctrine. A guide cannot be a guide if he does not know the way.

Isaiah 56:10 accurately describes most of our men today: "His watchmen are blind: they are all ignorant, they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber." What good is a blind watchman? What good is a dog that cannot bark? How would you know that danger is approaching? How would you know that company is coming? You wouldn't.

What is the responsibility of pastor-teachers? Our responsibility is to teach the whole counsel of God. The Apostle Paul summoned all the elders, all the pastors, to Ephesus and preached to them. He said, "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." Then he said, "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 kept back absolutely nothing that was profitable unto them. Remember 2 Timothy 3:16: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable." If all Scripture is profitable, what did Paul teach? All the Scripture.

Paul speaks to the preachers in verse 26: “Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men.” How could the apostle Paul be pure from the blood of all men? Let me tell you what I have been taught all my life: that you are obligated to witness to every person you see. If you do not witness to them, their blood is on your hands, and you will face them at the judgment seat of Christ. They will say, “Why didn’t you witness to me?” Folks, that interpretation is absolutely stupid. Can I tell you why it is absolutely stupid?

Suppose my wife tells me, “Sweetheart, we’re out of milk and bread. Would you please go to the store and bring us back some?” I say, “Sure.” But remember, I have to witness to every person I see, or their blood is on my hands. When would I ever return home? If I

have not witnessed to every person I see, I would leave her and never come home. It is impossible.

How did Paul say, “Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men”? Here is how: “For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.” Paul said he was free from the blood of all men because he preached the totality of Scripture.

We get free from the blood of all men by preaching the total Word of God. Pastors can witness until they faint and fall down in it, but if they do not preach the totality of the Word of God, blood is on their hands.

The point I am trying to make is this: We have lost in this country the messengers of recovery. We have lost men who will stand up and say, “Thus saith the Lord.” Jeremiah was a true prophet of God. He was a prayer warrior and a weeping prophet. Everyone would have thought, What a pastor Jeremiah would be. Everybody would be delighted to have Pastor Jeremiah around. But they said, “Oh no. We’re going to devise devices against him. We’re going to make it so nobody will listen to him,” and a little later they would even try to kill him. You will find that in chapter 20, verse 10.

Now, what happened in Jeremiah 18? God sent Jeremiah to the potter’s house to learn one lesson: God is in control. God controls nations, and God demands that nations repent. God said, “Jeremiah, you go and tell them.” Jeremiah went and told them, but they would not listen, heed, or hear.

The Consequence of Rejecting God's Means, Message, and Messengers

Since they despise the means and message of recovery, they decide to silence the messenger of recovery. They plan to kill him. Jeremiah 18:18 says, "Then said they, Come, and let us devise devices against Jeremiah; for the law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet. Come, and let us smite him with the tongue, and let us not give heed to any of his words."

Look what the messenger sent to be their help turned into. Jeremiah prays: "Give heed to me, O Lord, and hearken to the voice of them that contend with me. Shall evil be recompensed for good? for they have digged a pit for my soul. Remember that I stood before thee to speak good for them, and to turn away thy wrath from them. Therefore deliver up their children to the famine, and pour out their blood by the force of the sword; and let their wives be bereaved of their children, and be widows; and let their men be put to death; let their young men be slain by the sword in battle. Let a cry be heard from their houses, when thou shalt bring a troop suddenly upon them: for they have digged a pit to take me, and hid snares for my feet. Yet, Lord, thou knowest all their counsel against me to slay me: forgive not their iniquity, neither blot out their sin from thy sight, but let them be overthrown before thee: deal thus with them in the time of thine anger." Oh, the man who was sent for their good.

But he and his message and the means were rejected, and turned out to be an intercessor against them. The message and the messenger are ultimately bound together. We need to learn that to despise the message of God is to despise the messenger of God. To despise the messenger of God is to despise the message of God, which would also include the means of recovery.

In 2 Chronicles 36:15, notice what God says: “And the Lord God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers,” sending His messengers to His people, “rising up betimes, and sending.” Why did God send these preachers? “Because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling place.” But what happened? “But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words,” that is, God's words, “and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy.”

“Therefore he brought upon them the king of the Chaldees, who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young man or maiden, old man, or him that stooped for age: he gave them all into his hand.” So the men that were sent for their profit turned out to be men for their judgment. Why? Because they despised the message and the means.

The same truth appears in the New Testament. In 2 Corinthians 2:14, the Apostle Paul says, “Now thanks be unto God, which always

causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place." Note particularly that Paul says God always makes us triumph in Jesus Christ. Does that mean that people are saved every time we preach? No. Does that mean that people get right and repent every time we preach? No. God always makes us triumph in Christ, but that triumph does not mean that everyone responds savingly. He continues, "For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish."

"To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?" The man of God preaches God's message, declaring the means of recovery, repentance, and faith. Someone hears it and says, "That's God's word, that's the truth," repents of sin, falls on his face before Jesus Christ, and receives mercy. God says, "That's a sweet smelling savour. My son is preached."

But the same preacher, with the same message and using the same means, may be met by people who shake their fists and say, "We hate that Christ. We'll not have him reign over us. And furthermore, we'll kill you if you keep preaching about him." God still says, "That's a sweet smelling savour. My son is preached." To the one, salvation; to the other, condemnation. Only God decides which is for reconciliation and which is for condemnation.

God's Word never returns void. It always accomplishes the mission upon which God sends it, but that mission is determined by God. Isaiah 55:10–11 says, "My word shall not return unto me void, saith the Lord, but it shall accomplish that whereunto I send it, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." Thus the word that comes as an instrument of life, when men reject, despise, and refuse to repent, becomes an instrument of death. This is true individually, familially, ecclesiastically, and nationally.

Conclusion: Our Duty to Repent

We must value the means God has ordained in conversion, edification, teaching, evangelism, and preaching His Word. Without understanding the importance of the means of recovery, the message of recovery, and the messengers of recovery, God's people will

become slothful, indolent, and spiritually deficient. The means, the message, and the messenger are all part of God's desire and design. God ordained the preaching of His Word. The man sent for the good of the people can turn around and be for their evil and judgment. Romans 11:2 asks, "Know ye not what the scripture saith of Elias?"—that is, Elijah—"how he maketh intercession to God against Israel." When one refuses the means, he also refuses the message and the messenger.

What is our duty individually, familially, ecclesiastically, and nationally? Our duty is to repent, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and honor and glorify God. God holds us answerable and accountable. When the nation turns its back upon God, just as individuals do, God judges and destroys it. If we want to be blessed by God, we must always be reminded of the means of recovery, the message of recovery, and the messengers of recovery.

Father, we ask that You would teach us and build us up in the most holy faith. Help us, Lord, to see the importance of Your Word and of preaching and teaching the Word of God. We cry that Thou wouldst raise up men in this country who will preach the Word of God unashamedly, declare Thy truth, and hold our nation accountable. Father, if it please Thee, grant us repentance and grant us faith, that we may honor Thee in every area of our lives, in our churches, our families, and our nations. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 8

Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?

November 27, 2005

SCRIPTURE READING - Isaiah 51:1-13 (KJV)

Introduction: The Big Bad Wolf of Fear

The title of the sermon is "Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?" Isaiah 51, beginning with verse 1.

"Hearken to me, you that follow after righteousness, you that seek the Lord. Look unto the rock whence you are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence you are digged. Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you: for I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him. For the Lord shall comfort Zion: he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord.

"Joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody. Hearken unto me, my people, and give ear unto me, O my nation: for a law shall proceed from me, and I

> will make my judgment to rest for a light of the people. My righteousness is near; my salvation is gone forth, and mine arms shall judge the people; the isles shall wait upon me, and on mine arm shall they trust.
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> "Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath: for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner: but my salvation shall be for ever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished. Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law; fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings. For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool: but my righteousness shall be for ever, and my salvation from generation to generation.
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> "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord; awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. Art thou not it that hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon? Art thou not it which hath dried the sea, the waters of the great deep; that hath made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over? Therefore the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away."

"I, even I, am he that comforteth you: who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass; and forgettest the Lord thy maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth; and hast feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy? and where is the fury of the oppressor?"

The Word of God has a great deal to say about this subject. Who is afraid of the Big Bad Wolf? Everyone is aware of the question in the title of this message. The three little pigs were not afraid of the Big Bad Wolf until at least two of them had their houses blown down. The third little pig had built his house solidly out of bricks, and that house alone was safe. All else had failed.

There is a big bad wolf that concerns all of us, and the wolf's name is fear. Our Lord talked about this in Matthew 7, beginning with verse 24: "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."

Our Lord is saying simply that those who do not build their house based upon His truth and His teachings have a great deal to fear. But those who build their houses solidly upon the rock of His word have absolutely nothing to fear. The word "fear" occurs 400 times in our King James Bibles. Evidently, it is a very important subject to have been recorded that many times.

There are all kinds of phobias. Tripp was telling me this week that he had heard there is even a phobia of bald-headed men. Of course, I guess there is a phobia of phobias. But it was Winston Churchill, I believe, who told the English people, "We have nothing to fear but fear itself."

What do people fear most? I suppose that the greatest fears are in relationship to death, persecution, the unknown, and suffering.

Now, let me submit something to you: fear itself needs to be feared. Not in the sense that fear is anything that you and I should respect, but in the sense that we do not want to fall into that entangling and destructive snare. Most people have never understood the destructive and devastating nature of just fear. Fear itself is an emotion, it is a state of mind, it is a disposition—listen carefully—that is contrary to God and His Word.

It paralyzes, demoralizes, devastates, and destroys. Fleshly and worldly fear is never from God. This is a passage that I would encourage every one of you to commit to memory. I can quote the passage, but I want you to see it. The Bible says, “For God hath not given us a spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound

mind." It is a very simple statement. "For God hath not given us a spirit of fear."

The Nature and Source of Fear

So you have to ask yourself this question: if God does not give us a spirit of fear, where does fear arise? It may arise from the world. It may arise from the flesh. It may arise from a lack of faith. It may arise from the devil. But it never, ever comes from God. Now, there is a fear of God that is a reverential trust. But we are talking about the fear of man. We are talking about fear in general. God says He has not given us a spirit of fear, but God gives us a spirit of love and power and of a sound mind. I want you to note, and I am going to prove this before I close today, that fear is exactly the opposite of faith. Fear is also contrary to biblical love.

First John 4:18 says, "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love." Note that there is no fear in love. There is no fear in biblical love, but perfect love does what? It casts out fear. Why? Because fear has torment. Faith and fear, then, are exact opposites, but love and fear are contrary to each other as well.

If I were to ask you, "What is your greatest fear?" or ask people in general what their greatest fear is, undoubtedly one of the most frequently given answers would be the fear of death. But for a child of God, you should never, ever have a fear of death. In fact, the Bible tells us very explicitly that we have been delivered from that fear if we have been genuinely converted.

Common Fears and Biblical Deliverance

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 had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." What did our Lord do in saving us? One of the benefits of being saved is being delivered from the fear, or the bondage, of death.

You have just got to ask yourself whether or not you are afraid of death. If you are a child of God, there should be no reason why you should fear death. I will explain that in just a moment.

Another common answer is that we are afraid of the unknown. Who knows what tomorrow is going to hold? Who knows whether or not there will be surgery, whether or not we will die, or whether or not we will be financially bankrupt? The fear of the unknown should never, ever bother a child of God. Why? Well, first of all, what did our Lord tell us?

That is sufficient unto the day. We may not even be around tomorrow. But what else does the Bible say if we are around tomorrow? 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.” Why in the world should I fear anything when I know that God is ultimately going to work everything out for my good and for his glory? As a child of God, I should not have a fear of death or a fear of the unknown.

The Fear of Man and Its Dangers

What is your greatest fear? If you were honest in answering that question, you would probably say, “My greatest fear is the fear of man.” Or we could say it another way: “My greatest fear is the fear of government.” I am fearful of what men can do to me, to my family, my possessions, and my life. None of us want to be reviled, reproached, persecuted, or prosecuted.

Yet when you live in a corrupt and ignorant society, with a compromised and corrupt judicial system, under a government bent on silencing all who are opposed to it and all who are exposing its sins and wickedness, in one sense you could say it would be quite natural to fear. Inevitably, the power of man and the power of government is going to come down upon you. But at the same time, you have to recognize the dangers of fear. Fear is forbidden to the child of God, and especially the fear of man.

In Luke 12, beginning with verse 4, our Lord says, “And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye

shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him." Our Lord is saying that we are not to fear man; we are to fear God. God not only has power to kill, He has power to cast into hell. Once again, it is not man that we are to fear, but God. Do you realize that if we did not really fear man, how much more bold, brave, and courageous we would be?

As wicked as fallen men are, do you realize there is a limit to what they can do? What is the utmost that a wicked man can do to a child of God? The most he could possibly do is to kill the body.

Why should a child of God fear death? Our Lord told us in Hebrews chapter two that he came to deliver us from death. The Apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5 and verse 8, "We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord."

Once we are killed, what happens? We're in the presence of the Lord. Do you remember what the Apostle Paul said in Philippians chapter 1, while he was in the Roman jail, writing to the Philippians? He said, "For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better."

"Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you." And then he said, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." How horrible could it be to be ushered into the presence of Jesus Christ if you're a child of God? The answer is, it's not horrible; it's desirable. It's what we want. We want to be with the Lord. So how can even the threat of death to a child of God be a terror or a fear to us?

Now, you say, "But pastor, you don't understand. It's not just your life that they can take. They can take everything you've ever worked for. They can confiscate everything that you ever had. You just don't understand." Well, I do understand. Let me ask you several questions. How much of your stuff did you bring into the world with you? How much of your stuff are you going to take out of the world with you? Is all that stuff really your stuff?

Let's be honest: who gave it to you? Who gave you the ability to work and to earn and to save and to purchase all the stuff that you have? I believe the correct answer is God and God alone.

Now, listen carefully, because this is a very important point and we'll show it to you from the Bible. There's a difference between men and women. Do you know what the greatest concern for a woman is? Security. She wants security more than anything in the world. One of the greatest fears that a wife has is this: "What will happen to me if something happens to my husband? What will happen to me if my husband goes to prison? What will happen to me if my husband dies?" If you have children at home, then that is intensified.

Job's Example of Faith Over Fear

Now, turn in your Bibles to the book of Job. Let's look in Job chapter one. Job went through more than anyone in this room would ever go through. Job was the wealthiest man in his time, yet he lost all of his possessions in one day: all of his camels, all of his asses, and all of his cattle. He lost everything. In one day, he not only lost all of his possessions, but he lost ten children. He was also smitten with disease from head to foot—boils, putrefying sores, and worms eating him while he was alive. In fact, that's what he had the potsherd for: to scrape the worms off.

Job was useless for any work, even though he was left alive. Here was a man who had lost everything, including his children and his health. Yet consider his attitude. While Job's sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house, a great wind smote the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men; they were dead, and one servant escaped to tell him. Then Job arose, rent his mantle, shaved his head, fell down upon the ground, and worshipped, saying, "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither. The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

"In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly." Here was a man who had lost ten children and everything he had, yet he did not sin or charge God foolishly. He simply said, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

The interesting thing, as you study the book of Job, is that the one thing left to Job was his wife. The problem was that her attitude was not the same as Job's. Satan went forth from the presence of the Lord and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his

crown. Job took a potsherd to scrape himself withal and sat down among the ashes.

Then his wife said, “Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God, and die.” But he said unto her, “Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?” In all this did not Job sin with his lips. The one who should have been an encouragement was the one who tried to get him to defect, sin, curse God, and die. What did Job do? He looked at his wife and never got upset. He simply said, “You’re speaking as one of the foolish women.”

"You haven't thought this thing through. Shall we receive good at the hand of God and not evil?" I mean, God is sovereign. God can send whatever He pleases. We know it's from His hand and I'm willing to bow to it. So Job then not only corrected her in one sense of the word, he rebuked her. And by the way, Job was right, because if you'll turn right over to the book of Job, chapter 42, you'll notice in this passage that Job not only retained his integrity, Job not only did not sin in the fact that he did not curse God, the Bible tells you in Job, chapter 42, verse 10, look carefully, "And the Lord turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends: also the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before."

So ever how many millions he had before he got double? By the way, he had 10 more children. He didn't get another wife. I was going to say that. He got 10 more children because the 10 that were killed really were not gone. I mean, they were with the Lord, you see. He still had double. He had 20 children.

Now, I want you to take note of something, ladies. Listen carefully. I want you to take note of how a wife may become an encouragement or discouragement unto her husband based upon either her faith or her fear. Job's life was fearful, but Job was a man of faith. Do you realize it makes a difference when you move in faith. Now, I want you to turn in your Bibles to Hebrews 13.

God's Sovereignty and Our Security

Because let's go back to this mentality. Well, what if they take my husband? Or what if the Lord takes my husband? What if he dies?

Well, watch this, if you would, in Hebrews 13, beginning there with verse 5. Look what God says. Hebrews 13, verse 5. I usually quote this verse to my wife. She'll come in and she'll say, "You know, I need some new clothes" and I say, "Well, we're Christians. Let's see what the Bible says." And I preach this verse.

It's one of my favorites. Hebrews 13 verse 5. "Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have." I'd say there's your answer right there. You don't get it. No, the verse goes on. "Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." Now, wait, don't stop there. Watch the next verse. "So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper."

"I will not fear what man shall do unto me." I will not fear. Why? Because we are never, ever alone. We're never forsaken. I don't care if you're a widow woman, or if your husband and your children are in prison for the faith's sake. You're still never, ever alone.

You know what David said in Psalm 37 verse 25? "I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." God will take care of his own. He'll take care of the widow. He'll take care of the orphan. He'll take care of the husband and the wife. "I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread."

You can mark her down: if you are a child of God, and if you move in faith, and if you obey him, He will protect you and he will never leave you and never forsake you. You're going to be taken care of. Our trust has got to be in Christ alone. Our faith has got to be in Christ alone.

You better stop and think about something, ladies. Your husbands will not live forever, and then your wives will not live forever. But that doesn't mean that you're ever alone or forsaken. God will take care of you. I remember a widow woman who was deathly afraid to go to sleep at night because of all the break-ins, muggings, and rapes. She stayed awake most of the night, too fearful to sleep. One night, while reading her Bible, she came across the passage in

Psalms that said, "The Lord thy God that keepeth thee neither slumbereth nor sleepeth."

It dawned on her, and she said, "Well, Lord, since you're going to stay awake, there's no reason for both of us to. I think I'll just go to sleep." And that's a fact. The Lord that keepeth thee neither slumbereth nor sleepeth.

Now, why in the world should we fear what man can do unto us when the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth is on the throne? Man may kill the body, but that's all he can do. The Lord can give life back to the body. Man may confiscate and take everything that you have, but God may give back double, triple, or quadruple, or whatever he pleases.

Turn in your Bibles to Proverbs 29:25. Here is another verse you need to memorize. You need to memorize 2 Timothy 1:7: “For God hath not given us a spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.” You also need to memorize Proverbs 29:25: “The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe.” The fear of man bringeth a snare. You know what a snare is?

It is similar to a trap. Usually, a snare is made out of wire, rope, or a piece of heavy string. It is made in a circle and tied to a tree or a small branch, depending on what is being hunted. When the animal goes through it, the snare closes around its head, and the animal is choked to death. It is held there until whoever sets the snare comes by, releases the body, and resets the snare.

What does God say? “The fear of man bringeth a snare.” The word “snare” occurs twenty times in our Bibles. It is translated “gin” three times and “ensnared” one time. What is God telling us? Whoever fears man is ensnared and trapped. It is a snare and a trap designed to hold us in slavish fear. Whoever fears man is ensnared, but whoever puts his trust in the Lord is safe.

Exposition of Isaiah 51: The Mortality of Man

Now go back in your Bibles to Isaiah 51. Look closely at the context, because this passage really destroys the fear of man if you understand it. First, consider to whom this text is addressed. Look in

verse 1: “Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord.” If someone is following after righteousness and seeking the Lord, I would say he is pretty much a believer, wouldn’t you? Look in verse 4: “Hearken unto me, my people, and give ear unto me, O my nation.” God specifically says, “You’re my people, you’re my nation.” Look in verse 7: “Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law.” Now he says these are those who know righteousness and whose heart has his law entombed in it.

Now, if we look at the context, we cannot help but see that this passage is written to true believers. In verse 1, God says, “Hearken to me.” In verse 4, He says, “Hearken to me,” and in verse 7, again, “Hearken to me.” Three times God says to His people, “Hearken, listen, pay attention, shut up, take notice. I’m telling you something. You need to know it.”

In verses 1 through 6, God specifically identifies Himself as the source of all blessings in verses 2 and 3. He also designates Himself as the source of all help, all righteousness, and all salvation. It is God alone who can turn a desert into a fruitful garden, verse 3. It is God alone who will stand the test of time, verse 6. All else may wax old, decay, and vanish, but God and His righteousness shall endure forever, verse 6.

So what is he saying? I am the source of all your help. I am the source of salvation. I am the source of righteousness. I am the source of all your prosperity.

Now, in light of these verses and truths, since God says that He is the All-Sufficient One and the Sovereign One, and in light of His power, His mercy, and His grace, look at verse 7: "Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law; fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings."

Why in the world are we so afraid of what people will think, say, or do? Why are we afraid of being laughed at, mocked, ridiculed, persecuted, prosecuted, and reviled? How, in reality, do those things hurt us? You have heard that old expression, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me."

Well, that is not really true. Names do hurt, especially when we are being reviled, mocked, and ridiculed. Nobody likes that. But here is our real fear: those mockings and ridiculings will turn into real persecution, and those threats will turn into reality.

When we begin to fear the revilings, reproaches, and threats of man, we are afraid that they will turn into reality. What does that mean? We are now being motivated and controlled by fear.

Turn in your Bibles to Romans chapter 6, holding Isaiah 51; we are coming right back there. Look at this passage because it demonstrates how easily we can be manipulated and controlled. Romans 6:16 says, "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?" If ever one of you came and bowed the knee to me today and said, "Pastor, you're our master," you would understand the principle: to whom you yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants you are.

"Whatever you say, that is what we will do." Then I am your master, and you are my servant. It is just that simple. If you bow the knee to sin and say, "I'm going to follow you. I'm going to do what you want me to do," then sin is your master. Read verse 16.

"Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of fear unto death and destruction or of obedience unto righteousness?" Whoever you yield your body, your mind, and your thinking to is your master. One of the dangers in fear is that fear not only manipulates us; it will control us. Once fear takes over, we do not think or act. We panic and we react.

I never will forget, though I barely remember it. I was probably three or four years old, and my mother and father were down at my grandfather's pond fishing. I walked behind my mother just as she put the reel back to throw out there. It had one of those bass things with a treble hook on the end. As she did this, it caught in my cheek. When I screamed and she turned around and saw what she had done, she reached down, picked me up, and started running to the house, screaming. Of course, I was dragging the reel. My father had to chase her down, take me away from her, slap her to bring her back

to reality, and take the pliers, cut off the treble, and then get it out. What had she done? She just panicked. She was not in control.

When fear comes upon us, we panic and react. The greatest sin in fearing is not our panic or our loss of control; there is a far greater sin.

Why does God admonish us in verse 7 to "fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be afraid of their revilings"? There are two reasons. First, there is the mortality and weakness of the sinner. Secondly, there is the might and wonder of the sovereign. So let us look in verse 8 at the mortality and weakness of the sinner. In verse 7, he says, "fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings." Why? Here is why.

"For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool." Just stop right there. Men are so weak, they are so mortal, they are compared to a garment that a moth eats, or to wool that a worm eats. Here's a picture that God is presenting to us of fallen man, of sinners, of man in general, that man is really helpless, powerless and unable to do anything.

In other words, the rage of the sinner will be brought to absolute nought. Now, I want you to consider, first of all, he says the moth. He says, "for the moth shall eat them up like a garment." Do you realize how delicate a moth is? How many of you have ever caught a moth? Yeah, you know what happens when you touch their wings, everything starts coming off and falling apart. He says the moth shall eat them. The most delicate insect will be able to destroy them. The moth that has no means of self-defense is a creature that God uses to demonstrate the mortality and the weakness of the sinner. Moreover, one must also consider that this raging, wicked oppressor is here likened to a garment.

Now let me ask you this, and think about this. How many garments do you have hanging in your closet that can defend themselves against a moth? None. Not one. Can your wool defend itself? No. It's just hanging there. It can't do one thing. The garment has no power in and of itself. Here's what God is saying. It doesn't matter how powerful men are. It doesn't matter how rich they are. It doesn't matter how oppressive they are. They're just as defenseless

as a garment, and a little moth can eat them and destroy them and bring them to nothing.

I want you to look in your Bibles. Hold Isaiah 51. But look in your Bibles, first of all, to Job 4. This picture, and I had to be selective, but this picture occurs many times in the Bible. Look in Job 4, beginning there in verse 19. Job 4 verse 19. Look what he says, in fact. It is so clear Job 4 verse 19, "How much less in them that dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust, which are crushed before the moth?" Which are crushed before the moth. The moth can crush sinners. Isn't that amazing? Look in your Bibles at Psalm 39 and verse 11. Psalm 39, verse 11.

You see, when God takes away the power of man, man has no power. Look in Psalm 39 and verse 11. Look what David said. "When thou with rebukes dost correct man for iniquity, thou makest his beauty to consume away like a moth: surely every man is vanity." And then if you'll go back to Isaiah 50. And look at verses eight and nine, Isaiah 50 verses eight and nine. Isaiah 50 verse eight.

"He is near that justifieth me; who will contend with me? let us stand together: who is mine adversary? let him come near to me. Behold, the Lord God will help me; who is he that shall condemn me? lo, they all shall wax old as a garment; the moth shall eat them up." As a garment is eaten by the moth—secretly, slowly, silently, surely, and at last completely and totally—so that the garment becomes good for nothing, so secret, gradual, certain, sure, and complete ruin and destruction shall come upon the enemies of Christ. The worm, he said, shall eat them like wool. The moth shall destroy them. The garment cannot prevent itself from being destroyed. Do you realize that the moth and the worm are a picture of God's judgment upon the wicked, not only in this world, but in the next world, where the Word of God says, "where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched"?

Why should you and I fear such a mortal, weak sinner—so weak that a moth can crush him, so weak and helpless that he cannot hinder a moth from destroying him?

Exposition of Isaiah 51: The Might of God

There is also another truth in Isaiah 51, verses 9-13: God is telling us that we should not fear man, not only because man is mortal and weak, but because of the might and wonder of the Sovereign. "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord; awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. Art thou not it that hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon? Art thou not it which hath dried the sea, the waters of the great deep; that hath made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over?"

Our Lord has said that His righteousness and His salvation shall be forever. What does He mean by that? No one or nothing can stop Him from delivering His people. The Lord did not deliver us to be destroyed; He delivered us to be brought unto Himself. Therefore, when persecution and oppression and torment arises, especially from man, it is our duty.

It is our obligation to do what Isaiah did. What did Isaiah do? In verse nine, he prayed and cried to the Lord: "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord; awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old." Here is a prayer of the prophet, praying as a representative of the church. He is addressing God the Father, who, according to Isaiah's understanding, does not immediately appear on behalf of His people. Hence, he thinks that God may be asleep—not that God slumbers or sleeps. God does not slumber or sleep. But it appears that God has not moved quickly enough, while we are being persecuted, oppressed, and tormented. Therefore he says, "Awake, awake, O arm of the Lord, awake as in ancient times." In other words, we are in real danger. We need help, divine help, and divine intervention.

Here is a picture of vehement importunity. It is not merely, "Lord, please send help." No, we are crying, "Oh God, do something. Do something. Please move. Show thine arm." The Scriptures speak of the arm and hand of the Lord. The Psalms repeatedly set before us this language of the Lord's arm and hand. They show that deliverance does not come by human strength, but by His right hand, His arm, and the light of His countenance. They show His arm redeeming His people, His mighty arm acting in strength, and His holy arm getting the victory. Isaiah is asking God to act in that same

power again on behalf of His suffering people. Psalm 44:3 says, "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 favour unto them." What did God do? God destroyed their enemies. Psalm 77:15 says, "Thou hast with thine arm redeemed thy people, the sons of Jacob and Joseph."

Psalm 89:13 says, "Thou hast a mighty arm: strong is thy hand, and high is thy right hand." Psalm 98:1 says, "O sing unto the Lord a new song; for he hath done marvellous things: his right hand, and his holy arm, hath gotten him the victory." What is Isaiah praying when he says, "Awake, awake, O Lord! Awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord!" He is saying, "Oh God, in your power, in your justice, in your might, awake and deliver us and destroy our enemies."

Now, I want you to note that this prayer request is augmented by a review of biblical history and demonstrations of God's great power. He says, "Art thou not it that cut Rahab and wounded the dragon?" That's Egypt and Pharaoh. "Art thou not it which hath dried the sea, the waters of the great deep; that hath made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over?" God destroyed Egypt, Pharaoh, and his army. He parted the Red Sea and delivered his people. In Exodus chapter 15, we read: "Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the Lord, and spake, saying, I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea. The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation: he is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation; my father's God, and I will exalt him. The Lord is a man of war: the Lord is his name. Pharaoh's chariots and his host hath he cast into the sea: his chosen captains also are drowned in the Red sea."

The depths have covered them: they sank into the bottom as a stone. Thy right hand, O Lord, is become glorious in power: thy right hand, O Lord, hath dashed in pieces the enemy. And in the greatness of thine excellency thou hast overthrown them that rose up against thee: thou sentest forth thy wrath, which consumed them as stubble. And with the blast of thy nostrils the waters were gathered together,

the floods stood upright as an heap, and the depths were congealed in the heart of the sea.

The enemy said, I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; my lust shall be satisfied upon them; I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them. Thou didst blow with thy wind, the sea covered them: they sank as lead in the mighty waters. Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders? Thou stretchedst out thy right hand, the earth swallowed them. Thou in thy mercy hast led forth the people which thou hast redeemed: thou hast guided them in thy strength unto thy holy habitation. The people shall hear, and be afraid.

"Sorrow shall take hold on the inhabitants of Palestina." What is he saying? He is saying, "Awake, O Lord. You have done this in times past. Do it again." God is immutable. The word immutable means that God is unchangeable. If God has delivered his people in time past, will he not do it again? Of course he will.

Now look at this unequivocal answer. Isaiah has said, "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord, awake as in ancient times." Then he gives historical illustrations of how God has delivered his people in time past. In verse eleven he says, "Therefore"—as a consequence of God arising and answering this prayer—"the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away."

"I, even I, am he that comforteth you." God is saying, "I can turn your sorrow into joy. I can turn your mourning into happiness. I am the one that comforts you." Why will God do it? So that men may know that God is God alone. Ecclesiastes 3:14 says, "I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever."

"Nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him." God will deliver us, and he will deliver us so that we may learn whom we are to fear. He has shown us the mortality and weakness of the sinner. Now he is showing us the might and wonder of the Sovereign.

In light of his perfect, complete, and sovereign work, and in light of his deliverance and comfort, note the question asked in verse 12. After he says, "I, even I, am he that comforteth you," here is the question: "Who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass?"

In other words, if you are a child of the Most High God, if you are the subject of his converting and delivering grace, if you are esteemed in his sight, and if you will be ultimately delivered from every enemy and from all enemies, who are you to be afraid of man—especially a dying man who shall be made as grass? You know what I can do to grass. I can walk out and snap it with my fingers. I can pull it up with my fingers. It is no big deal to kill grass. How in the world can you fear a dying man? What can a dying man do? Nothing but die.

The Root of Fear: Forgetting God

Look at this question. In light of God's salvation and power, he asks, "Who art thou?" Remember, he is addressing this to his people: "Who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass?" Why would you fear man? This shows why Christians fear man, why Christians fear government, and why Christians fear at all. "I, even I, am he that comforteth you: who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass?"

"And forgettest the Lord thy maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth; and hast feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy? and where is the fury of the oppressor?" Do you know why you fear? Because you forget God. Verse 12 says, "Who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass; and forgettest the Lord thy maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth?" You cannot fear until you forget. Fear and faith are opposites. They are contrary to one another. You have fear on the one hand or faith on the other, but you cannot have them together. When you fear man, you have forgotten God—His person, His power, and His position.

In verse 13, He says, "and hast feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy?" Then He asks, "and where is the fury of the oppressor?" Where is it? In the hand of the sovereign God of heaven and earth. Man cannot do one thing apart from God. It is God who either sends, allows, withholds, restrains, or ends the fury of man. Psalm 76:10 says, "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain."

How much fury, oppression, torment, and persecution will be dished out to God's people? Only enough to be ultimately for our good and God's glory. The rest He will restrain. Everything is in His hand. Man can do nothing apart from God. Why should we fear man when we know that every man is in the hand of the sovereign God of heaven and earth?

Applications: Trust, Not Fear

The first application is this: the greatest sin in fear is not merely its manipulation or our loss of control. The greatest sin in fear is that fear is sin in and of itself. Romans 14:23 says, "For whatsoever is not of faith is sin." Is fear faith? No, it is not. Therefore, fear is sin. Now let me tell you what you do when you fear.

When you fear, you not only forget God and fail to put your trust in Him; in actuality, the fear of man is a form of idolatry because you are placing the power of man ahead of, before, and higher than the power of God. You are saying, in essence, “I do not need to fear the one true and living God, but I need to fear man because man is greater than God.” No, that is pure idolatry. It is sin to fear. Our fear can become—and is—idolatry.

Isaiah 12:2 says, “Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation.” When Wendy, our oldest daughter, was three years old, she was afraid of the dark. Like a lot of children, we taught her this verse. In fact, we taught her only the portion that said, “I will trust and not be afraid.” You could hear her walking down a darkened hall to her bedroom, saying over and over, “I will trust and not be afraid. I will trust and not be afraid.”

We need to do that. When fear seizes us, we need to say, “I will trust and not be afraid. I will not give man the glory and the honor that belong to God only.”

The second application is this: Why should we fear man when we know that the fury of the oppressor is in God’s hands? Romans 8:28 conclusively demonstrates that God is not going to allow anything to happen to us that will not be for our good and His glory. “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.” It may not always be good to us, but it is always good for us. You may not like the suffering or the pain, but whatever God allows is always going to be for our good and for His glory.

Our Heavenly Father is too loving to be unkind and too wise to make a mistake. Whatever He does is for our good and glory.

Thirdly, fear is the opposite of faith. I have told you this earlier, and I am going to say it again: it is impossible to exercise faith and fear at the same time. You may either fear or exercise faith, but you cannot do both together. When you are overwhelmed by your fears, you must repent and turn back to God. It is God and His Word alone that will encourage us, embolden us, and enable us.

Do you remember in Acts 2 and Acts 4, when those disciples were threatened? Do you remember what they did? They got together and said, “Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word.” When fear came upon them, they fled to God in faith and asked for boldness. They never backed down, backed up, or stopped.

You can either be fearful or exercise faith, but you cannot do both at the same time. If you are fearful, you are sinning against God and committing idolatry, because you are placing man above God. You need to remember: “The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe.” You need to remember: “For God hath not given us a spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.” You need to remember: “I will trust and not be afraid.” You need to remember: “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper.”

“I will not fear what man shall do unto me.” If you have faith, you cannot fear.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We ask You, Lord, to make us men and women of faith. Make us, Heavenly Father, fearless toward man, but fearing the one true and living God, so that we may give You the reverence, honor, and glory that You so richly deserve. We pray, Father, that You would instruct us, build us up, enable us to exercise faith, and always stand for You and Your truth. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 9

The Sin Every Christian Commits

September 19, 2007

The Sin That Every Christian Commits

SCRIPTURE READING - Jeremiah 13:1-11 (KJV)

Look at Jeremiah chapter 13. Please keep your Bibles open, because we will be looking at an awful lot of Scripture tonight as well. Let's read the first eleven verses.

Thus saith the Lord God unto me, Go get thee a linen girdle, and put it upon thy loins, and put it not in water. So I got a girdle according to the word of the Lord, and put it on my loins. And the word of the Lord came unto me the second time, saying, Take the girdle thou hast got, which is upon thy loins, and arise, go to Euphrates, and hide it there in a hole of the rock. So I went and hid it by Euphrates, as the Lord commanded me. And it came to pass, after many days, that the Lord said unto me, Arise, go to Euphrates, and take the girdle from thence, which I commanded thee to hide there. Then I went to Euphrates, and digged, and took the girdle from the

> place where I hid it. And, behold, the girdle was marred, and it was profitable for nothing. Then the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Thus saith the Lord, After this manner will I mar the pride of Judah, and the great pride of Jerusalem.
>
> This evil people which refuse to hear my words, which walk in the imagination of their own heart, and walk after other gods to serve them and to worship them, shall even be as this girdle, which is good for nothing. For as the girdle cleaveth to the loins of man, so have I caused to cleave unto me the whole house of Israel, and the whole house of Judah, saith the Lord, that they might be unto me for a people, and for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory, but they would not hear.

Introduction: The Sin Every Christian Commits

If I were to ask you tonight, What is the sin that every Christian commits? I suppose I could get many answers, and probably every answer would be right. You could say, “Every Christian commits the sin of lust,” or “the sin of covetousness,” or “the sin of prayerlessness.” We could go on and name sins of omission as well as sins of commission. Instead of outlining many different sins, I want to give you a sin that will cover everything just mentioned and an awful lot more.

The sin that every Christian commits is committed not only on a daily basis; it is especially committed on Sunday. You remember that old song, “Never on a Sunday”? Here is a sin that every Christian commits, especially on Sunday. What in the world is this horrendous sin? I am going to show it to you from the Word of God, especially from Jeremiah 13.

It is the sin of refusing to hear the Word of God. When we come to church, especially on the Lord’s Day, we sit and listen, but somehow we never really hear. We never really heed, never really obey, the Word of God. The proof is very simple: our lives are not changed, we never grow in grace and knowledge, and consequently we are never transformed into the image of Christ or conformed to the Word of God.

The Historical Nature of This Sin

This sin is what you and I would call a historical sin, because it has been committed through all the ages. In Jeremiah 13, this is primarily the sin of Judah and Jerusalem. Judah and Jerusalem particularly were to be the people of God. Certainly all Israel was. But after the northern kingdom apostatized and made Jeroboam the son of Nebat their king, at least the southern kingdom for a while continued to act as if they were God's people. In fact, the people in the southern kingdom had advantages—not only over all the other nations, but even over all Israel. How can you say that?

Look in your Bibles to Romans chapter 3, and then we will go to Romans chapter 9. In Romans chapter 3, beginning with verse 1, the Apostle Paul asks a question: "What advantage then hath the Jew, or the Judahite, that is someone of the tribe of Judah, what advantage then hath the Judahite, or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God."

There were many advantages that the Judahites had, many advantages that the Israelites had, but chiefly, Paul said, this was the chief advantage: unto them were committed the oracles of God.

The tabernacle was in Judah. The temple was in Judah. The teaching priests, the Levites, were in Judah. Everything centered around the tribe of Judah and especially Jerusalem. That is where the temple was built and where the tabernacle was set up after David took over. But Romans chapter 9 gives a further illustration of this truth. Beginning in verse 4, the Apostle Paul makes this statement: "...who are Israelites, to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises, whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen."

Notice that he says, "who are Israelites?" Then he outlines everything that pertained to Israel: the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises.

Most of these were particularly evident in the tribe of Judah, or especially the Southern Kingdom. Benjamin was in the Southern Kingdom as well. This certainly applied to all Israel, but if you were of the tribe of Dan or Manasseh and wanted to worship God, you still had to come to Jerusalem. That is where the tabernacle was, where the temple was, and where the teaching priests were. Here was a great advantage that Israel had, and Judah in particular.

The law, the promises, the glory, and the covenants were not given to the Babylonians or the Assyrians. They were given to Israel, particularly to the tribe of Judah. Judah therefore had a definite advantage, because the tabernacle and the temple were right there. They had a greater responsibility to hear the Word of God.

Two Types of Hearing

Someone may object, saying, "Wait a minute, Pastor, but I hear the Word of God every Sunday. I hear the Word of God every Wednesday night when I go to church." Let me explain something to you. According to the Bible, there are two distinct types of hearing. First, there is external and outward hearing, which you are doing right now. But secondly, there is internal and spiritual hearing. One may hear externally and outwardly and never hear internally and spiritually. This is where 99% of all professing Christians are in their lives. They hear externally and outwardly, but very seldom ever hear internally and spiritually.

How can I say that? Stop and think about this. Some of you have been going to church for a long time. How is it that we can go to church so often, hear so many sermons, and know so little? The average Christian cannot explain justification, sanctification, or election. They cannot explain any major doctrine of the Bible. They may say, "I believe it," but there is no way in the world they could ever defend it.

Have you ever noticed that Christians seemingly have the same problems in their lives that unsaved people have? How can we trudge through life, having the same problems over and over, never understanding and never experiencing the liberating power of the Word of God? There is something wrong with Christians when they have the same problem year after year. Everybody has problems, but

we should learn from our problems and should not have the same problems year after year. Why is there not a discernible difference between Christians and non-Christians, especially when it comes to problems?

Hearing Equals Obeying

Turn in your Bibles, if you would, to 1 Samuel, chapter 15. We are coming back to Jeremiah 13, so just hold on there. I hope you know this story. God sent King Saul on a mission to utterly destroy all of the Amalekites: man, woman, boy, girl, ox, suckling, ass, gosset—destroy everything.

You will remember how Saul spared Agag, the king of the Amalekites, and the best of the oxen and the best of the sheep. He destroyed all that was refused, but that which was the best, he spared. When Samuel the prophet came to Saul, Saul, being the hypocrite that he was, said to Samuel, "Blessed be thou of the Lord, I perform all of the word of God."

About that time, something went bad. Samuel said, "Saul, if you've obeyed God, what meaneth then the bleating of the sheep and the lowing of the oxen in mine ear?" Saul said that the people had spared them so that they might sacrifice to God. In 1 Samuel 15, verse 21, Saul says, "But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God in Gilgal."

Now notice what Samuel tells him: "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord?" "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken is better than the fat of rams." Stop there and think about this.

First of all, in this passage, God tells us that He would rather have our obedience than anything else. I do not care how many oxen you have, how many sheep you have, how much money you have in the bank, or how much you can give to God. God said, "I'd rather have your obedience than anything else."

Notice what he said in verse 22: "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord?" Then he makes this statement: "Behold, to obey is better than

sacrifice and to hearken is better than the fat of rams." In those offerings in the Old Testament, the fat was considered the chiefest part of the sacrifice, and it was always given to God. Yet, "to obey is better than sacrifice," and "to hearken is better than the fat of rams."

What has Samuel just said? He has equated hearkening, hearing, and obeying as being synonymous. They're one and the same. Let me say it like this: no one ever really hears the Word of God until he heeds the Word of God. No one ever really hears the Word of God until he obeys the Word of God. So we may sit here and hear externally and outwardly, and we may walk out that door and say, "I heard the Word of God," which you did, externally and outwardly. But unless you apply it to your life and bring your life in obedience to it, you have really never heard the Word of God.

Let me show you. In Luke 6 and verse 46, our Lord makes an astounding statement. Listen to what he said. It is what follows verse 46 that I want to emphasize. Our Lord asked, "And why called ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? Why called ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?"

The word "Lord" is the Greek word Kyrios, which means boss, owner, master, sovereign. So here's this question: Why are you calling me boss? Why are you calling me sovereign? Why are you calling me master if you're not doing the things which I say?

Look how he explains it, beginning with verse 47. "Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will show you to whom he is like. He is like a man who built a house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock. And when the flood arose, and the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it, for it was founded upon a rock. But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built a house upon the earth, against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great."

Notice what our Lord asks: "Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say unto you?" Then He gives an illustration. "He that hears my word and does them"—He equates hearing and doing, hearing and obedience, hearing and application—with the man who really and truly hears. But the man who hears and does not

obey, who does not really and truly apply, that man has never really heard.

That man's life is on a course of ruin and devastation. Our Lord is saying that there is a way you hear and obey, and there is also a way you hear and do not obey. There are actually two types of hearing. When someone says, “I heard the Word of God,” you may or may not have heard it. Augustine, one of the early church fathers, said that he heard the Word of God all of his life, and then one day he heard it. That is true: we do not really hear until we obey.

Do you remember what our Lord said in John 10:27? “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.” The sheep hear, and the sheep follow.

The Problem Throughout Scripture

Now look back in your Bibles to Jeremiah chapter 13. That is our text. I am going to make an application and explain it shortly, but there is much I want to show you first. Look at Jeremiah 13:10, remembering that God is speaking particularly about Judah and Jerusalem. In fact, read verse 9: “Thus saith the Lord after this manner will I mar the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem.” Judah and Jerusalem were part and parcel of God's covenant people. They openly professed that they belonged to the Lord. But look at what He says in verse 10: “This evil people, which refuse to hear my words, which walk in the imagination of their heart, and walk after other gods, to serve them, and to worship them, shall even be as this girdle.” Notice the words: “this evil people who refuse to hear my words.” Is that not amazing? Did they not hear the reading of the law? Yes. Did they not hear the teaching of priests and Levites? Yes.

They heard audibly, they heard externally, but they never heard internally or spiritually. They did not obey. In verse 11, the Lord says, “For as the girdle cleaveth to the loins of a man, so have I caused to cleave unto me the whole house of Israel, and the whole house of Judah, saith the Lord, that they might be unto me for a people, and for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory”; but they would not hear.

God said, “I had great designs for them, but they would not hear.” Let me point out a problem. This is a problem that has existed since the beginning: God’s professing people refuse to hear Him. They will not, and they do not, obey Him. This truth is not confined to the book of Jeremiah. There is one passage outside the book of Jeremiah that shows this truth elsewhere in Scripture, in 2 Chronicles chapter 36, beginning with verse 15.

The Bible says, “And the Lord God of their fathers sent to them betimes by his messengers, or sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes and sending.” Why? Because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place. But what happened when God sent His Word? “They mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, that is God’s words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy.”

What did God say? “I sent them My messengers. I sent them My prophets because I had compassion on them. I wanted them to hear. I wanted them to obey. But what did they do? They mocked My messengers. They despised My words. They misused My prophets until My wrath arose against My people, until there was no remedy.”

Here is how people respond naturally to the Word of God. Look in Jeremiah, chapter 7, beginning with verse 25. Just to show you that this has been a historical problem, God says: "...since the day that your fathers came forth out of the land of Egypt unto this day, I have even sent unto you all My servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them, yet they hearken not unto Me, nor incline their ear, but harden their neck, and did worse than their fathers." Wow! God said, I sent, but no one would listen.

Look in Jeremiah 11, verse 7. God says, "For I earnestly protested unto your fathers in the day that I brought them up out of the land of Egypt, even in this day rising early and protesting, saying, Obey my voice. Yet they obeyed not, nor inclined their ear, but walked every one in the imagination of their evil heart. Therefore will I bring upon them all the words of this covenant which I commanded them to do, but they did them not."

Look in Jeremiah, chapter 25, beginning in verse 3. As I read these verses, I hope you are thinking the same thing that I am: Some

people just never learn. "From the thirteenth year of Josiah the son of Ammon, king of Judah, even to this day, that is the third and twentieth year, the word of the Lord hath come unto me, and I have spoken unto you, rising early and speaking, but you have not hearkened. And the Lord hath sent unto you all his servants of prophets, rising early and sending them, but you have not hearkened, nor inclined your ear to hear." They would not listen to God.

Jeremiah 26:4–5 says, “Thus saith the Lord, if you will not hearken to Me, to walk in My law which I have set before you, to hearken to the words of My servants the prophets, whom I sent unto you both rising up early and sending them near, but you have not hearkened.” Jeremiah 29:19 says, “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 saying unto them, But you would not hear, saith the Lord.” God says, “I kept sending you my word, but you would not listen.”

Jeremiah 32:32–33 gives the context: “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 and their kings and 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.”

What did God say? They turned to Him their back. Let me ask you, especially parents: when your children get older, perhaps becoming teenagers, and a rebellious streak develops in them, you try to help and teach them, but the child is so impotent and so stiff-necked, he turns his back to you while you are trying to talk to him and walks away. Does that not infuriate you? Yes, it does. Why? Because it is a slap in your face. That child is saying, “I do not recognize your authority. I do not appreciate your advice and counsel, and I refuse to listen to you.” That is exactly what these people did. They showed God their back and said, “God, we are not going to listen to You. We do not appreciate Your counsel. We do not respect Your authority. We are going to do exactly what we want to do.”

God said, “I have sent also unto you my service 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 you shall dwell in the land which I have given to you and your fathers, but you have not inclined your ear, nor hearkened unto me.”

Over and over, God says, you just will not listen. And if you will look in one last passage before I start making some applications, look in Jeremiah 44. In verses 4–5, the sin that every Christian commits is a historical sin: it is a refusal to listen to the Word of God. God says, “Howbeit I send unto you all my servants the prophets, rising early, and sending them, saying, O do not this abominable thing that I hate. But they hearken not, nor incline their ear to turn from their wickedness to burn no incense unto other gods.”

Over and over throughout Scripture, here is what you find. God commands, begs, pleads, threatens, admonishes, and exhorts His people to hear His words and His commandments. Yet over and over they refuse, ignore, and fail to hear and heed His words; they refuse to obey Him. He judged them. He chastised them. He whipped them. He delivered His people over to their enemies again and again, yet they would not hear. It seems as if nothing would get the attention of God’s professing people. Let me show you how drastic the measures were that God took.

God's Drastic Measures to Get Attention

Everyone has heard the old story about the farmer who sold the mule. He told the man who bought the mule that it was very obedient and very compliant. But when the man tried to get the mule to go, it refused. Finally, he called the old farmer back and said, “Look, that mule won’t budge. I can’t get him to do a thing.” “Let me take care of it,” said the farmer.

He walked up, picked up a tube of corn, hit the mule upside the head, and said, “Now command him, now that you’ve got his attention.” You understand the joke, but it is no joke when it comes to God. Look in Amos chapter 4, verse 6. Look what God says.

Once again, God is talking to His people, not to His enemies. He says, “And I also have given you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and want of bread in all your places. Look, yet have you not returned unto Me, saith the Lord.” God said, I sent famine to get your attention, but you still would not listen. You still would not repent.

