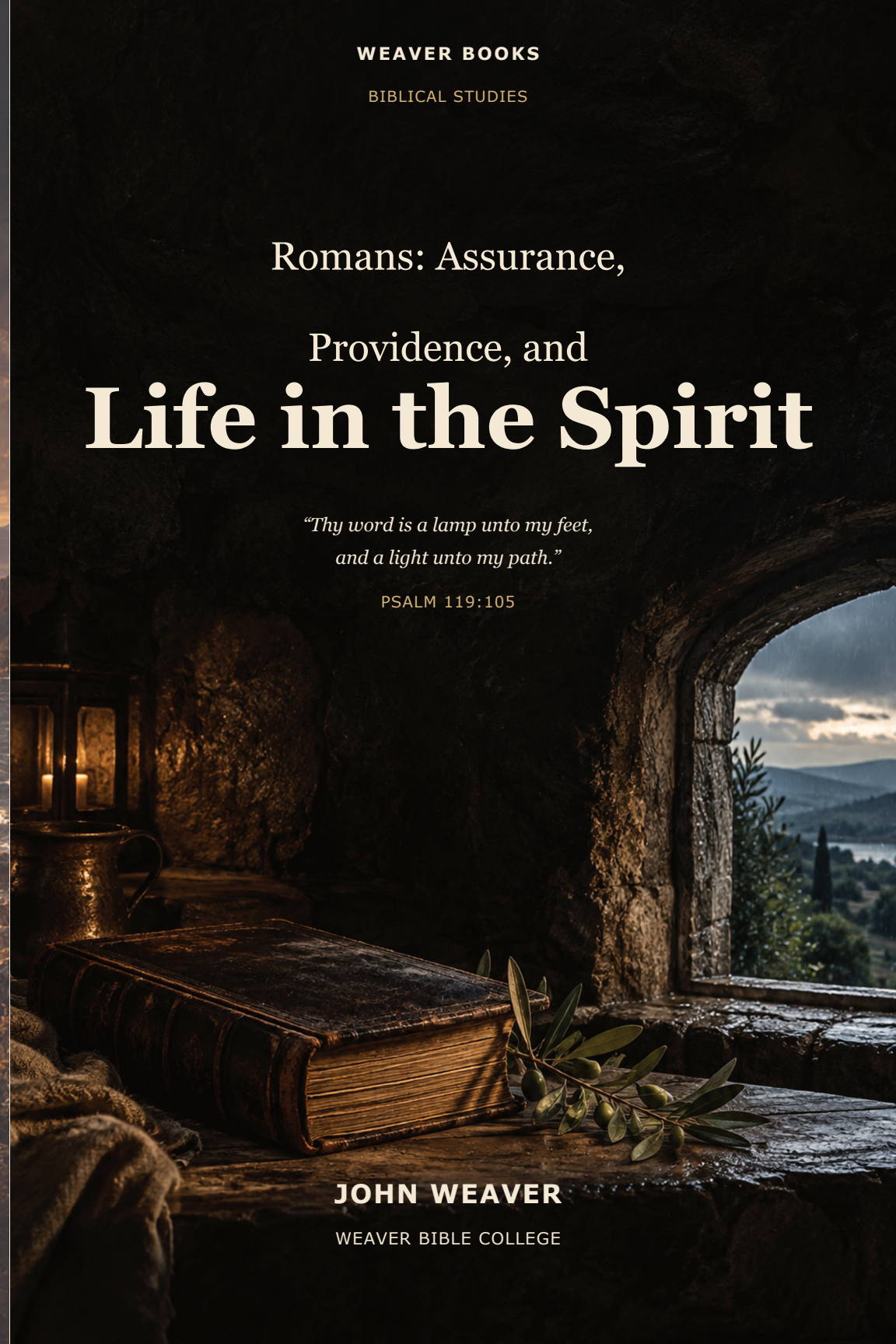
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BIBLICAL STUDIES

Romans: Assurance, Providence, and Life in the Spirit

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

PSALM 119:105



JOHN WEAVER

WEAVER BIBLE COLLEGE



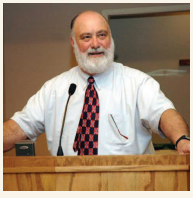
There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.

ROMANS 8:1, EXCERPT

Assurance is grounded in God's grace and the completed work of Christ. This Romans-related collection brings together sermons on salvation, intercession, patience, self-control, and the believer's response to correction. John Weaver connects confidence in providence with the practical discipline of living faithfully before God.

“Self-control is a virtue that everyone wishes to possess, but no one wishes to exercise.”