Then He says, “And I also have withholden the rain from you, when there were yet three months to the harvest, and I caused it to rain upon one city, and caused it not to rain upon another city. One piece was rained upon, and the piece whereupon it rained not withered. So two or three cities wandered into one city to drink water, but they were not satisfied. Yet have you not returned unto Me, saith the Lord.” God said, I sent famine, and that did not get your attention. Now I sent drought, yet you still would not listen. Now you are talking about famine and drought together.

But it gets worse. “I have smitten you with blasting and mildew, when your gardens and your vineyards and your fig trees and your olive trees increased, the palmer worm devoured them, yet you have not returned to me, saith the Lord.” The trees and vines that survived the drought, He sent palmer worms to eat and destroy. That still did not get their attention.

What happens next? “I have sent among you the pestilence after the manner of Egypt. Your young men have I slain with a sword, and I have taken away your horses, and I have made the stink of your camps to come up into your nostrils.”

“Yet have you not returned to me, saith the Lord.” Now, note in verse 10 that He is not speaking only of disease; He is also speaking of war: “Your young men have I slain with a sword.” God had used famine, drought, pestilence, disease, and war, yet nobody paid any attention. He had said, in effect, “Yes, you have not returned to me,” but they still would not listen.

Then He says in verse 11, “I have overthrown some of you as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and ye were as a firebrand plucked out of the burning: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord.” In other words, these were supernatural judgments, miraculous judgments, and yet what does God say? They still did not listen. They would not listen to famine, drought, insects devouring

their crops, pestilence, war, or miraculous judgments against them. They simply would not listen. Nothing seemingly got their attention.

Look at verse 12: “Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God.” When He tells them to prepare to meet their God, it is not going to be a blissful reunion. It means He is going to judge them; He is going to kill them. Why? They would not listen. They would not hear, heed, or obey the Word of God.

Isaiah chapter 1 gives us a verse showing how unnatural it is for people not to hear their Father and their God. Notice verse 3: “The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.” In this passage, God says that His people are oftentimes dumber than dumb beasts. I have cows. I call them, and they come. They know where to go to eat, they know their stall, and they know my voice. I usually feed them with a golf cart, and when they see that golf cart, they immediately begin coming to it. They want that golf cart because they know food is in it. Before my father died, he had hundreds of cows. He would go into the field with a truck, and the cows would swarm his truck.

They knew who fed them. They knew who their master was. This is what God said: “The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib, but Israel doth not know. My people doth not consider.” Sometimes we are worse than dumb animals. We simply will not hear; we will not listen.

SCRIPTURE READING - Jeremiah 35:1-19 (KJV)

The Rechabites' Obedience vs. Israel's Disobedience

> Here is a wonderful illustration of how ridiculous it is not to hear the Word of God. "The word which came unto Jeremiah from the Lord in the days of Joachim, the son of Josiah, king of Judah, saying, Go unto the house of the Rechabites, and speak unto them, and bring them into the house of the Lord, into one of the chambers, and give them wine to drink. Then I took Jeazaniah, the son of Jeremiah, the son of Habazaniah, and his brethren, all his sons, and the whole house of the Rechabites, and I brought them into the house of the Lord, into the chamber of the sons of Hanan, the son of Igdaliah, a man of

> God, who was by the chamber of the princes, which was over the chamber of Messiah, the son of Shalom, the keeper of the door. And I set before the sons of the house of the Rechabites pots full of wine and cups, and I said to them, Drink ye wine. But they said, We will drink no wine. For Jonadab, the son of Rechab, our father, commanded us, saying, You shall drink no wine, neither ye nor your sons for ever, neither shall you build houses, nor sow seed, nor plant vineyard, nor have any but all of your days you shall dwell in tents, that you may live many days in the land where you be strangers. Thus have we obeyed the voice of Jonadab, the son of Rechab, our father, and all that he hath charged us, to drink no wine all of our days, we, our wives, our sons, and our daughters, nor to build houses for us to dwell in, neither have we vineyard, nor field, nor seed. But we have left in tents, and have obeyed, and done according to all that Jonadab, our father, commanded us. But it came to pass, when Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came up into the land, that we said, Come, and let us go up to Jerusalem for fear of the army of the Chaldeans, and for fear of the army of the Syrians, so we dwell at Jerusalem. Then came the word of the Lord, and Jeremiah saith, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Go and tell the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, Will ye not receive instruction to hearken to my word, saith the Lord? The words of Jonadab, the son of Rechab, that he commanded his sons not to drink wine, are For to this day they drink none, but obey their father's commandment."

Notwithstanding, I have spoken unto you, rising early and speaking, but you have not hearkened unto me. I have sent unto you also all my servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them, saying, Return ye now every man from his evil way, and amend your doing, and go not after other gods to serve them. And you shall dwell in the land which I have given you, and to your fathers.

But you have not inclined your ear, nor hearkened unto me. The sons of Jonadab, the son of Rechab, have performed the commandment of their father, which he commanded them, but this people hath not hearkened unto me. Therefore thus saith the Lord God of hosts, the God of Israel, Behold, I will bring upon Judah, and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, all the evil that I have

pronounced against them, because I have spoken unto them, but they have not heard. I have called unto them, but they have not answered.

Jeremiah said unto the house of the Rechabites, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Because you have obeyed the commandment of Jonadab your father, and kept all his precepts, and done according to all that he hath commanded you, therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not want for a man to stand before me for ever.

God told Jeremiah to get the Rechabites into the temple and offer them wine—to tell them to drink the wine. That is exactly what he did. There are several implications here. I am not preaching on this tonight, but I am explaining: there is nothing material that is sinful in and of itself. Sin is in man's heart; it is not in anything material. This table is not sinful, and this microphone is not sinful. Alcohol is not sinful in and of itself. If it were, you could not have any medicines, because all of your medicines are basically alcohol-based. Even your herbal tinctures are alcohol-based. Alcohol, or wine, is not necessarily sinful in and of itself.

If you want to say that it is, then you have a real theological problem, because the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah and told him to offer this to these Rechabites. In those days, they drank wine the way we drink tea; it was simply a common thing. Jeremiah offered it to them, and they said, “We are not going to drink any wine.” Why would they not drink wine?

The Rechabites did not refuse wine because they thought it was evil or sinful. They said, “We’re not going to drink any wine because our father, Jonadab, commanded us not to drink any wine, not to build any houses, not to plant any vineyards, not to sow any seed,” and they had obeyed him. They were not going to drink anyway.

The point of Jeremiah 35 is very simple: the Rechabites honored their father’s instructions and kept their father’s commandments. Jonadab’s instructions and commandments were impractical. They were difficult. They came from a mere human origin. But none of those things deterred the Rechabites from obedience.

Contrast that with God's commandments, which are righteous, pure, holy, and for our good. Yet the people would not hear. They would not obey. They would not listen. Jeremiah 35:14 says, "The words of Jonadab, the son of Rechab, that he commanded his sons not to drink wine are performed unto this day. They drink none, but obey their father's commandment."

"Notwithstanding, here it is, I have spoken unto you, rising early and speaking, but ye hearken not unto me. I have sent also unto you all my servants the prophets, rising early and sending them, saying, Return ye now, every man, from his evil way, and amend your doings. Go not after other gods to serve them. Watch, that 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." He would not listen.

Would you not find it extremely impractical and difficult never to live in a house? Would you not find it impractical and difficult never to have a garden, a fruit tree, or a grapevine? The Rechabites obeyed their father's instruction in all those things. No matter how impractical or difficult, they obeyed. Judah and Israel, and Christians today, refuse to obey the pure, holy Word of God, which is for our good and for His glory.

The King's Rejection of God's Word

In Jeremiah 36, another example deals with the civil rulers. Jeremiah had been preaching, and they did not like his preaching, so they threw him in the dungeon. He had written the words of the Lord, but he could not preach because he was in the dungeon. Therefore, he got Baruch, his secretary, and dictated to him. Baruch then went and read the words of Jeremiah. What happened? Look in Jeremiah 36, beginning there with verse 20.

"And they went into the king, into the court, and they let up a roll in the chamber of Elisha, mother scribe. That was the roll that Baruch recorded Jeremiah's words and told all the words in the ears of the king. So the king sent Jehudi to fetch the roll, and he took it out of Elashimah the scribe's chamber, and Jehudi read it in the ears of the king and in the ears of all the princes which stood before the king.

"Now the king sat in the winter house, and the ninth month there was a fire on the hearth burning before him. And it came to pass that when Jehudi had read three or four leaves, he cut it with a penknife and cast it in the fire that was on the hearth until all the roll was consumed in the fire that was on the hearth. Yet they were not afraid, nor ripped their garments, neither the king nor any of his servants that heard all these words."

It is not only the people who refuse to hear the Word of God; it is the king, the princes, and the civil rulers. They were unafraid because they had no regard for God. They did not respect His authority. They simply said, "We will not listen."

Is it not strange that the Lord's professing people will not hear Him? Is it not strange that a child will not listen to his father or mother? My wife can tell you that one of the things I absolutely despise is disobedience. I tell her, "I will not have an animal that will not obey me." I cannot stand that. I do not even want a grandchild who will disobey me. I want a child to obey, as the Word of God commands.

My youngest grandson had just turned sixteen. When he was about eight or nine, I asked him to do something, and he said, "Papa, I don't want to do it." I answered, "I respect that, son. Since you don't want to do it, I will give you a choice: you may either do it, or you may get a whipping and do it." He replied, "Papa, I think I'll just do it." I said, "I think you're a wise son."

Imagine that my child or grandchild refused to obey me. I would take it as an insult. What do you think it is like to a holy, righteous, sovereign God when we thumb our noses in His face, clench our fists, and say, "We will not listen to You"? I want to put all this together. Go back to Jeremiah 13. It is a wonderful passage. In that chapter, God commands Jeremiah to do something that you and I would count very strange. What is it that God commands him to do?

The Marred Girdle: A Picture of Worthlessness

Look in verse one: "Thus saith the Lord unto me, Go and get thee a linen girdle, and put it upon thy loins, and put it not in water." Jeremiah was to get a new girdle, put it on, and not wash it. Verse 2

says, “So I got a girdle according to the word of the Lord, and I put it on my loins.” Then the word of the Lord came to him again: “Take the girdle that thou hast got, which is upon my loins, and arise, go to the Euphrates, and hide it there in a hole of the rock.” Jeremiah obeyed. He wore the girdle; it became soiled. He took it off, went to the Euphrates, dug a hole, and buried it there. The river rose and fell, and everybody knows what water does to garments, especially linen.

After many days, the Lord sent him back: “Arise, go to the Euphrates, and take the girdle from thence, which I commanded thee, to hide there.” Jeremiah went, dug, and took the girdle from the place where it was hidden. “And behold, the girdle was marred. It was profitable for nothing.”

Now ask yourself: Why did God command Jeremiah to do what you and I would call such an insane thing? Why get a girdle, wear it, take it off, bury it, and go back and get it? When he picked it up, it just fell apart. It was rotten; he could not wear it or do anything with it.

Here is what it means. The Lord said, “After this manner will I mar the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem. This evil people, who refuse to hear my words, who walk in the imagination of their own heart and walk after the other gods to serve them and to worship them, shall even be as this girdle which is good for nothing.” This was not merely a statement about strangers; He was talking about His people. Did I read that right? What did God say? God said, “Jeremiah, you had that girdle.”

You go back and get it. You dig it up, and it is worthless, useless, rotten, and good for nothing. God gives the application: “This evil people, which refuse to hear my words, shall be even as this girdle, which is good for nothing.” It is proper and biblical to speak of good-for-nothing Christians. That is what God said about His people. Christians who will not hear, heed, obey, or apply the Word of God to their lives are basically good for nothing. They are worthless, useless, and unprofitable.

That is God's attitude toward those who will not hear. In forty-two years of preaching, I have seen people sit in church year after year

without ever having one change in their lives. Yet they are willing to profess to be God's people and Christians, continuing in the same old sins, troubles, and problems. Nothing ever affects them. God says that those who will not hear are like that girdle—good for nothing. Those are God's words in verse 10, not mine.

This has been a historical interpretation. John Gill, one of the old Baptist preachers, commented that, because they were corrupt in their practices and had become useless and unserviceable to God, they would be carried captive into a foreign country, where they would be inglorious and unprofitable, uncomfortable in themselves and of no use to one another. Matthew Poole said that God was showing the Judahites that He intended them to be consumed by the people beyond the river Euphrates, as that girdle was marred. He also showed them that their own sins—disobeying His Word, following the imagination of their own hearts, and particularly their idolatry—had brought this sore judgment upon them.

Jeremiah wrote, “This evil people, which refuse to hear my words, shall be even as this girdle, which is good for nothing.”

Applications and Call to Hear

Now let us make some applications. Look in Jeremiah 13:11: “For as the girdle cleaveth to the loins of a man, so have I caused to cleave unto me the whole house of Israel, and the whole house of Judah, saith the Lord, that they might be unto me for a people, and for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory.”

But they would not hear. Now what did God say? God said, I had intended Judah and Jerusalem to be for me a praise and an honor and a glory. I wanted them to be built up. It is just like a girdle on a man, especially if you think of the girdle on the high priest, that curious girdle which was for beauty and for glory, the Bible says. It was supposed to be something honorable and right. God said, I wanted to have you as a showpiece, but now you have refused to hear My Word and have become what He calls an evil people and are good for nothing.

In other words, it is our sins, our rebellion, and our refusal to hear, heed, obey, and apply the Word of God that brings such

reproach upon us. Now, let me show you something else. Look in verse 10. Here is another application: “this evil people, which refuse to hear my words, which walk in the imagination of their heart, and walk after other gods, to serve them, and to worship them.”

People, listen. It should be properly noted that when we fail to hear God, fail to obey Him, and fail to walk after His Word, we are walking after the imagination of our own hearts, which is idolatry in and of itself. You do not have to bow down to an idol of stone to be an idolater. All you have to do is walk according to the imagination of your own heart.

The Bible tells us, “let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.” We are to bring every thought into subjection and captivity to Jesus Christ. When we refuse to hear, heed, and obey the Word of God, we are walking in the imagination of our own hearts, doing that which we think best for ourselves.

Here is a third application. Although I mentioned earlier, it is proper and right to talk about good-for-nothing Christians, because that is what God said in verse 10: These evil people are good for nothing. In one sense of the word, they are good for something. They are good for chastisement, and they are good for judgment.

Do you remember that passage in Hebrews chapter 12? “Whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth, and he scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.” God has ordained that we are either living a changed life or a chastised life. The Bible says in Micah chapter 6 and verse 9, “Hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it.” God is going to speak to us first by His Word. If we hear His Word, He does not need the rod. But if we refuse to hear the Word, the rod will always fall.

Those Christians whom God calls good for nothing are, in reality, good for one thing: chastisement. They are also an example to others not to disobey God and not to refuse to hear Him.

Notice something else in verse 9. God takes notice of men's pride. He says, “Thus saith the Lord, After this manner will I mar the pride of Judah, and the great pride of Jerusalem.” There are degrees in pride. The Bible says, “God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto

the humble." The word "resist" literally means fights against. God fights against the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall. The surest way to be brought down by God is to exalt yourself in pride. You lift yourself up, and God is going to bring you down. He will put you in the dust and show you that your pride is absolutely nothing. It is justice—God's righteous justice—to destroy our pride and mar our gifts when we are proud and arrogant of Him, in disobedience to Him and His Word.

You have got to remember this: God did not even spare His temple. He brought it to ashes because of the people. Remember, the disciples said to our Lord, "See these great stones?" And our Lord said, "Verily, there shall not be one stone left." The more you exalt yourself in pride, the more you are going to be humbled by God. He will kick the feet out from under you.

Here is my last application. We need to determine in our hearts that we are not going to be good-for-nothing Christians. We need to determine in our hearts that we are going to hear the Word of God and that our lives are going to be changed. The only way our lives can be changed is if we apply the Scripture to our hearts. If you walk out this door tonight, and you are never changed, never more obedient, and never conform yourself to the Word of God, mark it down: you have not heard tonight. But if you say, "I am not going to be a hearer only, but I am going to be a doer of the Word," as James teaches, then you have probably really heard.

You know what the Bible says in James 4 and verse 17? "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not to him, it is sin." Think about that. If you know you ought to obey and you do not, it is sin. If you know you ought to apply the Word of God and you do not, it is sin.

My wife and I had some dear friends who were older than we were. In fact, they had children older than we were. They are both dead now, but they counted us as their children, and we were always invited to a family reunion whenever they had one. Once, I was in a meeting, and we left the meeting and came right to the family reunion. We always called them Mama and Papa, although we were

not related. When I got there, Francis, one of the daughters-in-law, began to bombard me with questions, one right after the other. I answered them as best I could. Finally, Papa Morris looked at Francis and said, “Francis, why don’t you shut up and leave him alone? Can’t you see he’s tired?” Francis said, “Because, Papa, I don’t know the answer to these questions, and it bothers me.” I have never forgotten what that old man said: “Huh, it’s not what I don’t know that bothers me. It’s what I do know.”

"Therefore, to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." What we do know should bother us as well as what we don't know. One last verse. I want you to look in Jeremiah 16 and verse 12. Jeremiah 16, verse 12. Make up your mind that you will not be like these evil people that our Lord talks about, who professed to be the people of God. Jeremiah 16, verse 12. Look what our Lord says: "And you have done worse than your fathers. For behold, you walk every one after the imagination of his evil heart, that they may not hearken unto me."

Isn't that interesting? He says you're walking after the imagination of your evil heart. Why? That you may not hearken unto me. In other words, you not only will not, you're purposely doing this so you will not listen to me. You want your own will and your own wording. So he says you're worse than your fathers.

Make up your mind that you're not going to be a good for nothing Christian, that you're going to hear the Word, you're going to obey the Word, you're going to apply the Word, and you're going to bring your life in conformity to the Word of God.

Let's pray. Father, we are thankful tonight for Jesus Christ, our Lord. We do ask that you would teach us, build us up in the most holy faith, and show us the absolute importance of hearing and obeying the Word of God. Give us grace that we may serve Thee acceptably with reverence and godly fear. In Thy name we pray, Amen.

We hope that we'll all take heed to what you've had to say to us through the Lord.

I just wanted to make mention of something I found out this week. Many of you know and follow Dr. Chuck Baldwin. He has a

radio program and website, chuckbaldwinonline.com, if I am not mistaken. We have in our midst two of his recognized Black Road Regiment pastors, Pastor Weaver and Pastor Romo. He has made a list of, or is collecting a list of, men who are willing to stand, as did the Black Grove Regiment in the early formation years of this country. Both of you men have been so nominated, and we are pleased that the Lord has made that so.

CHAPTER 10

I Will Serve the Lord

December 30, 2007

Introduction and Review

Those who were here last week will remember that I began a message entitled “I Will Love the Lord,” or “I Will Love Thee, O Lord,” as the Scripture says. I want to take a few minutes to review. Those who did not hear the message last week would be encouraged to get a copy of the tape and listen to it, because I believe it is not only one of the most important, but one of the most practical messages.

In Psalm 18, verse one, David said, “I will love thee, O Lord, my strength.” Then, in verse two: “The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my strength and whom I will trust, my buckler and the horn of my salvation, my high tower.” Then he says in verse three, “I will call upon the Lord who is worthy to be praised. So shall I be saved from mine enemies.”

The message last week dealt with this phrase: “I will love thee, O Lord.” I showed you David’s determination. David is determining that he is going to love the Lord. May I remind you that we cannot

love Him first; we can only love Him because He first loved us. I dealt with my first sub-point, David's response, because David's love can only be a response to God's love. That is David's response.

I pointed out three key elements in love: attitude, affection, and action. Our attitude must be right, and our affections must be right. Then, of course, our actions will demonstrate and manifest whether or not our affections and our attitude are indeed right.

I pointed out that love, according to the Bible, is the fulfilling of the law of God. Romans 13:10 says, "Love is the fulfilling of the law." Love can be summarized in one word: obedience. If we love the Lord, we will obey Him. I went through the Bible, in the Old Testament and the New Testament, and showed basically the same principle. Our Lord said, "If you love me, keep my commandments." So very obviously, love is indeed the fulfilling of the law. It is obedience. It is not sentimentality, feeling, or some abstract thing floating around the universe somewhere. It is obedience.

David says, "I will love thee, O Lord," and one author comments: "With a strong, hearty affection, I will cling to thee as a child to its parents or a spouse to her husband. The word is intensely forcible. The love is of the deepest kind. I will love thee heartily and with my inmost bowels."

"Here is a fixed resolution to abide in the nearest and most intimate union with the Most High. Our triune God deserves the warmest love of our hearts. Father, Son, and Spirit have a claim upon our love. The solemn purpose never to cease loving naturally springs from a present fervor of affection."

Sometimes we smile when someone says, "I will love thee heartily with my inmost bowels." We forget that, to the Hebrew mind and even to the Greek mind, love came from the deepest recesses of one's being. Thus, "I will love thee from my bowels" is indeed a biblical expression.

David's Reasons for Loving the Lord

David's determination is shown in verse 1, but he also gives his reasons for being determined to love the Lord. He says, "I will love thee, O Lord, my strength." Psalm 116:1 says, "I love the Lord

because he has heard my voice and inclined his ear to my supplications.” I have read that verse innumerable times and preached from it, but what strikes me every time is that David said, “I love the Lord because.” You could stop right there and begin enumerating reasons why we should love the Lord. You could be there the rest of your life: “I love the Lord because.” Certainly, there are innumerable reasons why we should love the Lord. But in Psalm 18, David lists several reasons.

In verse 1 he says, “I will love thee, O Lord, my strength.” Then in verse 2: “The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer, my God, my strength, and whom I will trust, my buckler, the horn of my salvation, and my high tower.”

The Significance of the Accumulated Titles

Before explaining these two verses, consider two commentators. John Calvin writes, "When David thus heaps together many titles by which to honor God, it is no useless or unnecessary accumulation of words." When David calls the Lord his strength, his rock, his fortress, and his deliverer, there is a purpose in every description.

Calvin continues: "We know how difficult it is for men to keep their minds and their hearts stayed in God, they either imagine that it is not enough to have God for them, and consequently are always seeking after support and succor elsewhere, or at the first temptation which assails them, fall from the confidence which they placed in Him. David, therefore, by attributing to God various methods of saving his people, protests that, provided he has God for his protector and defender, he is effectually fortified against all peril and assault. As if he had said, those whom God intends to succor and defend are not only safe against one kind of danger, but are, as it were, surrounded by impregnable ramparts on all sides, so that should a thousand deaths be presented their view, they ought not to be afraid even at this formidable array."

If we understand why David gives all these attributes of God, we see that it does not matter what we are facing: if we are safe in our Lord, then we are fully and totally protected.

John Trapp says, "He is all in all for my preservation. Ten words say the Hebrews. He here heapeth up in reference to ten signal victories, or rather because his thankful heart was so enlarged that he could never satisfy himself in saying what God had been to him and done for him. And hence this congeries, or heap of holy expressions, and all to show that God is a rock of refuge, a firm fortress, a receptacle of rest, a sanctuary of safety to all his saints in times of trouble. David had had his share and had been put to his shifts, glad to hide himself as he could in rocks and strongholds that sheltered him from the storm. To these he alludeth when he calls God his rock, his fortress, etc."

I do not know, and certainly could not prove, that each description of God David lists here represents a signal victory in his life. Perhaps Trapp had information that I do not have.

However, we do know that David often hid himself among the sheepcotes, the rocks, the mountains, and the fortresses, especially when he was hiding from Saul and his multitudinous enemies. When David lists all of these names and attributes of God, if you understand what David is saying, it will greatly encourage your heart to trust in Him and in Him alone. David said, “I will love thee, O Lord, my strength.” Let us begin by looking at verse one, at the first title or name of God: “my strength.”

God as 'My Strength'

Did you know that the name or word “strength” is a name for God in Scripture? Look in your Bibles to 1 Samuel 15 and verse 29. Hold Psalm 18, but look in 1 Samuel 15 and verse 29. Saul had sinned against God. He had not kept the law of God or obeyed the commandment of God; he had allowed Agag, the king, to live, along with many of the sheep and oxen. In fact, let us begin with verse 28. Samuel said to Saul, “The Lord hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and given it to a neighbour of thine, that is better than thou. And also the strength of Israel will not lie nor repent, for he is not a man that he should repent.”

Here, then, is a title of God: God is called “the strength of Israel.” In the context of 1 Samuel 15, this indicates that God cannot lie, for lying is weakness. Hebrews 6:18 says that it is impossible for God to

lie. God is not weak. God is strength. In light of this context, when God is called “the strength of Israel,” it also refers to the fact that God’s judgment against Saul is basically irrevocable; the judgment will not come off Saul. God does not vacillate. God is immutable and unchangeable. He protects His name, His honor, His glory, and His people.

David said, “I will love thee, O Lord, my strength.” When you and I contemplate our weakness, our helplessness, and our powerlessness, it should encourage us to know that we have a Father who is strength incarnate. Younger people never really think about how weak they are. When you are young, you think you are going to live forever, and you think you have all power and can do anything and everything you want.

Until you begin to reach about fifty, and then, all of a sudden, those aches and pains catch up with you. I remember what Roy asked me one day. He said, "Pastor, why didn't you tell me getting old wasn't all that much fun? You just get the miseries every now and then." I mean, that's all there is to it. You begin to think about what you cannot do, and even to consider this in a spiritual sense.

Look at how many people you would like to straighten out, but you do not have the power. Consider the people we would like to help and heal, but over whom we have no power. Think of the people we would like to reach, but cannot reach in our own strength. The point I am trying to make is that we are helpless in and of ourselves, but our God is the omnipotent God of the universe. He cannot fail. We may fail, but He cannot fail. We may fall, but He cannot fall. We may be powerless, but He is powerful.

David said, "I will love thee, O Lord, my strength." What David is saying is this: if I have God as my protector, if I have God as my strength, I am then fortified against all peril and all danger.

After David says, "I will love thee, O Lord, my strength," he declares in Psalm 18:32, "It is God that girded me with strength and maketh my way perfect." In verse 39 he says, "For thou hast girded me with strength unto the battle: thou hast subdued under me those that rose up against me." Psalm 19:14 says, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O

Lord, my strength and my Redeemer." Psalm 22:19 says, "But be not thou far from me, O Lord: O my strength, haste thee to help me."

“The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?”

Psalm 28:7 says, “The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in him, and I am helped: therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth; and with my song will I praise him.” Verse 8 adds, “The Lord is their strength, and he is the saving strength of his anointed.”

I love Psalm 71:18 and have quoted this passage innumerable times: “Now also when I am old and grayheaded, O God, forsake me not; until I have shewed thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to every one that is to come.” Some of us who have gray hair will understand this verse a little better than those who do not have gray hair. David asks God not to forsake him in old age, but to enable him to show God’s strength to his generation and his power to everyone yet to come.

So God was David's strength when he was young, when he was a mature adult, and now that he had gotten old. He said, "Lord, now that I'm old and I'm grayheaded, allow me still to show thy strength unto this generation."

What is David saying when he says, "I will love thee, O Lord, my strength"? He is naming God as the sovereign, omnipotent God of the universe. Do you remember what our Lord said in John 15, verse 5? "Without me, you can do how much? Nothing." And do you remember what the Apostle Paul said in Philippians 4, verse 13? "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me."

When David says, "I will love Thee, O Lord, my strength," he is saying, "Lord, You are everything to me. It is Your strength I depend upon. It's Your strength that I will go in. It's Your strength in which I will stand. I will love Thee, O Lord, my strength."

God as 'My Rock'

Now, go back to Psalm 18. In verse 2, he goes further: "I will love thee, O Lord, my strength." Then he says, "The Lord is my rock." When David declares that God is his rock, he uses the Hebrew word

sela, which literally means to be lofty. It is translated as rock, a stronghold, a cliff, a crag, or a place of safety.

How many times David hid in the rocks, I do not know, especially when Saul was chasing him before he was able to have a real army. The Bible says in 1 Samuel 24 and verse 2, "Then Saul took three thousand chosen men out of all Israel, and went to seek David and his men upon the rocks of the wild goats." David often hid in the rocks. When he was hiding among them, he viewed those rocks as a temporary place of safety or a temporary expediency. Now David is saying, "The Lord is my rock."

These rocks are just a picture and type of the Rock who is my real protection. The word “rock” is another name for God in Scripture. David is using not only the names of God, but also the attributes of God, to fortify himself.

Look in Deuteronomy 32:4: “He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.” He is the Rock. That is God; it is a title for God. Look in Deuteronomy 32:15: “But Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked: thou art waxen fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatness; then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation.” Once again, God is called the Rock.

In verse 18 of the same chapter, we read, “Of the Rock that begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee.” Here again, the word rock is a name for God. Deuteronomy 32:30-31 says, “How should one chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight, except their Rock had sold them, and the Lord had shut them up? For their rock is not as our Rock, even our enemies themselves being judges.” God is called the Rock.

Did you realize that 1 Samuel 2:2 says, “There is none holy as the Lord: for there is none beside thee: neither is there any rock like our God”? Then turn to 2 Samuel chapter 23.

In 2 Samuel 23, notice verses 1–3. David says, “Now these be the last words of David. David the son of Jesse said, and the man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel, said, The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was in my tongue. The God of Israel said, the Rock of

Israel spake to me, He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God." In one passage, He is called not only the God of Israel but also the Rock of Israel.

In Psalm 28:1, David said, "Unto thee will I cry, O Lord my rock." In Psalm 31:2, he says, "Bow down thine ear to me; deliver me speedily: be thou my strong rock, for an house of defence to save me." Verse 3 continues, "For thou art my rock and my fortress; therefore for thy name's sake lead me, and guide me." Psalm 62:6–7 says, "He only is my rock and my salvation: he is my defence. I shall not be moved. In God is my salvation and my glory: the rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God."

These titles are not a useless and needless accumulation of words, as Calvin pointed out. Since we know that in the Old Testament the name Rock is a name of God, do you understand the play on words in Matthew 16:18, when our Lord said to Peter, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it"? Peter is not the rock, and Peter is not the head of the church. He never was. There is a play on words. The Greek word Petros means a small or little rock. Our Lord said, "Peter, thou art a little rock, but upon this rock I'll build my church." What rock is He talking about? Well, do you not remember verse 16?

Our Lord asked, "Who do men say that I the Son of man am?" Some answered that He was Elijah, Elias, or one of the prophets. Our Lord then said, "But whom say ye that I am?" Peter answered, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." That is when Jesus Christ said, "Thou art Peter. And upon this rock"—Peter's confession, "Thou art the Christ, Thou art the Anointed One, Thou art the Messiah, Thou art the Son of the living God"—"I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Peter was a small rock, but the rock was his confession: Christ is the Son of God, the Savior, the Anointed One of Israel.

Do you remember what the Bible says in 1 Corinthians chapter 10 and verse 4 concerning Christ? "And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them." And that Rock was Christ.

What is David saying? “I will love Thee, O Lord, my strength. You’re my God. You’re my rock. You are my salvation.” John Gill says concerning God being our rock, “to whom the saints have recourse for shelter and safety, for supply, support, and divine refreshment.” Remember, the water came from the rock. Gill continues that in God the saints “are secure and on whom they build their hopes of eternal life and happiness and so are safe from all enemies and from all danger. Christ is called a rock on all of these accounts.”

God as 'My Fortress' and 'My Deliverer'

David says, “I will love thee, O Lord, my strength. My rock.” Then, in Psalm 18:2, he says, “and my fortress.” Consider God as a fortress. Whenever I hear that word, I think of Psalm 46:1–2: “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea.” That passage moved Martin Luther to write the mighty hymn, “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God, a bulwark never failing.” David said, “I will love thee, O Lord, my strength, my rock, and my fortress.”

The word for fortress in the Hebrew is metzudah. It refers to a castle, a stronghold, a fort, a strong place, and a place of defense. Although fortress is not a name of God in the same way as rock and strength, God is often called a fortress in Scripture. In Psalm 31:3, David said, “For thou art my rock and my fortress; therefore for thy name's sake lead me, and guide me.” In Psalm 71:3, he said, “Be thou my strong habitation, whereunto I may continually resort: thou hast given commandment to save me; for thou art my rock and my fortress.” In Psalm 91:2, he said, “I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust.” In Psalm 144:2, he said, “My goodness, and my fortress; my high tower, and my deliverer; my shield, and he in whom I trust; who subdueth my people under me.” Jeremiah also uses fortress in reference to God: “O Lord, my strength, and my fortress, and my refuge in the day of affliction” (Jeremiah 16:19).

Spurgeon commented concerning the word fortress: “Dwelling among the crags and mountain fastnesses of Judea, David has

escaped the malice of Saul and here he compares his God to such a place of concealment and safety. Believers are often hidden in their God from the strife of tongues and from the fury of the storm of trouble." The clefts of the Rock of Ages are safe abodes.

So David is saying, "I will love thee, O Lord, my strength, my rock, and my fortress." God is all that he needs for his protection. Then, in Psalm 18:2, he goes further: "I will love thee, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer."

The word deliverer is the Hebrew word palat, which refers to someone who enables or causes an escape. It means to be delivered, to be brought into safety. David is building upon these descriptions of God. God is his strength, his rock, his fortress, and now his deliverer. Humanly speaking, rocks and fortresses do not always deliver. Many have escaped to rocks or mountain fortresses, only to be starved into submission by a waiting enemy below. But David says, My God is not only my strength, rock, and fortress; he is also my deliverer. He not only provides safety; he provides security as well.

Do you not remember that a deliverer is one who interposes and helps in an hour of peril? And so David says, in my deepest hour of peril, he is not only my place of safety; he is the one who delivers me. I suppose we could stop and preach all day on the fact that our Lord has delivered us from sin, from self, from Satan, from death, and from the wrath to come. He is indeed our deliverer. Let me show you.

I want to emphasize this, and I will show you why in just a moment. In Psalm 40, verse 17, David says, "But I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinketh upon me: thou art my help and my deliverer; make no tarrying, O my God." In other words, he says, "Lord, I'm in desperate straits. Make no tarrying because you are my deliverer."

Psalm 70, verse 5, says the same thing again: "But I am poor and needy: make haste unto me, O God: thou art my help and my deliverer; O Lord, make no tarrying." Then Psalm 144, verse 2, says, "My goodness, and my fortress; my high tower, and my deliverer; my shield, and he in whom I trust; who subdueth my people under me."

David continues to talk about his deliverer. Romans 11:26 says, “And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob.” There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer. Who is the Deliverer?

None other than Jesus Christ Himself. Jesus Christ, according to Hebrews chapter 2, has delivered us out of the hand of the mighty, because Jesus Christ is the Almighty. Mark 3:27 says, “No man can enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he will first bind the strong man.” There has to be someone stronger than the strong man, and our Lord is stronger than the strong man. He bound him, spoiled his goods, delivered us, and brought us out of darkness into his marvelous light. According to Colossians 1, we were translated out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of his dear Son.

God as 'My God', 'My Strength', and 'In Whom I Will Trust'

So David says, “I will love thee, O Lord, my strength, my rock, my fortress, my Deliverer.” Fifthly, he says in verse two, “and my God.” David uses a name for God that sums up just about everything he had previously stated. The word translated God in Psalm 18:2 refers to power, might, and strength. It is also translated as Emmanuel. Isaiah 7 says, “thou shalt call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.” The name implies that God is a strong God, the mighty God, the one who is able to say that He is the covenant God and Father of His people.

Spurgeon made a beautiful comment on the name of God from Psalm 18:2. He said that the name is “all good things in one”: “There is a boundless wealth in this expression. It means my perpetual, unchanging, infinite, eternal good. He who can truly say my God may well say my heaven and my all.”

That is exactly what David was saying: He is my strength, my rock, my fortress, my deliverer, and my God. Notice how David connects this with trust: “The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust.” When David calls God his strength in verse two, it is not the same word as the word strength in verse one. The word strength in verse two is

most often translated in our Bibles as rock. It is the Hebrew word tsur, translated as rock, strength, mighty one, or strong one. It refers to a strong rock or a boulder, a place of refuge. David says, “in whom I will trust.” The word trust implies a seeking of refuge.

It is fleeing for protection and having one's hope and trust in God. David says, “My strength, my rock, my fortress, my deliverer, my God, my strength in whom I trust.” In Psalm 5, verse 11, he says, “But let all those that put their trust in thee rejoice. Let them ever shout for joy.” Why? “Because thou defendest them: let them also that love thy name be joyful in thee.” Notice this God in whom we trust, this God in whom is our strength: He defends us.

Look in Psalm 7 and verse 1: “O Lord my God, in thee do I put my trust: save me from all them that persecute me, and deliver me.” In Psalm 9 and verse 10: “And they that know thy name will put their trust in thee: for thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek thee.” David is saying, He is my trust. I like that passage in Psalm 20 and verse 7: “Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the Lord our God.” It is not the armies. It is not the defensive or offensive weaponry. It is our God.

God as 'My Buckler' and 'The Horn of My Salvation'

Now in Psalm 18, verse 2, David goes further. David is not just needlessly and uselessly accumulating words. He says, “The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler.” If I were to ask you what a buckler is, how many could answer? The Hebrew word for buckler is magen, and it refers to a very large shield or an instrument of defense. There is a difference between a shield and a buckler. Look in your Bibles to 1 Chronicles chapter 12 and verse 8, just to show you there is a difference between a shield and a buckler.

“And of the Gadites there separated themselves unto David into the hold to the wilderness men of might, and men of war fit for the battle, that could handle shield and buckler, whose faces were like the faces of lions, and were as swift as the roes upon the mountains.” These Gadites were men who could handle shield and buckler. What is the difference? A shield could be a small instrument placed on the arm to ward off blows. But a buckler was a larger, heavier

instrument behind which a person could get and shield his entire body. He might have to kneel or squat, but the buckler then covered his entire body. David is saying, “The Lord is my buckler.” In 2 Samuel 22:31, he says, “As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the Lord is tried: he is a buckler to all them that trust in him.” He is a buckler.

Psalm 91 is a wonderful psalm of protection. “He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust. Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence. He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler.” God protects the entirety of our bodies, minds, spirits and soul because He is our buckler. Proverbs 2:7 says, “He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous: he is a buckler to them that walk uprightly.” What does that mean? If we want God’s protection, we walk in obedience to Him.

In Psalm 18, David is glorying in God’s sovereign protection. He says, “The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation.” What does “the horn of my salvation” mean? The Hebrew word for horn is translated “horn” in our Bible seventy-five times. It is translated “hill” one time.

There have been numerous interpretations of the phrase “the horn of my salvation.” John Brown, who lived in the 1600s, says the allusion is doubtful. Some suppose the reference is to the horns of animals, by which they defend themselves and attack their enemies: God does for me what their horns do for them, like the rhinoceros, for instance.

Others consider it a reference to the well-established fact that warriors placed horns, or ornaments like horns, on their helmets. The horn stands for the helmet, and “the helmet of salvation” is equivalent to a saving, protecting helmet. Others consider the reference to be the corners or handles of the altar in the court of the tabernacle or temple, which are called horns. You remember there were horns on that altar. Still others suppose it means the highest point, or a lofty and precipitous mountain, which we call its peak. No

doubt in the Hebrew language, horn is used for mountain, as in Isaiah 5:1. A very fertile mountain is often called a horn of oil.

The sense is substantially the same whichever view we take. Yet, from the connection with shield and buckler, Brown is induced to consider the second view most probable. It seems to express the same idea as Psalm 140:7: "Thou hast covered my head in the day of battle." Thus, John Brown says the most accurate interpretation would probably be "the helmet of salvation."

David calls God his horn of salvation. The Hebrew word for salvation is yeshah, translated salvation, safety, and deliverance. The Hebrew word for Jesus, Joshua, is Yeshua—salvation. David said that God was the horn of his salvation: Yesha, Yeshua.

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

He continues concerning Christ and John the Baptist: "And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord, to prepare his ways." Zacharias is prophesying concerning Christ. God has visited and redeemed His people and has raised up a horn of salvation. That horn of salvation is none other than Jesus Christ.

David said in Psalm 140, "thou hast covered my head in the day of battle." In Isaiah 59:17, speaking of Christ, we read, "For he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and an helmet of salvation upon his head; and he put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloke." Ephesians 6:17 says, "And take the helmet

of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." When David said, "he is the horn of my salvation," he referred to the Deliverer, Jesus Christ, who is specifically called in the Bible the horn of salvation. When we put on the helmet of salvation, we are putting on the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

In Psalm 18:2, David says, "The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower."

God as 'My High Tower' and Summary of Protection

"My high tower." Spurgeon said concerning the high tower: "A citadel, high planted on rocky eminence, beyond the reach of my enemies, from the heights of which I look down upon their fury without alarm, and survey a wide landscape of mercy, reaching even into the goodly land beyond Jordan. Here are many words, but none too many. We might probably examine each one of them had we leisure, but summing up the whole, we may conclude with Calvin that David here equips the faithful from head to foot."

In other words, Psalm 18:2 is the equivalent of that passage in Ephesians 6, where our armor is listed. Psalm 144:2 says, "My goodness, and my fortress; my high tower." Psalm 61:3 says, "Thou hast been a shelter for me, and a strong tower from the enemy." One of my favorite passages is Proverbs 18:10: "The name of the Lord is a strong tower."

"The righteous runneth into it, and is safe." Have you ever stopped to think about that? The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it and is safe. Here is what Calvin said, with which Spurgeon agreed: "My high tower, such is the name of the Lord, whither the righteous run and are safe, and where they are above and out of the reach of every enemy, it is added, and my refuge, my Saviour, thou savest me from violence."

These various epithets show the fullness of safety in Jehovah, the various ways He has to deliver His people from their enemies and secure them from danger. The psalmist, beholding and claiming his interest in Him under all these characters, found Him exceedingly lovely and delightful; each character contained a reason why he

loved Him and why, in the strength of grace, he determined to love Him. God may be regarded in all these characters by Christ as man. Every one of these descriptions fits Jesus Christ.

In Psalm 18, there are verses applied directly to Jesus Christ in the New Testament. David says, "I will love thee, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock, my fortress, my deliverer, my God, my strength in whom I trust, my buckler, the horn of my salvation, my high tower."

Consider verse 3: "I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised: so shall I be saved from mine enemies." When you understand the greatness, power, majesty, providence, and protection of God, you can understand why David says this. How could you not be saved if God is all these things for you? No wonder David said, "I will love thee, O Lord." Look at all He has done for me; look at how He has delivered me time after time.

Applications: Calling on the Lord and Gratitude

In context, David is listing reasons why he will love the Lord. He names his rock and his fortress and all these other titles. He has listed sufficient reasons for us to love the Lord as David loved Him, especially when we understand that He is our bulwark, our place of safety, to those who love Him and serve Him. One reason that we are so ungrateful to God is that we do not think about everything He has done for us.

You remember the ten lepers who were healed? How many came back to give our Lord thanks? What did our Lord say? "Where are the nine? Did I not heal ten? Where are the nine?"

Do you realize that God has protected us innumerable times, and we do not even realize it? The very fact that you are here today, alive and well, demonstrates God's sovereign protection in your life. I could stand here today and tell you that I know of numerous close calls with death in my life, and how God sovereignly protected me, even when I did not know Him.

Let me tell you one. I do not know how old I was, but I was probably six or under, because when we lived in that place, I started first grade. I was either four, five, or six. Out in front of where we

lived was a huge chinaberry tree, exceedingly huge. My sister and I were climbing in it. Underneath was a red clay bank filled with rocks—hard red clay.

Most of you know I am right-handed; I barely do anything with my left hand. But I was going to out-climb my sister, and I did. I reached the very top of that chinaberry tree. The limb I was on broke. I remember falling, screaming, closing my eyes, and grabbing. With my left hand, I caught the last branch on that tree. When I opened my eyes, my feet were about three or four inches from the ground. I simply dropped onto the ground. As a child, I never thought anything about it.

Once you grow up, however, you think, “I could have broken my neck. I could have broken my back. I could have been killed.” How many of you have nearly been in horrible wrecks, yet escaped? God has protected us so many times, and many times we do not even realize it. He has restrained the enemy.

If we learn to love the Lord and see what He has done, it will enable us not only to be more grateful, but to love Him with more fervor and zeal. “I will love Thee, O Lord.” When you discover how God provides for you, protects you, and preserves you, you must determine that you will love Him.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we acknowledge that You are our strength, our rock, our fortress, our deliverer, our God, our trust, our buckler, the horn of our salvation, and our high tower. Help us to call upon Thee more, for Thou art worthy to be praised. As we call upon Thee and trust Thee, so shall we be saved from our enemies. Give us grace, O Lord, that we may acknowledge that Thou art our All in all, and that with Thee is sufficient protection. We cry to Thee for mercy. Help us to honor Thee. In Christ's name we pray, Amen.

CHAPTER 11

The Lord as Deliverer

January 13, 2008

SCRIPTURE READING - Psalm 18:7-19 (KJV)

Introduction and Review

This is the fourth message. The first two messages were entitled "I Will Love the Lord," followed by "I Will Call upon the Lord." Now the fourth message is "The Lord as Deliverer." David said, "I will love the Lord. I will call upon the Lord."

"Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations also of the hills moved and were shaken, because he was wroth. There went up a smoke out of his nostrils, and fire out of his mouth devoured: coals were kindled by it. He bowed the heavens also, and came down: and darkness was under his feet. And he rode upon a cherub, and did fly: yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind. He made darkness his secret place; his pavilion round about him were dark waters and thick clouds of the skies. At the brightness that was before him his thick clouds passed, hailstones and coals of fire. The LORD also thundered in the heavens, and the Highest gave his voice; hailstones and coals of fire.

> "Yea, he sent out his arrows, and scattered them; and he shot out lightnings, and discomfited them. Then the channels of waters were seen, and the foundations of the world were discovered at thy rebuke, O LORD, at the blast of the breath of thy nostrils. He sent from above, he took me, he drew me out of many waters. He delivered me from my strong enemy, and from them which hated me: for they were too strong for me. They prevented me in the day of my calamity: but the LORD was my stay. He brought me forth also into a large place; he delivered me, because he delighted in me."
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> David said in verses 1 and 2, "I will love thee, O LORD, my strength." Here is David's determination: "I will love thee, O LORD." Real biblical love, first of all, is attitude.

Secondly, affection, and thirdly, action. If your attitude is right, you are going to always have affection. If your affection and attitude are right, they will always be demonstrated by action. So David makes the determination, "I will love thee, O LORD." His love was a response to God's love, and the reasons for that love are found in verse 2: "The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower." Then he says, "I will call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised. So shall I be saved from mine enemies."

God's Rapid Response to David's Cry

We looked at verses 3 through 6 and saw David's distress. He says in verse 4, "The sorrows of death compassed me, and the floods of ungodly men made me afraid. The sorrows of hell compassed me about: the snares of death prevented me." Then he says, "In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried unto my God."

"He heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him, even into his ears." Notice the connection between verses 6 and 7. David not only called; he cried. Then he said his voice was heard. Does God recognize your voice? David had cried and prayed enough that God knew it was David calling upon Him. "In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried unto my God." Then, "He heard my voice out of his temple. My cry came before him, even into his ears."

“Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations of the hills moved and were shaken, because he was wroth.” David, in great distress, cries in verse 6, and in verse 7 God answers. Take note of God's rapid response to David's cry. That response is given in verses 7 through 19. There was no long delay. God answered immediately, and He answered in such a way that everyone knew it was God.

Understand that the people in the Old Testament did comprehend, in some way and in some degree, what we would call the presence of God. God was a God at hand and not merely a God afar off. In Jeremiah 23:23, God asks, “Am I a God at hand, saith the LORD, and not a God afar off?” God is a God at hand, and God is a God afar off; I will explain later, because God is omnipresent.

The Nearness of God in the Old Testament

He is everywhere at one time in the totality of His being. But let me show you how the Old Testament saints understood the nearness of God and God's presence.

Deuteronomy 30:10 says, "If thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God to keep his commandments and his statutes which are written in the book of the law, and if thou turn to the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, for this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it afar off. It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it and do it? Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it and do it? But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it."

Here is what God is saying: I am where My word is. I am present. You do not have to climb up into heaven, and you do not have to go across the sea. My word is nigh thee, and where My word is, that is where I am.

Now notice how the Apostle Paul quotes Deuteronomy 30 in Romans 10:6-8: "But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise. Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:) Or, Who shall descend into the

deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.) But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach."

Notice once again how Christ is intimately connected with His Word. God is indeed omnipresent.

David's Deliverer

He is everywhere at one time in the totality of His person. The saints in the Old Testament understood this, and the saints in the New Testament understood this. That is why, when you look back at Psalm 18, it does not take days, months, years, or long periods of time for God to hear, answer, and respond. David said, “I cried unto Him out of my distress.” Then the heavens move. You remember Isaiah 65:24: “And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear.” Psalm 18 is a wonderful illustration of this truth, and it demonstrates the swiftness of God in hearing and answering our prayer. That is why, in verse 6, David cried, and then that very important word, “then,” is found in verse 7: “then the earth shook.” David's determination, David's distress, and now David's deliverer: God comes to David when David calls and cries out of his helplessness and distress.

God's Wrath and Power in Creation

The picture David gives us here is how God responds and moves in power and in anger. He moves in power in and through His creation, but He deals with anger toward those sinners and the wicked who are persecuting David. God appeared on David's behalf in a miraculous and glorious manner, with great terror, consternation, and confusion among all David's enemies. The appearance is that of an earthquake so deep and violent that it shook the foundations of the world and overthrew the mountains.

When you look at verse 7, “Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations also of the hills moved and were shaken.” Many times, when you speak of foundations being moved and shaken and mountains being overturned and uprooted, it has reference to kingdoms. It is a picture of an entire kingdom being overthrown, especially the kingdom of the wicked. Thus David states that the

earth trembled. Why? Because God was wroth. He was angry at the ungodly, at those who were persecuting David. David is painting a picture of how, when God is angry, He arms Himself with His righteous indignation that He may defend His people.

If we were to go through Scripture, we would find that when our Lord prayed in Matthew chapter 27, the earth shook. In Acts chapter 4, when the disciples prayed, once again the earth shook.

The Shaking of Temporary Things

When the Bible talks about a shaking, it is not only showing us the presence and power of God; it is also showing us that what is shaken is temporary. What cannot be shaken is permanent.

Hebrews 12:25-26 says, "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven: Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven." The passage explains, "Yet once more" signifies "the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain." God says that He is going to speak and shake this world. Those things that are shaken will be removed; those things that cannot be shaken will remain.

Verse 28 continues: "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved," that is, the kingdom of Jesus Christ, "let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear." Every kingdom besides Christ may be shaken and moved.

Psalm 18 says that when David cried unto the Lord in great distress, "Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations also of the hills moved and were shaken." Why? "Because he was wroth." The Bible teaches that God can be an angry God.

There used to be an old movie, or perhaps a TV series—I do not remember the name—in which Walter Brennan appeared. It was a family picture, and old Walter Brennan used to say, "I'm a peaceable man. But don't get me stirred up." That is the way God is. This verse

tells us that God was wroth; that is, He was angry. He was kicked off. He was ready to fight.

What we forget is that God is the defender of His people. Why? Because, basically speaking, His people are His property. We belong to Him.

We have been bought—body, soul, and spirit, everything we are. We have been bought and paid for by the blood of Jesus Christ. The Hebrew word for wrath here is kara, which literally means to be wroth, to be hot, to be angry, to be displeased, and to be incensed. It refers to the kindling of wrath and anger. So the Bible says that God's wrath was kindled. Why? Because God defends His own.

Deuteronomy 32:9 says, "For the LORD's portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance." The LORD's portion is His people. We get the grace of God, the mercy of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, and eternal life. And all He gets is us. Sometimes we get the far better bargain out of that. But He says the LORD's portion is His people. We belong to Him.

Deuteronomy 32:10, talking about Israel, says, "He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye," that is, the pupil. You do anything and everything to defend the pupil of your eye. In Psalm 17:8, David prayed, "Keep me as the apple of the eye."

"Hide me under the shadow of thy wings." And then in Zechariah 2 and verse 8, the Scripture says, "For thus saith the LORD of hosts; After the glory hath he sent me unto the nations which spoiled you: for he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye." Would you be upset if I came up to you and took my finger and poked you in the eye?

I can assure you, you would. And God said, whoever touches you touches the apple of my eye. Let me show you how wroth God was. Look in Psalm 18 and verse 8: "There went up a smoke out of his nostrils, and fire out of his mouth devoured: coals were kindled by it."

Anthropomorphic Imagery of Divine Wrath

You have to remember the language here is anthropomorphic. That is, he is speaking man-form because God is spirit. David is describing this as if God were a man so that we could understand his wrath and anger. Since the breath from the nostrils is heated by strong emotion, the figure portrays the Almighty deliverer pouring forth smoke in the heat of his wrath and the impetuousness of his zeal.

Nothing makes God angrier than for someone to attack his children. As a father, you mess with my children and you can really be in trouble; but as a grandfather, you mess with my grandchildren and you are then really in deeper trouble. Is it right to feel that way about your children? Of course it is. You want to protect your own. God wants to protect his own as well. It is true that God is not subject to passions which govern you and I. But it does show us that there is a righteous anger. God's righteous anger is poetically set forth in this image so that we can understand it: God is here pictured literally as smoke coming out of his nostrils.

He is breathing fire. He is angry and upset. Just stop and think about this: the only thing God has to do to destroy us is withhold air from us. God really does not have to do anything. He could destroy us simply by opening His mouth. But when you get the picture of a God so righteously angered that He is breathing fire and smoke, you understand that He is truly upset.

Unhappily, many people do not understand the righteous anger of God. This is true concerning the ungodly; that is why the Scripture says over and over, “There is no fear of God before their eyes.” That is why people do what they do when it is wicked, vile, and ungodly. They do not fear God. There is no fear of God. They do not even believe God.

God's Righteous Anger Against the Wicked and His People

But unhappily, that attitude is not confined to the ungodly. Sometimes the godly do not comprehend the righteous anger of God either. Psalm 7 and verse 11 says, “God judgeth the righteous, and

God is angry with the wicked every day." God judges the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day. There is not a day in which God's anger does not burn hot toward the wicked—not an hour, minute, or second. Sinners may have many feast days, but they never have any safe days, because God is angry with the wicked.

God may be righteously angry with the wicked, but He may also be righteously angry with His people because of our sins and rebellion toward Him. In Numbers 11, the people God had brought into the wilderness complained against Him: "And when the people complained, it displeased the LORD: and the LORD heard it; and his anger was kindled; and the fire of the LORD burnt among them, and consumed them that were in the uttermost parts of the camp." Did God get angry? Yes. Did He destroy? Yes. In this instance, He was angry with His people. Deuteronomy 29 gives another example.

Do you remember how God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah? Well, there were other cities that were destroyed at the same time. Some of them are listed here. Watch this. "And that the whole land thereof is brimstone, and salt, and burning, that it is not sown, nor beareth, nor any grass groweth therein, like the overthrow of Sodom, and Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboim, which the LORD overthrew in his anger, and in his wrath." Wow. Was God angry at Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboim? Oh yes.

If you will look in your Bibles to the book of Zephaniah, that little book toward the end of the Old Testament, Zephaniah, and then we'll go to the book of Zechariah, which is right before the book of Malachi, the last book in the Bible in the Old Testament. We're going to look in Zephaniah first. Notice Zephaniah chapter two and verse three, right after the little book of Habakkuk and right before the book of Haggai, you have the book of Zephaniah. Zephaniah chapter 2 verse 3. Listen.

"Seek ye the LORD, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the LORD's anger." Does the Lord have anger? Oh yes, he does. Look now in the book of Zechariah. Chapter 3 and verse 8. Zechariah chapter 3 and verse 8. Look what our Lord says. Zechariah chapter 3, and I've got verse 8, but that is not the verse that I want. "Therefore wait ye upon me" is the verse I want. I said

Zechariah 3:8. Let me see. I might have— Well, let me quote the verse. I've got the verse. I don't see it right now. I thought I might have just transposed it, but here it is. "Therefore wait ye upon me, saith the LORD, until the day that I rise up to the prey." Oh, Zephaniah. Zephaniah, said Zechariah. Zephaniah, back to where we were. Zephaniah 3 in verse 8.

No, that's not it either. Yes, it is. Yes, it is. "Therefore wait ye upon me, saith the LORD, until the day that I rise up to the prey: for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy." What did he say? "Therefore wait ye upon me, saith the LORD, until the day that I rise up to the prey." I'm going to rise up to destruction. "For my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, even my fierce anger." So God is saying, yes, I do have an anger. Yes, I'm going to destroy the wicked.

Now, go back to Psalm 18. Let me show you.

David has said that the earth is shaken and that God was angry. He has also said, “A smoke went out of his nostrils, fire in his mouth, coals were kindled by it.”

God's Swift and Concealed Judgment

“He bowed the heavens also, and came down: and darkness was under his feet. And he rode upon a cherub, and did fly: yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind.” Amid the terror of the storm, Jehovah the Avenger descends, bending beneath His foot the arch of heaven. He comes to execute His wrath and His vengeance upon wicked men, especially those wicked men who are menacing His children.

Christians have been hated and despised by tyrants and wicked people throughout history. It would be a wonderful study just to find what happened to all of those tyrants who persecuted the people of God. Pharaoh is a wonderful example. Balak is another example, the king of Moab. There are so many. The darkness that David speaks about is expressive of the fact that God hides Himself from wicked

men, and it also portrays the awful vengeance that awaits the wicked.

Psalm 97 gives the same picture: “Clouds and darkness are round about him: righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne. A fire goeth before him, and burneth up his enemies round about. His lightnings enlightened the world: the earth saw, and trembled. The hills melted like wax at the presence of the LORD, at the presence of the Lord of the whole earth.”

Notice, if you would: clouds and darkness round about Him, righteousness and judgment, fire going before Him and burning His enemies, and His lightnings enlightening the world. In other words, God is showing that He comes in great vengeance, in great wrath, and in great judgment. The Bible also tells us, “And he rode upon a cherub, and did fly: yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind.” So God is here pictured as riding upon the tempest, riding upon the wings of the wind. According to Psalm 104 and verse 3, the Bible tells us that He walks upon the wings of the wind. He rides upon a cherub.

What is that talking about? First of all, it shows us that God is in absolute, sovereign control of everything. He is in control of the wind and the weather. It also pictures the absolute swiftness and suddenness with which God avenges and protects His own. William S. Plumer, a godly commentator in years past, said this: "When God comes to punish his foes and rescue his people, nothing has ever surprised his friends or his foes more than the admirable swiftness with which he moves and acts. He flies upon the wings of the wind." Not only His friends, but His foes are surprised at the swiftness with which God acts. God knows how to clean their plows, and He can do a good job on it.

Look in verse 11: "He made darkness his secret place; his pavilion round about him were dark waters and thick clouds of the skies." This verse speaks of the darkness with which God wraps Himself and conceals Himself from His enemies. It is as if God is ready to shoot at them, and He does so, but they cannot tell from where the shots originate or their source. Can you imagine the horror of being fired upon with perfect accuracy when you cannot see your enemy, do not

know where he is shooting from, and every shot hits the target? God conceals Himself. They cannot see, yet they are destroyed.

The Scottish version of the Psalter gives us a couplet—actually three stanzas. Speaking basically of verses 9 through 11, it says: "He also bowed the heavens, and thence he did descend, and thick as clouds of darkness did under his feet attend. And upon a cherub he rode, and thereby he did fly; he owned swift wings of the wind, his flight was from on high. He darkness made his secret place, about him from his tent, dark waters were, and thickest clouds of the airy firmament."

So they sang this psalm concerning the righteous anger and judgment of God. Now look at verse 12 and read through verse 15: "At the brightness that was before him his thick clouds passed, hailstones and coals of fire. The LORD also thundered in the heavens, and the Highest gave his voice; hailstones and coals of fire. Yea, he sent out his arrows, and scattered them."

The Terrible Artillery of Heaven

"He shot out lightnings, and discomfited them. Then the channels of waters were seen, and the foundations of the world were discovered at thy rebuke, O LORD, at the blast of the breath of thy nostrils."

Spurgeon made this observation: "Suddenly, the terrible artillery of heaven was discharged. The brightness of lightning lit up the clouds, as were the glory proceeding from him who was concealed within the cloudy pavilion. And the volleys of hailstones and coals of fire were hurled forth upon the enemy. The lightning seemed to cleave the clouds and kindle them into a blaze, and then hailstones and flakes of fire with flashes of terrific grandeur terrified the sons of men."

Calvin said: "We should remember what I have said before, that David, under these figures, describes to us the dreadful power of God, the better to exalt and magnify the divine grace which was manifested in his deliverance. He declares a little after this, which was his intention, for when speaking of his enemies, he says, and they were scattered, put to flight by the arrows of God, as if He had

said, they have been overthrown not by the hands or swords of men, but by God who openly launched His thunderbolts against them."

This world knows nothing of what it is like to have God fight against it, but it shall discover. Thunder in the Bible is a sign of God's anger. In 1 Samuel 2:10 and 1 Samuel 7:10, when Samuel prayed and it thundered, the people were afraid because they knew that God was angry against them. Now God is thundering forth His voice.

When you stop and think about the wicked in this world—their arrogance, haughtiness, headiness, high-mindedness, and boastfulness—you see that they openly challenge God. Psalm 12:4 demonstrates their attitude: “Who have said, With our tongue will we prevail; our lips are our own: who is lord over us?” They think they can talk their way out of anything. They do not need God, do not recognize God, and are their own lord.

Sinners are very boastful and arrogant before the battle, but when God enters into battle with them, they soon turn tail and run. They appear to be nothing but cowards, quaking and cowering before the least demonstration of His righteous anger. When God shoots His arrows, He never misses. His arrows are feathered with lightning and barbed with eternal death.

If God is so great and powerful in Himself—and He is—what do you think it will be like for the man or men against whom God appears in arms? What will it be like when God demonstrates His righteous anger? Do you remember Revelation 6, where the great men, mighty men, and captains cry to the rocks and mountains, “Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb”?

Psalm 18:15 says, “Then the channels of waters were seen, and the foundations of the world were discovered at thy rebuke, O LORD, at the blast of the breath of thy nostrils.” Spurgeon said of this verse: “So tremendous was the shock of God's assault in arms that the order of nature was changed, and the bottoms of rivers and seas were laid bare. The channels of waters were seen, and the deep cavernous bowels of the earth were upheaved, till the foundations of the world were discovered. What will not Jehovah's rebuke do?”

"If the blast of the breath of thy nostrils, O Lord, be so terrible, what must thine arm be?" Vain are the attempts of men to conceal anything from Him whose word unbars the deep and lifts up the doors of the earth from their hinges. Vain are all hopes of resistance, for a whisper of His voice makes the whole earth quail in abject terror. If a blast of the breath of His nostrils does this to the earth, what will His arm do?

God does, and God is, righteously angry. He has a righteous anger, and He uses the blast of His nostrils to destroy His enemies.

In verses 16 through 19, David says, "He sent from above, he took me, he drew me out of many waters. He delivered me from my strong enemy, and from them which hated me: for they were too strong for me. They prevented me in the day of my calamity: but the LORD was my stay. He brought me forth also into a large place; he delivered me, because he delighted in me."

Deliverance in Plain Language

In verse 6, David calls and cries to the Lord in great distress. In verses 7 through 15, he gives us a picture of the awful power and righteous anger of God when God comes to deliver him and his people. In verses 16 through 19, David has put everything he said earlier into plain, simple language that anyone could understand.

David clearly alludes to the fact that his deliverance was marvelous and miraculous. It was an act of God. He says, "from above," "he took me," "he drew me," "he delivered me," "he brought me forth," "he delivered me," and "he delighted in me." All of this was something God had done. It was not David's skill, battle tactics, or better technological weaponry that delivered him.

It was not the aid of men that delivered him. No, it was an act of God and an act of God alone. Psalm 44 demonstrates this same truth and confesses that deliverance is an act of God: "We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, what work thou didst in their days, in the times of old. How thou didst drive out the heathen with thy hand, and plantedst them; how thou didst afflict the people, and cast them out. For they got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them: but thy right hand,

and thine arm, and the light of thy countenance, because thou hadst a favour unto them. Thou art my King, O God: command deliverances for Jacob."

Did Israel have to fight when she went into Canaan? Of course. But was it their skill, weaponry, and battle tactics that gave them the victory? Of course not. That is what Psalm 44 is saying. It was all of God. Did David have to fight? Certainly. Yet the deliverance was from God. God enabled and empowered David, and in Psalm 18 we will see that God taught David to fight. But it was God who was doing the delivering.

Now note what David says in verse 16: "He sent from above, he took me. He drew me out of many waters." What is David talking about? Go back to verse 4: "The sorrows of death compassed me, and the floods of ungodly men made me afraid." The many waters are the many enemies, or the torrents of enemies, the floods of ungodly men that had surrounded him. He said that God sent from above and drew him out of the floods of ungodly men.

Spurgeon said, "Now comes the rescue. The author is divine. He sent. The work is heavenly from above. The deliverance is marvelous. He drew me out of many waters. Here, David was like another Moses, drawn from the water. And thus are all believers like their Lord, whose baptism in many waters of agony and in His own blood has redeemed us from the wrath to come. Torrents of evil shall not drown the man whose God sitteth upon the floods to restrain their fury." No amount of ungodly men, floods, or torrents of enemies can destroy us when God controls the floods. David gives praise in verse 17.

"He delivered me from my strong enemy, and from them which hated me: for they were too strong for me."

There are plenty of ideas concerning the phrase, "he delivered me from my strong enemy." David could be referring to Goliath; he certainly was delivered from Goliath. He could have been referring to Saul, who persecuted him, or to Ishbi-benob, who thought to have slain David. Whoever it was, he was a very strong enemy. "He delivered me from my strong enemy."

Notice that the first may be singular, but the next is plural: "And from them that hated me: for they were too strong for me." It does not matter the multitude, the magnitude, or the strength of the enemy. God is still able to deliver.

The enemy thought they really had David, for he said, "They prevented me in the day of my calamity: but the LORD was my stay." The word "prevented" is an old English word that literally means they preceded me in the day of my calamity. The enemy preceded David there and had laid traps and snares for him. Since they were there, David was basically surrounded. They surprised him. He was entrapped and ensnared, but the LORD was his stay.

A stay is like a staff or a walking stick—something on which you put your weight, lean, and place your trust. David was surrounded by enemies who had laid traps and snares and gone before him. He walked right into them. It looked as though he was caught, but the LORD was his stay.

Then he says in verse 19, "He brought me forth also into a large place; he delivered me, because he delighted in me." The large place denotes safety or relief and is contrasted with the straits of distress. David began in great distress, in a tight place, surrounded.

He was ensnared and entrapped; he could not get out. But now the Lord had delivered him and brought him into a large place. Listen to what David said in Psalm 4:1: “Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness: thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress; have mercy upon me, and hear my prayer.” Thou hast enlarged me—in other words, Thou hast gotten me into a large place, out of the tight spot and cramped quarters. Listen to what he says in verse 19: “He brought me forth also into a large place; he delivered me.” So he gives God the praise, and then says, “because he delighted in me.”

The Sovereign Grace of God's Delight

Now, I want to explain that phrase, “because he delighted in me.” God delivered David because he was a man after His own heart in whom God delighted—not for any merit in David, not for any worthiness in David, and not for any works in David, but out of God’s own goodwill and pleasure. When David says that God

delighted in him, the phrase indicates that God had love and goodwill toward David. David is ascribing all of his mercies and all of his deliverance to the free, sovereign grace of God. He is not boasting of his own works or merits; he is saying that it was because of God's supernatural and sovereign favor.

I want to give you one more quote by Spurgeon. I love this. Here is what Spurgeon said concerning this phrase, "Because he delighted in me": "Free grace lies at the foundation. Rest assured, if we go deep enough, sovereign grace is the truth which lies at the bottom of every well of mercy. Deep sea fisheries in the ocean of divine bounty will always bring the pearls of electing discriminating love to light. Why Jehovah should delight in us is a question without an answer, and a mystery which angels cannot solve. But that He does delight in His Beloved is certain, and is the fruitful root of favors as numerous as they are precious."

Believer, sit down and inwardly digest this instructive sentence now before us. Learn to view the uncaused love of God as the cause of all the lovingkindness of which we are partakers. David says that God delivered him because He delighted in him—because He loved him, because He favored him. Why did God love David? Why did God favor David? It was out of God's own sovereign grace and mercy.

Deuteronomy 7:7-8 says, "The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: But because the LORD loved you." Why did God love you? Because He loved you. It was not anything in you. You did not earn it, merit it, or draw it forth. God loved you simply because He loved you.

That is what Spurgeon meant when he said that if you go deep enough in the deep-sea fishery of the bounties of grace, you will always find the pearls of electing, discriminating love. God did not love us because we were lovely, for we were unlovely. He did not love us because we were good, for there is none good, no, not one. He did not love us because we sought Him, for there is none that seeketh after God, no, not one. He did not love us because we were righteous, for there is none righteous, no, not one. He did not love us because we were godly, for the love of God is commended to us while we were

sinners. Why did God love us? Because God loved us. When we come down to it, everything comes down to God's sovereign, electing, gracious, and merciful grace.

Ask yourself: Why has God allowed you to live as long as you have lived? Look at some of your friends and family; they were cut off in the prime of life, but you have been allowed to live. Why are you in the health that you are in? Why do you have the family, friends, and financial standing that you have? Everything you have is based upon the mercy and grace of God. The Lord loves you because He loves you. That is what David is saying.

Applications for Believers

Three quick applications follow. First, we should rejoice and be extremely thankful that David's Deliverer is our Deliverer. We have the same sovereign, majestic, omnipotent, immortal, eternal God that David had. As he was God's child, so are we God's children. He promised us in Hebrews 13:5, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." God is immutable and unchangeable; therefore, He is the eternal Deliverer of God's people.

He has delivered us out of so many things, and we should be eternally grateful. Second, we need to learn to cry for deliverance as David cried in his distress in verse 6. He not only called, but cried. I genuinely believe that one reason we do not see God's mighty hand of deliverance in our day as they did in the Old and New Testaments is that God's people have not cried unto Him. We have not cried, repented, or turned. We live in a day when everybody trusts the arm of the flesh: We can work it out; we can handle it; we can do it; we have friends.

Jeremiah 17:5 says, "Thus saith the LORD; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the LORD." When we fail to cry to God and trust in man, we bring judgment and destruction upon ourselves. We need to cry, as David did: "Help, LORD; for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men."

The third application should give you great courage. Take heart: neither the multitude nor the magnitude of sinners arrayed against

us matters when the sovereign God of the universe fights for us. How can they stand? They cannot stand. There is absolutely no hope for those who fight against the King of Kings, Lord of Lords, and God of Gods.

Whether you are rebelling personally, as a family, as a church, as a nation or country, or as the world, there is no hope as long as you fight against God. God is invincible; you cannot win. Therefore, He demands that His enemies throw down their weapons of warfare, kneel before Him, and worship Him. You must worship Him, trust Him, believe Him, and bow to Him. He and He alone is God. It is useless to fight against God.

You want your own way? Fine. Fight. You want your own will? Fine. Fight. You will lose and you will die, because no one has ever successfully fought against God, and no one ever will. The safest thing for you to do is bow, worship, believe, and trust.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we ask that You would help, encourage, and enable us to see and know Thy mighty deliverance. Thou art David's deliverer, and Thou art our deliverer. Thou may deliver us personally, familiarly, ecclesiastically, or nationally; Lord, we must trust in Thee and cry to Thee. Give us grace to serve Thee acceptably with reverence and godly fear, knowing that the kingdom of Jesus Christ can never be shaken or moved. In Thy name we ask and pray, Amen.

CHAPTER 12

The Essence of Biblical Godliness

April 8, 2012

Introduction: The Need to Understand Godliness

I want to preach a message that I believe is absolutely fundamental, and yet so needed and necessary, and yet so unknown. In 1 Timothy 4:7–8, the Word of God says, “But refuse profane and old wives' fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness. For bodily exercise profiteth little, but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.”

Every true child of God desires to live a godly life. The word godly has many synonyms in Scripture. You will read the words devout, holy, pious, righteous, and sanctified. All of those words relate to godliness, and you will find them used over and over in Scripture. But then you have to ask yourself, what exactly is godliness? How do you know whether or not you are a godly person? You have to understand the essence of godliness—what it is made of, or what it consists of.

What Godliness Is Not

Let me answer these questions first of all negatively. I want to tell you what godliness is not. First of all, godliness is not vocabulary. That is, it is not knowing the lingo or using the right words. There are plenty of people who can talk like a Christian and talk as though they are godly, but they are simply not Christians, nor are they godly.

In Jeremiah 5:2, God told Jeremiah to go through the streets of Jerusalem and see if there were any who followed Him. The verse says, "And though they say the Lord liveth, surely they swear falsely." They might say, "Yes, I love the Lord," or, "Yes, the Lord liveth," or, "Yes, He is the one true and living God." But God said, "Surely they swear falsely." Just because someone knows the language and the lingo and can talk the talk does not mean that he is a Christian, nor does it mean that he is godly.

Some of the most wicked, vile, and heinous crimes ever committed have been committed under the guise of religion and even while using biblical terms. Think about the Inquisition, where many martyrs were not only burned at the stake, but murdered in various ways as well. Simply because one has the vocabulary does not mean that he is a Christian, nor does it mean that he is godly.

Secondly, godliness does not consist of doing things, especially religious things. Churchgoing, witnessing, praying, counting beads, and countless other acts do not make one godly.

It is true that godly people attend to the preaching of the Word of God. It is true that godly people read the Scriptures, pray, share their faith, and do many good things. But they do not do those things in order to be godly; they do them because they are godly.

Look at the Roman Catholics who count beads, the Muslims who pray three and four and five and seven times a day, and the Hindu and Buddhist monks who do all these other things. If doing religious things makes someone godly, then obviously even the pagans are godly.

You know what our Lord said in Matthew 7, verses 21 through 23? He said, "Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father

who is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name and in thy name cast out devils and in thy name done many wonderful works?"

"And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." If you are preaching in His name, casting out devils in His name, and doing many wonderful works in His name, you are doing religious deeds. But He will say, "I never knew you." Doing good things, therefore, does not make someone godly.

The average church today is so programmed that if the Holy Spirit of God were taken out of the world tomorrow, most churches would go right on as usual. They have their programs and their activities. Pastor McCurry sent me a link that I looked at momentarily concerning what some churches were doing for Easter. They were continually trying to outdo each other with all these programs and activities. I just read where one church in Albany put out 1,500 eggs. What in the world has an egg got to do with the resurrection of Jesus Christ?

One Sunday a year does not commemorate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Bible says He was raised on the first day of the week. Every Sunday is a fresh commemoration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, not merely once a year. Doing good deeds, therefore, is not what godliness is. The Bible says, "Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away."

Thirdly, godliness is not acting pious and holy. Many people try to exalt themselves and are willing to tell you how good and godly they are. It is poor English, but great theology: If you have to tell me how godly you are, you ain't. The Bible says in Proverbs 27:2, "Let another man praise thee, and not thine own lips; a stranger, and not thine own lips." Let another man praise thee; do not do it yourself.

Remember Luke 18, where the publican and the Pharisee went to the temple to pray. Our Lord said, "Two men went up to the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself." He said, "God, I thank thee that I'm not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican, for I fast twice in a week." "I give tithes of all that I possess." What was he doing? Exalting himself.

The publican smote himself on the breast, would not lift his eyes toward heaven, and said, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner.” Our Lord said that the publican went down justified rather than the other who was acting so pious and holy. The Word of God says in 1 Timothy 6:5, “Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself.”

I realize that reference may refer to monetary gain, but I believe it has other applications. You see preachers boasting, “I've got 500 in church. How many do you have?” I would rather have fifty people who truly want the Word of God and are willing to live and obey it than a church of five thousand who could care less whether they had the Word of God or not.

Godliness Is Not Ritualism

Godliness is not acting pious and holy. There are some who would be more holy than God Himself if they could, for they thought they could. And brother, when you try to be more holy than God, you are in trouble.

Fourthly, godliness is not ritualism, ceremonialism, or churchism. Most churches today have fallen into the same exact trap that Israel did of old. The temple and its rituals came first in ancient Israel. They concentrated so heavily on the temple and its rituals that they overlooked the God of the temple.

Consider Amos chapter 5, beginning with verse 21. God says, "I hate, I despise your feast days and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though you 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 vows. But let judgment run down as waters and righteousness as a mighty stream."

Notice what He says: "I hate, I despise your feast days. I will not smell in your solemn assemblies." Did not God ordain those solemn feast days? Yes. Did He not ordain those offerings, the music, and the sacrifices? Yes. And now God says, "I hate them. I despise them."

He will not have them because they had become pure ritual and pure ceremony.

What most professing Christians do today is the same thing. I said this a long time ago, especially in reference to Southern Baptists, because I was raised a Southern Baptist and observed it even as a child. Most Southern Baptists run into church fifteen minutes late with a quarter in one hand and a quarterly in the other.

Most Baptists—not just Southern Baptists—most Methodists, and most Presbyterians come to church, sit down, sing, give a little offering, hear a sermon, and go out thinking they have worshipped God. All they have done is gone through a little ritual or ceremony. There has been no real contemplation or acknowledgment of God in their minds. They have substituted the real, true worship of God for a ceremony or ritual.

The Word of God says in Hosea, "Israel hath forgotten her maker and buildeth temples." That is America. America has forgotten her Maker and builds church buildings.

Do you realize that traditions, ritualisms, ceremonialism, and churchism have taken over a real, genuine worship service? If we really and truly got to worshiping God, if we ever got in with Him, we would not care what time we got out.

I preached at a little Baptist church in South Georgia. Most of you know that I tend to preach more than fifteen or twenty minutes. That church sang until fifteen minutes before twelve on Sunday morning, leaving me fifteen minutes to preach, they thought. They told me publicly how much they loved to sing. I preached that morning, but I did not get out of there until about one or one-fifteen. That night, I told them, “I enjoy singing like anybody else. I enjoy music. But I believe the Word of God has priority, and I always preach at least twice as long as you sing.” That night, they sang fifteen minutes and quit. They really enjoyed singing, didn’t they? Yes, sure.

Godliness is not ritualism, ceremonialism, or churchism. Fifthly, godliness is not traditionalism. If you look at Matthew 15 and Mark chapter 7, you will see how little our Lord thought of traditions.

There is nothing wrong with a tradition as long as it is biblical. Or, secondly, there is nothing wrong with a tradition as long as you

understand that it is your tradition and is not binding on someone else. But in the average church, here is what you get: “Well, we’ve always done it like this.” “This is the way we’ve been taught.” Just because you have always done it that way, or because you have been taught that way, does not mean it is right.

I will show you how steeped most churches are in traditionalism. I have a pastor friend at a little Southern Baptist church. He was trying to teach and instruct them, and when Christmas season came, he was slowly teaching them about some of the paganism involved in Christmas. He made it known that he did not want a Christmas tree in the sanctuary or auditorium.

I was not there, but one of my men was there one night. He went over on Wednesday night thinking they were going to have a prayer meeting, but it turned out to be a business meeting. One of the men stood up and said, “The pastor does not want a Christmas tree in the auditorium.” One woman stood up and said, “This is our church.”

“We’ve always done it like this. I don’t care what the pastor thinks or says; we’re going to do it.” Within a few weeks, the pastor had resigned and gone on. Would I have left? Sure, I would have left. You know what the woman said? We don’t care what the Word of God teaches or even about the pastor’s concern. We’re going to do what we want. We’ve always done it this way, and we’re going to keep doing it.

Godliness Is Not Feelings

I tell people I can go to the average church and split it right down the middle with one sermon. All I've got to do is preach against tradition. When I start preaching against Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny, and a whole lot of other things, Halloween included, they're going to be parts left and right, because more people are concerned with their traditions than they are with the Word of God.

Sixthly, godliness is not feelings, and it is not emotionalism. Feelings come and go. Unhappily, most people live on feelings instead of principles. Years ago, Alice and I were in a little town, and I had heard that the pastor was resigning. At that time, I had a Bible Institute, and I was teaching young men to preach. I was always

looking for preaching opportunities for them, so I stopped to talk with the pastor and asked him, "Are you resigning?"

He said, "I did resign. But I rescinded my resignation." He explained, "I feel that the Lord wants me here, and I feel like we're going to have a good work here, and I feel there's a lot to do, etc." I said, "Well, good. I was just checking because I have these young men. If they can ever help you, you let me know."

I walked out, got in the car, and Alice asked, "Well, is he leaving?" I said, "Yeah, he'll be gone two weeks." And he was. Do you know how I knew he was going to be gone in two weeks? I feel, I feel, I feel.

There was never, "This is the Lord's will. This is the Lord's Word. This is where the Lord wants me." There was only, "I feel, I feel, I feel." When your feelings change, you change if you are living by your feelings. Feelings come and go. Principles do not.

Godliness is not feelings. With my arm, shoulder, and neck hurting, I don't feel too good. But that doesn't matter. Feelings have no bearing upon true godliness and true holiness.

Now, if none of these things are godliness, what is godliness? Look at 1 Timothy chapter 4, beginning with verse 7: "But refuse profane and old wives' fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness." First of all, godliness is something that must be worked at. "Exercise thyself rather unto godliness." The Greek word for exercise is gymnazo.

Godliness Must Be Worked At

It is where we get our English words gymnasium and gymnastics. Literally, he is saying, “Gymnasticize thyself unto godliness.” I enjoy watching gymnastics, and I will tell you why. I enjoy watching anybody who has flexibility and can at least bend over and tie their shoes. The older you get, the more you appreciate some of those things. But none of those gymnasts walk out on the floor and say, “I think I am going to do a little run and do a double back flip and a side spin.”

They do not start out doing that. They stretch, exercise, train, and work at it. When we look at those gymnastic competitions, we see how good those children are, and we have totally forgotten the four

and five years of daily working and stretching that enabled them to reach that level. If I were to mention the name Hank Aaron, you might think of somebody born with a baseball bat in one hand and a ball glove in the other. That is not true. Hank Aaron may have had excellent skills, but he worked at being good at baseball.

Years ago, a concert pianist came to our church in Jessup. He sat down at the piano and, for about an hour and a half, played without sheet music or anything in front of him. It looked as if the music were flowing out of his fingers. Afterward, I told him, "I would give anything to be able to play the piano like that." He said, "Really? I practice eight hours a day, six days a week." All of a sudden, I no longer wanted to be a concert pianist. Was he good? He was great. But he was great because he worked at being great.

When we hear names like John Calvin, Martin Luther, and John Hus, we think, "Those were godly men. They had character, integrity, and conviction." Yes, they did, but they did not always have it. They were not born with it; they worked at being godly. Look at what he said in verse 7: "But refuse profane and old wives' fables, and exercise, gymnasticize thyself rather unto godliness." You will never exercise yourself unto godliness until you learn to refuse profane and old wives' fables. An old wives' fable or a profane fable is something you hear all your life that simply is not true.

For instance, I remember when I was a young man, I heard that if a pregnant woman listened to beautiful music, her child would be born musically inclined. I tell everybody, my mother must have listened to a dying buzzard moan or something. I cannot sing, and I have nothing as far as music is concerned.

We have these shortcuts. If you want prayer, you raise your hand. You can raise your hand all day long. That is not going to make you godly. If you want to dedicate yourself to the Lord, you come forward and kneel at this old-fashioned altar. First of all, it is not an old-fashioned altar. Secondly, kneeling there is not going to make you godly. We think that we can go forward in some church service, kneel for two or three minutes, get up, and be changed individuals. That is not necessarily so.

Godliness is something that must be worked at. Secondly, godliness is something that must be added to our faith. Second Peter, chapter one, verse three, says, “According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue.”

Godliness Must Be Added to Faith

Now watch verse four: “Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises that by these you might be partakers of the divine nature having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust, and besides this, giving all diligence, watch now, add to your faith.” You are already saved, but here is something that has to be added. Add to your faith virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness. And to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity. He said, “For if these things be in you and abound, they make you that you shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

Godliness is something that must be added to our faith. It is indeed the work of Jesus Christ that makes us righteous. We do not make ourselves righteous in any sense of the word.

We do not work our way into heaven. We do not earn or merit salvation. Yet those who have been made righteous in Jesus Christ will seek to demonstrate evidence and manifest that righteousness by cultivating godliness. It is inevitable. Ephesians 2:10 says, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works which God hath before ordained that we should walk therein."

Philippians 2:12–13 says, "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." What did he say? God worked it in; you work it out. God put it in there; you make the application. The Word of God says, in Isaiah 26:12, "Lord, thou wilt ordain peace for us: for thou also hast wrought all our works in us."

Here it is, bottom line, cut and dried: any good thing in you, any godly thing in you, any holy thing in you, any righteous thing in you, it is only there by the grace of God. For if God did not put it in you, it would not be there, period.

The Essence of Godliness: Thinking and Acting Like the Father

Now, if I were to ask you who was the most holy or the most godly man that ever lived, undoubtedly you would answer the Lord Jesus Christ. And that is true. Jesus Christ was not only God; Jesus Christ was also man. He is perfect God and perfect man. He is the God-man. He was sent as a servant to the Father.

So what was it that made our Lord, as the perfect man, holy and godly? I want to bring this down to what I am going to call an irreducible minimum. I am going to show you two things, and I want you to pick them out as we look at John chapter 5. Notice verse 17: "But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." Now skip down to verse 19.

Then answered Jesus and said unto them, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise." He also said, "But I have greater witness than that of John: for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me." In verse 43, he said, "I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive."

In John 6:39, our Lord says, "And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day." Note the words, "this is the Father's will which hath sent me." Then in John 8:29, our Lord said, "And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him."

Did you pick up on what our Lord was saying? Did you pick up on the essence of what he said? He always did what the Father wanted him to do. He only acted as the Father acted. Here is the essence of godliness. Why was our Lord Jesus Christ obedient unto death? Why

did our Lord fulfill the law of God perfectly, completely, and totally? Here is the answer: our Lord thought as the Father would have him to think. Because he thought the way the Father thought, he acted the way the Father would have him to act.

Thinking and acting go together. Christ had a biblical mindset; he had a biblical attitude, and therefore his conduct and his actions were biblical and right. What did he say in John 8:29? "And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him." He thought like the Father, and he acted like the Father. Let me ask you a question. What is God's will for your life?

Conformed to the Image of Christ Through Mind Renewal

I'm not asking right now, Should you take another job? Should you move to Georgia? Should you move to Tennessee? Should you marry? Should you not marry? I'm not talking about that right now. I'm talking about, generally speaking, what is God's will for every child of God? Indiscriminately. Here it is: God's will for every child of God is that we might be conformed to the image of his Son. Romans 8:29 says, "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren." The word image in the Greek is the word icon. The word icon literally means a likeness, a resemblance, a profile, a representation.

Verse 29 says, “For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image” or to the likeness, profile, or representation “of his Son.” In other words, we are to be little Christs—not in the sense that we are saviors or Messiah, but in the sense that we have learned to think like Christ thought so that we can act the way Christ acted. Here is the word: “For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed.” The word conformed—con-with, with-formed, formed with—literally means to be jointly formed together with. As we learn to think like Jesus Christ and act like Jesus Christ, we are jointly formed together with Him in doing those things that the Father would have done.

Why? Because thinking and acting go together. You cannot act rightly until you think rightly. You cannot act biblically until you think biblically.

Now, turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 15 and look at verse 58. I want to show you something that is vitally important. In verse 58, the Apostle Paul makes this statement: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." Now look at that: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable." Why did the Apostle Paul say that right where he did in 1 Corinthians 15, verse 58? Verse 58 is the application of everything that he taught in 1 Corinthians 15. What did he teach in 1 Corinthians 15? He taught the bodily resurrection of the dead, not only of Christ, but of every believer.

Are you listening? What is to keep us faithful? What is to keep us steadfast and unmovable? I have never had NBC, CBS, or any television network, magazine, or newspaper come to me and say, "Pastor Weaver, you're doing a wonderful job. You're teaching the truth, and you're sharing the Word of God, and we'd like to do an article on you and promote your work." I've never had a studio say that to me, and I got news for you: no real Bible preacher ever has. They will promote those who are not teaching the truth. They'll promote those who are teaching political correctness and the New World Orderism, but they're not going to teach anybody or promote anybody who is teaching the truth of God. So I never get patted on the back. What is to keep me faithful? What is to keep you faithful?

I know that there is a resurrection, and I know that God is not unfaithful to forget our work and our labor of love, according to Scripture. Ultimately, my reward will be based upon his mercy and his grace, and that is sufficient.

When you get to 1 Corinthians 15:58, that is duty: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." That is duty. First Corinthians 15:1 through 57 is doctrine. Your duty is always based upon doctrine. If you do not know doctrine, how will you ever know your duty? If you do not know doctrine, if you cannot think right, then you cannot act right. If

you cannot think biblically, then you cannot act biblically. It is that simple.

What is our problem by nature? Isaiah 55:8-9 says, "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." God is not going to condescend to think like us. Then he would be ungodly and unholy. What we must do is humble ourselves and learn to think as he thinks, because his thoughts are far above our thoughts, and his ways are far above our ways.

In Ephesians 4, beginning with verse 17, Paul tells these Ephesian Christians how not to act: "This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness." He says, do not act like the ungodly; do not act like the unsaved.

"But ye have not so learned Christ." Christ must be learned. "But ye have not so learned Christ; if so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus: that ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness."

After telling us that we are not to walk as the ungodly walk, Paul says that we have to learn Christ. The way to learn Christ is to put off the old man and put on the new man. What is the old man? It is your old habits, your old way of thinking, your old way of doing things, and your old conduct. What is the new man? The new man is that which is regulated and controlled by the Word of God. It is the biblical man. We have to put off, and we have to put on.

How do we put off and put on? I can pull off this vest simply by reaching up and taking it off. If I want a coat on, I reach over, get the coat, and put it on. It is that simple. It is really that simple when it

comes to spirituality and godliness: we have to put off our old way of thinking and learn a new way of thinking. That is why Paul says, "and be renewed in the spirit of your mind." How do we put on? By renewing our minds.

The word renew is an interesting word. It is ananeoo in the Greek, and it literally means to renew, to renovate, and to reform. Let me give you an illustration. Suppose I were a real estate agent—I am not—but suppose I were, and you came to me and said, "I'm a handyman, a fixer-upper. I'd like to have twenty or thirty acres outside of town with an old house on it that I can fix up." I would say, "You know, I think I've just got the right piece of property for you. Come on, let's go look at it." I take you outside of town, and here are about twenty-five acres. The grass needs cutting, and an old house sits on it, having slipped off its foundation a little bit.

The porch is falling in, the windows are broken, the roof is caved in, and the inside is terrible. I said, "You know, I can let you have this old house and these 25 acres for forty thousand bucks." You look at me and say, "Sir, I told you I was a handyman and a fixer-upper, not a miracle worker. I wouldn't touch that with a 10-foot pole." I said, "OK." Then I get to thinking, I like this place. I could fix this up.

So I buy it. I get Joe and Henry, Warren Luke to come over. They redo the foundation. They fix the porch and the roof, put in new windows, re-gut it, and redo it inside out. They cut all the grass and plant flowers. I mean, they have it in A number one shape. After three months, I bring you back and say, "Let me show you this place that you didn't like before."

You look at it and say, "Wow. Wow. I never dreamed this place could look like this. Did you say it was $40,000?" "Yeah, that was before. Now let's ask $100,000." Why all of a sudden are you interested the second time when you were not interested the first time? Because everything had been renovated. It was renewed. In other words, listen carefully, it was totally different from what it was previously. Are you listening?

You know what godliness is? It is being someone totally different than you were previously, and you get to be renewed and reformed

by the renewing of your mind—that is, by submitting your mind to the Word of God and learning to think as he thought.

Bringing Every Thought Captive to Christ

Romans 12:2 says, “And be not conformed to this world.” Do not be pressed into the mold of the world. “Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed” how? “by the renewing of your mind.” First Peter 4 and verse 1 says, “Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind.” Philippians 2 and verse 5 says, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.” Second Corinthians chapter 10, verse 3 says, “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh.” Watch verse 4.

He says, “For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal” or fleshly, “but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds.” When the Apostle Paul says the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, he is not denigrating weaponry—an AR-15, a Glock, a bow and arrow, or a spear. He is saying that those kinds of weapons are not sufficient for the warfare he is talking about. Our weapons are mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds.

Do you know what a stronghold is? A stronghold is your place of defense. If someone came through that door with a shotgun, like we just read about in the church in South Carolina, I would jump down behind this pulpit. You say, “That’s not much.” It is better than what you have. If I jump down behind this pulpit, what is this pulpit now? It is my stronghold, my place of defense.

Now look back at verse four: “For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds.” You do not know where man’s stronghold is. Here it is. Verse five says, “Casting down imaginations, and every high thing” or every high thought “that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.” Now, here is my question: How many thoughts?

As a Christian, are you allowed any thoughts that are unbiblical? Not one. Every thought is to be brought into subjection, into captivity, to Jesus Christ. To renovate, reform, and renew our

thinking, we must submit our minds to the Word of God and learn to think the way God thinks. We are to take a biblical attitude and a biblical mindset. An attitude is a mindset, a frame of reference, a way of thinking that influences and affects behavior. Scripture says, "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." Therefore, as Christians, we should have biblical attitudes.

Biblical Mindset Determines Biblical Action

Our actions are determined by what we think, what we believe, and what we understand. Consider the word abortion. When I say abortion, most of you, if not all of you, immediately think of murder, because that is what it is. As Christians, you and I are not going to engage in it, support it, or endorse it. Why? Because we believe that it is murder, and we are simply not going to do it.

If I mention the word sodomy, I know what enters your mind, I hope: depravity, wickedness, violence, and, to some extent, reprobation and the death penalty. That is the biblical mindset.

I want you to see that our actions are determined by what we think, what we believe, and what we understand. The reason you are not robbing banks, defrauding individuals, or con men is because your theology and doctrine are, "Thou shalt not steal." I realize there are multiple forms of theft. Our conduct and actions are based upon our doctrine, the way we think, and the way we believe. That is why I keep saying you cannot act rightly unless you believe rightly.

Now, I've picked some of these very easy, simple subjects. I mean, I know you're not going to go to an abortion clinic. I know you're not going to support sodomy. I know you're not going out and rob a bank or try to con someone. I understand that. But let me mention a few other words and just see what your mindset is.

Suppose I use the word education. Do you realize there's a biblical doctrine of education? And I'll give you a hint: it ain't public education. Bad grammar, good theology, it ain't government schooling. Not according to the Bible. Do you understand the biblical doctrine about education? Here's another word: money. What do you think about money? What does the word of God teach about

money? How about civil government? What does the word of God teach about government? Here's another word: family.

How about this term, husband-wife relationships? Is there a biblical role for the wife, a biblical role for the husband? What about child discipline? How about justice, worship, and history? There are so many areas, so many subjects.

The Apostle Paul said, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”

Here's the truth of that: only individuals who have renewed minds will present their bodies a living sacrifice. If we do not renew our minds, we will never serve him.

In Daniel 3 and verse 28, after Nebuchadnezzar had pulled the three Hebrew children out of the fiery furnace, Nebuchadnezzar spake and said, “Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who hath sent his angel, and delivered his servants that trusted in him, and have changed the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God.” Why were Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego willing to go to the fiery furnace? Because they had a biblical attitude and a biblical mindset about God, refused idolatry, and yielded their bodies to the furnace rather than to sin against God.

"As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." You know what the Bible says: "Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: but as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy." We will never be holy people until we learn to think biblically. We will never be godly people till we learn to think biblically.

Applications: Ignorance Hinders Holiness; Grow in Knowledge

An ignorant man will never be a holy man. An ignorant man will never be a godly man. By an ignorant man, I am not talking about someone who does not have a college degree. You can have five college degrees behind your name and still be ignorant. I am talking about a man who is ignorant of the Word of God.

How can you obey that which you do not know? How can you act rightly if you do not believe rightly? The Bible says in 2 Peter 3:18, "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." The little word "and," kai, k-a-i in the Greek, is often translated another way in our Bibles, as the word "even." Thus, you could read 2 Peter 3:18, "But grow in grace, even in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." You are not growing in grace unless you are growing in knowledge.

The more we learn to think like our heavenly Father, the more godly and holy our actions will become. Matthew 5:44 says, "But I say to you," our Lord is speaking, "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven."

If we were to read all of Matthew chapter 5, we would find that our Lord is straightening out the Pharisees' misinterpretation of the law of God. Over and over, He said, "You've heard it said of them of old time, but I say unto you." What is our Lord doing? He is saying, I am telling you what the Word of God really teaches. Why?

So that you can apply it and obey it: “That ye may be the children of your Father.” Our children usually think the way we think. They act the way we act. And our Lord says, if you want to be the children of your heavenly Father, you had better learn to think as He thinks, so that you can act the way He acts. Godliness is nothing less than learning to think and act like our Heavenly Father and like His Son, Jesus Christ.

So the question is, are you godly? Are you growing in godliness? Are you increasing in knowledge? Lord, we ask You to make us godly, to make us holy, to teach us to think and to act like our

Heavenly Father, to submit our minds to the Word of God, and enable us to grow in grace, even in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Give us grace to serve Thee acceptably in reverence and godly fear. In Thy name we pray, Amen.

CHAPTER 13

The Supremecy of Christ in the Christian's Mind and Affections

August 9, 2012

The Supremacy of Christ over the Christian’s Mind and Affections

Brother Meyer, I appreciate your people, and I appreciate the Lord converting Brother Baker, too. Years ago, he and I had a discussion, and I finally told him, “Look, Brother, if you can be content to be John Wesley, I can be content to be George Whitefield.”

Introduction and Context

The subject today is the supremacy of Christ over the Christian’s mind and affections. In Colossians chapter 3, beginning with verse 1, we read: “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.”

Jesus Christ is Lord. Jesus Christ is God. Jesus Christ is the resurrected, glorified, majestic, supreme and sovereign God of heaven, and He deserves all honor, all praise, all glory and all worship. Jesus Christ must have His rightful place in everything.

If you look back to Colossians chapter 1, verses 15 through 17, we read concerning Christ: “who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature. For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers. All things were created by him, and for him. And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.”

Every genuine Christian would confess and acknowledge the truth of Colossians 1:15-17. But the question is not simply whether you confess and acknowledge that truth; do you apply that truth in your everyday life? What is it that you think about during your waking hours, and what is it that you think about when you lie down at night to go to sleep?

What is it, or may I ask, who is it that is controlling your thoughts, your imaginations, and your desires? Especially during the day, a thousand voices are screaming for our attention. But do you apply the Lordship and sovereignty of Jesus Christ to every aspect of your life, even those areas crying for your attention?

One of the charges that God places against the wicked is found in Psalm 10:4: "The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God. God is not in all of his thoughts." Notice that charge: "God is not in all of his thoughts." You may say, "But I just cannot think on the Lord Jesus Christ twenty-four hours a day. There are so many things that demand my attention and so many things that I must do."

When I work, I have to be careful that I do not hurt myself. I understand that, but the truth is this: We can think of whatever we do in reference to Christ, His kingship, and His sovereignty. My wife and I plant a garden. My job is to take the tractor and harrow it up; the planting, harvesting, and preserving are her job, and it works well that way. Yet whether you are planting a garden or doing anything else, you can do it in reference to the kingship and

sovereignty of Jesus Christ, knowing that He is King of kings and Lord of lords and God of gods. You must plant in faith, for whatsoever is not of faith is sin. The Bible says in Proverbs 21:4, "An high look, a proud heart, and the plowing of the wicked, is sin." Therefore, even planting a garden must be done in reference to the kingship and worship of Jesus Christ.

The Duty Enjoined

The Duty Enjoined: Risen with Christ

The same truth can be applied to child discipline, to economics, to the home, to education, and to any subject that concerns us. In other words, Jesus Christ has to have supremacy in our hearts and minds.

First, consider the duty enjoined in Colossians 3:1: “If ye then be risen with Christ.” Literally, it is saying that you are risen with Christ, or since you are risen with Christ. The Apostle Paul bases his exhortation upon the truth that he has previously stated in Colossians 2:11–12: “In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.”

The Bible tells us in Romans 6:4, “Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” Just as Jesus Christ was buried and resurrected, we who are in Christ have died in Him, have been buried with Him, and have been resurrected with Him. We have also ascended with Him. Ascension always follows resurrection. After our Lord was ascended, He sat down on the right hand of God the Father.