JOHN WEAVER



John Weaver

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

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New Testament Studies

John Weaver

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Romans: Assurance, Providence, and Life in the Spirit

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CHAPTER 1

Armed & Dangerous

January 11, 2004

Armed and Dangerous

Introduction: The Command to Arm Yourselves

“Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God. For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries: wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you: who shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead.”

Everyone has heard the phrase “armed and dangerous.” Usually, it refers to someone who is carrying a weapon and has a bad disposition and attitude to go along with it. A quick internet search found nearly 570,000 sites using the phrase. It refers to movies, books, rent-a-cops, vitamins, and everything else imaginable.

Naturally, I did not search all 570,000 sites, but the few I searched had absolutely no reference to Christianity.

You may ask, "Pastor, how in the world could the phrase 'armed and dangerous' even have reference to Christianity?" I am going to show you from the Word of God. But first, have you ever wondered why Christians are so despised, so powerless, and so ill-treated? One obvious answer is simply this: They are not armed, and therefore they are not dangerous.

The Weapon Identified: The Mind of Christ

I am not referring to a physical weapon at this point, but to a spiritual weapon, one that is vastly important. In fact, the weapon I am referring to is so important that it is impossible to live a real, genuine Christian life without it. What is it? It is the mind of Christ.

Look in your Bibles to 1 Peter 4:1: "Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God." Go back to verse 1: "Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind."

This is a command to arm yourselves, and this command is clearly stated. In the Greek, it is a direct middle first imperative. An imperative is a command. It is not advice or consideration, something you may accept or reject at your pleasure. It is a command, pure and simple. Literally, he is saying, "I command you to arm yourselves likewise with the same mind."

The word "arm" refers to weaponry. The Greek word is *hoplidzo*, the verb, from *hoplon*, which is translated "weapon" in our Bibles. Hold 1 Peter 4, but go back and look in John 18:3. Here you will see this same word translated "weapon": "Judas then, having received a band of men and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, cometh thither with lanterns and torches and weapons." It is the same word. In John 18:3, it refers to physical weapons. But when he says, "arm yourselves," he is talking about a weapon, and he identifies that weapon as the mind of Christ.

We are commanded and exhorted to arm ourselves with the mind of Christ. Why? Because only when we are armed with the mind of Christ will we be able to confront sin and our enemies in a right and biblical manner. In 1 Peter 4:1-5, the apostle exhorts us to have the mind of Christ in order that we may cease from sin.

Purpose of the Mind of Christ in 1 Peter 4

In fact, he gives us one admonition with two reasons attached to it. One is in regard to Christ having suffered for sin; the second is in light of a future judgment. That is what you read in verse 5: "who shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead." In verse 1, you have where Christ has once suffered for sins. In 1 Peter 4 and verse 7, he exhorts us to have the mind of Christ.

From the approaching end of all things, he therefore urges us to sobriety, watchfulness, and prayer. In verse 8, we are to have the mind of Christ in order that we may exercise biblical charity. In verse 9, we are to have the mind of Christ in order that we may exercise biblical hospitality. In verses 10 through 11, we are to use the spiritual gifts rightly; and in verses 12 through 19, we are to suffer under persecution for God's honor and glory.

Note all of these Christian virtues: holiness, watchfulness, sobriety, prayer, charity, hospitality, the right use of gifts, and suffering under persecution for God's honor and glory. None of these are attainable without having the mind of Christ. You cannot exercise any of these virtues correctly without the mind of Christ. Moreover, you and I cannot even face our enemies biblically and correctly without the mind of Christ.

The Early Church Feared Because They Had the Mind of Christ

Have you ever wondered how it was that in New Testament times Christians were exceedingly feared, while today we are laughed at and mocked? Have you ever wondered why our great and glorious Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, is held in such contempt by our enemies? Let me show you a few verses. Look in your Bibles to the book of Acts, chapter 2. Acts 2, verse 42: "And they, that is the Christians, continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and

fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers, "and fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles."

Fear came upon every soul—not just the believers, but even those around them. Look in chapter 5 and verse 5. Ananias and Sapphira had lied to God. Peter pronounced the death of Ananias and later Sapphira. But look what happens. Peter said, "Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things."

Barnabas had a certain piece of land, sold it, and gave all the money to the apostles to distribute among the poor and needy. Ananias and Sapphira thought, "Look at old Barnabas. He's getting some honor and glory." They also had a piece of land, but they kept back part of the sale price and pretended they were giving all the money to Christ. Peter said, "Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Ghost? You've not lied to man. You've lied to God." Ananias did not have to give any of the money. He could have kept it all, or kept part and given part. That was not the point; he had lied to God. God killed him, and great fear fell on all the people.

The same thing happened to Sapphira. "Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out. Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband. And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things." Great fear came not only upon the church, but upon all who heard these things.

Acts 9:31 deals with the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, and the Bible says: "Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and

Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied."