There is an interesting truth in Ephesians 2, because the Scripture teaches us very clearly that we ascended in Christ. Ephesians 2:4 says, “But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”

In the ages to come, God might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. The Bible tells us that He has raised us up together and made us sit together in heavenly places in Jesus Christ. We have ascended into the heavenlies with Christ. What does that mean? It means that we should therefore walk in a heavenly manner. It is not the old adage that we are so heavenly minded that we are no earthly good. Rather, we are so heavenly minded that we do and are of earthly good, because we apply the truths of God to our everyday life. Our earthly walk is controlled by Christ and by His Word. Having been raised from the dead in Him and having ascended into heaven in Him, we also live as He lived and walk as He walked.

The Bible makes this exceedingly clear in 1 John 4:17: “Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.” As He is, so are we in this world. Our minds, actions, attitudes—everything—is controlled by the kingship and lordship of Christ. In Colossians chapter 3, verse 1, the duty is enjoined: “If ye then be risen with Christ.” The duty is established: “seek those things which are above.” Christ sought me as a sinner; now I must seek Him as a saint.

The Duty Established: Seek Things Above

He came down from heaven to draw His people to heaven. He suffered death that we might live unto Him. Philippians 2:5 says, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.” Christ, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. 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 every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.”

We are told in Matthew chapter six and verse twenty, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth

corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal." Then Matthew six and verse thirty-three says, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." You remember Philippians three and verse twenty: "For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ."

If we are risen with Christ, or since we are risen with Christ, here is a duty that is established: we must seek those things which are above. The question is, what are those things which are above? How do we seek those things which are above? Let me answer that in several ways.

First of all, look in Acts chapter one and verse three, and see how our Lord walked and talked after He was resurrected. The Bible says, "To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God." What did our Lord do? He spoke of things pertaining to the kingdom of God. In other words, He was speaking of those things which are above, so to speak.

Seeking those things which are above would be the same thing as what Abraham did in Hebrews 11, verses 8-10: "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God."

Abraham's life was basically controlled by the Word of God, by the promises of God. In fact, all of our forefathers in the faith lived the same way. We are told in Hebrews chapter 11, "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth."

So seeking those things which are above means basically that we deny our flesh and our own selfishness, seeking those things which

are truthful and eternal, not necessarily those things that are temporal.

Now we know that we have to live. If the Lord allows me to live next week, I am going to have to eat and have clothes. But what did our Lord say? We are not to be concerned about those things. He knows that we have need of them and understands that. The way we seek those things above is what Peter admonished us in 1 Peter 2:11: "Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul." Abstain from those things. Why in the world would you do something when you know you ought not to be doing it to begin with?

It is like a person who was trying to lose weight visiting a Baskin-Robbins ice cream shop. Why would you do that if your real intention is to lose weight? I heard one man say that he had been on a diet and had done so well. He passed a Krispy Kreme donut shop and thought it would please the Lord for him to reward himself with a Krispy Kreme donut. He said that he made it a matter of prayer: "Lord, if you really want me to have a Krispy Kreme donut, I want you to have a parking place for me right in front of the store." After ten times around the block, he found one.

The Bible says that we are to make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lust thereof. Why in the world would we do something when we know that—listen, there are enough problems that we get into without even trying? Our minds should be controlled by the Word of God. So Peter tells us that we are to abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against our souls.

What does it mean to seek those things which are above? We seek them when, in our minds, we are truly sojourners in this world. We are not bound to it. When we seek a better and a heavenly country, the continuing city which is above in the heavens, whose builder and maker is God, we are seeking Christ and heaven and trusting in Him alone for salvation. Seeking those things which are above means that we live in obedience to Christ and His word, bringing our lives into conformity to that word. It means that we live by His righteousness.

Stop and think about this. God does command us to pray, but it is not our prayer that is really important; Christ is important. We live

by faith, and yet it is not our faith. Faith is merely an instrument; Christ is the object of that faith. Everything revolves around Jesus Christ. He is indeed the center of the universe, and for the child of God, He is the center of our universe.

So we have the duty enjoined in verse 1, the duty established in verse 1. Thirdly, look at the duty emphasized: “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.” Where is Christ? He is seated at the right hand of God. Since Christ is there, since He is the object of our supreme attachment, we should fix our affections on things above, on heavenly things, and live with Christ now by faith as we are being prepared to live for Him in eternity.

The Duty Emphasized: Where Christ Sits

One of the most blessed petitions of our Lord's prayer in John 17 and verse 24 is this: "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world." Our Lord prayed that we would be with Him, that we may behold His glory. We cannot behold the ultimate, absolute, and complete glory of Christ right now, but we can still behold His glory by faith. We may glory in the fact that all authority in heaven and earth is given unto Him. We may glory in the fact and realization that He must rule until He has put all His enemies under His feet. We must glory in the fact and exalt in the truth that Jesus Christ is God incarnate, perfect God and perfect man. We can glory and exalt in the truth that He is our mediator, intercessor, Savior, provider, and protector.

He is our all in all. We can glory in that and glimpse it even now by faith. The very fact that He is seated at the right hand of the Father means that in Him and through Him we have full and unfettered access into the Father. In the Old Testament, not only in the tabernacle but in the temple, the high priest went in only once a year, and that not without blood. What would happen to anyone who tried to run into the Holy of Holies on his own? Outside of the fact that he would have been killed by God if he had even made it that far, the Levites were armed and charged with protecting Aaron, the

tabernacle, and the temple. Probably the Levites would have killed him before he ever got in there. Can you imagine? Only Aaron could go in, only once a year.

The Bible tells us in Ephesians 2:18, “For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.” Hebrews 4:16 says, “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” Let us come boldly. Can you imagine that? Hebrews 10:19 says, “Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh.” Can you imagine that we may boldly come unto God the Father through Jesus Christ? In one sense of the word, He has made it absolutely simple and absolutely easy to get to God the Father. It must be through the merits of Jesus Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit of God. But in Him, we may have boldness to come.

Why do you and I run all of our lives, oftentimes in misery and ignorance, when we may boldly come to our Father through our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ? Since Jesus Christ is God, He is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. He encompasses us by His power. He knows our hearts. He knows our desires. He is with us by virtue of the fact that He is everywhere at once in the totality of His person. We are never alone, never forsaken, and always in His presence.

Such knowledge should motivate us not only to holiness and godliness, but to greater obedience, and to set our affection on things above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.

The Duty Exercised: Set Affection on Things Above

Notice, if you would, in verse two, the fourth thing: the duty exercised. He says, “Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.” In this verse, we have a positive and a negative. We are to set our affection on things above, positively, and negatively, not on things of the earth. So the question is, how do we do so? The word literally means to mind or to think on: mind or think on things above, not on things of the earth. John Gill, one of the great Baptist preachers, said, “The word signifies to mind them and think on

them, to favor and approve them, to be affectionately desirous of them and concerned for them. For where the treasure is, the heart should be. And as the saints' best things are above, their minds and affections should be there likewise. Their contemplation should be on those things, and their conversation should be in heaven."

They should regard nothing but what is there or comes from this. They belong not to this world, but to another and better country. Their citizenship is in heaven, and there, in a short time, they must have their everlasting residence. Therefore, they should seek after, highly prize, value, and set their affection on heavenly things, and not on things of the earth. They are not to mind earth and earthly things, temporal enjoyments, riches, honor, food, and the necessaries of life. These are to be sought after, cared for, and provided for, yet not with anxiety and perplexity of mind, in an over-thoughtful and distressing manner. Nor should the heart be set on those outward things, or happiness placed in possession of them.

I remember hearing about a multimillionaire who died. One of the men looked at the other, who was seated there, and asked, "How much did he leave?" The other man turned and said, "He left it all." And that is true.

Now, notice what Gill is saying. The primary emphasis of our life should be on Christ and His Word. We have daily chores and many things that we must do and concentrate upon, but we are not to be anxious or distressed over them. Whatever we do in those areas, we are still to do in reference to the lordship, kingship, and sovereignty of Jesus Christ.

Contrast what John Gill just said, and what Scripture is teaching in Colossians 3, with what Scripture says concerning the ungodly. Philippians 3:19 says, "Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things." All the wicked have is this life. All they can have is what they can get here and now. Their thoughts, hearts, and affections are on earthly things. In Romans 8:5, the apostle Paul says, "For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh." All the ungodly know to do is please and fulfill their flesh.

Setting your affection on things above means that, by grace, you have learned to love heavenly things, study them, enjoy them, and allow your heart to be totally and completely engrossed by them. Just stop and think: if we were as energetic for heavenly things after our conversion as we were for fleshly things before our conversion, we would probably be wonderful Christians. In setting your affection on things above, you have to learn several truths.

Philippians 2:5 says, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." Have you ever prayed, "Lord, help me to think like Christ, to talk like Christ, to walk and act like Christ"? If you have the mind of Christ, then you can't help but think and act and walk and talk like Christ. I like that passage in Philippians where Paul said, "I beseech Euodia, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord." Sometimes I mispronounce their names and say, "I beseech Odius and Stynchy, that they be of the same mind."

Because the two women were fussing. How do you get rid of the divisions? How do you get rid of the hard feelings? How do you get rid of the differences? The answer is very simple. Both of you—each of us—submit our minds to the Word of God, and we learn to think like Christ. Do you realize the Word of God says in 1 Peter 4:1 that we are to arm ourselves with the mind of Jesus Christ? How about that? Arm yourselves with the mind of Jesus Christ. In Romans 12:2 and Ephesians 4:23, he says, "And be renewed in the spirit of your mind." In other words, our minds are to be constantly renewed, in the sense that we are constantly having the mind of Christ.

I never will forget hearing about one prayer meeting where one person who was kind of wishy-washy was praying and said aloud, "Lord, fill us with thy spirit." Another brother said, "No, Lord, he leaks." You just stop and think about that. The problem is that all of us leak. We have to be armed with the mind of Christ. We have to be renewed in the spirit of our minds.

Practical Outworking: Bringing Every Thought Captive

Second Corinthians 10 is one of my favorite passages. In verse 4, the Apostle Paul says, "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds." When

Paul says the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, he is not dissing riflery, pistol shooting, archery, or fighting. No, no, no. All the apostle Paul is saying is that carnal weapons will not work in the warfare we are fighting. “For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds.”

This is a military illustration. Do you know what your stronghold is? It is your place of defense. If someone came through that front door shooting, I would duck down behind this pulpit. This pulpit would be my place of defense; it would be my stronghold. You say it is not much. It is better than what you have. This is our stronghold, our place of defense. What are our strongholds?

Consider 2 Corinthians 10:4: “For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds.” Here is your stronghold: “Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.”

How many thoughts are you and I allowed that are unbiblical, ungodly, and unholy? None. Every thought is to be brought into captivity in obedience to Jesus Christ. Have you prayed that prayer? Have you asked God on a constant, daily basis that you would think only those thoughts that are pleasing to Him?

I want to tell you something about our minds. I still pray this: Each night before I go to sleep, I say, “Lord, please control my consciousness, my subconsciousness, my unconsciousness.” At one time I thought, Lord, if You will take care of my subconsciousness and unconsciousness, I might be able to control my consciousness. Then I realized I cannot even control my consciousness. Thoughts can fly through your mind in an instant, and you think, What? Where did that thought come from?

If you don't believe me, just get out and try praying. All of a sudden, thoughts will come through. Where did they come from? The flesh and the world and the devil can throw thoughts through your mind so quickly. Really and truly, it is not a sin for that thought to come into your mind. The sin comes when you back it up and say, "Whoa, wait a minute, I want to think on that a while." It is not a sin to be tempted; our Lord was tempted. He was tested.

Have you ever stopped to think that, no matter how hard you try, you cannot think about one thing at a time? If I were to reach in my pocket and hold up this little knife, and ask you what you saw, you might tell me it is a knife and that it is green. Then I do this and ask, "Tell me now what you see." You say, "A Bible. What cover? Black." You realize that while you were thinking about the knife, you were not thinking about the Bible. When you were thinking about the Bible, you were not thinking about the knife.

No matter how hard you try, you cannot think about one thing at a time. So when thoughts come into your mind that are unbiblical, unholy, and ungodly, say, "Lord, I refuse those. I will not have those in my mind." Then purposely and deliberately put your mind on some Scripture or some promise of God. Or say, like David, "I hate vain thoughts: but thy law do I love." Begin to think, "God said thou shalt not commit adultery" or "thou shalt not steal," whatever is applicable to your situation.

You have to learn, by the grace of God, to bring every thought and every imagination into captivity to Jesus Christ. There is a biblical form of economics, government, child discipline, husband-and-wife relationship, and everything imaginable. Your responsibility before God is to bring your heart and mind into conformity to that and think on these things. Let the Word of God control your mind. Why? Because Jesus Christ is King of Kings, God of Gods, Lord of Lords. He is the Sovereign. He is the Supreme. He has commanded, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." Can you imagine how it would change our lives if we learned to bring every thought and every imagination into subjection and captivity to Jesus Christ? Our hearts, minds, and thoughts are to be captivated by King Jesus.

SCRIPTURE READING - Romans 6:1-12 (KJV)

> Here is the duty explained. Colossians 3:3 says, "For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." How can he say, "If ye then be risen with Christ," or since you are 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"? Here is why: "For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God."

Now hold Colossians 3, and go back to Romans chapter 6. I want you to see the Apostle's argument here, and I am going to apply it because it is the same in Colossians chapter 3. Romans 6, verse 1:

The Duty Explained: Dead and Hidden with Christ

"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof."

He says, "God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?"

This contains a reason for the Apostle's implied statement as to why we should not continue in sin. According to Scripture, we are dead to sin. It is impossible for a dead man to act as if he were alive. It is just as absurd to suppose that a Christian, a real, genuine Christian, would desire to live in sin as it would be for a dead man to evidence life. When we are dead to something, it is a strong expression of the fact that it has no influence over our lives.

For the child of God, consider this: If we are dead to sin, and a temptation comes to commit adultery, the answer is no. If a temptation comes to steal, the answer is, "No, thank you." Whatever

the temptation may be, we can say, “No, sir, I will have none of it.” Do you know what Romans chapter 6 teaches? We are no longer under the lordship or kingship of sin. We are under the kingship of Jesus Christ.

Sin is not our Lord. For the unsaved, sin may be their lord. When sin speaks, they may jump, and when sin tells them to jump, they may ask, “How high?” But when sin tries to dictate to the child of God, we can say truthfully, “No, thank you. Jesus Christ is my Lord, not you. I will have none of that, because I am dead to sin.”

There are temptations everywhere we turn. We must make it a habit in our minds to say absolutely no to sin and temptation. We must always consider the biblical alternative: the law of God, what God commands us to do, and how He commands us to live. In 1 Peter 2:24, speaking about Christ, the Word of God says, “Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness.” We, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness. The fact and reality is that we are dead to sin.

Sin does not have dominion over us. It is not our Lord. Practically speaking, we have to impute, or count, ourselves dead. We must apply the biblical truth: “Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.” He did not say, “Let not sin therefore be in your mortal body,” but, “Let not sin therefore reign.” It is not to have control; it is not Lord. “Likewise reckon,” that is, count or impute yourself dead indeed unto sin.

Do you realize that sin can do nothing to a dead man? A dead man has no affections for it, no desires for it, and no thoughts concerned with it. He is dead. God says that is how we must count ourselves.

“For ye are dead,” that is, dead to sin. You died in Christ. “For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.” We are dead to sin because our life is hid with Christ in God. The word hid here means to hide, to remain concealed, locked, or locked together with. This is a combination lock that no burglar can ever open. Our lives are hid with Christ in God. The language is taken probably from treasure

that is hid or concealed in a place of security. The idea is that eternal life is an invaluable jewel or treasure laid up with Christ in God in heaven.

That is what he said in 1 Peter chapter 1. The truth of the matter is, it is absolutely, totally secure. That is why the Apostle Paul said in 2 Timothy 1:12, “For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.” Why can we not keep our minds when our life is really hid in Christ and we are dead to sin?

Years ago, I was driving home. It was late at night, and I was coming through Atlanta, Georgia. I was doing everything to stay awake. So I turned on the radio and searched for preaching. I picked up an old black preacher from Atlanta. I never knew who he was, but I never forgot what he said.

He was preaching from John 10, using our Lord's words that He gives His sheep eternal life, they shall never perish, and they are in His hand, while He is in God the Father's hand. The preacher put it this way:

"Now let me tell you. The Bible says that we are hid in Christ's hand, and Christ is in God's hand. If this is true, God the Son is not going to pluck you out of His hand. God the Father is not going to pluck you out of His hand. And God the Spirit is not going to pluck you out of His hand."

Conclusion and Prayer

And come to think of it, those are the only three who can do any plucking anyhow. Your life is hid with Christ and God. Jesus Christ is Lord; Jesus Christ is God. Jesus Christ is the supreme, sovereign Lord of heaven and earth, and we owe Him absolute allegiance. We must submit ourselves and bring every thought and every imagination into captivity to Jesus Christ.

Father, bless Thy Word, we pray. Teach us and build us up in the most holy faith. In Thy name we ask. Amen.

CHAPTER 14

The Supremacy of Christ Over the Christian's Mind

October 14, 2012

The Supremacy of Christ Over the Christian's Mind and Affections

Introduction: The Preeminence of Christ

Paul writes in Colossians 3:1–3: "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." Jesus Christ is Lord. Jesus Christ is God. Jesus Christ is the glorified, resurrected, majestic, supreme, and sovereign God of heaven and earth. He deserves all honor, praise, and glory.

Therefore, Jesus Christ must have His rightful place in everything. Colossians 1:15–17 declares concerning Christ: "Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or

principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist." The Bible declares that Jesus Christ is preeminent, that Jesus Christ is supreme, and that everything was created not only by Him but for Him as well.

The question is not simply whether you believe what the Bible reveals in Colossians 1:15–17 about Jesus Christ. The real question is whether you apply that confession to your daily life. This is not merely a doctrine to affirm; it is a truth that must govern the way you live.

I could ask you several questions. What do you think about during your waking hours? What is on your mind as you lie down each night to sleep? Who or what is controlling your thoughts, your imaginations, and your desires? You have to understand that there are multitudes of voices, multitudes of voices screaming for our attention today. In fact, you can look around and say, "I have so many demands upon my life. It is unbelievable."

And yet, one of the charges that God brings against the wicked and the ungodly is found in Psalm 10:4: "The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts." God is not in all of his thoughts. The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God.

It is true that it is impossible for you and I to think upon our Lord twenty-four hours a day in one sense of the word, because there are so many things that demand our attention and claim our attention. Yet whatever demands our attention and whatever claims our attention can indeed be thought of in reference to Christ, in reference to His kingship, sovereignty, and supremacy.

For instance, a number of us plant gardens. You say, "I've got to concentrate upon my planting." You may have to concentrate upon your planting in the sense that you want to put your vegetables so many inches or feet apart, with the rows so far apart. But at the same time, you can think about those things in reference to Christ and His sovereignty.

The Bible teaches, "whatsoever is not of faith is sin," Romans chapter 14, verse 23. And Proverbs 21:4 says, "An high look, and a

proud heart, and the plowing of the wicked, is sin." Think about that. The plowing of the wicked is sin. Does not God demand us to earn our living by the sweat of our brow? Yes. How then can the plowing of the wicked be sin? Because he does not plow in faith.

So when we plant our gardens, or whatever we do, we must do it in faith, in reference to the kingship and sovereignty of Jesus Christ. The same truth applies to cooking, child discipline, economics, the home, education—whatever area of life it is. You can think about these things in reference to Christ and His sovereignty. Now, I want to show you from Colossians chapter 3 the truths that God enforces upon our minds and our affections.

The Duty Enjoined: Since You Are Risen with Christ

The first point is the duty enjoined. Look what he says: "If ye then be risen with Christ." Literally, it is this: seeing then that ye are risen with Christ, or since ye are risen with Christ, the Apostle Paul is enjoining us to a certain truth.

If you will look back in Colossians 2, at verses 11 and 12, you will understand the first phrase of chapter 3: "In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead."

Turn also to Romans chapter 6 and look at verse 4. You might want to mark Romans chapter 6 in your Bibles because we will be coming back there a little bit later. Romans 6:4 declares: "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." Just as Jesus Christ was buried and resurrected, we who are in Jesus Christ have been crucified, buried, and resurrected in Him.

Now listen carefully. Ascension follows resurrection. What happened when God the Father raised Jesus Christ from the dead? It is true He was seen of His disciples, but the Bible tells us that He ascended up into the heavens. The Bible also teaches that we were

not only crucified with Christ, buried with Christ, and raised from the dead in Christ; we also ascended into heaven with Christ. For instance, look in Ephesians, chapter 2, beginning with verse 4. Ephesians 2 shows that we who have been resurrected with Christ have also ascended with Christ.

Ephesians 2:4 says, "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus." Note verse 6: "And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus."

If Jesus Christ is our head and we are His body, when He ascended, obviously we ascended as well. Since we have ascended in Christ, we should therefore walk in a heavenly manner. It is not the old adage that someone is so heavenly minded that he is no earthly good. It is not that at all. Since our Lord has ascended into heaven and we have ascended with Him, our walk should be heavenly—a godly walk by virtue of our union and our association with Jesus Christ.

The Duty Established: Seek Those Things Which Are Above

First John 4:17 says, "Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world." What will give us boldness in the day of judgment? Because we walked as Christ walked in this world. As He is, so are we in this world.

The Apostle Paul is enjoining us with this duty because Christ is risen from the dead and we are risen with Him. If, or since, ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above. That is the duty established. Do you realize that you have a duty, an obligation, and a responsibility to seek those things which are above?

Christ sought me as a sinner; now, therefore, I must seek Him as a saint. He left heaven and came down from heaven in order to draw

and bring His people to heaven. He suffered death that we might live. Philippians 2:5–11 says, “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.”

He tells us to seek those things which are above. Where is Christ? He is seated at the right hand of God. Our Lord gave us this same principle repeatedly in Scripture. Matthew 6:20 says, “But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal.” He also said in Matthew 6:33, “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”

Philippians 3:20 says, “For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.” The word conversation refers to our conduct, the totality of our lives. Thus our Lord has told us to lay up treasure in heaven, to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and that our conversation, or conduct, is in heaven, from whence we look for our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.

“Since ye then are risen with Christ, seek those things which are above.” What is seeking those things which are above? Let us answer that question by looking at what Christ did and what He spoke of after His resurrection. Look in your Bibles to Acts, chapter 1, and verse 3.

Acts 1:3 says of Jesus Christ, “To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.” What did Christ speak concerning after His resurrection? The answer is things that pertain to the kingdom of God. Seeking those

things which are above is therefore equated with speaking and dealing with those things that involve the kingdom of God.

Hebrews 11 shows how our forefathers in the faith sought those things which are above. Speaking of Abraham, it says, “By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; And he went out, not knowing whither he went. Now watch. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.”

God gave Abraham this big, wide piece of land. What did Abraham and his descendants do, especially Isaac and Jacob? They stayed in that land as strangers and sojourners. Why did they consider themselves strangers and sojourners? “For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” What Abraham understood was this. What Isaac and Jacob understood was this.

That which they had been given physically was a type and a shadow of the real heavenly city, that eternal home not made with hands. These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. Isn't that interesting? They say plainly that they seek a country. What is it to seek those things which are above? It is to be content with seeking the things of God and not necessarily everything that we have around us.

Peter said it in 1 Peter 2:11: “Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.” Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob counted themselves strangers, pilgrims, and sojourners. Now Peter says we are to count ourselves strangers, sojourners, and pilgrims by abstaining from fleshly lusts that war against the soul.

What is it to seek those things which are above? We seek those things which are above when, in our minds, we are truly sojourners

and pilgrims in this world, in the sense that we are not bound to it. This world is not my home. By “this world,” I mean the world system and everything it has. I am not a citizen of the new world order.

The truth of the matter is this: when we seek those things which are above, we are seeking a better and heavenly country, the continuing city whose builder and maker is God. God may reform this earth. He may purge this earth with fire and have us hear the eternal city that may be. For I, John, saw the heavenly city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven as a bride adorned for us. Wherever God gives us this continuing city, it will be His handiwork and not the handiwork of men.

And that is what we are looking for. Seeking those things which are above means that we have sought Christ for His salvation and are satisfied in that salvation. It means living in obedience to Christ and His Word alone, living by righteousness, living by His doctrine, honoring Him in every area of life, and bringing our lives into conformity to His Word. So He tells us, “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above.”

The Duty Emphasized: Where Christ Sits at God's Right Hand

Thirdly, note the duty emphasized. Verse one says, “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.” I hope you can see the argument the Apostle Paul is giving here. If Christ is indeed our supreme affection, if we view Him as worthy of everything in all praise, honor, and glory, and since Christ is seated at the right hand of God, that is where our affections should be if we love Him. We should love heavenly things, love them, and be willing to live with them now in time and history in preparation for eternity. What do you say? “I can't see Him now.” By faith you can.

You may not be able to be with Him now literally and physically, but soon you shall be in eternity. Do you know what our Lord prayed in John 17:24, in His high priestly prayer? He said, “Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.” What did our Lord

pray? “I will that those whom thou hast given me be with me.” Do you think that prayer is going to be answered? Of course it is.

We are already with Him in union and by faith. One day, literally, we shall be with Him. Even now, in time and history, we may behold His glory by faith. We may glory in the fact that all authority in heaven and earth has been given unto Him. We may exult in the truth that He must rule and reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. We may rejoice that He is our God incarnate, perfect man and perfect God, the mediator, intercessor, Savior, protector, provider, preserver, and our glorious Lord and King. We can rejoice in those things now.

But what does it mean when it says, “where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God”? Think about this for a moment. If Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father, if Ephesians chapter 2 is true—and it is—

We who have been saved by his grace have ascended with him. What does that imply? It implies that we have full and unfettered access to our heavenly Father. In the Old Testament, in the tabernacle and in the temple, only the high priest went into the holiest of all once a year, and that not without blood. The highest priest in the land could only go into the presence of God once a year.

The Bible says in Ephesians 2:18, “For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.” Through Jesus Christ, we have access by the Holy Spirit unto the Father.

Hebrews 4:14 says, “Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.” In light of this, that he is our great high priest, verse 16 says, “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”

If any of the Old Testament saints had any understanding of coming boldly into the presence of God when all they had was the blood of bulls and goats and heifers, the answer is no. They knew that if they went into that holiest of holies, they would

immediately killed. And yet here the Bible says that we may come boldly into the presence of God.

Hebrews 10:19 says, “Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, 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. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;).”

Note that he said, “Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus.” Since Christ is at the right hand of God, since we are in Christ, we died with Him.

We were buried with Him, raised from the dead in Him, and ascended into heaven with Him. Since He is at the right hand of God, we have full and unfettered access to God, our Heavenly Father. Why should we not commune with Him, fellowship with Him, pray to Him, worship and adore Him? We can do all these things through Jesus Christ, which the Old Testament saints did not have and could not do, because Jesus Christ is the new and living way.

Our Lord not only died to provide for us and give us forgiveness of sins; He also lives to make intercession for us and to give us that which He actually died for. He gives us His salvation. Since Christ is at the right hand of God, and since Christ is God—omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent—Jesus Christ is everywhere at one time in the totality of His person. Therefore, we can never, ever be left alone. Did He not promise, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee”? Such knowledge should motivate us not only to holiness, but also to seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.

The Duty Exercised: Set Your Affection on Things Above

Now go back to Colossians chapter three, because I want you to see the fourth point in verse two: “Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.” Here is the duty exercised. This is your

responsibility and obligation. Positively, you are to set your affection on things above. Negatively, you are not to set your affection on things of the earth.

I have read, and we also know some individuals to whom this happened, that when people under Nazi rule tried to escape, those who attempted to take all their belongings with them were soon captured and either imprisoned or shot. But those who put just a few shackles in their pockets and walked off as though they were taking a Sunday afternoon stroll—most of them made it. In fact, we know someone who got out of Hungary like that. They simply walked out and left everything.

It really does not matter what we have or how much we have. We are going to leave it all. Literally, the word here means to mind or think on things above. That is where the propensity of our affection should be: thinking on the things of God, scriptural truth, and biblical truth, and how to apply them to our lives.

John Gill says that setting our affection on things above signifies that we should mind and think on them, favor and approve them, be affectionately desirous of them, and be concerned for them. For where the treasure is, the heart should be. As the saints' best things are above, their minds and affections should be there likewise. Their contemplation should be on those things, and their conversation should be in heaven.

Nor should they regard anything but what is there or comes from thence, for they belong not to this world, but to another and better country. Their citizenship is in heaven, and there, in a short time, they must have their everlasting residence. Therefore, they should seek after, highly prize, and value heavenly things, setting their affections on them and not on things of the earth. They should not mind earth and earthly things—temporal enjoyments, riches, and honors. Though food, raiment, and the necessities of life are to be sought after, cared for, and provided for, this must not be done with anxiety and perplexity of mind in an over-thoughtful and distressing manner. Nor should the heart be set on those outward things, or happiness placed in possession of them.

Stop and consider: if your happiness is placed in the possession of things, what is going to happen when you lose those things? There goes your happiness. Things are not what make us happy. I want to contrast this for you by looking at two passages, Philippians chapter 3 and Romans chapter 8. Paul says, “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.” Here are earthly things: those who are unconverted, those who are the enemies of Christ.

What do the wicked do? They mind earthly things. What does minding earthly things cause? It causes you to have your belly as your God, your glorying in your shame, and to walk completely and totally contrary to the Word of God. If you look back in your Bibles to Romans 8:5, he speaks of the unconverted: “For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit.” What are the things of the flesh? You can read about them in Galatians 5: fornication, adultery, murder, theft, witchcraft—all these things.

Alice and I saw a car the other day with three bumper stickers on it. I remember two of them. The first said, “I’m a pagan and I vote.” The second said, “I love Obamacare.” The third said, “I love equality.” That was in Douglas, Georgia: “I’m a pagan and I vote, I love equality, and I love Obamacare.” No wonder he loves Obamacare and equality. He’s a pagan; that explains the other two. They mind earthly things. What does Scripture say? Set your affection on things above.

That means whatever we do, we are to do in reference to Christ, His Word, and His law. Whether we are fighting in a war, educating our children, cooking supper, or digging a ditch, we are to do it biblically, for God’s honor and glory and in faith, doing the best we can for our good and the good of God’s people.

Setting your affection on things above means that you have learned by grace to love heavenly things, to study them, to enjoy them, and to let your heart be engrossed entirely by them. Isn’t it amazing that many Christians have said they would rather be with

their church family or Christian brethren than with their own literal flesh-and-blood family? We have far more in common.

Here is what happens when you set your affection on things above. You learn the truth of Philippians 2:5: “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.” You learn to think, or at least desire to think, as Christ thought. You learn the truth of 1 Peter 4:1, where we are to be armed with the mind of Christ. We learn the truth of Romans 12:2 and Ephesians 4:23: “And be renewed in the spirit of your mind.” We also learn the truth of 2 Corinthians 10:4–5: “For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds.” Now listen carefully. Here is man’s stronghold: his mind. “Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.” That is setting your affection on things above: learning to think biblically and scripturally.

SCRIPTURE READING - Romans 6:1-9 (KJV)

When you learn to think the way Christ thought, setting your affection on things above is when your mind, your heart, and your affections are captivated by Jesus Christ and His grace and His mercy. I've often thought and pondered how it could be that God could save someone like me. Have you ever thought about that? When you stop and think about all of your sins, and yet He loved us with an everlasting love. He loved us while we were ungodly, while we were sinners, while we were wicked and in rebellion to Him. And then He saved us by His infinite grace. Wow. It's amazing that God has saved anyone. For we've all sinned against Him, and yet He's gracious and kind.

The Duty Explained: For You Are Dead and Your Life Is Hidden with Christ

Look in Colossians chapter three and verse three. He says, "For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God."

How in the world can I set my affection on things above and not on things of the earth? He tells you how: because you are dead and your life is hid with Christ in God. No one can rise with

> Christ until he has died with Christ. Death comes before resurrection.
>
> Look in Romans chapter six, verse one. Try to follow the apostle's argument. He asked, "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once:"

"But in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God."

Go back and look at verses 1 and 2. The apostle asks, "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?" And he says, "God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" Have you ever thought what it means to be dead to sin? The apostle is giving us a reason why we should not continue in sin: we are dead to sin. It is impossible for those who are dead to act as if they were alive. It is just as absurd to suppose that a real, genuine Christian should desire to live in sin as it is impossible that a dead man should put forth the actions of life.

To be dead to something is a strong expression, noting that it has absolutely no influence over us. A dead man is uninfluenced by

anything—the nightlife, the cabaret, the liquor, the rodeo, football, baseball, business, family, nothing influences him. He is absolutely, totally dead. When the Bible says that we are dead to sin, it teaches us that sin no longer has dominion over us. Sin is not our lord. Jesus Christ is our Lord.

The Apostle Peter uses this expression also. Speaking about Jesus Christ, 1 Peter 2:24 says, “Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.” Note that we are to be dead to sins. If we are in Christ, we are already dead to sin; sin does not have dominion or lordship over us.

You say, “But pastor, I still sin.” I understand that. It is true that we sin and fall short. That is a whole different message. Look in your Bibles to Romans 6, beginning with verse 11.

There's a vast difference between being perfect and willfully sinning. I cannot be perfect by virtue of the fact that I'm a sinner right now, but I am perfect in Jesus Christ. One day I will be perfect, totally and completely, by his grace in glorification. But just because I am falling short of his perfection now, in the fact that I am a sinner, does not mean that I willfully and premeditatedly desire sin. These are two totally different things.

Romans 6:11 says, "Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof." Notice that he did not say, Let not sin therefore be in your mortal bodies. It's there. But he said, Don't let it reign. How can we not let sin reign over us? The answer is that we reckon ourselves dead indeed unto sin. The word reckon literally means to count; it means to impute. God says, Count yourselves dead indeed unto sin; impute yourselves dead indeed unto sin.

Here comes sin knocking at your door, saying, Let us commit fornication. Let us get drunk, let us steal. Let us do so-and-so. And you say, I'm sorry, I'm dead. I can't perform your actions. What can a dead man do? Nothing. We have to count ourselves dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. If we recognize that sin does not have dominion over us, that sin is not our

Lord, we must also understand the truth of 1 John 2:1: "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." John said, I wrote these things so you will not sin. How do you not sin? By reckoning and counting yourself dead indeed.

Colossians 3:3 says, "For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." In counting ourselves dead, we refuse to allow sin to reign in us, govern us, direct us, or control us. Rather, we yield our lives unto God as alive from the dead, and we yield our members unto righteousness in obeying him. Your life is hid with Christ in God. The word hid means literally to hide, to remain concealed, to remain locked together with Christ.

Do you realize that our real, genuine life is so safe that there is not a hellish burglar who can break in to get it? Our life is hid with Christ in God. The language here is probably taken from a treasure hidden or concealed in a place of security. The picture is that our life and salvation are hidden with Christ in God, and they will be very safe there.

Spurgeon used to say it like this: “Plagues and death around me fly till he please, I cannot die. Not a single shaft can hit till the God of life sees fit.” Isn’t that amazing? The Apostle Paul said it like this in 2 Timothy chapter 1 in verse 12: “For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.”

What did Paul do? He committed his life, his salvation, and his soul unto Christ. He said, “I’m persuaded that he’s able to keep that which I have committed unto him unto that day.” Do you realize that Jesus Christ has never lost one for whom he died? There’s no saint that has ever been lost.

You say, “But, Brother Weaver, I know plenty of people who professed to be Christians and left the Christian faith.” Yes, that is why you need to read 1 John 2 verse 19, where John said: “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.”

Anybody who leaves the faith demonstrates that he was never in the faith to begin with. He never lost his salvation; he never had it to begin with. If he did indeed have salvation, John said, no doubt he would have continued with us. The proof that you have been saved by the grace of God is that you will continue in the grace of God, in repentance, and in faith.

I was traveling through Atlanta, Georgia, one night, probably about one or two in the morning, going home and doing everything I could just to stay awake. I kept turning the radio, trying to find some kind of Christian music, but couldn't.

Finally, I found some preaching by an old black preacher from Atlanta, Georgia. I never will forget that old, rough voice. He was preaching from John chapter 10: "I know my sheep, and I call them by name, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand."

I never will forget that old preacher when he said, "Now, listen. When God saved you, He puts you in the hand of Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ is in the hand of God. Mark it down: God, the Father won't pluck you out of His hand. God, the Son won't pluck you out of His hand. God, the Spirit won't pluck you out of His hand. And, come to think of it, them's the only three that can do any plucking anyhow."

That is the truth. Our life is hid with Christ in God. So we must set our affection on things above and not on things below.

Father, help us, we pray, in the name of Jesus Christ. We ask, Father, for Your grace and Your mercy and Your help. Give us, Lord, a heart that desires to live for Thee and to serve Thee. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 15

Hearing the Word of God

March 10, 2013

Introduction and Review of the Parable

In Mark 4:8 we read, “Another fell on good ground and did yield fruit that sprang up and increased and brought forth some thirty and some sixty and some a hundred.” In verse 20, our Lord interprets: “And these are they which are sown on good ground, such as hear the word and receive it, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred.”

It is important to remember that this parable is about hearing the Word of God. I told you that it is called the parable of the sower, but it could also be called the parable of the soils. Each soil represents a different hearer, and the response of that hearer to the Word of God is different. Our Lord is teaching us that there are four different responses to the preaching and teaching of the Word of God. These four types of hearers were present not only in our Lord’s day, but also in our day. Nothing has changed. Men are still sinners, and everyone will respond in one of these four ways. There is nothing new under the sun, as Solomon said. Predictably, these four

responses will be manifested each and every time the Word of God is preached.

We have already examined three of these hearers. First, there was the wayside hearer, also called the hard-hearted hearer. Secondly, there was the stony-ground hearer, whom we also call the shallow-ground hearer. Thirdly, there was the thorny-ground hearer, whom we also call the half-hearted hearer.

It is important to note that our Lord stated that each of these three responses to the Word of God was a non-saving response. In the wayside hearer, the Word was immediately stolen from him by Satan. In the stony-ground hearer, suffering, persecution, and trials drove him away from the Word of God. In the thorny-ground hearer, there was a man who tried to have and live a Christian life without real, genuine repentance.

If you grasp the significance of what our Lord is teaching, He is teaching that three-fourths of those who hear the Word of God are actually lost. They hear, but they do not hear savingly. They receive, but they do not receive savingly. It is an eye-opener when we realize from Scripture that not all responses to the Word of God are saving responses.

Good Ground Is the Result of Preparation

One may respond positively and yet still be lost because his response is not a biblical or saving response. Therefore, it behooves us to make sure that our response is indeed a genuine saving one. The Apostle Peter said in 2 Peter 1:10, “Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall.” We are to give diligence to make our calling and election sure.

The Apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians 13:5, “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?” Again, Paul tells us to examine ourselves, prove ourselves, and make sure, like Peter, that our calling and election are real, genuine, and saving.

When we sow the Word of God, we have absolutely no idea where the seed is going to fall. Some will fall on the wayside, some on stony ground, and some on thorny ground. Thankfully, some will also fall on good ground. The Bible says in Isaiah 32:20, “Blessed are ye that sow beside all waters, that send forth thither the feet of the ox and the ass.” In other words, we simply sow and do not know where that seed will fall. We are thankful, however, that some is inevitably going to fall on good ground, and then we will see what is known as the wholehearted hearer.

Good ground is also known as the wholehearted hearer. The Bible says, “Another fell on good ground and did yield fruit that sprang up and increased and brought forth some thirty and some sixty and some a hundred.”

Good Ground Is the Result of Preparation

Good ground is the result of preparation. Anyone who has ever gardened understands that good ground simply does not happen. There is no such thing as naturally good ground when it comes to spiritual truths. Proverbs 16:1 says, “The preparations of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, is from the LORD.” We are taught, then, that man can neither think nor speak without God.

If this is true in the physical sense, and it certainly is, how much more true is it in the spiritual realm? Our hearts must be prepared toward Him and toward His government because of our depravity. By nature, man hates God. Romans 8 states this very plainly concerning natural man: "For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against 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."

When he says the carnal, fleshly mind is enmity against God, the word enmity means a strong word for extreme hatred. Literally, he says the carnal mind, or the mind by nature, holds extreme hatred toward God. Therefore, they that are in the flesh cannot please God.

Obviously, there is no good ground here. By nature, our lusts and our flesh long for fulfillment, even to the point of trespassing against God's law. All one has to do is look around and observe what is

happening. Rape, repining, murder, theft, fornication, and adultery are prevalent in our land today. All of this is done and thrown in God's face with a defiant attitude.

The sinner's attitude is this: No one will stop me from fulfilling my lust—not even God Himself. I do not care what God says or commands. I want what I want, and I am going to do it the way I want to do it. If I must sin against God and violate God's law to fulfill the lust of my flesh, that is exactly what I am going to do. If I have to do despite to the Spirit of grace, trample His Word under my feet, or reject His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, that is what I will do, that I might fulfill and satisfy my lust.

So there is no good ground here. By nature, we all have hearts of stone. By nature, there are no naturally good hearts. Each of us has referred to folks we have known in times past, saying, “They’re good-hearted people.” That might be true as far as man is concerned, but it is certainly not true as far as God is concerned. As far as God is concerned, there are no naturally good-hearted people.

If you look in your Bibles to the book of Romans, chapter three, let us begin reading with verse 10 and see what the Word of God says. Notice how God simply lays this out very clearly. Romans 3:10–12 says: “As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.” God says that, by nature, there is absolutely no one who does good. We have all gone out of the way and become unprofitable.

When I say that by nature we have a heart of stone, you must remember that a heart of stone is a cold, dead, unfeeling, and uncaring heart. It is the kind of heart that is in man by nature. If a heart is not changed through regeneration and conversion, it will remain cold, dead, and blind. Let me show you.

I want you to turn in your Bibles to the book of Ezekiel, chapter 11. We will look at several passages. Look, if you would please, at verse 19. God says concerning his people, “And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh.” Note that God

said, “I will take away the stony heart out of their flesh.” Turn over to Ezekiel, chapter 36, and look at verse 26. Again, God says it very clearly: “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.” So unless God prepares our hearts and gives us a heart of flesh, we will never hear his word savingly.

And we will never love Him. God must sovereignly and powerfully write His law in our hearts. He does so in such a way as to make us what the Scripture calls living epistles.

Years ago, I heard a message on this passage from a preacher who has been dead many, many years now. He titled his sermon “The High Cost of Writing Paper.” I liked the message so well that I took his outline down. One of these days, I will probably preach his outline. It is a wonderful message, but you will understand what I mean when I talk about the high cost of writing paper.

The Apostle Paul says, “Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.”

So what does God write upon our hearts? He writes His law upon our hearts. He enables us to love Him and to love His truth.

The new covenant is the covenant that He is going to make with His people through the Lord Jesus Christ: “Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord.”

"I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people." So God writes his laws in our hearts. In Hebrews 10:16, He says exactly the same thing again: "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."

What does God do when He gives us a new heart, or a fleshly heart? The truth is, He writes His Word in our minds and in our hearts. Now a question should come to your mind. I just read from the book of Ezekiel how God said that, by nature, we have stony hearts, and that God will give us a fleshly heart and write His law into our hearts. How, then, does God break up our stony hearts?

Have you ever thought about that? How does God break up our stony hearts? Turn back in your Bibles to the book of Jeremiah, chapter 23, and look at verse 29. I love this passage. Jeremiah 23:29 says, "Is not my word like as a fire? saith the LORD; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?"

What does God use? We understand that giving us a new heart is the work of the Holy Spirit of God. We normally answer that we get our new heart through the ministry and work of the Holy Spirit. But it is the Holy Spirit who uses the Word of God to break our stony hearts into pieces. He uses the hammer of the Word of God to break us under our cold, hard, stony hearts.

I enjoy reading as well as hearing the testimonies of other believers. I have been absolutely amazed at the different Scriptures that God has used to awaken people from their sins and from their slumber. I remember reading—I think it was Augustine—who was converted after he heard the passage in Romans, I think it is chapter 13: “Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame.” God simply used that passage.

I have heard other men come to me broken and say, “The Lord really spoke to me. Look at this.” I would read that same passage and say, “That is a great passage. That is a great truth.” But it did not affect me the way it affected them. There are other passages that affected me that never affected them. It is amazing how the Holy Spirit uses the Word of God in our conviction and conversion. The same passage may be used by God in one person's awakening, while another person is affected by an entirely different passage.

Notice the terms used in reference to the good-ground hearer. The good-ground hearer, known as the wholehearted hearer, hears far more than simply externally. His hearing is not merely an outward

hearing. This parable is found in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. In Matthew chapter 13, verse 23, we see that the preparation of the heart by God is what produces good ground: “But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.”

The good-ground hearer not only hears the Word of God; he understands it. Without understanding, it does you no good to hear. So the good-ground hearer, the wholehearted hearer, hears and understands. Luke chapter 8, verse 15, says: “But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.” They receive the Word in an honest and good heart. Having heard the Word, they keep it. They do not merely hear the Word externally; they receive it, understand it, and bring forth fruit with patience.

None of these terms were used in reference to any of the other hearers. They were not used in reference to the wayside hearer, the stony ground hearer, or the thorny ground hearer. Each one of those was absolutely fruitless. In Luke 8:12, our Lord tells us concerning the wayside hearer: “Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.” Obviously, the wayside hearer was lost.

In Mark 4:15, the Lord says, “And these are they by the way side, where the word is sown; but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts.” Watch now the stony ground hearer: “And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground.” The stony ground hearer, then, is just as lost as the wayside hearer.

When you get to Luke 8:14, the Bible says, “And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection.” When our Lord is talking about the good ground hearer, obviously he is the only one that produces fruit.

Look at Mark 4:20. We are talking about the good ground hearer; his soil is prepared: “And these are they which are sown on good

ground; such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred." The word "receive" here is paradechomai in the Greek. It means to receive, to take up, to take to oneself, to acknowledge to oneself, and to admit it to oneself. In other words, the man who hears is the man who takes this word and makes it his own. That is how he understands. Luke 8:15 says, "They on the good ground are they that receive it in a good and honest heart."

Now, the point I'm trying to make is this: it's only the good and honest heart that produces fruit. By nature, by nature, we do not have a good and honest heart. In fact, it's just the opposite. Do you not remember in Jeremiah 17:9, where the Scripture says, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" So if our hearts are prepared, it must be prepared. They must be prepared by sovereign, supernatural, and powerful work of God. So the good ground hearer, the wholehearted hearer, is the man whose ground is prepared.

Only Good Ground Hearers Produce Fruit

Now, there's a second truth I want you to see today, and that is this: I've already hinted at it. Only good ground hearer is to produce fruit. Only good ground hearer is to produce fruit. In Matthew 13:23, the Bible says, "But they that receive the seed in the good ground, as he that heareth the word and understandeth it, who also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty." In Mark 4:20, "And these are they which are sown on good ground, such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred." And Luke 8, they receive the word and bring forth fruit with patience. Now, I've pointed out to you already, I'm saying this again, none of the others produced any fruit. Only the good ground hearer produced fruit. Do you understand that fruit is the only evidence of life? Fruit is the only evidence of life. The wayside hearer had no fruit. The shallow-hearted or stony ground hearer had no fruit.

The thorny ground hearer had no fruit. It was abortive. He brought forth no fruit to perfection. Only the good ground hearer produced fruit.

Now, I want you to turn in your Bibles to the book of John chapter 15, and look if you would, beginning there with verse 1. John 15:1, and let's read the first six verses. And I want you to see how our Lord is talking about fruit. John 15, beginning with verse 1, our Lord said, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit."

"Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned."

Note several things in this passage. First, our Lord talks about fruit, more fruit, and much fruit. In all probability, these six verses correspond to the thirtyfold, the sixtyfold, and the hundredfold spoken of in the parable of the sower.

In verse five He says, "I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned."

Two things are evident here. First, our Lord said that if any man abides in Him, and He in him, the same brings forth much fruit. Obviously, if you are not abiding in Him, you are not bringing forth fruit. Therefore, in verse six, if someone does not abide in Him, if he is not bringing forth fruit, he is cast forth as a branch.

It is lopped off, cut off. What happens? It withers, shrivels, and dries out. It has no life in it. Therefore, it is picked up and burned.

You say, "But wait a minute, Brother Weaver. That's an illustration, yes. But an illustration of what?" It illustrates those who have no fruit in their lives. Those who have no fruit in their lives are unsaved. Our Lord says very obviously that they are gathered up, cast into the fire, and burned. Do you understand? The reason they

are fruitless is because they are unsaved. It is impossible to be saved and not bear fruit.

In Galatians chapter five, verse 22, the Bible says, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law." Note carefully: the fruit of the Spirit is.

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance. These are all of those fruits. Now, if the Holy Spirit of God resides in us, there is going to be fruit. It is just that simple. It may be thirtyfold, sixtyfold, or a hundredfold, but there is going to be fruit.

Romans 8:9 says, “But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you.” Remember, we just read what the fruit of the Spirit really was. If the Holy Spirit of God dwells in you, you are in the Spirit. If the Holy Spirit of God dwells in you, what does that mean? It means you are going to have fruit. The verse continues, “Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.” If any man does not have the Spirit of God, he does not have any fruit. His lack of fruit evidences that he does not have the Spirit of God and therefore does not belong to Christ.

It is impossible to be saved and to be fruitless. It is impossible because if the Holy Spirit of God resides in us, He is the one who produces the fruit, and there is going to be some fruit. Good ground is not only prepared ground; good ground is the only kind that produces fruit.

Varying Degrees of Fruit

Here is the third truth: Good-ground hearers produce varying degrees of fruit. What did our Lord say in Matthew and in Mark? Our Lord said that some brought forth a hundredfold, some sixtyfold, and some thirtyfold. Every true believer is going to produce fruit. You may not produce as much as someone else, but you are certainly going to produce fruit. Each of these passages teaches that you will bring forth a hundredfold, sixtyfold, or thirtyfold.

Now, let me try to explain this and give you a good illustration. Consider the plants in your garden. Some outperform others. Some are stronger and more resilient, continuing to produce fruit even when other plants have died. I remind you of this to ask you several questions. Have you ever wondered why our Lord said that some bring forth thirtyfold, some sixtyfold, and some a hundredfold? Do you expect a six-week-old plant to produce as much fruit as a twelve-week-old plant? You might expect it, but it will not happen. Do you expect a twelve-week-old plant to produce as much as a twenty-four-week-old plant? You might expect it, but it will not happen. Do you know why? The very answer is really simple: plants bring forth fruit according to their maturity. If they are not mature, they will not bring forth the fruit you think they should.

Obviously, then, you expect plants to produce according to their age and maturity. Christians are the same. We always produce according to our age and maturity.

Now, let me explain to you very quickly and demonstrate why Matthew and Mark mention varying degrees of fruit. If you understand it, it will keep you from wrongly condemning other believers and from being upset with them at times. There are times you should be upset with them, which I will explain later. But most of the time we become upset for no reason at all, because we do not understand this simple principle.

In 1 John 2:12, the Apostle John writes to Christians: “I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name’s sake. I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father. I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.” He labels believers as little children, young men, and fathers.

It is impossible to make a six-week-old plant bear fruit the way a twenty-four-week-old plant will. Likewise, it is impossible to make a babe act like a young man or to make a young man think and act like a father. Babies, or little children, think and act according to their

maturity. Young men think and act according to their maturity. Fathers think and act according to their maturity. We cannot expect a child to produce the same amount of fruit that a young man does, nor can we expect a young man to produce the same amount of fruit as a father does.

When we examine and condemn other Christians for not understanding what we understand, or for not producing the way we produce, we may be comparing apples with oranges—comparing a babe with a young man, or a young man with a father. A young Christian, a new believer, is not going to act like someone who has been saved fifteen or twenty years. And someone who has been saved fifteen or twenty years, if he has matured, is not going to act like someone who has been saved forty, fifty, or sixty years.

There is a difference in maturity. When you look at other Christians and commune in fellowship with them, you have to do so based upon their maturity. A babe cannot handle strong meat, and a young man cannot handle that which a father handles.

Fruit Bearing with Patience

Fruit Bearing Must Be Accomplished with Patience

As they were able to bear it, there are some truths that some young Christians are just not able to bear right now. That is a fact. So the good-ground hearer must be a prepared hearer. He is the only one who produces fruit, and we have to understand that there are varying degrees of fruit.

Fruit bearing must be accomplished with patience. Our Lord says in Luke 8:15, “But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.” We understand patience when it comes to gardening. No one expects to sow one day and reap the next, except Linda. She was already expecting fruit on a young plant.

You do not sow one day and expect to reap the next. Patience is required simply because, when the seed is planted, it may take months before that plant is able to produce. Patience is required

because fruit does not appear immediately; the planted seed must develop before the plant can produce.

Our Lord said in Mark 4:28, "For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear." When you plant a grain of corn and that stalk comes up, you do not run out and gather that corn. Even when the stalk gets high, and a little shoot comes out with a little silk sticking out of it, you do not gather the corn. You have to wait until that corn matures. Our Lord is saying, here are the stages.

Maybe it is thirtyfold, sixtyfold, or a hundredfold. Everybody understands that gardens do not mature overnight. Neither do Christians. It takes time, and time requires patience. It is our responsibility to bring babes to be young men and to bring young men to be fathers. Children do not grow up overnight, and neither do Christians.

But it is frustrating when you see a plant that should be producing fruit, or at least should be producing more fruit than it is. You are disappointed when you do not see the fruit that should really be there. When you examine the plant, you may think, "Oh, well, here is the problem. This plant is stunted. It never really matured. It never really grew like the other plants." Why was it stunted? The answer is that there were problems with that plant. Although it is our responsibility to bring babes to young men and young men to become fathers, we understand that this requires time and patience.

However, when one should be a father and is still a young man, or when one should be a young man and is acting like a baby, something is wrong. The Apostle Paul had this same problem. In 1 Corinthians 3:1–4, he wrote: "And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?"

I certainly do not adhere to or believe in what is known as the carnal Christian theory. That theory says there are some people who

are genuinely saved, but who live according to the flesh and live like the devil. The word carnal here means fleshly, but notice what their fleshliness consisted of in this passage: choosing preachers whom they liked more than others.

That is why some say, “I am of Paul, I am of Apollos, I am of Cephas,” while others say, “I like Christ, I don't like these fellows.” Their fleshliness was immaturity in understanding the preaching and teaching of the Word of God. It was not drunkenness, whoremongering, murder, or theft. No. But the Apostle Paul said, “I had to treat you like babes. I had to feed you with milk and not with meat because you're not able to bear it. Neither yet now.” They had not matured. They were stunted and had problems. Their problem was that they were fleshly: they were not listening, not understanding, and not bringing their lives into conformity to the Word of God.

Hebrews 5 says, “Called of God an high priest after the order of Melchisedec. Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing. 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.”

Notice what the apostle says: everyone that uses milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness. Can you imagine that? You don't know the Word. You don't know how to apply the Word. Strong meat belongs to them that are of full age, that is, those who are mature, even those who by reason of use have exercised their senses to discern both good and evil.

While patience is required, those who refuse to grow up need a sound rebuke and chastening. We may have patience with someone while he is maturing, but we cannot exercise patience toward those who refuse to mature and grow up. The truth is that God holds us accountable and responsible.

Paul wrote to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:2, “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.” What Timothy learned from Paul, he was to teach to faithful men who would be able to teach others. Paul taught Timothy, Timothy taught them, and they would teach others.

Notice that Paul told Timothy to teach faithful men; he did not tell him to teach unfaithful men. I am more than happy and willing to teach faithful men. But if you think for one minute that I am going to run you down, burp you, and stick a bottle in your mouth, you have another thought coming. If you wish to remain immature and refuse to listen and be thankful for the preaching and teaching of the Word of God, then the Father will have to deal with you if you are His child. He will chasten you as He thinks best.

You cannot make a stunted plant produce more fruit, nor can you make a stunted Christian mature. He has to be dealt with. Something is wrong and must be corrected. Therefore, if he refuses to mature, he will be judged and chastened by the Father as the Father sees fit.

Why would you waste your time trying to nourish a stunted plant that will not produce when you could spend your time nourishing healthy plants that will produce? That is why Paul told Timothy, “The things which thou hast seen and heard of me, the same commit thou to faithful men who shall be able to teach others also.” We are to spend our time on those who genuinely want to learn.

Yes, there are times when Christians must be rebuked, admonished, and confronted, especially when they are acting like babes and little men, when in reality they should be mature adults.

Applications of the Word

Applications

Here is the first application: We cannot expect fruit except from good ground. We will not get any fruit from the wayside hearer, the stony ground hearer, or the thorny ground hearer. The only ground that is going to produce fruit is good ground, and that ground has

been prepared by God the Holy Spirit through conviction. Conviction comes by the Word of God, and that Word is to be received in meekness and humility and repentance. This whole parable is about individuals who responded to the Word of God, but it was a non-saving response. Good ground always produces fruit, and it always produces fruit in varying and differing degrees.

The second truth is this: We cannot benefit from the Word of God unless we have a good and honest heart. Only God can give us a good and honest heart. How can we tell whether or not we have a good and honest heart? A good and honest heart will always agree with God, our Heavenly Father. It will agree with His Word. It is one thing that we must learn: to be in submission to the Word of God, to obey the Word of God, and to bring our life into conformity unto it.

The third and final application is this: Each Christian has a responsibility to read, study, learn, and apply the Word of God in his own life. No pastor, no deacon, and no board can do that for you. This is why we are to look in 2 Peter, chapter 3, and get ready to look at verse 18.

I can tell you what is right, but I cannot live right for you or make you apply it. You must learn to apply it. You must study to show yourselves approved unto God.

In 2 Peter 3:18, the Bible admonishes and commands, “But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.” The little word “and” is the Greek word kai, K-A-I. That word is translated in our Bible multitudinous times in a different way. Sometimes, many times, it is translated as “even.” So you could read verse 18 like this: “But grow in grace, even in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” You are not growing in grace unless you are growing in knowledge, and you cannot grow in knowledge unless you are studying and applying the Word of God to your life.

The good ground hearer has had his heart prepared. He is the only one that brings forth fruit. He brings forth fruit in varying degrees, and he brings forth fruit with patience. The good ground hearer knows whether or not he is a babe, a young man, or a father. He may

be a babe, but he wants to be a father. He may be a young man, but he wants to be a father. He wants to be mature in the things of God.

Our Lord is teaching that these four different responses—the wayside hearer, stony ground hearer, hard-hearted hearer, and good ground hearer—are all prevalent today. When anyone hears the Word of God, he hears and responds in one of these four ways. Our Lord is basically teaching that three-fourths of those who hear the Word of God are lost.

It makes you want to follow the admonition of Peter: "Brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure." It makes you want to follow the teaching of the Apostle Paul: "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith or not. Know ye not that Christ be in you, except ye be reprobates?"

We need to make sure as we examine our lives according to the Word of God. If the Holy Spirit of God resides in you, there will be fruit. May not be thirtyfold, may not be sixty, may not be a hundred, but there will be fruit. For he is the producer of fruit.

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. We ask, dear Lord, that you would give us grace that we may serve thee acceptably with reverence and godly fear. In thy name we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 16

Hope For The Southern Christian Cause

January 24, 2016

The Hope for the Southern Christian Cause (Last Man Standing)

SCRIPTURE READING - 1 Kings 22:1-27 (KJV)

Introduction and Scripture Reading

> And they continued three years without war between Syria and Israel. And it came to pass in the third year, that Jehoshaphat the king of Judah came down to the king of Israel. And the king of Israel said unto his servants, Know ye that Ramoth in Gilead is ours, and we be still, and take it not out of the hand of the king of Syria? And he said unto Jehoshaphat, Wilt thou go with me to battle to Ramoth-gilead? And Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, I am as thou art, my people as thy people, my horses as thy horses. And Jehoshaphat said unto the king of Israel, Inquire, I pray thee, at the word of the Lord today.

Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, about four hundred men, and said unto them, Shall I go against Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall I forbear? And they said, Go up; for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king. And Jehoshaphat said, Is there not here a prophet of the Lord besides, that we might inquire of him? And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, There is yet one man, Micaiah the son of Imlah, by whom we may inquire of the Lord: but I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil. And Jehoshaphat said, Let not the king say so. Then the king of Israel called an officer, and said, Hasten hither Micaiah the son of Imlah. And the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah sat each on his throne, having put on their robes, in a void place in the entrance of the gate of Samaria; and all the prophets prophesied before them.

SCRIPTURE READING - 1 Kings 22:11-25 (KJV)

And Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah made him horns of iron: and he said, Thus saith the Lord, With these shalt thou push the Syrians, until thou have consumed them. And all the prophets prophesied so, saying, Go up to Ramoth-gilead, and prosper: for the Lord shall deliver it into the king's hand. And the messenger that was gone to call Micaiah spake unto him, saying, Behold now, the words of the prophets declare good unto the king with one mouth: let thy word, I pray thee, be like the word of one of them, and speak that which is good. And Micaiah said, As the Lord liveth, what the Lord saith unto me, that will I speak. So he came to the king. And the king said unto him, Micaiah, shall we go against Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall we forbear? And he answered him, Go, and prosper: for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king. And the king said unto him, How many times shall I adjure thee that thou tell me nothing but that which is true in the name of the Lord?

And he said, I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills, as sheep that have not a shepherd: and the Lord said, These have no master: let them return every man to his house in peace. And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, Did I not tell thee that he would prophesy no good concerning me, but evil? And he said, Hear thou therefore the word of the Lord: I saw the Lord

> sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing by him on his right hand and on his left. And the Lord said, Who shall persuade Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?
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> And one said on this manner, and another said on that manner. And there came forth a spirit, and stood before the Lord, and said, I will persuade him. And the Lord said unto him, Wherewith? And he said, I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said, Thou shalt persuade him, and prevail also: go forth, and do so. Now therefore, behold, the Lord hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets, and the Lord hath spoken evil concerning thee. But Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah went near, and smote Micaiah on the cheek, and said, Which way went the Spirit of the Lord from me to speak unto thee? And Micaiah said, Behold, thou shalt see in that day, when thou shalt go into an inner chamber to hide thyself.

And the king of Israel said, Take Micaiah, and carry him back unto Amon the governor of the city, and to Joash the king's son; and say, Thus saith the king, Put this fellow in the prison, and feed him with bread of affliction and with water of affliction, until I come in peace. And Micaiah said, If thou return at all in peace, the Lord hath not spoken by me. And he said, Hearken, O people, every one of you.

It was General Robert E. Lee who said this: "Everyone should do all in his power to collect and disseminate the truth, in the hope that it may find a place in history and descend to posterity. History is not the relation of campaigns and battles and generals or other individuals, but that which shows the principles for which the South contended and which justified her struggle for those principles."

The Need for Hope

Today, I want to deal with the very principle that's taught clearly in the Word of God: the principle of hope. Everyone needs hope. In one sense of the word, everyone has a hope of some kind. It may be a false hope, a hope without a foundation, but it's still a hope. False hopes, like the hypocrite's hope, are designed only for failure and destruction. In Job 8 and verse 13, the Word of God says, "So are the paths of all that forget God; and the hypocrite's hope shall perish." In

Job 27 and verse 8, the Word of God says, "For what is the hope of the hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God taketh away his soul?" Only Christians have a real, genuine hope, because the Bible tells us very clearly in Romans 15 and verse 13 that our God is the God of all hope. We have hope because of the person and work of Jesus Christ.

This refers directly to the Lord Jesus Christ. In Hebrews chapter 6, verse 19, the Bible, in speaking of Christ, 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." Note the words, "which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast."

If there was ever a day in which we needed hope, it is today, in our time and age. You have to consider the facts. Christianity is cursed, condemned, and castigated. Our Christian culture is assailed, assaulted, and attacked. Our history and heritage are under constant, continual, and consistent revision and rewriting. The Confederate battle flag is defamed, denounced, and despised.

The leftists, liberals, progressives, Marxists, communists, and fascists all seem to be enjoying their program of devastation and destruction. Political correctness and hatred for anything and everything that reeks of freedom, independence, character, and common sense seem to be advancing not just daily, but hourly. If someone truly wanted to be discouraged, depressed, and downhearted, all they would have to do is consider the circumstances.

Hope Against Circumstances

But I want to show you something. Hold 1 Kings 22, but look in Romans chapter 4. In this day and time, we must have the faith of Abraham. Notice what the Bible clearly states in Romans 4, beginning in verse 17, particularly in reference to the promise of God: “As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations, before him whom he believed, even God.”

God "quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were." They have not yet come into existence, but God calls them as though they were in existence because He is the one who brings them into existence. Look what Abram did: "Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be."

"Being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb: He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform."

God had given Abram a promise. When Abram looked at himself and his wife—he was one hundred and she was ninety—the circumstances seemed impossible. Yet he believed in hope against hope and counted that whatever God promised, God was fully able to perform. I want to try today to inject some biblical hope into our lives based upon the truth of God's Word. All hope is not lost, and all is not lost.

The wicked do not win. Truth is not always on the scaffold while lies are sitting upon the throne. God is still sovereign, still on the throne, still reigning and governing. As I have said before, everything is going wrong just right. The Bible says in Psalm 76:10, "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain." How much wickedness is God going to allow? The answer is, just enough that it will ultimately redound to His honor and glory. That which will not redound to His honor and glory, He will restrain.

The Wickedness of Ahab and Compromise of Jehoshaphat

The message of hope I want to deliver today lies in a web of deceit, dastardly deeds, and destruction. If you paid attention as I read 1 Kings 22, you will find Ahab on the throne of the kingdom of Israel. Ahab was the vilest and wickedest king in the entire northern kingdom, period. The Bible says in 1 Kings 21:25, "But there was

none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up." There was none like Ahab who sold himself to work wickedness. Jezebel may have stirred him up, but he was the one who did it. Ahab was a tyrant.

He was a murderer, a blasphemer, an idolater, a pervert, and a thief. He was consumed with himself, his programs, his lusts, and his desires. He had no real interest in his people and believed they were there only to serve him. The description of Ahab makes you think of modern-day politicians, does it not? There are so many parallels between Ahab and modern-day politicians that it is mind-boggling.

To make matters worse, in 1 Kings 22, wicked, vile, ungodly Ahab is joined by godly Jehoshaphat, king of the southern kingdom. Jehoshaphat not only compromised by joining an affinity with Ahab, but was also thoroughly rebuked for his sin. 2 Chronicles 19:1–2 says, "And Jehoshaphat the king of Judah returned to his house in peace to Jerusalem. And Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him, and said to king Jehoshaphat, Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord? Therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord."

"Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord? Therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord." Jehoshaphat did not escape with simply a rebuke. He suffered, and so did his children and grandchildren, because of his compromise and sin. But that is a different message in and of itself, because you reap exactly what you sow.

In 1 Kings chapter 22, Jehoshaphat, at one point in this chapter, exhibited some sound understanding, and in another instance acted completely insane. Compromise with evil does indeed rob one of common sense. When we compromise with evil, we lose.

Ahab desires to take back Ramoth-gilead. Ramoth in Gilead did indeed belong to the children of Israel, but it had been captured and possessed by the Syrians. In fact, Ramoth in Gilead was also a refuge city for the Israelites. In Joshua 21 and verse 38, the Bible says, "And out of the tribe of Gad, Ramoth in Gilead with her suburbs, to be a

city of refuge for the slayer; and Mahanaim with her suburbs." Ahab wants Ramoth back and wants Jehoshaphat to help him recapture Ramoth and bring it back into his possession and power. Jehoshaphat, being a godly man, does something simply insane, silly, and stupid. What does he do? Verse 3 records, "And the king of Israel said unto his servants, Know ye that Ramoth in Gilead is ours, and we be still, and take it not out of the hand of the king of Syria?"

And he said unto Jehoshaphat, "Wilt thou go with me to battle to Ramoth-gilead?" And Jehoshaphat said unto the king of Israel, "I am as thou art, my people as thy people, and my horses as thy horses." Can you imagine such an answer coming from a supposed godly man? "I am as thou art, my people as thy people." Spiritually speaking, neither Jehoshaphat nor his people were as Ahab and his people. Jehoshaphat and Judah at this time still remained true to the covenant and to the one true and living God, Yahweh, Jehovah, while Ahab and his people were total, absolute idolaters.

Our forefathers knew that the southern people were different from those in the north. Did you know that Robert E. Lee and some of the others referred to the Yankees simply as "those people"? We were understood to be a totally different people, and we are still different today. Listen to me carefully: a Bible-believing Southern Christian is totally and completely different from a non-believing, politically correct Yankee humanist. We have a different faith, culture, history, and heritage.

The Distinctiveness of the Southern Christian

It is the goal of the cultural Marxist to blend all people into one homogeneous blob with no past or future, content only to exist in the present, because people like that can be controlled. When you understand that there is a difference, you must come to this attitude: I will not be reconstructed. I will not deny my faith, my ancestry, my history, or my heritage. By the grace of God, I will never be like those people. Make up your mind that you are different and that you will persevere in that difference. You must maintain your history and your heritage.

Jehoshaphat was completely insane, in one sense of the word, when he said, "I am as thou art, my people as thy people, my horses

as thy horses." Then Jehoshaphat began to think a little bit. In verse 5, he said unto the king of Israel, "Inquire, I pray thee, at the word of the Lord today." Why did he not inquire before he answered, "I am as thou art, and my people as thy people, and my horses as thy horses"? He should have done that before he consented to go with Ahab.

In order to satisfy Jehoshaphat, Ahab summoned his state prophets, who told Ahab only what he wished to hear. "Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, about four hundred men," and asked whether he should go against Ramoth-gilead. They said, "Go up; for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king." Notice the difference between "Lord" in verse 6 and "LORD" in verse 5. In verse 5, it is all caps; in verse 6, it is only capital L, followed by little o-r-d. They were using a totally different word.

Jehoshaphat recognized that these were not God's preachers or prophets. They were prophets of Baal, prophets of the king who gave him only what he wanted to hear. He asked, "Is there not here a prophet of the Lord besides, that we might inquire of him?" He wanted to hear from a man of God.

The king of Israel answered, "There is yet one man, Micaiah the son of Imlah, by whom we may inquire of the Lord: but I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil." Jehoshaphat said, "Let not the king say so."

The Lone Prophet Micaiah

In verse 8, he said, "There is yet one man." One man. What happened to all the other prophets of God? Why is there only one prophet of God left in the northern kingdom? The answer is that they were either expelled from the kingdom or murdered at the instigation of Ahab and Jezebel. Look in 1 Kings chapter 18 and verse 4. Here we read, "For it was so, when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the Lord, that Obadiah took an hundred prophets, and hid them by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water." Thus, he hid a hundred of them who had been expelled.

The rest were probably killed, had to fend for themselves, or simply leave the kingdom. If you turn to 2 Kings chapter 9 and verse

7, notice what the Word of God says. After Jehu is anointed, God tells him, “And thou shalt smite the house of Ahab thy master, that I may avenge the blood of my servants the prophets, and the blood of all the servants of the Lord, at the hand of Jezebel.” They were either expelled or murdered. That is why there was only one.

Notice something else found plainly in verse 8: “And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, There is yet one man, Micaiah the son of Imlah, by whom we may inquire of the Lord: but I hate him.” Ahab publicly acknowledged to Jehoshaphat, who was a believer in the one true God, that he hated the prophet of God. Let me emphasize that.

It is not merely that our enemies hate our history, heritage, culture, or flag. They hate us. They hate us. The Southern Poverty Law Center—which is not Southern by any stretch of the imagination, nor is it in poverty by any stretch of the imagination—makes that exceedingly clear, because it is the largest hate group in the country. Yet it labels anything Southern or Christian as morbid, hateful, racist maniacs.

We are hated for who we are and what we represent. It is impossible to have a new world order as long as there is a people who believe in and stand for freedom, independence, states' rights, and historic biblical Christianity. We are the roadblocks, the hindrance, the immovable objects, and they hate us. Our Lord said in Mark 13:13, “And ye shall be hated of all men for my name’s sake.” It should therefore be an honor to be hated by those who hate Jesus Christ and His truth.

Look back at verse 8 and pay close attention to why Ahab hated Micaiah: “And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, There is yet one man, Micaiah the son of Imlah, by whom we may inquire of the Lord: but I hate him.” Why? “For he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil.” Ahab hated him because he did not prophesy good concerning him, but evil.

How could anyone prophesy, speak well of, or speak concerning a positively evil man? There is a curse upon those who confuse good and evil. Isaiah 5:20 says, “Woe unto them that call evil good, and

good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!" There is a curse upon them.

How many of you could speak well or prophesy good things concerning our modern-day politicians who have violated their oaths, sold their souls, dishonored their marriage vows, perverted their lives, destroyed the Republic, enslaved our people, and denied our history and heritage? Perhaps there are one or two about whom you might say a few good things. But as a whole, you cannot say good things about most of them, because most are positively evil, condemning themselves by their unfaithfulness and greediness.

This is something that still amazes me about Jehoshaphat. In verse 8, the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, "There is yet one man, Micaiah the son of Imlah, by whom we may inquire of the Lord: but I hate him." Here is why: "For he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil." Jehoshaphat had the perfect opportunity to set Ahab straight and to be a real, true witness. Yet all he said was, "Let not the king say so." Instead of rebuking and reproving, he simply said, "Let not the king say so." He missed a perfect opportunity to set the record straight. Instead, he sat silently. He did not defend the one true and living God, nor the man who represented the one true and living God.

I want you to understand something: silence is consent, and silence is betrayal. Psalm 50 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 thou sawest a thief, then thou consentedst with him, and hast been partaker with adulterers." When you saw a thief, then you consented with him.

How do they consent to theft? By silence. How are they partakers with adulterers? By silence. God says that to sin by silence is indeed a betrayal—a betrayal of the truth. All Jehoshaphat did was say, "Let not the king say so," when he could have defended Micaiah and witnessed to the one true and living God. When we remain silent and do not lift up our voices, we are consenting with evil and betraying the truth.

Now look back in First Kings 22, verse 9. After Jehoshaphat asked for a prophet of the Lord, Ahab immediately sent for Micaiah: “Then the king of Israel called an officer, and said, Hasten hither Micaiah the son of Imlah.” How did Ahab know where Micaiah was? You have to remember that oftentimes God’s prophets were led hither and yon.

That is what Obadiah said to Elijah: “If I go and tell my master that you are here, then the Lord is going to take you somewhere else, and then he is going to kill me for lying.” So how did Ahab know where Micaiah was? The answer is given in verses 26 and 27. Watch what Ahab commands: “And the king of Israel said, Take Micaiah, and carry him back unto Amon the governor of the city, and to Joash the king’s son; and say, Thus saith the king, Put this fellow in the prison, and feed him with bread of affliction and with water of affliction, until I come in peace.” Carry him back. He knew where Micaiah was because he had already had him in prison. He knew exactly where he was, and now he sends him back to be fed with the bread and water of affliction.

So they come to get Micaiah. In verse 13, “And the messenger that was gone to call Micaiah spake unto him, saying, Behold now, the words of the prophets declare good unto the king with one mouth: let thy word, I pray thee, be like the word of one of them, and speak that which is good.” Everybody is agreeing with the king now, and Micaiah needs to agree with him as well. He needs to be politically correct. Do not rock the boat, upset the government, or upset the powers that be. Speak good like everybody else.

Verse 14 says, “And Micaiah said, As the Lord liveth, what the Lord saith unto me, that will I speak.” He says, “I’m going to speak what God gives me.” Now understand what Micaiah does. He does this in such a way that Ahab knew he was being mocked.

Micaiah comes into the presence of Ahab, Jehoshaphat, and all the officers. “So he came to the king. And the king said unto him, Micaiah, shall we go against Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall we forbear? And he answered him, Go, and prosper: for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king.” Then the king says, “How many times shall I adjure thee that thou tell me nothing but that which is true in the name of the Lord?” Ahab understood that Micaiah was

mocking him and the false prophets as well. He understood the sarcasm, the mockery, and the insult. You say, “Micaiah dishonored Ahab.”

No, he did not dishonor Ahab. He spoke the truth concerning Ahab when he mocked him. We must always honor the office of authority, but we do not honor dishonorable men who are holding the office of authority. To be honored, you must be honorable.

Three kings had come together to fight against Moab, but they found themselves in a situation where there was no water. Jehoshaphat was there. They asked, “Is there not here a prophet of the Lord, that we may inquire of the Lord by him?” One of the king of Israel’s servants answered, “Here is Elisha the son of Shaphat, which poured water on the hands of Elijah.” Jehoshaphat said, “The word of the Lord is with him.” So the king of Israel, Jehoshaphat, and the king of Edom went down to him.

Elisha said unto the king of Israel, “What have I to do with thee? get thee to the prophets of thy father, and to the prophets of thy mother.” When the king of Israel replied that the Lord had called the three kings together to deliver them into the hand of Moab, Elisha answered, “As the Lord of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, surely, were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would not look toward thee, nor see thee.”

Let me spell it out. If it was not for Jehoshaphat, I wouldn’t spit on you if you were on fire. That was the attitude of Elisha, the man of God, toward Jehoram, the son of Ahab. He let him know in no uncertain terms that he thought absolutely nothing of him.

Ahab said to Micaiah, “How many times shall I adjure thee that thou tell me nothing but that which is true in the name of the Lord?” I can hear Micaiah saying, “You want the truth? You can’t handle the truth. I want to tell you the truth.” God was going to kill Ahab and wipe him out. He had sent a lying spirit into the mouths of all his false prophets to lure him to battle at Ramoth-gilead, in order that he might be killed. God had enough of his blasphemy, perversion, idolatry, and violation of His law. He was dead meat—a walking dead man.

You just do not realize it yet. That is why, in verses 26 and 27, Ahab is so upset. “And the king of Israel said, Take Micaiah, and carry him back unto Amon the governor of the city, and to Joash the king’s son; and say, Thus saith the king, Put this fellow in the prison, and feed him with bread of affliction and with water of affliction, until I come in peace. And Micaiah said, If thou return at all in peace, the Lord hath not spoken by me. And he said, Hearken, O people, every one of you.”

Although Micaiah’s words were directed to Ahab, he was warning all who heard, even King Jehoshaphat. Interestingly, no one listened or heard; they all went on their way to Ramoth-gilead.

Now notice verse 8: “And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, when he asked for a prophet of the Lord, he said, There is yet one man, Micaiah the son of Imlah, by whom we may inquire of the Lord: but I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil.”

The Call for Courageous Men

“Is there not a prophet of the Lord here?” Ahab says, “There is one man left.” The last man standing. It was one man, and one man only, who spoke the truth that ended the tyranny and wickedness of Ahab and his government. Ahab did indeed speak the truth when he said, “There is yet one man, Micaiah the son of Imlah.”

Micaiah was a man. He was a fighter and a champion of the cause. The Hebrew word for “man” here means not only a man distinguished from a woman, but also a champion and a servant. Micaiah’s name literally means “who is like God.” In other words, Micaiah was a servant of the Most High God, a fighter and a champion.

There is emphasis upon the numeral one: “There is one man left.” The Hebrew word for “one” means one. It is the same word used in the Shema Israel in Deuteronomy 6:4: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord.” Micaiah was a singular man.

He was alone, and yet he stood for truth and righteousness, where no one else could stand or would stand. It is kind of like John the Baptist. In John 1:6, God says concerning John the Baptist, “There

was a man." Micaiah was a man willing to forsake all for the cause. He was willing to walk away from everything and suffer for truth and righteousness.

One of our problems today is that we are too materialistic. We believe somehow that things make us happy, complete, and successful. But the truth is this: we brought nothing into this world, and we are not going to carry anything out of this world. Life is more than raiment, food, or things.

Here was Micaiah, one of the greatest prophets of God, telling the king, "God's had enough of you, and God's going to kill you." He was a man willing to be imprisoned for his faith and for the truth's sake. I am sure no one in this room wants to go to prison. The greatest thing about prison is the stigma attached to an individual once he has been there. But there is no stigma against someone being in prison if he is there for the right reason. John the Baptist was in prison. Our Lord was in prison. All the apostles were arrested. Paul was in prison numerous times.

In 2 Timothy chapter 1 and verse 8, Paul wrote to Timothy: "Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God." In other words, he says, "Timothy, you might end up in here as well."

There is no stigma to being in prison if you are there for the Lord's sake. Think of all the Confederate soldiers who were in Elmira, Point Lookout, and the other Yankee prisons. What were they fighting for? Not slavery, I can assure you. They were fighting for self-defense, independence, and the right to rule their own lives. Micaiah was a man willing to suffer. He spoke the truth even though he knew it would probably add to his afflictions.

That is why Ahab said, "Carry him back to the prison and you feed this man with the bread of affliction and the water of affliction until I return in peace." Micaiah said, "If you return in peace, the Lord has not spoken by me." Micaiah was kind of like General Nathan Bedford Forrest.

You could never misunderstand Micaiah. When he spoke, you knew exactly what he meant, and he said exactly what he meant: "If you return in peace, the Lord has not spoken by me."

I hear people say, "Well, the past is past." We would do well to heed the words of Robert L. Dabney, an eminent theologian, scholar, and chief of staff to Stonewall Jackson. In his commencement address to the students of Hampden-Sydney College in Virginia on June 15, 1882, Dabney made these remarks:

"It behooves the New South in dismissing the animosities of the past to see to it that they retain all that was true in its principles or ennobling in its examples. There are those pretending to belong to this company who exclaim, 'Let us bury the dead past. Its issues are all antiquated and of no more practical significance. Let us forget the passions of the past. We're in a new world. Its new questions alone concern us.' I rejoin, 'Be sure that the former issues are dead before you really bury them. There are issues that cannot die without the death of the people, of their honor, their civilization, their greatness. Take care that you do not bury too much while burying the dead past.'

"...that you do not bury the inspiring memories of great patriots whose actions, whether successful or not, are the eternal glory of your race and section, the influence of their virtues, the guiding precedents of their histories. Would you bury the names and memories of a Jackson, Lee and their noble army of martyrs? Would you bury true history whose years are those of the God of truth?"

Principles do not die. Principles do not have funerals. The very issues that face us today, and that we are fighting against today, are the exact same issues that our forefathers fought against in the war of aggression and also in the war for independence. We had better take heed that we do not bury too much, as Dabney says.

The Christian cause and the Southern cause are rolled into one. How can I say that? It was the North that gave the South the nickname of the Bible Belt, and it is true that the South has remained predominantly Christian. I know that not everybody in the South is a Christian. But many in the South still hold to and believe the Bible to be the Word of God and Jesus Christ the Lord and

Savior. So we have the Christian cause and the Southern cause basically rolled into one, and our problem is the same in both instances. What is the problem?

We do not have men. We do not have fearless men, men who are unafraid. We do not have men who will stand and speak the truth and allow the chips to fall where they may. We do not have men willing to sacrifice. We do not have men like Lee and Jackson, Ewell and Stuart. Where are the men who will follow in the footsteps of Lee and Jackson? Where are the men who will follow in the footsteps of Micaiah or John the Baptist?

Listen to what General Lee said. What he said about the past is just as true today: “Our country demands all our strength, all our energies. To resist the powerful combination now forming against us will require every man in his place. If victorious, we have everything to hope for in the future. If defeated, nothing will be left for us to live for. My whole trust is in God, and I am ready to do whatever He may ordain.”

“At present, I am not concerned with results. God's will ought to be our aim, and I am quite content that His designs should be accomplished and not mine. The truth is, the march of providence is so slow, and our desires so impatient, the work of progress is so immense, and our means of aiding it so feeble, the life of humanity is so long, that of the individual so brief, that we often see only the ebb of the advancing wave, and are thus discouraged.”

We must expect reverses, even defeats. They are sent to teach us wisdom and prudence, to call forth greater energies, and to prevent our falling into greater disasters. It is history that teaches us to hope. Principles do not die. They do not have funerals.

There is one Yankee officer that I really agree with. E. Benjamin Andrews, who was then the president of Brown University, himself a veteran of the Yankee Army, said this: “The question of greatness is a relative thing. And we in America will probably always differ as to the rank of our prominent men. But if any American father were asked which of our great men he would most want his son to resemble, that father, if he were wise, would be compelled to answer Robert E. Lee.”

So here is my question: Will you be the one man? Will you be the Micaiah? Will you be the Lee, the Jackson, the Ewell, the Stuart? Why in the world would we trade our manhood, our history and our heritage, and truth, for a bowl of governmental humanistic pottage?

Our prayer needs to be that God will give us men. Our hope in the Christian and the Southern cause is that God will give us men, that God will raise up men with a holy determination and a holy desire to stand for that which is right and holy and true, to stand for the faith that has been handed down in the Word of God, and to stand with integrity and virtue. What did Ahab say? "There's one man left." The last man standing. And God used the last man to destroy Ahab and his tyranny.

Conclusion and Prayer

God is pleased to use small things and little things to confound the mighty. God is a majority in and of himself, but he is pleased to use men. We need men willing to stand and suffer for the Christian cause and the Southern cause.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we ask for your grace, mercy, goodness, and kindness. We pray, Lord, that you would indeed raise up men for us—men like Micaiah, who are willing to stand, to do that which is right and holy, and to suffer; men like John the Baptist, and like Lee, Jackson, Ewell, Stuart, and a host of others.

God, give us men with backbone and determination. Give us men, Lord, who are willing to fight based upon your word and your truth and proclaim it no matter what. Give us, Lord, men filled with thy spirit, full of faith, righteousness and holiness, integrity and virtue. Give us men, we pray, in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, in whose name we ask. Amen.

CHAPTER 17

A Method to Guage Your Love To Christ

September 18, 2016

A Method to Gauge Your Love to Christ

SCRIPTURE READING - Luke 7:36-42 (KJV)

I want you to listen very closely today. Some of the messages and some of the Scriptures I am going to quote just to save time. I have a lot that I want you to look at. The Lord has been gracious lately, as busy as I have been and as much teaching as I have been doing. I still have five or six messages that I am working on that I think and hope and pray will be a real blessing and help to each of you.

Luke chapter 7 and verse 36: “And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat. And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, and stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head,

> and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner. And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on.
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> "There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged. And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman?"

A Method to Gauge Your Love to Christ

"I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven. And they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also? And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace."

Introduction: The Need for a Gauge of Love

Almost everyone has a rain gauge because we want to know how much rain we receive. There are gauges for blood pressure, blood sugar, oxygen levels, tire pressure, and even micrometer gauges. But one important question Christians should ask is, How do we gauge our love for Jesus Christ?

In reality, there are a number of gauges in the Bible. One of the most familiar is obedience, because our Lord said in John 14:21, "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth

me." Then He said in verse 24, "He that loveth me not keepeth not my commandments." The same truth is set out in 1 John 5:3: "And this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous."

Our lesson today involves another gauge. Our love for our Lord Jesus Christ will be influenced and gauged by our understanding of our sin, depravity, ruin, and the forgiveness of our sins. The context of the message is an invitation to Jesus Christ to dine at a Pharisee's house. His name is Simon. As our Lord sits at the table, a very notorious sinner comes to Him. Interestingly, even Simon the Pharisee knew this woman. He knew about her, and she is labeled a sinner.

The Setting: Jesus at Simon the Pharisee's House

The interesting thing is that the Greek word is hamartōlos, which literally refers to one as preeminently sinful, especially wicked, and one devoted to sin. The word also refers to men stained with certain vices and crimes.

One can only assume what kind of sinner this woman was, because her sins are not enunciated in this particular passage. She had an alabaster box of ointment, which she broke and began applying to His feet. At the same time, she was weeping profusely. She was extremely emotional and deeply moved. The Greek word used to describe her weeping is klaiō, which literally means to mourn, to weep, or to lament, as one weeping as a sign of grief and pain. Simply put, she was heartbroken, devastated, and weeping profusely.

The heart of the Pharisee is revealed in verse 39: “Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner.” A sinner.

The Pharisees were notoriously self-righteous. They did not wish to contaminate themselves by associating with sinners. Their attitude is expressed in Isaiah 65:5: “Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou.” God says, “These are a smoke in

my nose, a fire that burneth all the day." God cannot stand self-righteousness.

The Pharisees always had trouble with the Lord Jesus Christ. They could not understand how He could associate with sinners and even eat with them. In Matthew 9:11, the Bible says, "And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?" In Mark 2:16, it says, "And when the scribes and Pharisees saw him eat with publicans and sinners, they said unto his disciples, How is it that he eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners?"

In Luke 15:2, "And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them." According to Simon, if our Lord was a prophet, He should have known how wicked this woman really was; consequently, if He really knew that, He would not have allowed her even to touch Him. And yet Simon calls our Lord Master, but will not account Him a prophet. He said that if He had been a prophet, He would have and should have known. Thus, our Lord demonstrates that He knows not only the heart of the woman, but also the heart of the Pharisee. Simon was unwilling to acknowledge that our Lord was a prophet because, according to him, He did not meet the standard of the Pharisees.

Since our Lord knows the hearts, He did not immediately lash out at Simon and say, "Let me tell you something, you dirty fore-flushing hypocrite." He did not say that. He simply said, "Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee." Basically, He was asking permission to speak. He was in Simon's house, and Simon said, "Master, say on."

The Parable of the Two Debtors

The lesson and illustration our Lord conveyed were simple and plain enough even for a Pharisee to understand. If Adam Clarke is correct in his commentary on this passage, Simon would have had a double reason to comprehend what our Lord said. Clarke writes: "A certain creditor—our Lord means by the creditor, God, and by the two debtors, Simon and the woman who was present. Simon, who had the light of the law and who, in consequence of his profession as a Pharisee, was obliged to abstain from outward iniquity, might be considered as the debtor who owed fifty pence or fifty denarii. The

woman, whom I suppose to be a heathen, not having these advantages, having no rule to regulate her actions and no curb on her evil propensities, may be considered to be the debtor who owed five hundred pence or denarii."

"And when both were compared, Simon's debt to God might be considered, in reference to her, fifty to five hundred. However, we find, notwithstanding this great disparity, both were insolvent. Simon, the religious Pharisee, could no more pay his fifty to God than this poor heathen her five hundred. And if both be not freely forgiven by the divine mercy, both must finally perish. Having nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both."

Some think that this very Simon was no inconsiderable debtor to our Lord, having been mercifully cleansed from leprosy, for he is supposed to be the same Simon the leper. In Matthew 26:6, the Bible says, "Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper." In Mark 14:3, it says, "And being in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at meat, there came a woman having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious; and she brake the box, and poured it on his head." This could be the second time that our Lord was in this house. Clarke is saying that this Simon could be Simon the leper. If so, he certainly had a double reason to be extremely thankful to our Lord.

In verses 41 through 43, our Lord gives us this illustration and lesson: "There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged."

The scope of this parable is to demonstrate that Simon is wrong in condemning the woman who is acquitted by the heavenly Judge. Our Lord proves that she is righteous, not because she pleased God or because she did those things, but because her sins were forgiven. The argument our Lord employs here is not from cause, but from effect. She was not forgiven because she loved much; she loved much because she had already been forgiven. We do not love in order to be forgiven. We love because we have been forgiven.

The Principle: Love in Proportion to Perceived Forgiveness

The reason this woman is so filled with love, thankfulness, and gratefulness, and the reason she is shedding so many tears, is that she realized the greatness of her sins and the greatness of our Lord's forgiveness. One debtor owed our Lord five hundred pence, and the other fifty pence, or fifty denarii.

Both amounts are relatively small; however, neither debtor was able to pay the debt. Let us grasp the implications of this little parable. First, all sins are debts. There is a penalty for violating the law of God, and the penalty is such as none can pay. The Bible says plainly in Galatians 3:10, "For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." All sin is a debt owed to the violated law, and the law demands the death penalty. We are under the curse. It is not merely physical debt, but spiritual debt as well.

Second, as all sins are debts, so all sinners are not equal in the sight of God. All are guilty, but there are degrees in guilt. All are vile, but some are viler than others. All are sinners, but some are more sinful than others. There are degrees even in sin. Murder demands the death penalty; that is a grievous sin. Theft demands restitution. Lying is bad, but it is not nearly as bad as adultery. All of it is sinful, but there are degrees in sin and in sinners. Some are far worse sinners than others, but all are sinners.

Third, it does not matter whether you are a big sinner or a little sinner; you are still a sinner. One sin makes you liable to God and His law, no matter how great or how small a sinner you are. You are still just as much in need of God's divine forgiveness. James 2:10-11 says, "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all."

"For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law." You could make that even lighter: He said, "Thou shalt not covet." Though you do not kill, but you covet, you're still a transgressor of the law. He said, "Thou shalt not steal." You

may not steal, but if you profane God, you're still a transgressor of the law. So just one sin makes us guilty and liable to God.

Fourthly, God is gracious and free in the forgiveness of sins, no matter how great or how small they are. The Bible says in Psalm 130:4, "But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared." Notice also Psalm 85:2: "Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people, thou hast covered all their sin." So there is forgiveness from God.

The fourth thing to point out before getting into this is that Christ speaks of these two debtors as being forgiven, and then he speaks of their loving much or loving little. In other words, the comprehension of your sins and the comprehension of the forgiveness of your sins correlates to your love to the Lord Jesus Christ. If you do not think that you are a very bad sinner, very sinful, transgressing God's law and iniquitous, then you're not going to love much. Our Lord said that to whom much is given, much is required; but also, of whom much is forgiven, he is going to demonstrate much love.

Here we have a sharp contrast between this woman and the Pharisee. Look in verse 43. Our Lord says, "Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged." Simon, you're right in this. Whoever comprehends the depth of God's forgiveness, based upon the comprehension of the depth of their sins, is going to love more than anyone else.

The Contrast: Simon's Lack of Love

Our Lord demonstrates something to Simon. This woman came, anointed His feet, wept and washed them with her tears, dried them with her hair, and kissed His feet. Simon did not love Christ enough to provide Him the common courtesies of the day. A common courtesy was to wash your guest's feet, to anoint his head, and to provide whatever he needed.

Luke 7:44 says, "And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman?" Remember, this is the woman Simon had criticized. Our Lord continued, "I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my

feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss."

It was a common courtesy in those days. When the Bible says, "Greet one another with an holy kiss," men usually greeted men by taking their beard and kissing the beard. They did not kiss the cheek; they kissed the beard. That was a holy kiss. Christ means, "You did not kiss my beard. You did not greet me as a brother, or as someone you loved." He said, "Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment."

"Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven." Note again that our Lord said, "Therefore, she loved much." Her great love was not the cause of the remission of her sins; the full and free remission of her many sins was the cause of the manifestation of her great love.

If this woman had not already repented, she would never have sought Jesus Christ or been willing to do what she did. Obviously, something had already transpired in her life and heart.

Our Lord does not leave out the Pharisee, because He states, "to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little." This has a very special respect to Simon the Pharisee. His debts in his own eyes were either few or none, at least ten times less than the woman's. Consequently, he had no great sense of the depth of his sins or depravity, and therefore no great sense of forgiveness and no great love for Jesus Christ. Our Lord was teaching Simon an important point: the greater the sinner's comprehension of his sin and forgiveness, the greater love will be manifested.

The truth is simply this: a man's love to God will be in proportion to the obligations he understands himself to be under to the bounty of his Creator, his Maker, his Lord, and his Savior. Have you ever really comprehended the greatness of your depravity, the exceeding abundance of your sins, and the wickedness of your own mind, attitude, and actions? Have you ever really comprehended the depth of forgiveness that you received through Jesus Christ?

Ralph Venning, in The Plague of Plagues, writes about all of us by nature:

"The sinfulness of sin not only appears from, but consists in this, that it is contrary to God. Indeed, it is enmity itself. Carnal men or sinners are called by the name of enemies to God, but the carnal mind or sin is called enmity itself. Accordingly, it and its acts were expressed by names of enmity, such as hostility, such as walking contrary to God, rebelling against God, rising up against him as an enemy, striving and contending with God, and despising God. It makes men haters of God, resistors of God, fighters against God, and even blasphemers of God, and in short, very atheists who say there is no God. It goes about to un-God God, and is by some of the ancients called deicidium, that is God-murder or God-killing. Though all these things are not done by every sinful man, yet they are not only in the nature of sin, and that of every sin more or less, but are all of them in the heart of all sinners in their sinning root."

The Greatness and Wickedness of Sin

"So what is done by any man would be done by every man if God did not restrain some men from it by His power and constrain others to obedience by His love and power. Here then is the depravity and the desperately wicked nature of sin, that it is not only high treason against the majesty of God, but it scorns to confess its crime. It is obstinate and will not that he should reign over it. It is not only not subject, but it will not be subject nor be reconciled to God. Such is its enmity."

Biblical Pictures of Sin's Depravity

I want to take you through the Bible very quickly and show you the greatness, wickedness, and filthiness of your sins by several pictures given to us in the Bible. We have never really grasped how God hates sin and how God views sin. We do not understand sometimes why God exclaimed in Jeremiah 44:4, "Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate." Sin is a stench in His nostrils. It is absolutely, totally contrary to Him.

If we understand in any degree the greatness of His forgiveness and love, we have to understand also the greatness of our sins. When

we say what God has done for us, it should make us love Him even more.

The pictures from the Bible are distasteful, disgusting, and damning. Yet they are what the Bible records and what fallen man is by nature. I cannot give you every picture in the Bible, but I want to give you enough that you can genuinely see the pit from which you were digged and the rock from which you were hewn. If you really understand these pictures, you will understand to a greater degree the great love and forgiveness that God has exercised towards you. You will understand what it means when it says that Christ died for the ungodly.

In 1 Kings 8:38, Solomon is praying as he dedicates the temple: "What prayer and supplication soever be made by any man, or by all thy people Israel, which shall know every man the plague of his own heart, and spread forth his hands toward this house." Note, "which shall know every man the plague of his own heart."

Sin is pictured as the plague of some horrible disease such as leprosy. I would encourage you to read Leviticus, chapters 13 and 14, and other passages that deal with leprosy. I would also encourage you to go on the Internet and type in pictures of leprosy. Leprosy deforms, destroys, and rots the body. No disease is more contagious and infectious than leprosy. It spreads over the entire body and causes the flesh to rot off. It is stealthy, putrid, and breaking forth all over the body in a most loathsome disease. Everyone knows that leprosy was so vile that individuals had to cover their faces or mouths, particularly their noses; and if anyone even came close, the leper was obligated to cry out, "Unclean, unclean, unclean," so that no one would come near. The biblical picture is very gross: a leper, someone who has the plague and is absolutely contaminated, to the point that he is nothing more than rotting and dying alive.

Look at Isaiah 1:5-6 and think this through. The first picture is easy to handle; the second might be more difficult. Isaiah 1:5 says, "Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint." Verse 6 says, "From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment."

Here is a picture of what fallen man is in the eyes of God. From head to foot, he is nothing but wounds, bruises, and putrifying sores. Putrifying sores literally means running sores oozing with pus and putrefaction. They have not been closed up. David, when he confessed his sins in Psalm 38:5, said, “My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness.” If you have ever had a boil or rising, you know that wounds stink. David said again in Psalm 38:7, “For my loins are filled with a loathsome disease: and there is no soundness in my flesh.” From head to foot, he is filled with this loathsome disease of sin.

I was preaching in a little country church in South Carolina. We had started the song service and had probably been singing for about fifteen minutes when a man walked in the back door. He had on a very large pair of overalls. I thought, Well, that is strange. Although it was a little country church, most people did not wear overalls there.

The pastor leaned over to me and said, "Boy, I'm glad to see you here tonight." I thought to myself, Why? What is it about this man that you are just glad to see here tonight? He sat down, we finished the song service, and I preached. When the service was over, the pastor walked over to him and said, "I told Brother Weaver I was really glad to see you tonight. I am so thankful that you made it. I'm so thankful that you're here. Would you please show Brother Weaver why you came in a little bit late?"

The man reached down, picked up the legs of the overalls, and pulled them up to expose his legs. I will tell you, there was not one spot on his legs that did not have a putrid, running sore full of pus. He could not bind them up or do anything; he could barely walk. When I saw them, I immediately turned my head away. Then this passage instantly came to my mind: That is what my sins are in the sight of God. This picture does not flatter us at all. And I have news for you: the picture even gets worse.

I want you to turn in your Bibles to Isaiah 64. I want you to see the greatness of your sins. These are just pictures. Alice and I have been to Sequoia and Yosemite a number of times. She takes more pictures than you can shake a stick at, sometimes pictures of the same scene over and over. That is fine; she likes it.

But the amazing thing is this: no picture can really show the reality. You may look at these pictures, or see a DVD with all that, but we always tell people, "No picture can accurately convey the reality; you just have to see it." And here it is with sin. No picture can accurately convey the reality of the wickedness, vileness, death, and depravity of our sins. Yet there are picture after picture in the Bible. So look, if you would, at Isaiah 64:6.

Here is the passage you have probably heard quoted all your life: "But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away." Notice, first of all, that we are called an unclean thing. That means we are polluted and defiled. The word properly means that which is polluted and defiled in the Levitical sense, regarded as polluted and abominable by the law of Moses. We are regarded as wholly, totally, and completely polluted and depraved.

Secondly, he says, "But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags." There is a comment in the old MS Bible: "If preachers knew properly the meaning of this word, would they make such a liberal use of it in their public ministry? And why should any use a word, the meaning of which he does not understand? How many in the congregation blush for the incautious man and his filthy rags?"

Why would something like that be in an old Bible? Because the Hebrew word describes a cloth of separation or a menstrual rag or a minstrel's cloth, nauseous and odious, such as a man would be loathe to touch or even to take up. Now listen to me: "all of our righteousnesses are as such." If that is a picture of our righteousness, what must our sins be like?

Third, look at Isaiah 64:6: "But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf." Do you know how leaves fade? They wither away, dry up, and die in autumn. What is God saying? Our beauty is gone, our strength is fled, and the only thing left facing man by nature is death and destruction.

In other words, without him, we are hopeless and helpless. Without divine intervention, we perish. In the latter part of verse 6, fourthly, he says, "like the wind, he said, we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away." The wind blows hither and yon. That is what it is like for fallen man. His sins and iniquities simply blow him hither and yon. He does not even know what he is doing.

Sin here is not a pretty picture, which means sinners are not a pretty picture. Turn to the book of Ezekiel, chapter 16. I have an illustration of this—not a good one, but an illustration. Ezekiel 16:3, speaking to Jerusalem: "Son of man, cause Jerusalem to know her abominations." And in verse 3: "Thus saith the Lord God unto Jerusalem; Thy birth and thy nativity is of the land of Canaan; thy father was an Amorite, and thy mother an Hittite." You were already sinners.

"And as for thy nativity, in the day thou wast born thy navel was not cut, neither wast thou washed in water to supple thee; thou wast not salted at all, nor swaddled at all. None eye pitied thee, to do any of these unto thee, to have compassion upon thee; but thou wast cast out in the open field, to the lothing of thy person, in the day that thou wast born. And when I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live; yea, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live."

This is the simile of a newborn infant with nothing done to it, covered all over with menstrual blood, denoting the wretched and miserable estate in which we are by nature. Here is a picture of a people, of a child, unloved, unwanted, unpitied, loathsome, abominable, and in danger of being utterly destroyed because it was ready to perish through lack of mercy and compassion. God said, "When I found you, this is what you were." Just this week, I read or someone gave birth to a child.

Someone wrapped the baby in a blanket and put it beside the road. Evidently, that same person, or someone connected with that person, drove the car, ran off the road, and purposely killed the baby. My first thoughts were, "I know how to take care of people like that." My second thought was, "That's what we were when God

found us": unwanted, unloved, unpitied, loathsome, and abominable.

When the Bible speaks here of being polluted, the word literally signifies being trodden underfoot in the mire of the streets. That is what God is saying in Ezekiel 16: Nobody wanted you. Nobody loved you. When God found you, you were despised, and people would simply tread you down in the mud. They could care less about you.

Sin is not a pretty picture. Sinners are not pretty people. In Ezekiel 24:6, God says, "Wherefore thus saith the Lord God; Woe to the bloody city, to the pot whose scum is therein, and whose scum is not gone out of it!"

"Bring it out piece by piece; let no lot fall upon it. For her blood is in the midst of her; she set it upon the top of a rock; she poured it not upon the ground, to cover it with dust; that it might cause fury to come up to take vengeance; I have set her blood upon the top of a rock, that it should not be covered.

"Therefore thus saith the Lord God; Woe to the bloody city! I will even make the pile for fire great. Heap on wood, kindle the fire, consume the flesh, and spice it well, and let the bones be burned. Then set it empty upon the coals thereof, that the brass of it may be hot, and may burn, and that the filthiness of it may be molten in it, that the scum of it may be consumed. She hath wearied herself with lies, and her great scum went not forth out of her: her scum shall be in the fire."

Here, sin is pictured as the scum of a boiling pot wherein is a detestable carcass. Everyone in this room at one time or another has burned coffee.

It stinks to high heaven. It has melted in the bottom of the pot and takes a great deal of washing. How many have burnt meat? Clones? You are talking about a stench. Yet God says this is a picture of what our sins are to God: a stench in His nostrils. The foulest smell that you and I can ever imagine cannot be compared with the stench of sin to a holy God. He gives us a picture of sin as the scum of a boiling pot, wherein is a detestable carcass.

Look in Romans chapter 7 and verse 24. The Apostle Paul makes a startling statement: "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver

me from the body of this death?" We could easily render Paul's cry, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this dead body?" The body of this death means the whole mass of sin, or all those ingredients of which the whole man is composed. Paul is referring to a dead carcass that is stinking and loathsome. You can always tell when a dead animal is nearby; you can always tell when the dead carcass of anyone or anything is nearby. When Paul says, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" this is what he is talking about.

Men sent to us and others who were pagans had a unique punishment for murderers and other vile criminals. If a man murdered another man and was captured, they would take the dead body—the murdered man—and tie him face to face, stomach to stomach, leg to leg, and arm to arm to the living man, until the putrefaction and worms from the dead man ate the living man alive and killed him.

That is the picture given here: "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this dead body?" Pitt wrote a few lines about this method of punishment: "What tongue can such barbarities record, or count the slaughters of his ruthless sword? 'Twas not enough the good, the guiltless bled, still worse, he bound the living to the dead. These limb to limb, and face to face he joined, O monstrous crime of unexampled kind, till choked with stench the lingering wretches lay, and in the loathsome embraces died away." Paul likens it to a dead and rotting body.

Sin was attached to him, and he longed to get rid of it. Here is another picture, number seven: "But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire." This is a picture of sin as the vomit of a dog and the wallowing of a sow in the mire. It is quoted from Proverbs 26:11: "As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool returneth to his folly."

Isaiah 19:14 says, "The Lord hath mingled a perverse spirit in the midst thereof: and they have caused Egypt to err in every work thereof, as a drunken man staggereth in his vomit." Isaiah 28:8 says, "For all tables are full of vomit and filthiness, so that there is no place clean." Jeremiah 48:26 says, "Make ye him drunken: for he

magnified himself against the Lord: Moab also shall wallow in his vomit, and he also shall be in derision."

None of these are beautiful pictures. Understand Paul's argument in Romans chapter 6. This is why he gives such an exclamation: "What? What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" How can you, if you are alive, go back to all of this filthiness and pollution?

If you understand these pictures, you will find that your sin is very repulsive in the eyes of God, and it should be very repulsive in your eyes. Jeremiah 7:8 says, "Behold, ye trust in lying words, that cannot profit." Verse 9 continues: "Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not; and come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations?" God did not save you out of your filth so that you can continue in filth. No.

Application: Gauging Our Love by Our Sense of Sin and Forgiveness

This woman came to our Lord weeping, broken, and contrite. She anointed His feet, washed them with her tears, and dried them with her hair. Simon would not even do anything. What did our Lord say? "To whom much is forgiven, they love much. To whom little is forgiven, they love little."

Have you ever stopped to think about this? Undoubtedly, part and parcel of this woman's brokenness was the grief and pain she had caused her Savior. Have you ever stopped to think about the suffering of Jesus Christ in relationship to your sins? "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all."

What did my sins do to Jesus Christ? How did my sins cause Him to suffer—not just physically, but spiritually and emotionally? Have you ever really contemplated the grief and pain that your sins caused Jesus Christ?

You will never recognize the depth of our Lord's grace, mercy, and forgiveness until you realize the depth of your sin, wickedness, and rebellion. If you look at me today and say, "Well, I may be bad, but I'm not that bad," I have news for you. If the Holy Ghost ever convicts you of your sin, you would fight the Apostle Paul for the place of chief of sinners. The divine creditor has a righteous claim upon all his debtors, but none of us can meet it, so reconciliation can only be brought about by the grace of God. How great of a sinner are you?

How much do you love Jesus Christ? You can gauge it by your understanding of your sins and your understanding of His forgiveness. To whom much is forgiven, they love much. To whom little is forgiven, they love little.

Father, help us in the name of Jesus Christ to honor Thee, to praise Thee, to glorify Thee, and to understand, Lord, the depth of our wickedness, and yet, Lord, the depth of Your so great love and mercy. Help us, Father. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 18

Simon the Cyrenian

December 24, 2017

Introduction: The Many Simons of Scripture

Mark 15:21 says, “And they compel one Simon, a Cyrenian, who passed by, coming out of the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to bear his cross.” There are many Simons in the Bible, and we are certainly familiar with a few of them. The first one that would come to anyone’s mind would be Simon Peter. Secondly, probably Simon the sorcerer, who is found in Acts chapter 8. Then there was also Simon the Tanner in Acts chapter 10.

Now there is another Simon that few remember. He was the father of Judas Iscariot. John 6:71 says, “He spake of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon: for he it was that should betray him, being one of the twelve.” Then, in John 13:2, we read, “And supper being ended, the devil having now put in the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray him.” John 13:6 says, “Jesus answered, He it is to whom I shall give a sop when I have dipped it. And when he had dipped the sop, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon.” So when you hear “Simon’s son” or “the son of Simon,” you probably should think of Judas Iscariot.

It is amazing that his father's name is given to us over and over in Scripture, and we very seldom connect the name Simon with Judas Iscariot. It is intriguing to think that it was Simon's son who betrayed the Lord Jesus, which led to His crucifixion, and yet another Simon who helped our Lord carry His cross to the place of crucifixion.

Initially, our Lord bore that cross Himself. John 19:16–17 says, "Then delivered he him therefore unto them to be crucified, and they took Jesus and led him away. And he bearing his cross went forth unto a place called the place of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha." It was the design of the Romans to make the victim always carry the instrument of his death. Our Lord, therefore, would have been forced to carry the cross Himself all the way to Golgotha, had He been able to do so.

Why Jesus Needed Help Carrying the Cross

So we have to ask this question: Why was He not able to carry the cross all the way to Golgotha Himself? Or, put another way, why would He need help? You must remember that our Lord was raised in a carpenter's shop. You do not get weak doing carpentry work. He had a very strong body, that is for sure. But why would He need help?

First of all, you have to understand that our Lord's trial initially was at night, which was unlawful. He was up all night with a trial by the chief priests and the scribes. Matthew 27:1 says, "When the morning was come, all the chief priests and elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put Him to death."

"And when they had bound Him, they led Him away and delivered Him to Pontius Pilate the governor." All night long they had drilled our Lord and kept Him awake. When morning came, they agreed that He was to be put to death, although they had obviously predetermined that as well. Then our Lord went through a lengthy trial before Pilate. You can read about that in verses 11 through 25. Verse 11 says, "...And Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, saying, Art thou the king of the Jews? And Jesus said unto him, Thou sayest." Literally, the way you and I would say it, "As you said it, buddy. You got that right, Jack." In other

words, that is basically what He said: Yes, I am the Son of God. I am the King. That is exactly what you said, and that is certainly the truth.

After the people chose Barabbas to be released, Pilate did something else. Matthew 27:26 says, "Then released he Barabbas unto them, and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified."

Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall and gathered unto Him the whole band of soldiers. They stripped Him and put on Him a scarlet robe. When they had plaited a crown of thorns, they put it upon His head and a reed in His right hand. They bowed the knee before Him and mocked Him, saying, "Hail, king of the Jews!" They spit upon Him, took the reed, and smote Him on the head. After they had mocked Him, they took the robe off Him, put His own raiment on Him, and led Him away to crucify Him.

“And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name, him they compelled to bear the cross.” Once Pilate released Barabbas to them, the next thing he did was have Jesus Christ scourged.

Initially, scourging was done simply with a rod. To make the blows more severe and painful, lashes were added. Pieces of iron, lead, rock, or some other sharp object were tied to the end of the lash. When the rod struck and the lash wrapped around the ribcage, pulling back tore the flesh away; if the beating was hard enough, it reached the muscle and exposed it.

These rods, with their lashes and pieces of iron and lead, were called scorpions because they stung like a scorpion. If you have never been stung by one, you do not really understand that. When I was a little boy, I went down to the cow pen—I do not remember whether I was milking the cow or Mother was—and saw a funny-looking little bug carrying its tail on its back. I thought, “Well, let me check that one out.” I picked it up in my hand and put it down very quickly, I can assure you, because it stung.

But this is exactly what these things are called in 1 Kings 12:11. The people came to Rehoboam and said, “Look, if you’ll make our

burdens easier and lighter, we will serve you." Rehoboam consulted the old men, who told him, "If you'll serve the people, they'll be your servants." But the young men said, "No, no, no. You've got to be hard-nosed with these people. You show them who is boss."

So Rehoboam said to the people, "Now whereas my father did lade you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke: my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions." In other words, this lash, with all its pieces of metal, was referred to as a scorpion.

According to biblical law, a man could receive only forty stripes. To be accurate, the Jews would take a rod and add three lashes to it. Thus, after striking a man thirteen times, there would be thirty-nine stripes. Lest they go over, they would stop at that point. The Apostle Paul himself was scourged five times in this manner, according to 2 Corinthians 11:24.

But remember this: it was the Roman soldiers who scourged Jesus. They did not feel themselves bound by God's law; consequently, they scourged Him according to their pleasure and leisure, until they got tired of it. Once the hide, flesh, and skin had been peeled back, our Lord could indeed have been a bloody mess, with His muscles showing.

Moreover, on top of the scourging, the Bible says, in verse 27: "Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered in the whole band of soldiers, and they stripped Him, and put on Him a scarlet robe, and when they had plaited a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand, and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, king of the Jews. And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him upon the head."

The Greek word signifies a bramble bush, thorns from the bramble bush. That crown was woven with very sharp-pointed thorns, sharp enough to pierce not only His skin but His brow as well. In all probability, these soldiers were not delicate. They probably pressed that crown of thorns down as hard as they could and as deeply as they could into His brow.

If you have ever been cut above the eye or over the forehead, you know that once you receive a cut there, you will bleed profusely. In fact, the blood will cover your eyes, and you will find out exactly what is going on. But notice what they said in verse 30: "And they spit upon him and took the reed and smote him on the head." They gave Him a reed. The Bible says in verse 27, "Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall and gathered unto him the whole band of soldiers." If each man took a time with the reed, hitting Him over the head, they were deliberately forcing those thorns deeper and deeper into His brow.

An Unexpected Hour

Everything they did was to mock Him, to denigrate Him, and simply to ridicule Him. One author said this, and I liked it so well, I thought it would go well right here, since obviously they did not believe in Jesus Christ, and they did everything they could to mock Him: "Let the world do what it will to render the royalty and mysteries of Jesus Christ contemptible. It is my glory to serve a king thus debased, my salvation to adore that which the world despises, and my redemption to go unto God through the merits of him who was crowned with thorns." And that's certainly, certainly true.

But it was after this mocking, after this scourging, after being beaten with the reed over the head with the crown of thorns on His brow, that Jesus was delivered to be crucified. The crucifixion always took place without the gate of Jerusalem. In fact, the Bible says in Hebrews 13:12–13, "Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach."

So now Jesus Christ was being forced to carry His cross. Undoubtedly, our Lord had to be in great physical shape to endure such a beating and such a scourging and still be able initially to carry the cross. He was not able to carry it all the way. So either Simon was compelled to carry it for Him, or at least to help Him carry it by picking up the back part of it.

An Unexpected Hour

Today I want to share with you two thoughts. I want you to look back at Mark 15:21, because these two thoughts fit very well into this one passage: "And they compelled one Simon, a Cyrenian, who passed by coming out of the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to bear the cross." The very first thing I am going to give you is an unexpected hour. When Simon woke up that morning, he had no idea that he would be carrying the cross of Jesus Christ. It was unexpected. He just happened to be in the right place at the right time, and I will explain that statement a little later. Notice also the wording: "And they compelled one Simon a Cyrenian, who passed by, coming out of the country."

The word "country" is translated from the Greek word agros, agros. I hope that sounds familiar, like agriculture. Of course, agros is translated in our Bibles as "field" twenty-two times, "land" four times, "farm" one time, and "piece of ground" one time. It is also translated as "country" eight times.

So obviously, Simon was already in Judea. He was out in a field or on a farm, perhaps in a village, returning from it. Maybe he was carrying wood or bringing in crops; I do not know. He could have been staying in a village outside Jerusalem. At any rate, he was a man of Cyrene. The very fact that he was a man of Cyrene does not indicate that he was a pagan. In fact, I am going to show that he probably was not a pagan. He was an Israelite and probably a real believer. Cyrene was in Libya, on the north coast of Africa. Ptolemy Lagus had founded a Jewish colony there.

Cyrenians are mentioned several times in the Bible. At Pentecost, there were men of Cyprus and Cyrene. Acts 2:5 says, “And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men out of every nation under heaven.” When this was noised abroad, the multitude came together and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. They all were amazed and marveled, saying one to another, “Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue wherein we were born?” The passage names Parthians, Medes, Elamites, the dwellers of Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, and “in parts of Libya about Cyrene,” together with strangers

of Rome, Jews, proselytes, Cretes, and Arabians. They heard them speak in their tongues "the wonderful works of God." Thus Libya and Cyrene are particularly mentioned at the day of Pentecost.

The Cyrenians also had a synagogue in Jerusalem. It may surprise us that they had a synagogue there. Acts 6:9 says, "Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians and Alexandrians, and with them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen." Here were men of the synagogue of the Cyrenians, among those disputing with Stephen.

There was persecution in the early church. Saul was breathing out threatenings and slaughter against all of these disciples, and they were scattered abroad. Acts 11:19-20 says, "Now they which were scattered abroad about the persecution that arose about Stephen, traveled as far as Phenice and Cyprus and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only. And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus." Thus there were men of Cyrene who came to Antioch and preached the Lord Jesus.

There were also Cyrenians in the church. Acts 13:1 says, "Now there was in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod, the Tetrarch, and Saul." Lucius of Cyrene was among the prophets and teachers in the church at Antioch.

So there's Lucius of Cyrene. When the Bible tells us in Mark chapter 15 and verse 21 that they compelled one Simon a Cyrenian, that does not indicate at all that he was a pagan. In all probability, he was not only an Israelite; I believe that he was also a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and celebrate. Of course, he may have bought a farm outside Jerusalem. Who knows? The Bible does not tell us. It simply tells us that he was coming from a farm or from a field.

Whatever he was doing, he was in the right place at the right time. Simon did not wake up that morning and say, "Wow, I think I'm going to carry the cross for Jesus Christ today." It did not come into his mind. When he saw what was happening, the Romans may have

chosen him at random. I do not know; the Bible does not say. He could have indicated or shown sympathy toward Jesus Christ, and therefore they may have said, “Since you are showing sympathy, you will be the one to help carry the cross.” He may have been counted as a stranger to them, but he was certainly not a stranger to the truth.

The Bible says, “Him they compelled”—that is, they impressed him—to carry the cross of Jesus Christ. The Romans did not compel him out of pity or sympathy. They did not say, “Look at Jesus. He is so weak. We beat Him so horribly. Let us have pity upon Him.” No, there was no pity or sympathy. They wanted Him crucified, and they were afraid that He might die before reaching the place of crucifixion. They wanted to make sure that He suffered all the indignity of crucifixion, the disgraceful punishment reserved for slaves and criminals.

Plutarch, a Greek essayist and biographer, said, "Every kind of wickedness produces its own particular torment. Just as every malefactor, when he is brought forth to execution, carries his own cross." It was standard procedure for the man who was going to be crucified to carry his own cross. But since Jesus Christ had been beaten so by the Roman soldiers, they compelled Simon, and he then helped carry the cross.

The Roman soldiers had authority to compel or impress anyone to carry their baggage or weapons for up to one mile. Our Lord said in Matthew 5:41, "And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain." Stop and think: this would have been highly honorous to a man on his way somewhere who saw a Roman soldier say, "You have to come carry my baggage and my equipment," and take him a mile in a different direction.

Our Lord says, You are not going to get angry or bitter. If you are compelled to go a mile, go with him twain, just to make sure there is no bitterness and no anger.

Simon was probably not a man of means. If he had been a man of money, he probably would not have been out in the field doing work. If he was not out in the field doing work, he would not have been staying in a village outside Jerusalem. He would have had the money to stay in Jerusalem. Undoubtedly, he was a peasant and a stranger

to the Roman soldiers. Carrying a cross was counted as absolutely detestable, and anyone who touched it would be counted as polluted.

Whatever his circumstances—whether he was coming from work, lived there, or was coming from a village—he was in the right place at the right time, and his calling at this unexpected hour was in line with the principles of Scripture. They found one Simon, a Cyrenian, coming out of the country, out of the fields, and compelled him to carry the cross. Remember this: they did not compel a king. It was not a king.

It was not a prince, an ambassador, or a diplomat. He was no person of position or high honor. He was a peasant, a lowly individual. In 1 Corinthians 1:26, the Bible says, "You see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called, but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise. And God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty. And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen ye, and things which are not, to bring to naught things that are. That no flesh should glory in his presence."

"But of him are you in Christ Jesus, who of God is made in us wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, that according as it is written, he that glorieth let him glory in the Lord." He says, "You see your calling, brethren, not many wise men, not many mighty, not many noble." It was not the nobility that were called upon to carry the cross of Christ. It was a simple individual who believed. Here was an unexpected hour: Simon came from his fields and was called upon to help carry the cross of Jesus Christ.

The second thing to see is an unanticipated honor. In Mark 15:21, the Bible says, "And they compel one Simon a Cyrenian, who passed by, coming out of the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to bear his cross."

An Unanticipated Honor

There is a principle in Scripture repeated throughout the Bible. In 1 Samuel 2:30, God says, "For them that honor me will I honor. And they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed, saith the Lord." Those

that honor God, God is going to honor. Simon was honored by God in that he was allowed to help carry the cross of Jesus Christ.

Had you been alive at that particular time, and had you been in the place of Simon, would you have been willing and ready to carry the cross of Jesus Christ? As a believer, each one of us would answer, yes. We would be willing to do that.

Well, I said earlier, it was probably that Simon showed some sympathy toward Jesus Christ that made the Roman soldiers choose him. I not only believe that Simon was a true Israelite, I also believe that Simon was a true Christian, that he also trusted in Christ as Messiah and believed indeed in his salvation.

Now what makes me think that? How can I say that? There's no scripture that says that Simon was saved. I understand that. But, if you look in verse 21 again, the Bible says, "...they compel one Simon a Cyrenian, who passed by coming out of the country." And then this is added, "...the father of Alexander and Rufus to bear the cross." So what makes me think that Simon was a believer? The answer is because he was the father of Alexander and Rufus. Alexander and Rufus were men of note and men of faith among the early disciples.

If you will look in your Bibles to the book of Acts chapter 19 and verse 31, Acts 19 and verse 31, there is a row, there is a riot almost in Acts chapter 19, because Paul and some of the other followers of Paul were here in Ephesus, and my goodness, these people were worshipers of Diana of the Ephesians. And the silversmiths had it in for Paul because when people got converted, they quit buying their wares.

A great commotion was taking place in Ephesus. Acts 19:32 says, “Some therefore cried one thing and some another, for the assembly was confused, and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together. And they, that is, the Jews, they drew Alexander out of the multitude.” In other words, the Jews put him forward. “And Alexander beckoned with his hand and would have made his defense unto them, unto the people, but when they knew that he was a Jew, all with one voice, about the space of two hours, cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians.”

The Jews put Alexander forward, not because he was about to make a defense for the Jewish nation, but because he was a Christian. They hated him as much as they hated the other idolaters, and they wanted Alexander put to death. John Gill, the great Baptist expositor, says it like this: “The Jews putting him forward being equally enemies to him as being under a profession of Christianity.”

Since Alexander was a Christian, they wanted him put forward so that he would be mobbed and murdered. Romans 16:13 says, “Salute Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother, and mine.” Rufus was literally the son of his mother, and Paul was saying that she was figuratively his mother as well.

Now, if Alexander and Rufus were both prominent Christians, and the mother of Rufus was a prominent Christian whom Paul had taken to calling his mother, having probably partially adopted him as her third son, do you not think that Simon, the father, would also have been a Christian and a believer? The truth of the matter is that Scripture demonstrates these individuals were choice Christians, eminent in grace and gifts. Rufus is honorably mentioned by Polycarp, one of the disciples of John the Apostle, in one of his epistles. Rufus supposedly became the Bishop of Spain, and Alexander suffered martyrdom. If the sons of Simon, Alexander and Rufus, are the same men mentioned by Luke and Paul, they were men of note among the Christians. Undoubtedly, Simon would have been a believer as well, since Paul called his wife, figuratively speaking, his mother.

The Significance of the Names

Look in Mark 15, verse 21. Before the applications, I want to point out this concept. Names usually do not mean anything to us today; they are simply handles by which we are identified—Steve, David, John. They may be biblical names, but most people have no earthly idea what their name means. We know what a few names in the Bible mean because we read, like Samuel, “Ask of the Lord.”

In Bible times, however, names were usually given based upon an individual's character or some truth, and often they were related to God. Consider Elijah. You remember our Lord cried, “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?” Somebody says He is calling for Elijah. But what

was He saying? “My God, my God.” If Eli refers to God, then my God is Yahweh, my God is Jehovah. Names meant something in Bible times.

When you look at verse 21, the Bible says, “...they compelled one Simon, a Cyrenian, who passed by coming out of the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to bear his cross.” The name Simon literally means hearer, hearkener, obedient. Alexander means man defender. Rufus means red. It was Jesus Christ who heard, hearkened, and obeyed the Father, defended His own, and gave His blood for our redemption. That is why in John 10 and verse 11, Jesus Christ said, “I am the Good Shepherd, and the Good Shepherd giveth His life for His sheep.” In John 10, verses 14 and 15, He said, “I am the Good Shepherd, and I know My sheep, and am known of Mine, as the Father knoweth Me, even so I know the Father, and I lay down My life for the sheep.”

In these three names—Simon, Alexander, and Rufus—we see the work of Jesus Christ set forth. He heard, hearkened, and obeyed the Father; He defended His own, carried His cross, shed His blood, and saved His own. It was not luck, chance, fate, or fortune that Simon happened to be in the right place at the right time.

It was God's sovereign providence. Simon and his sons, through their names, exemplified the saving work of Jesus Christ. Undoubtedly, God has another lesson for you and I to learn: our lives have meaning and honor only as we serve Him.

Application: Taking Up Our Cross Daily

Stop and think. How hated and detestable was the cross. How polluted, ceremonially speaking, one became just by touching that instrument. And yet it was an honor. Here is a man whose name rings out through the ages because he carried the cross of Jesus Christ.

I read this week about a young man who, if I remember correctly, was twenty-one. He murdered a couple of other people, and then he murdered himself. He left a note saying, "Life sucks. I want out of it as quickly as I can get out of it." Twenty-one years of age! You wonder why our country is running crazy and why suicide is on the

rampage? We need to understand that our lives can only have meaning in relationship to God. If there is no relationship to Him, most people think life is not worth living anyhow.

Jeremiah 9:23-24 says, "Thus saith the Lord, let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might. Let not the rich man glory in his riches, but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, saith the Lord."

So God says, if you're wise, don't rejoice in your wisdom. If you're mighty, don't rejoice in your strength. If you're rich, don't rejoice in your money. If you're going to glory, glory in this: that we understand and know the Lord. We understand and know that He's lovingly kind, that He has righteous judgment, and that He has righteousness in Himself. That's what He says we're delighted in. And without that, life is meaningless. That's why so many are taking their own lives.

Let me make a couple of applications. The first one is this: if you had been alive, on the scene, and impressed—compelled—to carry the cross of Jesus Christ, would you have done so? The answer for a believer is yes. But that part of history is over and done with. We need not concern ourselves with that question, because it will never be repeated again. Jesus Christ, the Bible says, died once and for all. He is not going to die again, and no one will have to carry that cross again. Simon was called at that unexpected hour and given that unanticipated honor. He was the one who carried that cross.

The question is not whether we would have been willing to carry the cross back then, but whether we are willing now to carry whatever crosses He places upon us. Matthew 16:24 says, “...then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” You have to willingly take up your cross by denying yourself and following Christ.

“For whosoever will save his life shall lose it, and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” Our Lord says, “If any man will

come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." So there is a cross that we have.

Luke 9:23 adds an important word: "And He said unto them all, If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross,"—"Daily."—"...and follow Me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it, but whosoever will lose his life for My sake, the same shall find it, or save it. For what is a man's advantage if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away?" There is a sense in which we have a daily cross. We have to deny our flesh, our lusts, and everything that is contrary to the Lord Jesus Christ and His Word.

You remember what the Apostle Paul said: "I die"? How often did he die? Daily, daily, daily. So we have to carry our cross, no matter how heavy it seems or how disagreeable to the flesh it may be. It should be the love of Christ that constrains us to carry that cross.

Let me point something else out. The very first point that I made was an unexpected hour. Simon did not wake up that morning and say, "I think I'm going to carry the cross of Jesus Christ today." Something happened over which Simon had absolutely no control and for which he had made no plans.

In God's sovereign providence, things happen that you and I have never planned for and hardly ever think about. I preached for fifty-three years. I never kept a record of how many people I married or buried, nor how many people I watched die. I have seen people die quickly and others suffer a great length of time. I have been with very, very sick people, on the edge of death, innumerable times. Yet when a person finally died, the family would say, "We knew it was going to happen, but we didn't expect it so soon." Stop and think about that. We die.

Sometimes it will be unexpected. It may be your husband, your wife, your child, or you. But we did not wake up that morning and say, "I think I'll die today." Let me show you. Look in your Bible at John 21. You remember that three times Peter denied Christ, and three times Christ asked Peter, "Do you love me?" After Peter said, "Yes, Lord, You know all things. You know that I love You," look at verse 18. Here is what our Lord told Peter: "Verily, verily, I say unto

thee, When thou wast young, thou girdest thyself, and walkest whither thou wouldest."

When Peter was young, he girded himself and did what he wanted to do. But when he became old, and when it came his time to die, Christ said, "But when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thine hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me." In other words, Peter was crucified as well. He surely did not expect to be crucified, and yet he was. There are unexpected crosses that we have to bear and face. We must face and bear those crosses so that we may honor Jesus Christ, whatever that cross may be.

We must learn not only to rejoice in Him, but to suffer with Him. That is why He said, "Let us go forth unto Him without the gate bearing His reproach." Our Lord said it like this in John 12:26: "If any man serve Me, let him follow Me. And where I am, there will my servant also be." We are to be with Jesus Christ in rejoicing and glory, and in humility and reproach. Wherever He is, that is where we are to be.

"And they found one Simon the Cyrenian coming out of the country. And they compelled him to bear the cross of Jesus Christ." We need to bear our crosses without being compelled, for the honor and glory of Jesus Christ.

Let us pray. Father, help us in the name of Jesus Christ to learn from Simon an unexpected hour and an unanticipated honor. Help us, Lord, not only to be willing to rejoice with Thee and be with Thee in glory, but to suffer with Thee and be with Thee in reproach. Enable us, Lord, always to do those things which will please Thee and glorify Thee. In the name of Jesus Christ we ask and pray, Amen.

CHAPTER 19

Knowing the Will of God

February 2, 2012

Introduction and Command

One reason I am preaching this message is that just this week I spoke with two brothers who asked me how specifically to know the will of God in their lives. I shared the information with them, and then I began thinking that, especially in light of these times, this information needs to be in all our heads and hearts so that we can apply it to every situation.

Look in Ephesians 5, verse 17: “Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.” Do you know the will of God for your life? Do you know the will of God in everything that relates to your life? How can we discern the will of God in every situation and circumstance? Scripture commands us not to be unwise, but to understand what the will of the Lord is.

Negative and Positive Commands

Notice that verse 17 contains a negative and a positive. God commands us how not to act, and on the other hand He commands

us how to act. Negatively, we are not to be unwise concerning the will of the Lord.

The word “unwise” is from the Greek word aphron, which literally means foolish, unwise, one who is senseless, and one who acts rashly and without reason. Since we have some college students here, aphron is related to the word “sophomore.” That is related to two Greek words: sophia, which means wisdom, and moros, from moron, which means fool. So the word sophomore simply means a wise fool. That is usually what a sophomore is in college.

But here is the word aphron, which once again means foolish, unwise, one who is senseless, and one who acts rashly and without reason. God says, Do not be this way.

The positive is that we are to understand what the will of the Lord is. The Greek word for understanding is suniemi, which literally means to understand, to consider, and to be wise. Technically, it means to set, bring together, or join together in the mind. It means to perceive and know the will of God, having it fully set and established in your mind.

Doing God's Will from the Heart

You and I are commanded, on the one hand, not to be unwise, and on the other hand, to know what the will of God is. We must remember that we are not only to be constantly knowing what the will of God is, but also proving what the will of God is. In fact, you remember that a month or two ago I brought a message on Romans 12:1–2 entitled “Proving the Will of God.” Verse two says, “And be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Now listen carefully, that you may prove what is that good and perfect and acceptable will of God.”

So God says we are not only to know His will; we are to be proving His will. And even though we may know His will and prove His will, we are not to do this through some mechanical action where nothing else is involved. The Bible says in Ephesians chapter 6 and verse 6, “Not with eye service as men pleasers, but as servants of Christ doing the will of God from the heart.” Notice what he said: doing the will of God from the heart. It is not that we are just acting mechanically,

thinking, “I have to do this,” and treating it as a reflexive action. No, we are to do the will of God from the heart. Our affections, our attitude—everything—is to be involved. It was Epaphras who, in Colossians chapter 4 and verse 12, prayed for his godly friends.

His prayer request was that they would stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. Notice: perfect and complete in all the will of God.

General Answer: God's Will Revealed in His Word

Now the question that you have to ask is this: How do we find and how do we know the will of God? There is a very general answer, and there are a few specific answers. First, we have to understand that the will of God is revealed in the Word of God. Let me make something exceedingly clear: We do not acquire or receive God’s will through dreams, trances, fortune tellers, or tarot cards. No. We do not use wicked, demonic, and humanistic means to discern God’s will.

Turn in your Bibles to Hebrews chapter 1. In the Old Testament, and occasionally in the New Testament while it was being written, God spoke through dreams, visions, or trances. Hebrews 1:1 says, "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets." God spoke in many different ways, but verse 2 says, "Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; who being the brightness of his glory and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high."

How does God reveal His will now, since we have Jesus Christ? The answer is only through Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the living Word. John 1:1-3 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." "The worlds were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made." Verse 14 says, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." Jesus Christ is the living Word.

Second Timothy 3:16 says, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable." Jesus Christ is the living Word, and the Bible is the written Word. Seeking the will of God apart from Christ and apart from His Word is an insult to the Father and a rejection of Jesus Christ.

Do you understand the implications of Hebrews 1:1-3? Suppose you and I are walking along and see a sign: "Sister Lois, spiritual advisor. Come in and I'll tell you your fortune. Come in and I'll tell you what your future is." You say, "Oh, that's interesting. Let's go in and see what she has to say." By your very act,

You're saying Jesus Christ is not the full and final revelation of God. You're saying the Bible is not complete and that God has not given us everything that we need in His Word. Now we're going to seek revelation apart from Jesus Christ and apart from the Word of God. Once again, it is an insult to the Father and a rejection of Christ. Jesus Christ said in John 6 and verse 38, "For I came down from heaven not to do mine own will, but the will of Him that sent me." In John 5 and verse 23, the Bible says, "That all men should honor the Son even as they honor the Father. He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father who has sent him." When you go outside of Christ and outside of the Word of God, you're dishonoring Christ and dishonoring the Father.

So the first general answer is this: God has revealed His will in His Word. Jesus Christ is the living Word. The Bible is the written Word.

The Word of God contains everything that you and I need to know for godly, holy, obedient living. As 2 Peter 1 and verse 3 says, "According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that called us to glory and virtue." According as His divine power has given us all things that pertain unto life and godliness. What we need to know comes through the knowledge of Christ, which God has revealed in Christ and revealed in His Word.

Specific Clear Commands in Scripture

Deuteronomy 29 and verse 29 gives us the same truth in the Old Testament: "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but

those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law." People occasionally ask me things that I not only do not know, but no one knows. The best you could do is speculate. Why should you speculate on something about which you have absolutely no knowledge? There are some secret things that belong to the Lord only. There are some things that you and I will not know until God brings them to pass in time, and some things we will not know until we reach eternity. The secret things belong to the Lord.

I'm not really concerned about the secret things that I don't know anything about. What I should be concerned about is those things which are revealed, because God has given them to me and to my children, that I may know them and that I may do them. God said, even in the Old Testament, that the revelation He gave was in His Word.

When we ask what the will of God is in every area of our life, there are a number of things for us that are spelled out in the Scriptures. We do not even have to wonder, guess, or do any research, really. If we read the Bible, we should automatically know them. If I want to know what the will of God is for my life, how do I know? I can find out based upon the Bible, because there are specific verses that give specific knowledge concerning the will of God.

For instance, 1 Thessalonians 4:3 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.” Notice what it says: “For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication.” There should be no question about immorality, fornication, adultery, sodomy, or licentiousness in any form whatsoever. It is the will of God that we be pure and holy and godly. Period.

I do not have to ask the question, “Well, should I have an affair and run around on my wife?” I know what the answer is: No, do not do it. This is the will of God. I do not have to ask any other question. There it is in black and white: “This is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye abstain from fornication.”

Now look at 1 Thessalonians 5:18. Here is another statement: “In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.” In everything give thanks. I will bet you, if I were a gambling man, Dr. Bowen had not yet thanked God for the attack of the tiller. We fail to do things like that. But do you realize what He said? In everything give thanks.

It could have been a lot worse. In everything give thanks. This is the will of God in Christ Jesus. Have you thanked Him this morning for rest and sleep? Have you thanked Him for life and health? Have you thanked Him for His provision? Have you thanked Him for your protection? Have you thanked Him for your family? Have you thanked Him for the Word of God? Have you thanked Him for salvation? In everything give thanks.

We do not have to wonder about that. God spells it out for us. Look in 1 Peter chapter 2 and verse 15. “For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.” For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.

Here is someone lying about me, spreading rumors about me, criticizing me, and saying all manner of evil against me—wicked and false. Am I to jump up, get mad, and attack them? No. Here is what God says, and here is the will of God: that you may, with well-doing, act biblically, holily, and godly, in such a way that they will be proven to be liars, foolish, and wicked. In other words, live such a life that those spreading lies and rumors about you will be found out to be liars, wicked, and wrong. This is the will of God.

First Peter 3:17 gives another specific: “For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing.” If you and I are going to suffer, it is better that we suffer for that which is right and holy than for that which is wrong. Isn’t that simple?

We live in such a perverted time. Many times you will find criminals on the streets, and God would have been incarcerated. My statement has always been this: I am not going to say that I will never be in prison. I do not want to be in prison. But one thing is sure: if I go, I want to go for doing righteousness instead of doing

that which is stupid, wicked, and wrong. If you are going to have to suffer, suffer for doing that which is right.

First Peter 4:19 says, “Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.” If you are going to suffer as a Christian, commit it to Him. He will take care of you and work it out. As you read through the Bible, you will find verses that say, “This is the will of God.” There is no question, guessing, deducing, or analysis.

Five Ways to Know God's Will in Unclear Matters

These matters are plain, black and white. We should have no problem discerning the will of God in verses like these. They are specific and exceedingly clear. But how do we know the will of God in those other areas that are unclear? For instance, I cannot find in the Bible a verse like this: "Pastor John Weaver, buy this house." I cannot find a verse that says, "John Weaver, marry this person," or, "John Weaver, go on this trip," or, "John Weaver, sell this car," "move to this town," "change jobs now," or "attend this school." How do I know when to buy a house and when not to buy one? How do I know whether I should go to college or not? These are all very practical things.

It would be very interesting and convenient if we could turn in a Bible and find a verse that says, "Lacey, do this," or, "Trip, don't do this," or, "James, go here," and, "Doc, don't do this." It would be easy if we could find verses like that. But if God spelled everything out for each one of us in the Bible, we could not carry our Bibles around. They would be too heavy and cumbersome. What God does is reveal His will, even in specifics, by giving us divine principles. We need to know these principles and how to apply them. The Bible says in Proverbs 25 and verse 2, "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honour of kings is to search out a matter." It is the glory of God to conceal a thing, but it is the honor of kings to search out a matter.

What has our Lord done? Our Lord has made us kings and priests unto our God. So it is our honor to search out a matter, to discern and know the will of God in every area of our lives. I am going to give

you five ways that you can know the will of God in every situation. Some of you know these things, but you have not put them together yet, or you may not know how to make the final application. If you will jot these down and learn them, it does not matter what situation you are in: you can discern the will of God by using these five principles.

Knowing God's Will by His Promise

Explanation of the Five Ways

First, we may know the will of God by His promise. In John 7:17, our Lord says, "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself." In the context, naturally, our Lord is speaking of doctrine, but I want you to note the principle that He is enunciating: If any man will do His will, he shall know. That principle is true regardless of whether we are talking about doctrine, some other principle, or the will of God.

Our Lord is far more interested in our obedience than we are interested in obeying Him. Our Lord is far more interested in our knowing the will of God than we are in knowing it. Discerning and knowing the will of God is not difficult as long as you genuinely, honestly, and sincerely desire the will of God. If you come to the Lord with this attitude—"Lord, I want Your will in my life. Regardless of the circumstances, regardless of the situation, I want Your will"—I can assure you, you will find His will. You will know His will.

But on the other hand, if you come to God with this attitude—"Now, Lord, show me Your will. If I like it, I'll do it. If I don't, I won't"—you mark her down: God will never give you His will. He said, "If any man will to do his will." God has promised to direct our steps and order our paths. Our responsibility is to submit to Him. He is the one that does the directing and the ordering.

There are so many such promises in Scripture, and I have had to be selective. Isaiah 30 and Psalm 32 show that we do have promise concerning God's direction. Notice Isaiah 30:21: Isaiah 30, verse 21. These passages show that God has promised to direct us. The

promise is not that we will direct ourselves, but that He will do the directing and the ordering as we submit to Him.

Isaiah 30:21 says, “And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left.” What did God say? God says you are going to hear a word saying, “This is it. This is the way.” In other words, God promises to lead us, guide us, and direct us.

Look in your Bibles to Psalm 32, verses 8 and 9. I like this passage. Psalm 32, verse 8 says, “I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye.” With mine eye. Now look what else He says: “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.”

Now, wait a minute. What did our text say? “Be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.” God has promised in verse 8, “I will instruct thee and I will teach thee in the way that thou shalt go. I will guide thee with mine eye.” Although He is promising to guide you, He says, “Be not as the horse and the mule, who must have a bit and a bridle on them, to make them go where you want them to go.”

If God wants us to do something, there is an easy way and a hard way. God says, “I’ll just guide you. All you have to do is submit, ask, and search My Word out. I promise I’ll guide you.” But if you will not submit and He really wants you to do something, God knows how to use a bit and a bridle. That bit can be very irritating in a horse’s mouth or in a mule’s mouth. Have you ever seen a horse chewing the bit?

Usually it's a tight up there. He's trying to get it off his jaw. And God knows how to do that, but God says, "Look, you don't need to have a bit and a bridle. Don't be stupid like a horse or a mule. Submit to Me. I promise you," said God, "I will lead you. I will guide you." These two passages demonstrate that God wants us to do His will. God is far more interested in you and me doing His will than we are interested in doing it. What God does not want is for us to be forced to obey. He wants us to willingly submit to Him. He has promised us

that if we genuinely, honestly, and sincerely want His will, He will give it to us.

So how can I know the will of God? First of all, by His promise. Secondly, we may know the will of God by His providence. 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." Here is a verse that refers to God's providence, where God sovereignly works everything out for our good and for His glory.

In Revelation 3:8, He told His church, "I know thy works. Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name." Notice what He said: "I've set before you an open door. And no man can shut it."

The Bible teaches that God is absolutely sovereign. God rules over everything. God controls everything. Thus, in His providence, He sovereignly works everything out for our good and for His glory. In His providence, He opens some doors and closes some doors. When God opens a door, we simply walk through it.

In 1 Corinthians 16:9, the apostle Paul uses this very same terminology: “For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries.” There may be many adversaries, but he says a great door is opened unto him. What did God do? God opened a door for a ministry for him to walk through that door.

Paul uses this language again in 2 Corinthians 2:12: “Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, and a door was opened unto me of the Lord.” God opens doors for us. God also closes doors for us. Acts 16 illustrates how God not only closes doors, but opens them as well. Again, here is the illustration of the apostle Paul.

“Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, after they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not. And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us. And after he had seen the vision,

immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them."

Note what happened. The Holy Spirit said, "Do not go into Asia. I am not going to let you go there." Paul accepted this, and they then assayed to go into Bithynia. But the Holy Spirit said, "No, no, no, no. That's not where I want you." The doors closed there. Paul may have wondered where in the world God did want them. Then God showed him the man from Macedonia saying, "Come over and help us." Paul knew that was where God wanted them. What did God do? God closed two doors and then opened the door He wanted Paul to go through.

God's providential dealings have been evident in my life a multitude of times throughout my ministry. Years ago, some churches held two-week meetings. I was preaching in Virginia, where I had a one-week meeting scheduled. Afterward, I was supposed to be in Illinois for two weeks, and then I was going to take two weeks off to return home and be with my family. At that time, all I was doing was traveling and preaching.

During the middle of that week in Virginia, the pastor from Illinois called. He said, "We've got church problems. There's a split. This is no time to have a meeting. I'm sorry to have to do this, but I'm going to have to cancel the meeting." I said, "Well, I understand. You're the pastor; you're responsible." I hung up the phone and thought, "Huh."

That had been a two-week meeting, and I was going to take two weeks off. That would be a month. I said, "Lord, I don't understand, but that's fine." I went to church that night and preached. The power of God fell in such a way that the pastor looked at me and said, "Could you stay another week?" I said, "You know, it just so happened, I can."

When I returned to the motel room, there was a message from another pastor in Michigan. He said, "The Lord has broken out upon us up here. Can you come up here week after next and preach for us?" I said, "You know, it just so happens I can." You know what God did? He closed one door and opened another.

Here is a very valuable lesson: when God opens a door, we walk through it. When God shuts a door, we sit still and say, “Lord, I trust You. You know what is best for me. I am going to sit here, trust You, and look for the next open door that You want me to run through.” That is God’s providence.

God is more interested in our serving Him than we are interested in serving Him. God did not bring us out of Egypt to drop us in the desert. He did not deliver us out of the kingdom of darkness and bring us into the kingdom of His dear Son to do nothing. He brought us into that kingdom that we might serve Him and obey Him. God will open doors for us if we will be submissive to Him and trust Him.

How do I know God’s will? First, by His promise; second, by His providence; and third, by His principles. Look in John 17:17. John 17 is the high priestly prayer of our Lord. Notice this prayer request: “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.” Are we going to be sanctified through truth, through the power of the Holy Spirit? Peter wrote in 2 Peter 1:19, “We have also a more sure word of prophecy;

“Whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts.” Peter also said, “We have also a more sure word of prophecy.” Until Jesus Christ returns, we have a sure word of prophecy. What is that sure word? It is the Word of God, the truth of God. Jesus Christ and His Word are indeed the full, final, complete, ultimate, and absolute revelation of God.

Since God’s Word is truth, God never leads us contrary to His Word. His principles are eternal. There is never an instance in which God will lead, guide, direct, or command us to violate His Word. Period. I have heard horror stories from those who claimed they were being led by the Holy Spirit and then did something utterly stupid and contrary to the Word of God.

The leading of the Holy Spirit is real and genuine. The Bible says in Romans 8:14, “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” But if you read that verse in its context, the leading of the Holy Spirit is leading us to mortify the deeds of our flesh and to be obedient to the Word of God.

Do not tell me that the Holy Spirit is leading you to have an affair, steal, murder, or do anything contrary to the Word of God. You may be led by a spirit, but I can assure you it is not the Holy Spirit of God. God does not lead us to violate His Word.

I have known of women who forsook their husbands and children and ran off with another man, then had the gall to say they were being led by the Holy Spirit. I know of pastors who left their wives and ran off with a woman in the church, then had the gall to say, “Well, the Holy Spirit led them because the woman they ran off with was more spiritual than their wife.”

That's not only hogwash, that's not only stupidity, that's blasphemous. God never leads us to violate His Word, period. If I were to ask you as a Christian, as a brother or sister in Christ, to pray with me because I was considering going out tomorrow night and getting drunk, I would hope you would have enough insight and biblical character knowledge to say, "Pastor, I don't have to pray about it. God said, Don't do it."

If it's a violation of a principle in the Word of God, we don't do it. God never leads us to violate His Word. We can save ourselves a great deal of heartache by remembering this simple truth: It's never right to do wrong. It's never safe to violate the Word of God. It is never God's will for you and me to go contrary to the will of God.

If we sin, we shall suffer. Mark that down. There are individuals in the Bible, and I've preached on them, who did go contrary to the Word of God. God did work out what happened in their lives, and they did sin, but they never got away with their sin. A principle of Scripture is that if you sin, you suffer. So we may know the will of God by His promise, by His providence, and by His principles.

Fourthly, we may know the will of God by prayer. In John 14, verses 13 and 14, our Lord said, "And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it."

I have a message that I've preached in times past on why God does not answer most prayers. In that message, I explain what it means to ask in the name of Jesus Christ, so I'm not necessarily going to go into that today. But our Lord is telling us here that we may know His

will based upon prayer, for He said, "If you ask anything in My name, I will do it." If we ask in the name of Christ for the will of God in our lives, of course, our Lord will give it to us.

We have been commanded in Philippians chapter 4 and verse 6, “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.” What did he say? Be careful for nothing. But in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. So if I want to know God’s will, I may pray and ask Him to give me His will, to show me His will. In fact, the Bible says in Colossians 4 and verse 2, “Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving.” So what if I do not get God’s will instantaneously? I am to continue in prayer, asking Him. The Bible says in Ephesians 6 and verse 18, “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit.” Do I stop praying? No. I would continue to pray. Romans 12 and verse 12 says, “Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer.” Continuing instant in prayer. That means we continue to pray until God shows us what He would have us to do.

Now, let me remind you something about prayer. Prayer is a means to accomplish the will of God. It is not just a privilege. It is not just simply a form of communication. Prayer was never, is never, and never shall be designed to change God’s mind. In fact, it is impossible to change God’s mind. Job 23 and verse 13 says, “But he is in one mind, and who can turn him? and what his soul desireth, even that he doeth.” You have to remember that God is immutable. He is unchangeable. He said in Malachi 3:6, “I the Lord change not.” If you think that prayer is a means to change God’s mind, you are going to have a very difficult time changing the unchangeable One, and you are wasting your time and breath. Prayer is not a means to change God’s mind. Prayer is a means so you and I may discern His will and accomplish His will.

Naturally, everything that we ask in the name of Jesus Christ must be in accord with His Word and His will. If there is a question as to whether I should go to this college or not go to this college, sell this house or buy this house, move here, or change jobs, my first question is this: Have you prayed about it? Have you made it a

matter of prayer? We may know the will of God, by His promise, by His providence, by His principles, and by prayer. Here is the fifth one: We may know the will of God by His peace.

Colossians 3:15 says, “And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.” Note that it is the peace of God that is to rule in our hearts.

The Greek word for “rule” literally means to decide, to determine, to be an umpire, to direct, and control. Literally, he says, let the peace of God be an umpire in your hearts. Philippians 4:7 says, “And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” In one passage, the peace of God is to rule us; in the other passage, the peace of God is to keep us.

Adam Clarke wrote this sentence: “No heart is right with God where the peace of Christ does not rule. And the continual prevalence of the peace of Christ is the decisive proof that the heart is right with God.” No heart is right with God unless there is peace, and constant, continual peace is persuasive evidence that the heart is right with God.

What do we mean by peace? The Greek word for peace is eirene, which literally means this: a settled state of tranquility.

Application of the Five Ways and Final Counsel

It is an exemption from rage, havoc, turmoil, and strife. When the Bible says, "Let the peace of God rule in your hearts," and peace means a settled state of tranquility—the absence of rage, havoc, turmoil, and strife—it means that we are not fighting against the will of God or raging against it. It is a settled assurance that we know what God's will is and that we are willing to do it. We are not endeavoring to escape God's will.

That does not mean the complete and total absence of human nervousness or anxiety. Suppose I was having physical problems and went to a doctor. The doctor examined me and said, "No wonder you're having problems. Your gallbladder is totally diseased, and it needs to be taken out instantly or you're in real, real trouble."

The only surgery I had in my life was when I was two years old, so I do not remember anything about it. I do not know what it is like to

go through an operation. The doctor told me, "This operation is really relatively simple, and you'll be back on your feet, preaching and traveling, within a week." I said, "Well, thanks, Doc, for that information."

I started praying about it: "Lord, you know, I've never had an operation that I can remember. I don't know anything about it. And Lord, I know they can put me to sleep. I just don't know if they can wake me up." That was my problem. As I prayed, I had peace that God was going to bring me through the surgery and that it was going to be successful. I had peace in my heart that I would come through it and that I was not going to die. But here is my question: When I go into that hospital and they start to put me to sleep, and I do not understand everything about anesthesia, everything they are going to do to me, how they are going to get my gallbladder out, or how it is going to affect me afterward, am I going to be nervous? Yes, I am going to be nervous.

I'm going to be anxious. Why? I've never gone through this before. I've never experienced it before. Do I have peace? Yes, I have peace. Is God going to bring me through it? Yes, He's going to bring me through it. I know He's going to bring me through it, but I still don't know everything I need to know. So there is going to be some human anxiousness and some human nervousness. God's peace means that I cannot be shaken from the confidence I have in God, that I have His will, and that I'm doing His will.

You can take this and apply it. If you have prayed about leaving one job and taking another job, or you get laid off or fired, you may have peace and confidence that God is going to take care of you, but there is still going to be a little anxiousness: "Lord, how am I going to support my family? How am I going to pay my bills? Where's this coming from? How soon will I learn a new trade? How soon will I learn a new job? Will I be accepted? Will I be able to do it? Will I be able to accomplish what I need to accomplish?" There is going to be a little human anxiety. The peace of God does not negate our humanity or the fact that we are still flesh and blood.

But here's what does happen: if you begin to get overanxious, the peace of God comes in like an umpire and says, "No, you don't go that far. You don't do that because here's the peace of God. God's got

His hand on you. God's working it out. God's will is being accomplished through you and in you." The peace of God comes as an umpire and controls us, directs us, and settles the issue for us.

Now, let me put all these things together for you. I've given you five ways that you can know the will of God. Listen carefully. You may know His will by His promise, by His providence, by His principles, by prayer, and by peace.

God, if He so chooses, may lead you by any one of those five ways. He does not have to use all of them. His providence is sufficient. He may lead you by any two, three, or four of those five ways, or He may lead you by all five at one time. That is no problem. But here is where I want you to pay attention: if whatever you start to do contradicts one of those five truths, it is not God's will.

If you do not have His promise, it is not His will. If His providence does not open the door, it is not His will. If it violates a principle of the Word of God, it is not His will. If there is no prayer, it is not His will. If there is no peace, it is not His will. God may lead you by any combination of those five ways if He so chooses. But if whatever you start to do contradicts one of those five truths, it is not God's will.

Now, I want to add something to what I have just said. You may say, "I may be unclear on some things still. I may use those five principles, and still not know, still have doubts, and still not be sure." Look at Romans chapter 14 and verse 23. Without going into the context of Romans 14, he says, "And he that doubteth is damned if he eat." He is talking about eating things that have been sacrificed to idols and that kind of thing. But here is the latter part of the verse: "For whatsoever is not of faith is sin."

Let me put it to you this way: if, after you examine those five principles, you still do not know, do not do it. "For whatsoever is not of faith is sin." If you cannot in faith, as unto God, do what you think needs to be done, and cannot do it in faith, God says, "Do not do it." Because whatsoever is not of faith is sin.

Here has been my counsel for years, and it is still my counsel: When in doubt, don't. Isn't that simple? For whatsoever is not of faith is sin. If you have to give an answer, when in doubt, say no. After further study, further truth, and further understanding, it is

always easier to change a no to a yes than it is a yes to a no. So when in doubt, simply say no.

Proverbs 16:3 says, “Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established.” Let me give you one illustration. I am thankful for the doors God has opened for me to preach, and I have preached all over this country. I go to some churches knowing exactly what I am going to preach. There is no question or doubt; I know what God would have me preach.

Occasionally, however, I arrive at a church and am unsure. I do not know, so I pray and ask the Lord for wisdom. Finally, when there seems to be no light, I say, “Lord, Your providence has opened the door for me. You have promised me that I would know Your will. What I am doing here does not violate any of Your principles. I have prayed about it. Although I may not necessarily have peace right now, I know I am to preach Your Word, for You have called me to preach.

“So, Lord, tonight I am going to preach this message that I have picked out, unless You change my mind. I am committing my works unto You and asking You to establish my thoughts. Unless I get clear direction from You, this is what I am preaching.” Inevitably, someone comes to me, sometimes many, and says, “Pastor, that was exactly what we needed.” Why? “Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established.”

When you and I learn to think biblically upon any subject, that is the correct point of beginning. When you start out on the right road and stay on the right road, you always end up at the right place. The starting point is always our Lord and His Word. Therefore, He commands us, “Be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.” You may know that will by His promise, His providence, His principles, prayer, and peace. Let us pray.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we commit our works unto Thee and ask You to establish our thoughts. Help us, Lord, to know and do Thy will. Help us to learn, to search Thy words, and discern Your will in every area of lives. Give us understanding that we may serve Thee and honor Thee and glorify Thee. Thank You for Your mercies and Your grace. Above all, thank You for Jesus Christ, the

unspeakable gift. Thank You for salvation. In the name of our Lord and Savior. Amen.

CHAPTER 20

Christian Manhood

May 9, 2018

Introduction: The World's Definition vs. Biblical Manhood

Tonight I want to bring a message entitled Christian Manhood from the book of John, chapter 1. John 1, verse 6, says, “There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.” Verse 19 continues, “And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou?”

“And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ. And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? He saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet?” That is from Deuteronomy 18. “He answered, No. Then said they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself? He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias.”

Verse 35 says, “Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples; And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the

Lamb of God! And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus."

When we think about Christian manhood, let me explain the word manhood. When you look at the Greek text, there are basically two words for man. One is anthropos, which simply means mankind in general and includes men and women. That is where we get our English word anthropology. The second word is aner, which means a man and a man only—not a woman, not a child, but a man.

Christian manhood, of course, would be talking about anthropos, which includes women as well in that sense of the word. But when you think of manhood, you have to stop and think that the biblical definition of a man, or manhood, is totally and completely different from that which the world gives us today. In fact, if I had time to go back to the book of Genesis, I could show you that, basically speaking specifically about a man, manhood refers to maturity, responsibility, and a work ethic.

When God created Adam, He did not create him a baby or a teenager. He created him full grown, mature, and responsible, and there was work before the fall. Work is not a product of the fall. Certainly, our work became onerous because of the fall, but there was work before the fall.

So manhood, or maturity—I could call this Christian maturity—certainly deals with character. When we think about a man today, we can see that the world's definition of a man is totally different from a biblical definition. I have two good friends who are brothers. One of them was a Marine, and that was not enough for him. When he left the Marines, he joined the army and became a Ranger.

When he got out of that, he decided to go to college and study some things, and we were in school together. Occasionally, when I was gone preaching, my wife would stay with him and his wife and their child. He lived at the end of a driveway. One night, a car came up and parked in front of his house. There were four men in the car. They had been drinking, were cursing and raising all kind of cane, and he went out and simply asked them, "Would you please move your car from in front of my house? My wife and my child are inside,

and the pastor's wife is inside. I just don't appreciate your cursing and your drinking right here in front of my house."

They made a very horrible mistake. They cursed my friend and threatened him. When they did, he jerked open the driver's passenger door, took the driver with one hand, opened the back door, took the other man out with the other hand, slammed their heads together, dropped them on the pavement, and was reaching for the other two when everybody went to apologize. It was time to apologize. Now you say that's a man. Not necessarily.

It is true that a man is going to defend his family. But muscles do not necessarily make a man. His brother was one of the few men from whom I really began to take karate many years ago. He had studied in Okinawa, came home, and lived in the same town. One day he pulled up at a red light, and a convertible came by with five men in it. They had the radios turned up and were cursing. My friend looked at them and said, "Would you please not take God's name in vain, and please turn that radio down?" They answered, "You follow us and we'll show you something." He said, "We'll lead the way."

They went to a park. When they got out, the leader and driver had a long chain with a ceiling around his neck around his hand, and the others had Coke bottles. Ronnie stood there and looked at them. Before they started, he handed the leader his card and said, "Would you please come to my karate school and learn how to fight?"

The man with the chain laughed and drew it back to hit Ronnie. Ronnie put his foot across the man's mouth, knocked him down and out, then stepped back and said to the others, "Any two at the time, any three at the time, any four at the time, it doesn't matter to me." They picked up their man, dragged him, threw him in the car, and took off.

Now you say that is a man. Not necessarily. Muscles do not necessarily make a man. What makes a man? You have to understand that there is a thing called character and integrity.

The Need for Character and Integrity

Robert E. Lee was one of the finest Christians that ever walked. He said that a Christian man is always a gentleman. In his mind, he

could not distinguish a Christian from a gentleman or a gentleman from a Christian; they were basically one and the same. But look around today in our society. We have produced an entire generation of wimps, a generation of people who have been given everything and had everything handed to them.

They have never really had to work for anything or earn anything. They have developed the mentality that we deserve everything, that you must give it to us, and that if you do not give it to us, we will take it. That is the mentality today. There certainly is not much character or integrity. We are living in desperate times, probably in a time similar to that in which Ezekiel lived.

If you read Ezekiel 22, you will find that God condemned the prophets, the priests, the princes, and the people in general. When you get to Ezekiel 22:30, 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." God said, "I look for a man, I look for someone who would stand in the hedge and make up the gap." He looked and could not find even one.

When you look at John 1:6, the Bible says, "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John." Understand exactly what that means, but when you read it, you can also think of it this way: When God looked at John the Baptist, He said, "There was a man."

Tonight, I want to give you several principles of Christian manhood based upon the life of John the Baptist. In John 1:23, John answered those who had been sent by the Jews to ask who he was. "Art thou the Messiah?" "No." "Are you Moses or Elijah?" "No." "Are you that prophet," the prophet Moses spoke of in Deuteronomy 18? "No. I'm not." "Well, who are you?"

John could have said, "What do you mean, who am I? I am the subject of Old Testament prophecy. I was miraculously and sovereignly born by God's almighty power. I was indwelt with the Holy Spirit from my birth. I am the forerunner of Jesus Christ." He could have answered that way, but he did not. He said, "I am the voice of one." This makes the truth known: God's kind of man is a solitary man, one who stands alone. He was unashamed to stand for what he stood for.

He was unmoved by peer pressure and peer approval. He did not sin or seek any of that. You remember when the religious leaders of his day came to his baptism? What did he say to them? "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" That is not really how to make friends and influence enemies, but that was exactly what he said because it was the truth. He said, "You're a generation of vipers. Who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" Don't you know there's wrath coming? Look at you. John was unwilling to compromise the truth.

He was willing to stand even when no one else stood. It is easy to stand when you have your family, friends, support group, or an entire congregation around you saying, "Yes, we're with you." But when you have to stand alone, that requires a little character. That requires some integrity.

John was not trying to be unnoticed. He wanted to be noticed because he wanted to be heard. He was willing to stand even if he had to stand alone. The more I study history and read the biographies of great men of God, the more I have come to the conclusion that there is a very great dearth of character in our land today. Things have changed even since I was a boy, and that has not been too terribly long ago.

When you stop and think about it, one of the greatest reasons we are in such a desperate state in this society, country, and nation is simply because there is no character or integrity. We have no backbone, no intestinal fortitude, or, as we used to say in South Georgia on the farm, we just don't have any guts.

That's the truth. We have sired a generation of wimps, spineless jellyfish who like to parade themselves around as men, but who constantly and continually violate the principles of the Word of God and everything that you and I consider moral. Since there is indeed a dearth of character, you have to understand this: a man who will not stand for something will fall for anything. Most men today have fallen for that which is not true. Let me tell you something about character.

Character is what a man is in the dark. You can tell me everything about yourself, what you do and what you do not do, but character is

what a man is when he is alone and no one else is around. Tell me what you would do if you knew that no one else would ever find out. If you said, "If I knew I would never be discovered, I would go down and rob that bank," then you are a thief. If you said, "If I knew I would never be found out, I would run off old sister so and so," then you are an adulterer. If you said, "If I knew I would never be found out, I would take out so and so," then you are a murderer. That is what you are in the dark. That is when the real you actually shows itself.

Moreover, the test of your character is what it takes to stop you. Have you ever stopped to think about that? Do you realize that most people today are such quitters? They give in at the drop of a hat—and they will drop the hat. If you really want to stop someone from serving, all you have to do is a little gossiping.

Or say something that hurts their feelings, or imply something they do not like, and the next thing you know, they take their marbles and go home. They say, "Well, I'm just not appreciated." Why? Because the test of your character is what it takes to stop you, and it really does not take much today to stop the average individual.

We give in, we give up, we give out, and we quit. Not only is character what a man is in the dark; the test of your character is what it takes to stop you. You also have to remember that circumstances never make or break a man. They just reveal him. We always try to believe the opposite. We think about some great battle and say, "That battle really made him a hero." No. He was already a hero in his heart; the battle just revealed him. Here is a man who ran and hid and turned coward in the battle. Did the battle make him a coward? No. He was already a coward in his heart; the battle just revealed him. Circumstances reveal what we are really made of. When people lie, cheat, steal, and do all kinds of immoral things under the circumstances, understand that this is simply their character.

That is what they are, because the Bible says in Proverbs 23:7, "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he." You actually end up doing what you think. Sin does not slip up on you, and sin does not happen accidentally. You think about it, choose it, plan it, and put it into effect, because that is what you are in your heart. In times past, there

were many moral men who were not Christians. In fact, sometimes some of those men were greater in morality than professing Christians.

A Solitary Man: Standing Alone

One of them was General Nathan Bedford Forrest. Forrest was not converted until after the war, but his mother was a godly woman who taught him, and his wife was also a Christian and a godly woman. Major Ellis came upon Forrest's tent and heard a conversation in which Forrest was putting one of his bravest officers and finest friends out of his command because of immorality. Listen carefully to what Major Ellis said:

"On one occasion while approaching his tent, I heard him, that is General Forrest, in tones of great anger, using the most bitter denunciatory language to an officer, who although as brave a man as served in the war, and was a warm personal friend to Forrest. He said, Forrest had just heard of him being guilty of immoral conduct. He denounced him in the severest language that I think I've ever heard, and dismissed him from his command on the spot, saying, 'I will not have any man about me who will be guilty of such conduct toward a woman.'"

The man was married and had an affair with another woman. What did Forrest do? He dismissed him. “You’re not in my command anymore. I’ll not have you around me.” Forrest at that time was as lost as he could be.

Do you understand that many men had to stand, and they had to stand alone? Think about the men in the Bible. You remember Daniel in Daniel chapter 6. A law had been passed that no man could ask any petition of any God, save the king, for thirty days. If he asked any petition, he would be thrown into the den of lions. Daniel 6:10–11 says, “Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime. Then these men assembled, and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God.”

By the way, if you want to know how to pray effectively and successfully when you are in danger, the answer is that you must be accustomed to praying effectively and successfully before you get into danger. Daniel knelt and prayed three times a day as he did aforetime. That was his practice.

When Daniel had his window open toward Jerusalem, he was not flaunting his rebellion to the king. He was simply doing what Solomon prayed concerning in 1 Kings chapter 8, verses 29 through 30: that any time God's people had sinned against Him, if they prayed toward Jerusalem and confessed their sins, God would hear, forgive, and heal them. That was exactly what Daniel was doing. When he knew that the writing was signed, he knelt and prayed three times a day, just like he did before time. He just kept praying. He was the only one in the entire kingdom that prayed.

Because he was a solitary man. He stood alone. How about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego? Nebuchadnezzar, in Daniel chapter 3, built that image in the plain of Dura and said, "At the time you hear the sound of the sackbut, the psaltery, the harp, and all these manner of instruments, you kneel down and worship my golden image." Everybody knelt down except Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

They stuck out like a sore thumb. I've often thought how those boys could have pulled one over on Nebuchadnezzar. They could have sat down on the ground and rested. Probably people would have thought they were either halfway up or halfway down, and nobody would have noticed. Or one of them could have said, "Hey, Shad, I got a good idea. Let's just lie down on our face and take a nap. And these silly heathen, they'll think we're just being really dedicated to this false god." They could have done anything like that and gotten away with it. No one would have known.

But they didn't do that. They told the king, "Be it known unto thee, O king, our God can deliver us. But whether he delivers us or not, that's his business. But be it known unto thee, we will not bow down." These young men stood, and they stood alone. The Apostle Paul had to stand by himself at times. In 2 Timothy 4, verse 16, he said, "No man stood with me."

He went on to say it more fully: “At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge.” Can you imagine the Apostle Paul not having anyone to stand with him? They said, “John, who are you?” He said, “I’m the voice of one.” John was willing to stand, and willing to stand alone.

Here was his attitude: If no one else is going to be honest, I’m going to be honest. If no one else is going to be holy, I’m going to be holy. If no one else is going to be obedient, I’m going to be obedient. If no one else is going to proclaim the truth, I will proclaim the truth. If I’m the only one, I’m the only one. It takes character to stand alone. It takes character to be a solitary witness and a solitary man standing for righteousness and truth.

It does not matter what the world says. I hear people all the time say, “But there are so many on that other side.” Have you ever stopped to think about what would have happened in the book of Genesis had Noah said, “Wow, there are so many people that really don’t believe it’s going to rain, you’re going to have a flood. Maybe they’re right. Maybe I’ll just give in and go with them”? No. No one knew, because God had spoken. Just because everybody else is doing it does not make it right, and just because everybody else is saying it does not make it true.

When you know the truth, you have to stand for the truth if you have to stand alone. “John, who are you?” “I am the voice of one.” Christian maturity, Christian manhood, will enable you to stand solitarily. You will stand if you have to stand alone.

A Strong Man: Crying in the Wilderness

Secondly, Christian maturity will enable you to stand strongly. “John, who are you?” “I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness.” John was not whispering. John was shouting from the rooftops the truth of God. He was not hoping that no one would notice him. He wanted people to notice him because he wanted the truth to be heard. Therefore, he was crying.

These two characteristics really go together. One has to be strong in order to stand solitarily. And if you are standing solitarily, it has to be evidence of strength because you are standing there by yourself.

Do you realize what God said in Isaiah 58:1? “Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression.” We have to have strength to carry out our convictions and to apply what we know from the Word of God. Do you remember James 4:17? “Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.”

Years ago, Alice and I had some friends whom we called Mama and Papa. We were not related; in fact, they adopted Alice and me. Their three sons have been lifelong friends of ours. They had a family get-together and invited us, and I came from a meeting. When I got there, Papa’s daughter-in-law began peppering me with questions, one right after the other. Finally, Papa looked at her and said, “Francis, why don’t you leave him alone? Can’t you see he’s tired?” She said, “Because, Papa, I don’t know the answers to these questions. And it bothers me.” I never will forget what he said. He looked her right in the eye and said, “It’s not what I don’t know that bothers me. It’s what I do know.”

You have to have strength to stand for your convictions. Dr. Bob Jones, Sr., used to say, “You can borrow brains, but you cannot borrow character.” Stop and think about that. There are a lot of things I do not know how to do, but I can ask, and I can learn.

But you can give me all the information in the world, all the books, and everything I need to do; if I do not have the character and the strength to put it into action, all that knowledge is worthless. You have to have strength. Christian maturity, Christian manhood, comes not only with learning to be a solitary individual, but with learning to be a strong individual.

My youngest grandson was with me one day, and I had a cow that was down on the farm. I looked at him and said, “Trip, you’re going to have to help me with this cow.”

“I can’t do it by myself.” You would have had to know that young boy. At that time, if he saw blood, he got sick and turned away. He couldn’t stand it. He said, “Papa, I can’t do it.” I said, “Yes, you can,

and you will. You just have to do what needs to be done. That's all there is to it, son. I need help, and you're going to help me. And we're going to save this cow. Do you understand?"

He turned out to be a nurse. You see what I'm saying? You say, "But I'm weak in an area." Well, you have to overcome that weakness. You have to learn to be strong. When your children say, "Well, I can't do that," always add one word: yet. You might not be able to do it now, but you might be able to do it tomorrow, next month, or next year. Do not say, "I can't do that."

We have a generation of people who say, "I can't do it," and they never even tried. You have to have strength. Christian maturity deals with being able to stand solitarily and stand strong.

A Separated Man: In the Wilderness

Thirdly, Christian maturity and Christian manhood deal with separation. "John, who are you?" "I am the voice of one crying"—where? "In the wilderness." He was not in the barrooms, saloons, ecumenical councils, or dance halls. He was in the wilderness, separating himself as far as he could from the sin and wickedness surrounding him.

Men—and I am saying that generally, including women—like to dabble with sin and play with sin. We tend to think that sin is exciting and titillating, and that we can get great pleasure from it. There is temporary pleasure in sin; the Bible says so. But what we misunderstand is that temporary pleasure always brings suffering and death. We think we can play with sin and get away with it.

We like to sow our wild oats and hope we can leave before harvest time. Galatians 6:7-8 says, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." You're not going to escape the law of harvest. If you try to mess around with sin, play with sin, and indulge in sin just a little bit, then you're going to be deceived.

In Hebrews 7:26, the Bible tells us, "For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens." Jesus Christ was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate. If you and I are going to stand for Christ,

stand for righteousness, and have biblical character, we have to learn to be like Jesus Christ.

In Hebrews 11:24-27, the Bible says, "By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter." Pharaoh was the highest officer in the land, and Moses was in line to become a Pharaoh. He could do whatever he wanted. He could have all the pleasure, all the money, and whatever else he desired. But when he came to years, he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter.

He chose "rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." Moses lived to be 120. If he had been a Pharaoh and lived to be 120, it would still have been only a season, because eternity is long and 120 years is nothing. The Bible says he was "Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt." None of us will ever turn from sin until we realize that the reproaches of Jesus Christ are greater than all the treasures and pleasures of sin.

Moses, by faith, forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king, "for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible." We'll never escape the pleasures of sin until we esteem and value the reproach of Jesus Christ. Most people like to dabble in sin.

They do not want to go all the way. They do not want to get caught in sin, but they want to dabble in it. Here is a principle: when God forbids any sin, at the same time He forbids anything that would lead up to that sin. When God forbids the sin of murder, He also forbids anger, wrath, and bitterness that would lead to murder. When God forbids theft, He forbids covetousness and greediness that would lead to theft. When God forbids adultery and fornication, He forbids lustfulness, pornography, and anything that would lead up to that. When God forbids cheating, He forbids laziness and sloth that would lead to cheating. Whatever God forbids as sin, at the same time He forbids anything and everything that would lead up to that sin.

The Bible tells us in Romans chapter 13 and verse 14, "But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof." You are to put on Jesus Christ, and as you

put on Jesus Christ, you are not to make provision for the flesh to fulfil its lusts. How do you make provision for the flesh? You make provision for the flesh by thinking and desiring and planning and wishing.

How do you put on the Lord Jesus Christ? By putting off all those thoughts that are wicked and contrary to Him and contrary to His words. You cannot have two thoughts in your mind at one time; you can have only one thought at one time. When an evil thought comes into your mind, you must instantly replace it with a godly thought, a biblical thought. You are putting on the Lord Jesus Christ. When you replace it with that godly thought, you are not making provision for the flesh to fulfil its lust. If you continue to think evilly, then you are making provision for your flesh.

The Bible tells us in 1 Thessalonians 5, verse 22, "Abstain from all appearance of evil." It is not just that we are to abstain from evil, but from anything that appears evil. A mature individual in Jesus Christ is willing to abstain from anything that would appear evil. It may not necessarily be evil, but if it would appear evil, we are not going to do it.

What David said in Psalm 119, verses 9 through 11, is a passage I love, and I would encourage every young man and every young father to memorize this passage. David asked, “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word. With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments. Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.” Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee.

When a thought of sin or wickedness comes into your mind, you must immediately think of His Word. If that Word is in your heart, if that Word is in your mind, it is going to come out and say, “This is wrong. This is wicked. You can’t think like this. You can’t act like this. This is violations of God’s word.” The passage asks, “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?” and directs him to do so “by taking heed thereto according to thy word.”

Do you realize that, as God’s people, we are to be clean not only from the filthiness of the flesh, but also from the filthiness of the

spirit? Second Corinthians 7:1 says, “Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

Most of God’s people are not going to wallow around in drunken vomit. They are not going to get drunk. They may not even be whoremongers or thieves. You shouldn’t be, especially if you are God’s people. But while we abstain from those grosser violations, we may still engage in the sin of bitterness, resentment, unforgiving spirits, hardheartedness, stiff neck, and rebelliousness. Those are sins of the spirit.

You cannot be holy unless you are pure in body as well as in spirit. Your spirit is just as important as your body. God wants you to abstain not only from the grosser and viler sins, but even from those sins of the spirit that aggravate us and demonstrate our wickedness.

The apostle said it like this: 1 Corinthians 15:33, “Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners.” It is impossible to live a holy, godly life inwardly and outwardly if we align ourselves with wickedness. God's kind of man is not only a solitary man and a strong man, but he is a separated man.

I read years ago of an extremely wealthy man who lived on a mountain in Tennessee 100 years back, four cars particularly, and whose buggy driver had died. He placed an advertisement in the paper for a new buggy driver. Everyone knew that this man was exceedingly rich and well off, so it would be a good job. Three men came and applied.

The rich man looked at the first one and said, “There’s the edge of the mountain. I want to know how fast you can run those horses and swing this buggy around without going over the edge of that mountain.” The man said, “I’m so good, I can do this and come within twelve inches and never go over the edge.” He said, “Let me see you do it.” The man got in the buggy, got the horses running, and swung it around.

The rich man looked at the second applicant and said, “How close can you come to that?” He said, “I’m such an excellent driver, I can do it within six inches.” He got in the buggy, got the horses running, and came within six inches without going over the edge.

The rich man looked at the third one and said, “How close can you come to it and not go over?” The third man said, “I don’t know, and I’m not stupid enough to try it to find out.” The rich man said, “You’re hired. The man that drives my buggy, I want him to stay as far away from the edge of that cliff as he can.”

Do you realize the same principle is true? God is going to use us as long as we stay as far away from sin as we can by His grace. Young people, listen to me. God may use you on credit the first years of your life. After that, He’ll use you on character. If you don’t have any character, you can mark it down: God’s not going to use you. To be a solitary individual and a strong individual, you have to have character.

A Straightening Man: Make Straight the Way

To stand and be separate. Here is John. “John, who are you?” He said, “Here’s my answer. I’m the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord.” Hopefully, God’s kind of man is a straightening man. Do you realize that’s what we’re supposed to do? We’re to straighten out those things that are crooked. We need men and women who are godly enough and holy enough and strong enough and bold enough to confess their own sins and acknowledge their own weakness and their own failures.

We blame everything on everything else and everybody else. We are the sinners. If we fail to keep our heart, we have sinned. If we fail to think biblically, we have sinned. If we fail to act biblically, we have sinned. You don’t make me sin; I make me sin. I can’t make you sin unless you allow me to make you sin. The truth of the matter is, we have to make things right, whether it’s our fault or not.

You say, “What are you talking about?” Well, let me show you. Turn to two passages: Matthew chapter 5 and Matthew chapter 18. Matthew chapter 5 lays this out for us very plainly, very clearly. Let’s begin reading at verse 23. Look what our Lord says: “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.” I want to call your attention to the fact that in verse 23

He said, “If you bring your gift to the altar and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee.”

You don’t have anything against him. You’re not mad at him. You’re not upset at him. But he’s got something against you. What does God say? You leave your gift, and you go and be reconciled to him; then you come back and offer the gift. Now look in Matthew chapter 18, verse 15. Our Lord says this: “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.”

Your brother may be trespassing against you. He may not have known it or realized it. What does God say? It is your turn. If he has something against you, you go to him. If you have something against him, you go to him. In other words, it does not matter which way you go. You cannot get out of it, and it does not matter who started it. God said His kind of man is a straightening man.

What a responsibility we have, and whose responsibility it is—it is our responsibility to make things right, to straighten them out. If we have lied, cheated, or done wrong, we need to straighten it out. If we have slandered a friend, gossiped, insulted someone, or used unkind remarks, we need to straighten it out.

God’s kind of man is a straightening man. God said, “Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him.” We have a responsibility ourselves and also a responsibility to our neighbors. One of the things that God hates, according to Proverbs 6:19, is “a false witness that speaketh lies, and one that soweth discord among the brethren.”

I have two messages on General Nathan Bedford Forrest. I wish I had time not only to preach those two messages but also to tell you about his conversion. He was under such conviction that he met one of his old officers on the street, a preacher, and confessed to him his concern for his soul. The preacher said, “Well, we need to get that straight even now, since you're obviously concerned and God's dealing with your heart.”

They were on the sidewalk, and there was not any room to do anything, so the pastor said, “Let's go into the bank building.” They went into the bank building, and both knelt on the floor. Forrest

cried out to God for mercy and forgiveness in a public place, publicly.

Years ago, I was at a flea market with a Christian friend, and we saw shirts for sale. One had a picture of General Nathan Bedford Forrest with a quote beneath it in big, bold letters: “No damn man kills me and lives.” My friend asked, “You're not going to buy that shirt, are you?” I said, “I am.” He asked, “You're not going to wear that shirt, are you?” I said, “I am.” He asked, “How can you do that?” I said, “Because I know the story and you don't know the story. I will tell you the story.” I wore that shirt until I wore it out. Every time I wore it, I had an opportunity to tell what I am telling you now. One of those opportunities was with a judge.

The judge asked me about it. From that day forward, whenever we were in the same restaurant, he would call me and say, “Preacher, come over and sit. And let's talk about Forrest.” Lieutenant Wills Gould was head of the artillery, or under another officer, but he was in the artillery division at the Battle of Sand Mountain. The enemy first got the cannons. Eventually, they got them back. But Forrest was upset because Gould had lost his cannon, so he dismissed Lieutenant Gould from his ranks. He did not want him around him.

Lieutenant Gould did not want to be dismissed. He knew Forrest was upset with him and that it would go on his record. So he asked Forrest for a meeting, and Forrest said, “Yes, I'll meet with you.”

Gould came into the building in town. Forrest was tied out front, with a little pocket knife, twirling it around his finger. They talked, and Forrest told Gould, "You'll never serve under my command again. I'm not going to retract the dismissal, and that's it."

Lieutenant Gould was so upset that he pulled out a pistol and shot Forrest in the stomach. Forrest knocked the pistol away, opened his knife with his mouth, and slashed Gould across the stomach. Gould turned and ran out. Forrest went to a doctor in the next building, who pronounced the wound fatal, though it was not. Forrest stormed out of the doctor's office to his horse to get his pistol. Then he said, "No damn man kills me and lives." He took the pistol and went after Lieutenant Gould, who had gone into a tailor shop and was lying down.

People all around hollered, "Forrest is here." Forrest said, "Get out of my way. I'm going to kill him." Gould jumped up off the table, leaped out the window, and Forrest shot, but missed. Gould fell to the ground unconscious, and they cried, "You killed him, General Forrest." They took Gould to a doctor. Forrest went to another doctor, who told him, "Well, it's bad, but it's not necessarily fatal." He said, "You'll have to lie over here and let me cut it out." Forrest replied, "It's just a little bullet. I'm not about to let you cut it out and leave it alone."

Lieutenant Gould here tonight is sitting and he was dying. Word came to Forrest: Lieutenant Gould was requesting that he come and visit him. Forrest said, "Make me a bed next to his." Forrest was taken to Lieutenant Gould, who reached over and grabbed his hand. "General Forrest," he said, "I'm thankful for the sake of the Confederacy that it's me dying and not you. I acted in such haste and such anger. Please forgive me. I am so sorry that I shot you and I acted so wickedly."

Forrest reached over, fell on his neck, and wept and cried like a baby. He said, "Son, I forgive you, and I hope that you do live." But Lieutenant Gould died. Here was a man who not even yet was willing to straighten things out. You know why?

Because he did have some character. The truth of the matter is this, folks: we have to have character to straighten things out.

Private sin is different from public sin. If you have sinned privately against someone, you can confess and make things right privately. But if you have sinned openly, publicly, and rebelliously, you need to make things right openly and publicly. We need to learn to straighten things out. God's men and God's people ought to have courage to straighten things out in their lives. If you are going to be God's man, you are going to have to be a solitary man, a strong man, a separated man, and a straightening man. Only then can you become a satisfying man.

A Satisfying Man: Pointing to Christ

Look in the book of John, chapter 1, verse 35: “Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples; And looking upon Jesus as

he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God! And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus." That has always been an astounding blessing to me: they heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. In John 1:29, "The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." They heard John speak, and they followed Jesus. John could not save, but he could point people to the One who could save. He could tell people about the Lord Jesus Christ, who could correct all problems.

John never had to plead, beg, cajole, or coerce. He simply spoke, and they followed Jesus. So here is a good question: Do folks follow the Lord Jesus Christ when you speak? If someone follows you, will they find Jesus Christ? If someone emulates your character and conduct, would they be sinful or holy? Do you want your children to turn out the way you are? The truth is, our children usually turn out just the way we are, whether good or bad. Does your conversation build up Jesus Christ? Does it edify others?

Or is it self-centered? In John chapter 3, beginning at verse 26, we read: "And they came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to him. John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven. Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease."

So the question is, Is Christ increasing in your life, and are you decreasing? It does not matter the situation or the circumstances. I mentioned earlier that General Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson were two of the godliest men that ever lived. If you have never studied their lives, you should. I ran across a testimony from a wounded northern soldier concerning General Lee. He was at Gettysburg when General Lee was retreating.

He wrote: "I had been a most bitter anti-South man and fought and cursed the Confederates desperately. I could see nothing good in any of them. The last day of the fight, I was badly wounded. A ball

shattered my left leg, and I lay on the ground not far from Cemetery Ridge, and as General Lee ordered his retreat, he and his officers rode past me. As they came along, I recognized him, and though faint from exposure and loss of blood, I raised my hands and looked General Lee in the face and shouted as loud as I could, 'Hurrah for the Union! Hurrah for the Union!' The general heard me, looked, stopped his horse, dismounted, and came toward me.

"I confess at first I thought he meant to kill me. But as he came up, he looked down at me with such a sad expression upon his face that all fear left me. He extended his hand to me, grasping mine firmly, and looking right into my eyes said, 'My son, I hope you will soon be well.' If I live a thousand years, I shall never forget the expression on General Lee's face."

There he was, defeated, retiring from a field that had cost him his cause and almost their last hope, and yet he stopped to say words like these to a wounded soldier of the opposition who had taunted him as he passed by. As soon as the general had left me, I cried myself to sleep there on the bloody ground. It does not matter the circumstances. You have to do what is right.

Billy Sunday preached a message entitled "The Measure of a Man." He said there are five ways that you can measure a man. You measure a man by his character. That is what he is. You measure a man by his conduct. That is what he does. You measure a man by his contribution. That is what he gives. You measure a man by his creed. That is what he believes. And you measure a man by his companions. That is who he associates with. You can take those measures and measure yourself and others as well.

Conclusion: The Call for God's Men

John was indeed a solitary man, a strong man, a separated man, a straightening man, and a satisfying man. All five of these are tied together, and you cannot have one without having the others. You cannot say, "Well, I am just going to be strong," or "I am just going to be solitary," separated, straight, or satisfied. They are all tied together. You will never be a satisfying man who points folks to the Lord Jesus Christ until you learn to be solitary, strong, separated, and straightening.

What did God say in Ezekiel 22 and verse 30? “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.” Not one. Not one. You say, “I do not think manhood is that important.” Really? I believe everyone in this room would acknowledge with me that we are wicked as a nation. All you have to do is check on the abortion, the socialism, the Marxism, and the sodomy. Look at it! And have you ever stopped to think that, as wicked and vile and filthy as Sodom and Gomorrah were, God was willing to spare those cities if He found ten righteous? We have more than ten in this room.

We need to be God's kind of man, with the character, courage, integrity, intestinal fortitude, and guts to live obediently and do what's right.

God, give us men. Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We ask for Your grace, Your mercy, Your goodness, and Your kindness. Lord, we do ask and pray, Father, that You would be so kind, Lord, as to deal with our hearts and help us, Father, to love Thee, to live for Thee, to serve Thee, Lord, to be men and women who would bring honor and glory to Your name. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 21

How to Act in the Time of Judgment

February 9, 2012

Introduction: The Context of Judgment

So we're looking in the book of Zephaniah chapter 2, and I would encourage you to go ahead and mark this chapter since we will be turning some and you will have to find this chapter again, okay? So, Zephaniah chapter 2, and let's begin reading with verse 1. Zephaniah 2 verse 1, "Gather yourselves together, yea, gather together, O nation not desired; before the decree bring forth, before the day pass as the chaff, before the fierce anger of the Lord come upon you, before the day of the Lord's anger come upon you. Seek ye the Lord, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger." The message today is entitled "How to Act in the Time of Judgment." How to act in the time of judgment. I thought it would be fitting after having preached the brief series from 1 Peter chapter 4, "Judgment at the House of God," to bring this message from

some and you will have to find this chapter again. Okay. So Zephaniah chapter 2, and let's begin reading with verse 1. Zephaniah 2, verse 1, "Gather yourselves together, yea, gather together, O nation not desired; before the decree bring forth, before the day pass as the chaff, before the fierce anger of the Lord come upon you, before the day of the Lord's anger come upon you. Seek ye the Lord, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger." The message today is entitled "How to Act in the Time of Judgment." How to act in the time of judgment. I thought it would be fitting after having preached the brief series from 1 Peter chapter 4, "Judgment at the House of God," to bring this message from the book of Zephaniah. So look, if you would please, at verse 3, that is our text today. "Seek ye the Lord, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness." Watch carefully.

"It may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger." What strange and dangerous times we live in. It seems as if our whole society as well as our nation is disintegrating before our very eyes. Our morals have collapsed. Our money is worthless. Our politicians are corrupt. Our government is tyrannical and despotic. And it does not seem that there is any help from anyone or from any institution.

When you look around you will notice that churches are practically on every corner in our land today, and usually they are pretty well filled each Lord's Day. But the problem is our preachers are silent, at least as to the issues at hand. Very few preachers today are asking questions or addressing the problems. In fact, there can be no answers to the multitudinous problems that we face as long as we ignore Scripture and ignore the God of Scripture. Therefore, most preachers today are absolutely worthless. Isaiah said it like this in Isaiah 56 and verse 10: "His watchmen are blind: they are all ignorant. They are all dumb dogs that cannot bark, sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber." Notice what God says. His watchmen are blind, all ignorant, all dumb dogs that cannot bark. Why in the world do you have a dog? You usually have him as a watchdog, and you want him to bark when danger is around. But God's watchmen in Isaiah 56 were not guard dogs; they were simply slumbering dogs. God's preachers should have the answers in dangerous times. In

Jeremiah chapter 9 and verse 12: "Who is the wise man that may understand this? And who is he to whom the mouth of the Lord hath spoken, that he may declare it? For the land perisheth, and is burned up like a wilderness, and none passeth through." Here is someone to whom the mouth of the Lord has spoken, and yet he is responsible to declare it, and yet he does not. And Malachi chapter 2 and verse 7: "For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts." So God's preachers should indeed be addressing the problems, bringing forth biblical answers and biblical solutions. But since that is not happening, with all that is going on in America, the question that is almost universally asked—and I get asked this question innumerable times—is, "What shall we do? What are we going to do?" In light of the obvious judgment that is upon our land, we should also be asking, "Which way do we turn and how do we act?"

The Question: What Should the Righteous Do?

If the general population could care less and evidences no desire to repent and change the situation, what should the righteous do? David asked that exact question in Psalm 11:3: "If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" Zephaniah 2:3 answers: "Seek ye the Lord, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger." This verse is given in the context of God's judgment. In Zephaniah 1:2–3, God says, "I will utterly consume all things from off the land, saith the Lord. I will consume man and beast; I will consume the fowls of the heaven, and the fishes of the sea, and the stumbling blocks of the wicked; I will cut off man from off the land, saith the Lord."

The Context of Zephaniah 2:3: Judgment on Judah and the Nations

He continues: "I will also stretch out my hand upon Judah, and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem; I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place, and the name of the Chemarims with the priests; and them that worship the host of heaven upon the housetops; and them that worship and that swear by the Lord, and that swear by Malcham; and them that are turned back from the Lord; and those

that have not sought the Lord, nor inquired of him. Hold thy peace at the presence of the Lord God: for the day of the Lord is at hand; for the Lord hath prepared a sacrifice, he hath bid his guests. And it shall come to pass in the day of the Lord's sacrifice, that I will punish the princes, and the king's children, and all such as are clothed with strange apparel. In the same day also will I punish all those that leap on the threshold, which fill their masters' houses with violence and deceit. And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord, that there shall be the noise of a cry from the fish gate, and a howling from the second, and a great crashing from the hills."

Now if you read all the way down, skip down to verse 14. "The great day of the Lord is near, it is near, and hasteneth greatly, even the voice of the day of the Lord: the mighty man shall cry there bitterly. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness." You can read all the way down to verse 18, and you will see that judgment is in the context.

Now, if you will turn to chapter 2, if you would, very quickly, and begin reading with verse 4, since we've already read the first three verses. In verse 4, "For Gaza shall be forsaken, and Ashkelon a desolation: they shall drive out Ashdod at the noonday, and Ekron shall be rooted up. Woe unto the inhabitants of the sea coast, the nation of the Cherethites! The word of the Lord is against you; O Canaan, the land of the Philistines. I will even destroy thee, that there shall be no inhabitant. And the sea coast shall be dwellings and cottages for shepherds, and folds for flocks. And the coast shall be for the remnant of the house of Judah; and they shall feed thereupon: in the houses of Ashkelon shall they lie down in the evening: for the Lord their God shall visit them, and turn away their captivity. I have heard the reproach of Moab, and the revilings of the children of Ammon, whereby they have reproached my people, and magnified themselves against their border. Therefore as I live, saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Surely Moab shall be as Sodom, and the children of Ammon as Gomorrah, even the breeding of nettles, and saltpits, and a perpetual desolation: the residue of my people shall spoil them, and the remnant of my people shall possess them." If you read on down through verse 15, you'll see it is judgment as well. So if you look at chapter 1, if you look at chapter 2,

you will find verse 3 right smack dab in the middle of God's judgment. His judgment on Judah and Jerusalem in chapter 1 and His judgment on some of the other nations in chapter 2. So Zephaniah then is speaking to a remnant.

Now let me just tell you very quickly two problems that exist in relationship to God's judgment. The first problem that exists is this at times. Some individuals do not perceive that which is happening is the hand of God in judgment. Now, why is it people do not perceive the hand of God in judgment? Well, there could be numerous answers. One of them is because of our humanistic thinking.

Two Problems in Recognizing God's Judgment

That is why our weathermen always refer to tornadoes, hurricanes, storms, floods, and droughts as "mother nature." They do not perceive those things as the hand of God. But if you would hold Zephaniah and turn to Amos chapter 4—Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos—notice that Scripture teaches there are degrees in judgment and degrees of severity. It is possible that God can be judging and yet people not recognize it because it is not as severe as they think it should be to be the hand of God.

God says, "And I also have given you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and want of bread in all your places: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord." God sent a little famine among them, and it never even affected them. "And also I have withholden the rain from you, when there were yet three months to the harvest: and I caused it to rain upon one city, and caused it not to rain upon another city: one piece was rained upon, and the piece whereupon it rained not withered. So two or three cities wandered unto one city, to drink water; but they were not satisfied: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord." Famine did not do it. Drought did not do it.

"I have smitten you with blasting and mildew: when your gardens and your vineyards and your fig trees and your olive trees increased, the palmerworm devoured them: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord." Here are all these insects plaguing and destroying the crops. It is a judgment of God, and yet people still did not pay attention. "I have sent among you the pestilence after the manner of

Egypt: your young men have I slain with the sword, and have taken away your horses. And I have made the stink of your camps to come up into your nostrils: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord." War did not wake them up either. "I have overthrown some of you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and ye were as a firebrand plucked out of the burning: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord. Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God."

Some will not admit or recognize God's judgment even under the severest judgment, and consequently the only thing left for those individuals is destruction. That's why God said, "Because I will do this, prepare to meet thy God." In other words, I'll just kill you and take you off the face of the earth. In these judgments, one became a little more severe until you finally had the most severe at the very end. So there are indeed degrees of judgment. Some people fail to recognize God's judgment only because it is not as severe as it should be or could be according to their way of thinking, and some will not recognize it at all and shall die and be destroyed. There is always a remnant—a few that really desire repentance and restoration and a return to God and His law—while the vast majority is indifferent and unrepentant. So the question has to be asked, "What shall the righteous do?" We're sitting here wanting to do what's right, wanting to obey God, wanting our country restored, wanting God's law and sovereignty over us, wanting to recognize God in every area of our life, and yet the vast majority could care less. So what in the world should we do?

The Action Commanded: Seek the Lord

Verse 3 of Zephaniah chapter 2 gives the answer: "Seek ye the Lord, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger." Zephaniah is not addressing the nation as a whole, but only the remnant. In verse 1 he says, "Gather yourselves together, yea, gather together, O nation not desired," and then in verse 3 he tells the remnant exactly what they were to do. The vast majority will never listen to, receive, hear, or heed the Word of God. In Isaiah 1:5, God says to those folks, "Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the

whole heart faint." What good is judgment upon you? You're not going to listen. I'll just take you out. Prepare to meet thy God. So Zephaniah is addressing the remnant, giving instruction to those who will listen. It is as if he is saying, "Don't worry about the multitudes. Don't concern yourself with those who will not listen. You just do what you need to do. You take care of yourself and your family. You fulfill your responsibility." Now, I want us to look at verse 3 and see several things. First, the action commanded: "Seek ye the Lord, all ye meek of the earth." We are commanded to seek the Lord. But note that this action is addressed to the meek of the earth. I'm going to cover this thought more completely later, but the meek are those who have humbled themselves and submitted themselves unto the Lord. The word "meek" here refers to those who have profited under the scourgings of God. They have been chastised, they have repented, they have been afflicted, and they were humbled under their affliction. Thus the action commanded is addressed to true believers.

The phrase "to seek the Lord" occurs in a number of scriptures. For instance, hold Zephaniah and look in your Bibles, if you would, to Deuteronomy chapter 4 and verse 29. I will use this verse just momentarily. So I want you to see it. Deuteronomy chapter 4 and look at verse 29. The Word of God says this, "But if from thence thou shalt seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul." If you would turn over to 1 Chronicles chapter 16. 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles. You'll have 1 Chronicles chapter 16. And notice if you would please, 1 Chronicles 16 at verses 10 and 11. 1 Chronicles 16, beginning there with verse 10. "Glory ye in his holy name: let the heart of them rejoice that seek the Lord. Seek the Lord and his strength, seek his face continually." Note that command. Seek the Lord and His face continually. Look, if you would, at 1 Chronicles 22 and verse 19, 1 Chronicles 22 and verse 19. And I could stay all day here giving you passages like this, but 1 Chronicles 22, verse 19, "Now set your heart and your soul to seek the Lord your God; arise therefore, and build ye the sanctuary of the Lord God," etc., etc. But note, "Now set your heart and your soul to seek the Lord your God." And then of course, everyone in here can quote Isaiah 55 and verse 6, when the Bible said, "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near." So there

are a multitude of passages that command us to seek the Lord. It is one thing to understand that we have been commanded to seek the Lord. And it's quite another thing to understand how we're to seek the Lord. So how in the world do we seek the Lord? The action commanded is to seek the Lord, all ye meek of the earth. So how in the world do we seek the Lord? Well, let me try to answer that by giving you an irreducible minimum. I'm going to give you four truths. First and foremost, it should be obvious that to seek the Lord properly, we must seek Him with a genuine and undivided heart. There must be a genuine desire and an undivided heart.

We read earlier, Deuteronomy 4 and verse 29. Now listen again as I read it. "But if from thence thou shalt seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul." What does that mean? It means that there cannot be a divided heart. There can be no half-hearted seeking Him. There must be a genuine desire to seek the Lord. In Jeremiah 29 and verse 13, God said this, "And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart." What? You shall seek Me and you shall find Me when you search for Me with all your heart. In 2 Chronicles 15 and verse 12, we read about God's people who entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers with all their heart and with all their souls. Very obviously, God does not want any half-hearted seeking or half-hearted worshipping. God is not going to be found by an indolent and slothful attempt to find Him.

No. The Bible teaches us and tells us about Rehoboam. The Bible tells us that King Rehoboam in 2 Chronicles 12 and verse 14 said this, "And he did evil." Why? "And he did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek the Lord." Isn't that interesting? He did evil because he prepared not his heart to seek the Lord. And yet we're told in 2 Chronicles 27 verse 6, "So Jotham became mighty, because he prepared his ways before the Lord." Obviously, he prepared his heart and he prepared his ways as well. So if you and I are going to seek the Lord, there must be first a genuine desire and there must be a wholehearted seeking of the Lord. Secondly, if we're going to seek the Lord, we must have a humble, accurate estimation of ourselves. We must have a humble and accurate estimation of ourselves.

I want you to look in your Bibles very quickly. Hold Zephaniah. We're coming back there. But look in Romans chapter 12 and verse 3. Romans chapter 12 and verse 3. Here is the counsel the Apostle Paul gave in ascertaining our gifts. He said in Romans chapter 12 and verse 3, "For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith." So what is God's counsel to us when it comes to our gifts? That we're not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think, but we're to think soberly and righteously according as God has dealt us our measure of faith.

Now, if I were to announce that everyone needs to be here next Saturday from seven to ten in the evening because I was going to give a musical presentation and sing solo for three hours, how many of you would attend? I see no takers, no hands. Because everyone knows, number one, I can't sing. And I don't play music. I know nothing about singing. So it would be foolish of me to assume that I could sing and entertain or even edify anyone with my singing abilities, for I don't have any.

So if God then requires us to think soberly concerning our gifts, how much more does He require us to think soberly concerning ourselves when we seek Him? Look in your Bibles to Isaiah 51 and verse 1. "Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord." Now he's talking to us specifically. "Look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged." And then he said, "Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you." I wonder where Abram was when God called him. He's in Ur of the Chaldees. He's a pagan. He's a heathen. And what does God say? "Look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged." Simply stating, here's what God says: You must remember when you seek Me that you deserve nothing but punishment and justice. You must remember that we were nothing when God found us. We were nothing when God saved us. And without Him, we would still be nothing. You cannot come to God with the attitude, "I deserve this. I earned this. I merited this." The only way that you can come to God with that attitude is if you're talking about punishment and justice. Because that's the only thing you've earned and that's the only thing

you merited. Everything else that you have is basically only by God's grace. You know what the Bible says in the book of Colossians 1 in verse 13?

Paul is talking about the work of God the Father in our salvation: "Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son." Our salvation is totally, absolutely, and completely the work of God alone. Period. So when you seek me, you need to remember who you are and what you are. You need not only come with a genuine desire and an undivided heart; you need to come with a correct estimation of yourself and with humility.

Thirdly, in seeking the Lord, we must be careful to obey Him in every area of our lives. We must be consistently, constantly, and continually seeking to bring our lives into conformity to the Word of God. We cannot cease to obey God simply because we are a nation under judgment. Some people have the attitude, "Well, what good is it going to do me to seek the Lord? Look what's happening. The whole thing's going to hell anyhow. Why should I be concerned? Why should I do what's right?" Well, let me ask you a question. Why in the world is God's judgment upon our nation anyhow? Because of our sin, wickedness, disobedience, and rebellion. Now, do you think that your rebellion, disobedience, and sin is going to help correct the problem? No, it's going to just bring more judgment.

What did David pray in Psalm 66:18? "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." How in the world do you think that God will hear you if you're still consistently disobeying him? He's not going to hear you or help you. All that will do is bring judgment upon you. So thirdly, if we're seeking the Lord, we have to be careful, constant, and continually seeking to do what is right and to be obedient in every area of our lives. The Bible tells us in 2 Chronicles 14:4, "And he commanded Judah to seek the Lord God of their fathers, and to do the law and the commandment."

Now notice what he said: "To seek the Lord God of their fathers, and to do the law and commandment." So what is part and parcel of seeking the Lord? Obeying Him. In fact, look in your Bibles, if you would, to Mark chapter 4. As you're turning there, let me just quote a verse. In James 4 and verse 17, the Bible says this, "Therefore to him

that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." So God says you're required to obey that which you know. If you know what is right, you're required to do what is right. Now, watch carefully Mark chapter 4, because here is a principle in verse 24. Look what God said. Our Lord Himself said, "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." In other words, to the degree that you give, to the measure that you give in hearing and obeying the word of God, to that same measure, it's going to be measured back to you. And then he said, "Unto you that hear shall more be given." In other words, seeking Him means that we not only obey the truth that we now have, but we also obey any and all truth that He shows us and illuminates us to understand and to receive. So seeking the Lord then means, thirdly, that we must obey Him in every area of our lives. Plain and simple. Fourthly, in seeking the Lord, it means that we cry unto Him for help.

We are not instructing Him what to do; we are crying to Him for help. Many wish to tell God what to do, when to do it, where to do it, and how to do it. I never have forgotten what Arthur W. Pink wrote years ago: "One reason we do not like the Pope is because we like to be the Pope ourselves." We want to be in charge. But in seeking God, we have to understand that He is in charge. He is in control. He is the sovereign. We have absolutely no say in the matter. Our responsibility is to cry to Him for help. The Bible tells us in 2 Chronicles 20:4, "And Judah gathered themselves together, to ask help of the Lord: even out of all the cities of Judah they came to seek the Lord." So in seeking the Lord, they were crying to Him for help, not instructing Him what to do. They were just saying, "Help, Lord, please, please help us."

John Gill said this on the phrase "seeking the Lord," talking about Zephaniah 2:3: "They were here exhorted to seek the Lord. That is, by prayer and supplication to know more of his mind and will, and especially their duty in their present circumstances. Implore His grace and mercy, protection and safety in a day of common danger, and attend the public ordinances of His house in order to enjoy His presence and communion with Him. For to seek the Lord is to seek His face and favor, to have the light of His countenance and the discoveries of His love, and to seek His honor and glory in all things,

particularly the Lord Christ may be met who was to come in the flesh and good men sought for him before he came and now he has come and to him should men seek for righteousness and life, for peace and pardon, for grace and all supplies of it, for everlasting salvation, and all this before as well as since his coming. And such seek him aright who seek him early, in the first place, above all things, who seek him with their whole hearts, sincerely, diligently, and constantly, and where he is to be found, in the ministry of the word of God and his ordinances." So Gill just summarized everything that I just said in seeking the Lord.

We must seek him in the minimum of those four ways. So the action commanded is very simple: "Seek ye the Lord, all ye meek of the earth," according to Zephaniah 2:3. Secondly, look in verse 3 at the action commended. Not only the action commanded, but the action commended: "which have wrought judgment." Here is a commendation. These individuals had wrought judgment.

The Action Commended: Those Who Have Wrought Judgment

What does that mean? To do the judgment of God means that you form your life according to the righteousness of the law. The Hebrew word frequently refers to the equity or the rule of right living. Hence to do judgment is to do that which is righteous and just and to abstain from that which is wrong and injurious. The prophet calls it the judgment of God because it is what God prescribes, commands, and approves. Thus doing the judgment of God means that we act according to God's mind and will, doing that which is revealed in his word, which is the rule of judgment both as to faith and practice. That is, we obey and observe his law and statutes and keep his ordinances as delivered. We perform works of righteousness from right principles and right views as fruits of faith and as meat for repentance.

Let me show you exactly this word "judgment." Go back to Genesis 18:19. God says concerning Abraham, "For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him."

Note what God said: "I know Abraham. I know he's going to command his children and his household after him. And they shall keep the way of the Lord." What is the way of the Lord? To do justice and judgment. What is doing justice and judgment? It is simply obeying God, bringing your life in conformity to the Word of God. Doing justice or judgment is obedience to God and His Word.

Listen to what Isaiah said in Isaiah 1:17: "Learn to do well; seek judgment."

Now let me stop right there. "Learn to do well; seek judgment." Learning to do well and seeking judgment are synonymous. And I didn't finish the verse. Listen carefully. "Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow." What is doing judgment? It's doing that which is right, that which is in conformity to the Word of God. So the action commended is that here were some who were already obeying God. Cyril said this: "God is sought by us when of our choice, laying aside our listlessness or our slothfulness and indolence, we thirst after doing what pleases Him and we shall do judgment too when we fulfill His divine law, working out what is good unshrinkingly. And we shall gain the prize of righteousness when crowned with glory for well-doing, and running the well-reported and blameless way of true piety to God, and of love to the brethren, for love is the fulfilling of the law." So the action commended is that they were doing judgment—that is, they were obeying the truth of God that they had at that particular time.

Now, let's go to Zephaniah chapter 2 and verse 3 again. You've seen the action commanded, the action commended. Now here's the action clarified. He said, "Seek ye the Lord, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment." Here it is clarified. "Seek righteousness, seek meekness." Wow. Seek righteousness, seek meekness.

The Action Clarified: Seek Righteousness, Seek Meekness

Let me point something out. It is impossible to seek righteousness without at the same time seeking meekness or real biblical humility. When righteousness is sought, humility is sought. Do you remember

that passage in Isaiah 6? Isaiah said, "In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up." And he began to describe the glory of God. And then the next thing you know, he's saying, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." In other words, while on the one hand, there was elevation, then there was also on the other hand, humiliation. He understood that there was a humbling experience there. If you're seeking righteousness at the same time, you're seeking meekness. When he said, clarifying this action, "Seek righteousness, seek meekness," he's saying this is something that must be done constantly and continually. You must be seeking to bring your life in conformity to the Word of God.

Now let me explain this. It doesn't matter what you're doing. I do it regularly when I drive down the road. I'm praying, asking the Lord in my mind to help me, to make me holy, godly, more obedient, to give me more understanding, to illuminate my mind, to teach me. I don't care if you're plowing the garden or washing dishes; you can still do it. You just have to develop the mentality of seeking the Lord and seeking humility constantly and consistently, whatever you're doing, whenever you're doing it.

It's something that must be done at all times, but Zephaniah is saying it must be done especially in the time of judgment. So Zephaniah is admonishing us to advance in righteousness and holiness in our life. Why? Because he knows that God is not going to forget our obedience provided that we do not grow weary and provided that we persevere to the end. The Apostle Paul said the same thing in Galatians 6:9: "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not." You've got to keep on keeping on. You can't look at circumstances, surroundings, or situations. You have to keep doing what's right regardless. Hebrews 6 says, "For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love." God's not going to forget. So we must persevere.

Now notice what he said: "Seek righteousness, seek meekness." I really want to clarify this. Do not equate meekness with mousiness. In this day and time, most consider a meek individual someone who happens to be weak, anemic, feminine, and unmanly. To the

humanistic and modernistic worldviews, the meek man is the 90-pound weakling that becomes a foot mat for everyone to ridicule, to run over, to wipe their feet upon. I read years ago—some of you have read Rushdoony's Institutes of Biblical Law—he's discussing "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth," and he tells about one bathroom where someone had written that on the wall, and someone had come in under that and written, "If that's all right." What was their estimation of a meek man? Someone who was weak, someone who wouldn't stand for anything, someone who was mousy. Biblical meekness is exactly the opposite. You must remember that according to Numbers 12:3, in his day Moses was the meekest man upon the earth.

What did the meekest man upon the earth do? He defended a brother, slew an Egyptian, stood up to Pharaoh, spoke the truth and allowed the chips to fall where they may, delivered Israel out of Egypt, faced a rebellious group of Israelites, and prayed that God would let a new thing happen—that the earth would open up and they'd go down alive into hell. Hardly a mousy man, hardly someone easily swayed from his position or who allowed others to wipe their feet upon him. He was a real, genuine man, not mousy by any stretch of the imagination.

Our Lord said, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls." In Matthew 21:5 it was prophesied, "Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass." How did Christ come in meekness? Our Lord certainly was not a mousy man. I do not think that anyone who's ever lived or ever shall live could endure everything that he endured without whining and complaining. He endured ridicule, mockery, rejection, slander, an unjust trial, scourging, and crucifixion, yet we are told that he was meek. He said in Matthew 5:5, "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth." Meekness is an attitude or disposition that not only accepts and receives God's dealing with us without disputed argument, but is also submission unto Him, resting in Him, and trusting in Him.

Listen carefully. This will give you the best explanation of meekness. Our Lord said in Matthew 11:29, "Take my yoke upon

you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart." Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me. You know what a meek person is? A meek person is someone who is broken to yoke. And the word "yoke" in Matthew 11 refers to a real, literal yoke.

I told you once before about Beauregard, that big bull I had that weighed about 3,000 pounds. Alice and I went out to hook up to the eight-foot harrow, which probably weighed a thousand pounds or better. When we got to it, it was totally flipped over, all the discs pointing up to the sky. The only thing you could see were Beauregard's footprints where he went to the front of that harrow, scratched his head, raised his head, and flipped the whole harrow over. I had to get a chain and pull it back right with the tractor before I could hook up to it.

Can you imagine the strength in that bull's neck? Forrest is just as big or bigger than Beauregard now. When you place a yoke upon an ox or a bull, you have him under your control. All that strength is still there—it is just disciplined, controlled strength. A meek man is not a mousy man. According to the Bible, a meek man is someone who has placed upon himself the yoke of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ has the reins and does the driving. The man is under the sovereign control of the Son of God. He is still strong, still a man, but now his strength is disciplined and controlled. He moves at Christ's command, does what Christ tells him, and obeys because he is broken to yoke. Meekness is nothing less than disciplined strength under God. So he said, "Seek righteousness, seek meekness." There are many things humanly speaking I would like to do that I will never do because of the yoke placed upon me. I can only act according to what Christ commands. John Calvin said, "We hence learn that even the best are roused by God's scourges to seek true religion with greater ardor than they've ever done before. Though then it be our object to serve God and to follow his word, when these calamities arise and God appears as a judge, we ought to be stimulated to greater care and diligence. For it never is the case that any one of us fully performs his duty." Did you hear what he said? It is never the case that any one of us ever performs his duty. How many of you have ever done what God has commanded perfectly and completely? None. So when God sends judgment, you better pay special attention, because even the best of us, even the holiest, are

still full of sin and never totally and completely obey. He goes on, "Let us remember then that we are roused by God whenever adversity impends over us."

The Action Consummated: It May Be You Shall Be Hid

When God Himself shows manifest signs of displeasure, the prophet bids the pious doers of righteousness to seek God, however much they were before devoted to Him, to do that which is just and upright. So when Zephaniah says, "Seek righteousness, seek meekness," he is still telling us we must seek with greater ardor and strength to bring our lives in conformity to the word of God. In Zephaniah 2:3 we have seen the action commanded, "Seek ye the Lord, all ye meek of the earth"; the action commended, "which have wrought his judgments"; the action clarified, "Seek righteousness, seek meekness"; and finally the action consummated: "It may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger." Lord have mercy upon us. Zephaniah encourages obedience and submission by stating, "It may be that you shall be hidden in the day of the Lord's anger." In other words, the Lord may spare you. You must remember that his wrath is directed at the disobedient and the rebellious, and if you're under judgment, you certainly do not want to be disobedient and rebellious. This is probably what Zephaniah had in mind when he said, "It may be that the Lord will hide you." Psalm 27:5: "For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me up upon a rock." David said, He's my protector and He indeed shall hide me. Psalm 31:20: "Thou shalt hide them in the secret of thy presence from the pride of man: thou shalt keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues." David said, God will hide me during the time of judgment.

SCRIPTURE READING - Psalm 91:1-16 (KJV)

> And as you turn there, I want to quote a verse from the New Testament, 2 Peter 2 and verse 9, where God says this, "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished." Notice, "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations." He knows exactly how. And he also knows how to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished. But David is talking about how the Lord hides him. I want you to

look in Psalm 91, and I want to take the time to read all 16 verses. You talk about a blessed Psalm. Here it is. Psalm 91, verse 1, "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust." Now watch. "Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence. He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler. Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day; nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee. Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked. Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation; there shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone. Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet. Why? Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name. He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him. With long life will I satisfy him, and shew him my salvation." What a wonderful psalm. Of course, this psalm is indeed applied of our Lord Jesus in the New Testament, but it is also applied to all of those who are in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Application: How to Act in the Time of Judgment

Go back to Zephaniah and look at verse 3 again: "Seek ye the Lord, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger." One last quote before the application. John Trapp said, "Possibly you may. Probably you shall be. Pardon of sin you shall be sure of, mitigation also of sorrow, if not prevention. Saved you shall be, or more gently handled, or so inwardly calmed that you

shall be able to call your souls to rest when others are at their wit's ends. You shall be safe under the cover of God's wings and the hollow of his hand, when others that are without God in the world shall be as a naked man in a storm, an unarmed man in the field, or as a ship without an anchor, subject to dash and split against rocks and quicksands." Trapp says if you're not delivered totally, you'll be more gently handled.

This one application should be sufficient because Zephaniah teaches us how to act in the time of judgment. We should constantly, consistently, and continually bring our lives into greater conformity and obedience to the Word of God. Especially in times of judgment, pay special attention to this fact: God in His mercy may spare us, or at least handle us more gently. No parent chastens his child with severity when that child displays a repentant, compliant, and submissive attitude. When you see submission, humility, compliance, and meekness, you always lighten the rod. The same is true with our heavenly Father. Don't be concerned with those who won't listen. Your responsibility is to seek righteousness, seek meekness, and bring your life into greater conformity to the Word of God. Remember Lamentations 3:33: "For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men." Why would we not expect our loving, gracious, heavenly Father to deal more gently with His submissive and obedient children than with the wicked and ungodly? Certainly, we should.

Zephaniah says, if you want to know how to act in the time of judgment, here it is: seek the Lord, seek righteousness, seek meekness; be consistent, constant, faithful. And it may be the Lord will hide you in the day of His anger. In all probability, as John Trapp said, He will, for He is a loving, gracious, heavenly Father.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank You for Your Word, that You teach us not only how to act every day, but how to act in the time of judgment. We are in it up to our eyeballs and most people do not see it, grasp it, or understand it. But Lord, Thy remnant that do see it, teach us how to act in the time of judgment by seeking righteousness and seeking disciplined, controlled strength under Your yoke. Give us grace that we may

serve Thee acceptably with reverence and godly fear. In Thy name we pray. Amen.

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Chapter 2: Perfect Love
JW01033 | 2004-01-18 | SermonAudio

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Chapter 6: Little Aleck - Confederate Memorial Day
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Chapter 12: The Essence of Biblical Godliness
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JW00488 | 2016-09-18 | SermonAudio

Chapter 18: Simon the Cyrenian
JW00437 | 2017-12-24 | SermonAudio

Chapter 19: Knowing the Will of God
JW01226 | 2012-02-02 | YouTube

Chapter 20: Christian Manhood
JW00422 | 2018-05-09 | SermonAudio

Chapter 21: How to Act in the Time of Judgment
JW01254 | 2012-02-09 | YouTube

Topical Index

Chapter titles and section headings are listed with the pages on which they begin.

A

A Method to Gauge Your Love to Christ p. 299, p. 300
A Method to Guage Your Love To Christ p. 299
A Satisfying Man: Pointing to Christ p. 23, p. 370
A Separated Man p. 17
A Separated Man: In the Wilderness p. 17, p. 363
A Solitary Man: Standing Alone p. 359
A Solitary Man: Willing to Stand Alone p. 13
A Straightening Man: Make Straight the Way p. 367
A Straightening Man: Making Things Right p. 20
A Strong Man: Crying in the Wilderness p. 361
A Strong Man: Lifting His Voice p. 16
Absolute Hopelessness p. 91
An Unanticipated Honor p. 325
An Unexpected Hour p. 321, p. 322
Anthropomorphic Imagery of Divine Wrath p. 199
Application and Call for Men of Character p. 109
Application of the Five Ways and Final Counsel p. 347
Application: Gauging Our Love by Our Sense of Sin and Forgiveness p. 314
Application: How to Act in the Time of Judgment p. 392
Application: Taking Up Our Cross Daily p. 328
Applications p. 277
Applications and Call to Hear p. 170
Applications for Believers p. 209
Applications of Perfect Love p. 42
Applications of the Word p. 277
Applications: Calling on the Lord and Gratitude p. 190
Applications: Ignorance Hinders Holiness; Grow in Knowledge p. 228
Applications: Invincibility, Wrong Seeking, and the Sufficiency of Scripture p. 94

Applications: Remembering God and Hating Sin p. 59
Applications: Trust, Not Fear p. 149

B

Biblical Demands for Perfection p. 28
Biblical Mindset Determines Biblical Action p. 226
Biblical Pictures of Sin's Depravity p. 307
Biographical Sketch of Alexander Hamilton Stephens p. 99
Bringing Every Thought Captive to Christ p. 225

C

Christian Manhood p. 11, p. 353
Common Fears and Biblical Deliverance p. 134
Common Focus on Consequences of Sin p. 46
Conclusion and Prayer p. 245, p. 297
Conclusion: A Call to Godly Manhood p. 25
Conclusion: Every Knee Shall Bow p. 77
Conclusion: Our Duty to Repent p. 129
Conclusion: The Call for God's Men p. 372
Conformed to the Image of Christ Through Mind Renewal p. 221

D

David's Confession: Against Thee Only p. 49
David's Deliverer p. 196
David's Reasons for Loving the Lord p. 176
Deliverance in Plain Language p. 205
Doing God's Will from the Heart p. 334

E

Explanation of the Five Ways p. 340
Exposition of Isaiah 51: The Might of God p. 145
Exposition of Isaiah 51: The Mortality of Man p. 140

F

Five Ways to Know God's Will in Unclear Matters p. 339
Fruit Bearing Must Be Accomplished with Patience p. 274
Fruit Bearing with Patience p. 274

G

General Answer: God's Will Revealed in His Word p. 335
God as 'My Buckler' and 'The Horn of My Salvation' p. 186
God as 'My Fortress' and 'My Deliverer' p. 183
God as 'My God', 'My Strength', and 'In Whom I Will Trust' p. 185
God as 'My High Tower' and Summary of Protection p. 189
God as 'My Rock' p. 180
God as 'My Strength' p. 178
God's Drastic Measures to Get Attention p. 162
God's Rapid Response to David's Cry p. 194
God's Righteous Anger Against the Wicked and His People p. 199
God's Sovereignty and Our Security p. 138
God's Swift and Concealed Judgment p. 201
God's Wrath and Power in Creation p. 196
Godliness Is Not Feelings p. 216
Godliness Is Not Ritualism p. 214
Godliness Must Be Added to Faith p. 219
Godliness Must Be Worked At p. 217
Good Ground Is the Result of Preparation p. 264, p. 265

H

Hearing Equals Obeying p. 157
Hearing the Word of God p. 263
Hope Against Circumstances p. 284
Hope For The Southern Christian Cause p. 281
How God Saves a Sinner p. 63
How God Saves Sinners p. 63
How to Act in the Time of Judgment p. 375

I

I Will Serve the Lord p. 175
Introduction and Command p. 333
Introduction and Context p. 231
Introduction and Review p. 175, p. 193
Introduction and Review of the Parable p. 263

Introduction and Scripture Reading p. 99, p. 281
Introduction: A Man Sent from God p. 11
Introduction: Paul's Conversion as a Pattern p. 63
Introduction: The Astounding Truth of Seeking Christ and Dying Lost p. 80
Introduction: The Big Bad Wolf of Fear p. 131
Introduction: The Context of Judgment p. 375
Introduction: The Many Simons of Scripture p. 317
Introduction: The Need for a Gauge of Love p. 300
Introduction: The Need to Understand Godliness p. 211
Introduction: The Potter and the Clay p. 111
Introduction: The Preeminence of Christ p. 247
Introduction: The Problem of Perfection p. 27
Introduction: The Sin Every Christian Commits p. 154
Introduction: The Small Word with Great Consequences p. 45
Introduction: The World's Definition vs. Biblical Manhood p. 353
Is America A Lost Nation? p. 111
Is America a Lost Nation? p. 115

J

Job's Example of Faith Over Fear p. 137
Joseph's Argument: Sin Against God p. 47

K

Knowing God's Will by His Promise p. 340
Knowing the Will of God p. 333

L

Little Aleck - Confederate Memorial Day p. 99

N

Negative and Positive Commands p. 333

O

Only Good Ground Hearers Produce Fruit p. 270

P

Paul's Enlightenment: The Spirituality of the Law p. 71
Paul's Enmity: The Sinner's Natural Hatred of God p. 65

Paul's Experience: Bowing to Christ's Lordship p. 75
Perfect Love p. 27
Perfect Love Defined and Its Fruits (1 John 4:17–18) p. 39
Practical Outworking: Bringing Every Thought Captive p. 240

S

Salvation Is from Sin, Not Just Hell p. 77
Salvation Is Impossible Apart from God's Supernatural Work p. 80
Salvation Is of the Lord and Involves Genuine Conviction p. 64
Seeking Christ and Dying Lost p. 79
Simon the Cyrenian p. 317
Sin Is Always Against God p. 51
Sin's Attempt to Dethrone God p. 53
Sinless Perfection Is Unattainable p. 30
Sinning Against God p. 45
Specific Clear Commands in Scripture p. 336
Stephens' Christian Faith and Death p. 109
Stephens' Conscience and Honesty p. 106
Stephens' Constitutionalism p. 107
Stephens' Courage and Commitment to Principle p. 103

T

The Action Clarified: Seek Righteousness, Seek Meekness p. 387
The Action Commanded: Seek the Lord p. 380
The Action Commended: Those Who Have Wrought Judgment p. 386
The Action Consummated: It May Be You Shall Be Hid p. 391
The Call for Courageous Men p. 293
The Consequence of Rejecting God's Means, Message, and Messengers p. 127
The Context of Zephaniah 2:3: Judgment on Judah and the Nations p. 377
The Contrast: Simon's Lack of Love p. 305
The Danger of Denying Sin or Necessity of Sin p. 33
The Difference Between Joseph and David p. 50
The Distinctiveness of the Southern Christian p. 287
The Duty Emphasized: Where Christ Sits p. 237
The Duty Emphasized: Where Christ Sits at God's Right Hand p. 253

The Duty Enjoined p. 233
The Duty Enjoined: Risen with Christ p. 233
The Duty Enjoined: Since You Are Risen with Christ p. 249
The Duty Established: Seek Things Above p. 234
The Duty Established: Seek Those Things Which Are Above p. 250
The Duty Exercised: Set Affection on Things Above p. 238
The Duty Exercised: Set Your Affection on Things Above p. 255
The Duty Explained: Dead and Hidden with Christ p. 243
The Duty Explained: For You Are Dead and Your Life Is Hidden with Christ p. 258
The Essence of Biblical Godliness p. 211
The Essence of Godliness: Thinking and Acting Like the Father p. 220
The Fear of Man and Its Dangers p. 135
The Foundation of Perfect Love (1 John 4:14–16) p. 35
The Greatness and Wickedness of Sin p. 307
The Historical Nature of This Sin p. 155
The Hope for the Southern Christian Cause (Last Man Standing) p. 281
The King's Rejection of God's Word p. 167
The Lone Prophet Micaiah p. 288
The Lord as Deliverer p. 193
The Loss of Recovery p. 116
The Loss of the Messengers of Recovery p. 124
The Lost Message of Recovery p. 121
The Marred Girdle: A Picture of Worthlessness p. 168
The Measure of a Man p. 24
The Nature and Source of Fear p. 134
The Nearness of God in the Old Testament p. 195
The Need for Character and Integrity p. 355
The Need for Hope p. 283
The Painfulness of Dying in Sin p. 88
The Painfulness of Dying in Sin: Realization, Recollection, and Hopelessness p. 88
The Parable of the Two Debtors p. 302
The Penalty of Sin: The Curse of the Law p. 86

The Phrase 'Die in Your Sins' and Its Implications p. 81
The Power of Sin: Enslavement and Bondage p. 84
The Principle: Love in Proportion to Perceived Forgiveness p. 304
The Problem Throughout Scripture p. 159
The Question: What Should the Righteous Do? p. 377
The Rechabites' Obedience vs. Israel's Disobedience p. 164
The Root of Fear: Forgetting God p. 148
The Setting: Jesus at Simon the Pharisee's House p. 301
The Shaking of Temporary Things p. 197
The Significance of the Accumulated Titles p. 177
The Significance of the Names p. 327
The Sin Every Christian Commits p. 153
The Sin That Every Christian Commits p. 153
The Sinner's Separation, Curse, and Wrath p. 66
The Sovereign Grace of God's Delight p. 207
The Supremacy of Christ Over the Christian's Mind p. 247
The Supremacy of Christ Over the Christian’s Mind and Affections p. 247
The Supremacy of Christ over the Christian’s Mind and Affections p. 231
The Supremecy of Christ in the Christian's Mind and Affections p. 231
The Terrible Artillery of Heaven p. 203
The Ultimate Punishment: Separation from God p. 92
The Wickedness of Ahab and Compromise of Jehoshaphat p. 285
Two Problems in Recognizing God's Judgment p. 379
Two Types of Hearing p. 156

U

Understanding 'Perfect' in Scripture p. 34

V

Varying Degrees of Fruit p. 272

W

We Have Lost the Means of Recovery p. 116
We Have Lost the Message of Recovery p. 122
We Have Lost the Messengers of Recovery p. 125
What Godliness Is Not p. 212

What Sin Does to God p. 53
Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf? p. 131
Why Jesus Needed Help Carrying the Cross p. 318

Scripture Index

Scripture references identified in chapter readings, headings, and manuscript text are listed with their page locations.

Genesis

Genesis 6:9 p. 34

Genesis 9 p. 34

Genesis 18:19 p. 386, p. 387

Genesis 39:7-9 p. 47, p. 48

Genesis 39:9 p. 45, p. 47, p. 58, p. 59

Exodus

Exodus 5:2 p. 54

Exodus 15:11 p. 52, p. 53

Leviticus

Leviticus 19:17 p. 22, p. 23

Leviticus 26:21 p. 51

Numbers

Numbers 11 p. 200

Numbers 11:20 p. 51, p. 59

Numbers 12:3 p. 388, p. 389

Numbers 15:30 p. 59

Deuteronomy

Deuteronomy 4 p. 382

Deuteronomy 6:4 p. 293

Deuteronomy 7:7-8 p. 208

Deuteronomy 18 p. 353, p. 356

Deuteronomy 28 p. 70, p. 71

Deuteronomy 29 p. 200, p. 336, p. 337

Deuteronomy 30 p. 195, p. 196

Deuteronomy 30:10 p. 195

Deuteronomy 32:10 p. 198

Deuteronomy 32:15 p. 181

Deuteronomy 32:30-31 p. 181
Deuteronomy 32:4 p. 181
Deuteronomy 32:9 p. 198

Joshua

Joshua 21 p. 286, p. 287

1 Samuel

1 Samuel 2:10 p. 204
1 Samuel 2:2 p. 181
1 Samuel 2:30 p. 325, p. 326
1 Samuel 7:10 p. 204
1 Samuel 15 p. 157, p. 178, p. 179
1 Samuel 24 p. 181

2 Samuel

2 Samuel 12:9 p. 58, p. 59
2 Samuel 22:31 p. 186, p. 187
2 Samuel 23 p. 181, p. 182

1 Kings

1 Kings 8:38 p. 308
1 Kings 12:11 p. 319, p. 320
1 Kings 21:25 p. 285, p. 286
1 Kings 22 p. 284, p. 285, p. 286, p. 291
1 Kings 22:1-27 p. 281
1 Kings 22:11-25 p. 282

1 Chronicles

1 Chronicles 16 p. 381, p. 382
1 Chronicles 22 p. 381, p. 382

2 Chronicles

2 Chronicles 6:26 p. 51
2 Chronicles 12 p. 382
2 Chronicles 14:4 p. 384
2 Chronicles 15 p. 382
2 Chronicles 16 p. 19

2 Chronicles 19:1-2 p. 286
2 Chronicles 20:4 p. 385
2 Chronicles 27 p. 382
2 Chronicles 36:15 p. 128

Job

Job 4 p. 144
Job 8 p. 283, p. 284
Job 23 p. 346
Job 27 p. 283, p. 284

Psalm

Psalm 4:1 p. 207
Psalm 5 p. 67, p. 68, p. 186
Psalm 5:4 p. 68
Psalm 7 p. 186, p. 199, p. 200
Psalm 7:11 p. 68
Psalm 9 p. 186
Psalm 10:1 p. 56
Psalm 10:4 p. 232, p. 248
Psalm 11:3 p. 377
Psalm 12:4 p. 54, p. 204
Psalm 14:1 p. 51
Psalm 17:8 p. 198
Psalm 18 p. 175, p. 176, p. 177, p. 178, p. 180, p. 181, p. 186, p. 187, p. 190, p. 196, p. 197, p. 198, p. 201, p. 206
Psalm 18:15 p. 204
Psalm 18:2 p. 183, p. 184, p. 185, p. 189
Psalm 18:32 p. 179, p. 180
Psalm 18:7-19 p. 193
Psalm 19:14 p. 179, p. 180
Psalm 20 p. 186
Psalm 22:19 p. 179, p. 180
Psalm 27:5 p. 391
Psalm 28:1 p. 182

Psalm 28:7 p. 180
Psalm 31:2 p. 182
Psalm 31:20 p. 391
Psalm 31:3 p. 183
Psalm 32 p. 340, p. 341
Psalm 37 p. 139
Psalm 38:5 p. 309
Psalm 38:7 p. 309
Psalm 39 p. 144
Psalm 40 p. 184
Psalm 44 p. 205, p. 206
Psalm 44:3 p. 145, p. 146
Psalm 46:1-2 p. 183
Psalm 50 p. 57, p. 290
Psalm 51 p. 49
Psalm 52:1 p. 58
Psalm 61:3 p. 189
Psalm 62:6-7 p. 182
Psalm 66:18 p. 384
Psalm 70 p. 184
Psalm 71:18 p. 180
Psalm 71:3 p. 183
Psalm 73 p. 68, p. 69
Psalm 76:10 p. 149, p. 285
Psalm 77:15 p. 145, p. 146
Psalm 85:2 p. 305
Psalm 89:13 p. 146
Psalm 91 p. 187, p. 391, p. 392
Psalm 91:1-16 p. 391
Psalm 91:2 p. 183
Psalm 94 p. 57
Psalm 97 p. 202
Psalm 98:1 p. 146
Psalm 104 p. 202

Psalm 116:1 p. 176, p. 177
Psalm 119 p. 52, p. 365
Psalm 119:11 p. 18
Psalm 130:4 p. 305
Psalm 140 p. 188, p. 189
Psalm 140:7 p. 188
Psalm 144 p. 184
Psalm 144:2 p. 183, p. 189

Proverbs

Proverbs 2:7 p. 187
Proverbs 3:33 p. 70, p. 71
Proverbs 6:19 p. 368
Proverbs 11 p. 92
Proverbs 14:32 p. 92
Proverbs 16:1 p. 265
Proverbs 16:3 p. 350
Proverbs 18:10 p. 189
Proverbs 21:4 p. 232, p. 233, p. 248, p. 249
Proverbs 23:7 p. 358, p. 359
Proverbs 25 p. 339
Proverbs 26:11 p. 313
Proverbs 27:1 p. 88
Proverbs 27:2 p. 213
Proverbs 28:9 p. 71
Proverbs 29:1 p. 88
Proverbs 29:25 p. 140

Ecclesiastes

Ecclesiastes 3:14 p. 147

Isaiah

Isaiah 1 p. 72, p. 73
Isaiah 1:17 p. 387
Isaiah 1:2 p. 51
Isaiah 1:5 p. 308, p. 380, p. 381

Isaiah 1:5-6 p. 308
Isaiah 1:6 p. 67
Isaiah 5:1 p. 187, p. 188
Isaiah 5:20 p. 289, p. 290
Isaiah 6 p. 66, p. 387, p. 388
Isaiah 6:1 p. 66
Isaiah 7 p. 185
Isaiah 12:2 p. 149
Isaiah 19:14 p. 313, p. 314
Isaiah 26:12 p. 219
Isaiah 28:8 p. 313, p. 314
Isaiah 30 p. 340, p. 341
Isaiah 30:21 p. 124, p. 340, p. 341
Isaiah 32:20 p. 265
Isaiah 45:9 p. 51
Isaiah 50 p. 144
Isaiah 51 p. 131, p. 140, p. 141, p. 142, p. 144, p. 145, p. 383, p. 384
Isaiah 51:1-13 p. 131
Isaiah 53 p. 125
Isaiah 55 p. 381, p. 382
Isaiah 55:10-11 p. 129
Isaiah 55:8-9 p. 223
Isaiah 56 p. 376, p. 377
Isaiah 56:10 p. 126
Isaiah 58:1 p. 16, p. 362
Isaiah 59:17 p. 188, p. 189
Isaiah 64 p. 309
Isaiah 64:6 p. 72, p. 73, p. 310
Isaiah 65:24 p. 196
Isaiah 65:5 p. 301, p. 302

Jeremiah

Jeremiah 2:31 p. 54
Jeremiah 5:2 p. 212
Jeremiah 6 p. 123

Jeremiah 7:8 p. 314
Jeremiah 9:23-24 p. 329
Jeremiah 11 p. 160
Jeremiah 13 p. 154, p. 155, p. 157, p. 168
Jeremiah 13:1-11 p. 153
Jeremiah 13:10 p. 159
Jeremiah 13:11 p. 170
Jeremiah 16 p. 173
Jeremiah 16:19 p. 183
Jeremiah 17:5 p. 209
Jeremiah 17:9 p. 270
Jeremiah 18 p. 113, p. 117, p. 121, p. 122, p. 123, p. 127
Jeremiah 18:1-13 p. 111
Jeremiah 18:15 p. 123
Jeremiah 18:18 p. 127
Jeremiah 23:23 p. 195
Jeremiah 23:29 p. 268
Jeremiah 26:4-5 p. 161
Jeremiah 29 p. 382
Jeremiah 29:19 p. 161
Jeremiah 32:32-33 p. 161
Jeremiah 35 p. 166
Jeremiah 35:1-19 p. 164
Jeremiah 35:14 p. 167
Jeremiah 36 p. 167
Jeremiah 44 p. 162
Jeremiah 44:4 p. 60, p. 307
Jeremiah 48:26 p. 313, p. 314

Lamentations

Lamentations 3:33 p. 393

Ezekiel

Ezekiel 16 p. 312
Ezekiel 16:3 p. 311

Ezekiel 22 p. 356, p. 373
Ezekiel 22:30 p. 356
Ezekiel 24:6 p. 312

Daniel

Daniel 3 p. 227
Daniel 6:10-11 p. 359
Daniel 9:7-8 p. 52

Jonah

Jonah 2:9 p. 64, p. 96

Micah

Micah 2:8 p. 51

Habakkuk

Habakkuk 1:13 p. 53, p. 67

Zephaniah

Zephaniah 1:2-3 p. 377
Zephaniah 2 p. 375, p. 376
Zephaniah 2:3 p. 377, p. 385, p. 386, p. 391
Zephaniah 3 p. 200, p. 201

Zechariah

Zechariah 2 p. 198
Zechariah 3:8 p. 200, p. 201
Zechariah 13:6 p. 124

Malachi

Malachi 2:17 p. 55
Malachi 2:2 p. 70, p. 71
Malachi 3:6 p. 346

Matthew

Matthew 1:21 p. 76, p. 77
Matthew 5 p. 20, p. 74
Matthew 5:23 p. 20
Matthew 5:41 p. 324

Matthew 5:44 p. 228
Matthew 5:48 p. 28, p. 30
Matthew 5:5 p. 389
Matthew 6:20 p. 251
Matthew 6:33 p. 251
Matthew 7 p. 133, p. 212, p. 213
Matthew 9:11 p. 302
Matthew 11 p. 389, p. 390
Matthew 11:27 p. 37
Matthew 11:29 p. 389, p. 390
Matthew 13:23 p. 270
Matthew 15 p. 215
Matthew 16 p. 37
Matthew 16:18 p. 182
Matthew 16:24 p. 329
Matthew 18 p. 20
Matthew 18:15 p. 20
Matthew 21:5 p. 389
Matthew 25:41 p. 70, p. 71
Matthew 26:6 p. 303
Matthew 27:1 p. 318
Matthew 27:26 p. 319

Mark

Mark 1:15 p. 47, p. 117
Mark 2:16 p. 302
Mark 3:27 p. 185
Mark 4:15 p. 269
Mark 4:20 p. 269, p. 270
Mark 4:28 p. 275
Mark 4:8 p. 263
Mark 13:13 p. 289
Mark 14:3 p. 303
Mark 15 p. 327
Mark 15:21 p. 317, p. 322, p. 325

Luke

Luke 1 p. 188
Luke 6 p. 158
Luke 6:40 p. 28
Luke 7:36-42 p. 299
Luke 7:44 p. 305, p. 306
Luke 8 p. 270
Luke 8:12 p. 269
Luke 8:14 p. 269
Luke 8:15 p. 269, p. 270, p. 274
Luke 9:23 p. 330
Luke 12 p. 135, p. 136
Luke 15:2 p. 302
Luke 16 p. 89, p. 90, p. 91, p. 97
Luke 16:23 p. 89
Luke 18 p. 66, p. 213
Luke 19:10 p. 46, p. 47
Luke 19:14 p. 54
Luke 23:8 p. 95

John

John 1 p. 353
John 1:1-3 p. 335
John 1:23 p. 13, p. 19, p. 356
John 1:29 p. 370, p. 371
John 1:6 p. 11, p. 109, p. 110, p. 293, p. 294, p. 356
John 3:18 p. 68
John 3:36 p. 68
John 5 p. 336
John 5:39 p. 97
John 6 p. 336
John 6:24 p. 95
John 6:39 p. 220
John 6:71 p. 317

John 7:17 p. 340
John 7:25 p. 94
John 8 p. 41, p. 77, p. 92, p. 93, p. 95
John 8:20-30 p. 79
John 8:21 p. 92, p. 93, p. 95
John 8:24 p. 96
John 8:29 p. 220, p. 221
John 8:36 p. 86
John 8:40 p. 94
John 10 p. 245, p. 328
John 10:27 p. 159
John 11:55 p. 94, p. 95
John 12:26 p. 331
John 13:2 p. 317
John 13:6 p. 317
John 14 p. 120, p. 345
John 14:21 p. 300, p. 301
John 15 p. 180, p. 271
John 15:1 p. 271
John 17 p. 44, p. 237, p. 344
John 17:17 p. 344
John 17:23 p. 28
John 17:24 p. 253, p. 254
John 19:16-17 p. 318
John 20:31 p. 97
John 21 p. 330, p. 331

Acts

Acts 1:3 p. 251, p. 252
Acts 2 p. 150
Acts 2:5 p. 322, p. 323
Acts 3 p. 120
Acts 4 p. 96, p. 150
Acts 5 p. 118
Acts 5:30-31 p. 118

Acts 5:39 p. 51
Acts 6:9 p. 323
Acts 7:51 p. 51
Acts 9 p. 73, p. 75
Acts 11:18 p. 118
Acts 11:19-20 p. 323
Acts 13:1 p. 323
Acts 16 p. 342
Acts 17 p. 117
Acts 19 p. 326
Acts 19:32 p. 326

Romans

Romans 3 p. 83
Romans 3:10-12 p. 266
Romans 3:23 p. 46
Romans 4 p. 284
Romans 5 p. 42
Romans 5:12 p. 46, p. 47
Romans 5:8 p. 67, p. 68
Romans 6 p. 243, p. 260
Romans 6:1-12 p. 242
Romans 6:1-9 p. 258
Romans 6:11 p. 53, p. 260
Romans 6:16 p. 142
Romans 6:23 p. 46
Romans 6:4 p. 233, p. 249
Romans 7 p. 72, p. 73
Romans 7:12 p. 74
Romans 8 p. 42, p. 43, p. 265
Romans 8:14 p. 344
Romans 8:28 p. 135, p. 150, p. 342
Romans 8:29 p. 221
Romans 8:5 p. 239, p. 257
Romans 8:7 p. 60, p. 65, p. 71

Romans 8:9 p. 272
Romans 9 p. 114
Romans 10:6-8 p. 195, p. 196
Romans 11:2 p. 129, p. 130
Romans 11:26 p. 185
Romans 12 p. 346
Romans 12:1-2 p. 334
Romans 12:2 p. 225, p. 240, p. 258
Romans 13:10 p. 176
Romans 13:14 p. 17, p. 18
Romans 13:8 p. 106, p. 107
Romans 14 p. 349
Romans 14:23 p. 149
Romans 15 p. 283, p. 284
Romans 16:13 p. 327

1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 1:26 p. 325
1 Corinthians 2:13 p. 33, p. 34
1 Corinthians 3:1-4 p. 275
1 Corinthians 15 p. 222
1 Corinthians 15:1 p. 222, p. 223
1 Corinthians 15:19 p. 92
1 Corinthians 15:33 p. 17, p. 18, p. 366
1 Corinthians 15:58 p. 222, p. 223
1 Corinthians 16:13 p. 99, p. 100
1 Corinthians 16:9 p. 342

2 Corinthians

2 Corinthians 2:12 p. 342
2 Corinthians 2:14 p. 128, p. 129
2 Corinthians 5 p. 136
2 Corinthians 7:1 p. 365, p. 366
2 Corinthians 8:12 p. 43
2 Corinthians 10 p. 240, p. 241

2 Corinthians 10:4 p. 241
2 Corinthians 10:4-5 p. 258
2 Corinthians 11:24 p. 320
2 Corinthians 13:11 p. 28
2 Corinthians 13:5 p. 264

Galatians

Galatians 1 p. 123
Galatians 3 p. 87, p. 88
Galatians 3:10 p. 70, p. 304
Galatians 5 p. 257
Galatians 6:7-8 p. 46, p. 363
Galatians 6:9 p. 388

Ephesians

Ephesians 2 p. 233, p. 249, p. 250
Ephesians 2:10 p. 219
Ephesians 2:18 p. 238, p. 254
Ephesians 2:3 p. 71
Ephesians 2:4 p. 233, p. 250
Ephesians 4 p. 223
Ephesians 4:18 p. 71
Ephesians 4:23 p. 240, p. 258
Ephesians 5 p. 333
Ephesians 5:8 p. 67
Ephesians 6 p. 189, p. 346
Ephesians 6:17 p. 188, p. 189

Philippians

Philippians 2 p. 225
Philippians 2:12-13 p. 219
Philippians 2:5 p. 234, p. 240, p. 258
Philippians 2:5-11 p. 77, p. 78, p. 250, p. 251
Philippians 3:12 p. 31
Philippians 3:19 p. 239
Philippians 3:20 p. 251

Philippians 4 p. 180
Philippians 4:7 p. 347

Colossians

Colossians 1 p. 185, p. 383, p. 384
Colossians 1:15-17 p. 232, p. 247, p. 248
Colossians 1:28 p. 29
Colossians 2 p. 249
Colossians 2:11-12 p. 233
Colossians 3 p. 239, p. 243
Colossians 3:1 p. 233
Colossians 3:1-3 p. 247
Colossians 3:15 p. 347
Colossians 3:3 p. 242, p. 261
Colossians 4 p. 346
Colossians 4:12 p. 29

1 Thessalonians

1 Thessalonians 1:9 p. 117
1 Thessalonians 4:3 p. 337
1 Thessalonians 5 p. 365
1 Thessalonians 5:18 p. 338

1 Timothy

1 Timothy 1:15 p. 46, p. 47
1 Timothy 4:7-8 p. 211
1 Timothy 6:5 p. 214

2 Timothy

2 Timothy 1:12 p. 245
2 Timothy 1:7 p. 40, p. 41, p. 140
2 Timothy 2:2 p. 277
2 Timothy 3 p. 30
2 Timothy 3:16 p. 126, p. 336
2 Timothy 4 p. 360

Hebrews

Hebrews 1:1 p. 335
Hebrews 1:1-3 p. 336
Hebrews 2:11-12 p. 43
Hebrews 2:14-15 p. 134
Hebrews 4:14 p. 254
Hebrews 4:16 p. 238
Hebrews 5 p. 276
Hebrews 6 p. 388
Hebrews 6:18 p. 178, p. 179
Hebrews 7:26 p. 17, p. 363, p. 364
Hebrews 10:16 p. 267
Hebrews 10:19 p. 238, p. 255
Hebrews 11 p. 235, p. 252
Hebrews 11:24-27 p. 364
Hebrews 12:25-26 p. 197
Hebrews 12:29 p. 70
Hebrews 13 p. 138, p. 139
Hebrews 13:12-13 p. 321
Hebrews 13:5 p. 209

James

James 1 p. 29, p. 30
James 1:13 p. 53
James 2 p. 70, p. 71
James 2:10 p. 87
James 2:10-11 p. 304
James 3:2 p. 31
James 4 p. 172, p. 384, p. 385
James 4:17 p. 362
James 5:16 p. 22

1 Peter

1 Peter 2:11 p. 236, p. 252
1 Peter 2:24 p. 244, p. 260

1 Peter 3:17 p. 338
1 Peter 4 p. 225
1 Peter 4:1 p. 240, p. 258
1 Peter 4:19 p. 339
1 Peter 5 p. 30

2 Peter

2 Peter 1 p. 336
2 Peter 1:10 p. 264
2 Peter 1:19 p. 344
2 Peter 2 p. 391, p. 392
2 Peter 2:4 p. 66, p. 67
2 Peter 3:18 p. 228, p. 278

1 John

1 John 1 p. 36
1 John 1:10 p. 32
1 John 1:5 p. 67
1 John 2 p. 261
1 John 2:1 p. 33, p. 260, p. 261
1 John 2:12 p. 273
1 John 3 p. 83
1 John 3:14-15 p. 44
1 John 3:16 p. 43
1 John 4 p. 30, p. 39, p. 42
1 John 4:14 p. 27
1 John 4:14-15 p. 35
1 John 4:14-16 p. 35
1 John 4:14-21 p. 27
1 John 4:15 p. 37
1 John 4:17 p. 35, p. 234, p. 250
1 John 4:17-18 p. 39
1 John 4:18 p. 41, p. 134
1 John 4:20 p. 43
1 John 4:21 p. 43

1 John 4:9-10 p. 38
1 John 5:3 p. 300, p. 301

Revelation

Revelation 3:8 p. 342
Revelation 6 p. 204
Revelation 15:4 p. 52, p. 53

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