Whenever they abode in the doctrine of the apostles, whenever they were obedient and God did some miraculous work, the early Christians were feared because everyone knew they were individuals who were different and who had the power of God.

Now look in Acts 19. This is one of my favorite stories; I cannot help but laugh every time I read this passage. It really demonstrates that our Lord has a sense of humor. Billy Sunday used to say, "I know God has a sense of humor, because He made monkeys and some of you folks."

"Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth." These men were not Christians, but they had heard Paul do this. Seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew and chief of the priests, attempted the same thing. "And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?" The man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. They tried to cast the devil out of the man, and the man beat the devil out of them.

"This was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified." What is this passage teaching us? The same thing that Acts 5 is teaching us: You do not play with God. You do not mess around with the holiness, righteousness, and power of God.

Great fear fell upon all those when God's people abode in the doctrine of the apostles. That is, they had the mind of Christ. I want to share an article I received on the Internet this week. Some of you have already read it, but it was so wonderful and pointed that I wanted to incorporate it into this message. It was written by Coach Dave Daubenmire and received on January the 8th.

Modern Church's Failure: Mad Cow Disease Analogy

"What is all this fuss about? Mad cow disease is nothing new. It has been poisoning America for years. It is an insidious disease,

scientists tell us, attacking the central nervous system. The results are not immediate, sometimes taking years to manifest, but the results are devastating. It slowly hinders one's ability to think, leading eventually to dementia and the total loss of the power to reason.

“Is our meat supply safe?” the headlines ask. “Can you trust Wendy's and McDonald's? Can you be sure that the meat at your local grocery is not tainted? Just to be safe, maybe it would be wise to stop eating meat. Perhaps we should ask pastors the same questions. Is the meat they are serving us safe? The church, for generations the central nervous system of America, has been ravaged by mad cow.

“Once the safeguard of our nation, she's lost her ability to reason. How else can you explain the inability to distinguish those who are church from those who are not? Dementia is running rampant because we've been fed a contaminated gospel.” Then he quotes Hebrews 5:14: “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.”

“The disease infected us quietly. Despite the firm warning of some veteran chefs, our seminaries were turning out a new breed of cooks with fancy recipes for a new casserole. It looked good, tasted fine, and appeared to have no negative effects. America was ready for a new dish, one easily prepared in the microwave, and we liked the new chef.

“He seemed like such a nice man. Surely he would not give us tainted food. Many pastors were leery at first, holding fast to old or proven methods and warning about the dangers of feeding people this rotten flesh. But as they watched short-order cooks who served this meat grow larger churches, the temptation became too great. This new improved hamburger helper, flavored not with salt but with the spices of diversity and tolerance, looked and smelled the same, but was easier to digest and required almost no chewing. Seven-course meals were out, and fast food was in.

“Three points and a poem replaced fire and brimstone. ‘Feed my sheep,’ Jesus said. So the churches did. The new, seeker-friendly

menu was great for business. A generation starving for spiritual nourishment was being spoon-fed poisoned meat. Consider the entrees these enlightened chefs served: Jesus loves you in spite of your sin. He will be your best buddy. Divorce is okay because God wants you to be happy. Jesus died to deliver you from poverty; He wants you to be rich. God made you gay. He loves you and so do we. Abortion isn't murder; it is a difficult choice between a woman and her doctor. Open hearts, open doors, open minds. Who are you to judge? All religions are the same. People just have different names for God.

"Sort of makes your stomach growl, doesn't it? Pardon my cold-hearted PETA—that is, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals—but the chickens have come home to roost. Someone call the FDA. Some pastors are spreading mad cow disease, and America is losing her mind. Check the symptoms: gays want to marry, and churches bless the union. In fact, we now have gays offering sacraments. Moo. Fifty percent of all Christian marriages end in divorce, and the church crows about defending the sanctity of that union. Moo. We have condoms to prevent disease and abortion to prevent children. Moo."

We educate our kids in godless schools, but rave about their sports programs. Moo. But why worry? Our attendance is up, and so is the Dow. Things are looking better. Mad cow has taken over. We're losing our minds.

In the area where I live, Amish food is gaining popularity. Restaurant-serving, home-style cooking have customers standing in line. Sick of fast food and microwave dinners, Americans are finding something of value in the old ways of cooking. It has a more lasting taste, and as Grandma used to say, it sticks to your ribs.

We need a new diet. The time has come when pastors must feed the flock something that sticks to the ribs. Years of greasy grace have led to a dazzling showcase, but an empty stockroom. Rewrite the menu and include some of the old family basics. The soul that sinneth, it shall die. God hateth the workers of iniquity. In righteousness doth he judge and make war. Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. Be ye holy; for I am holy.

Alexis de Tocqueville is credited with having said, "I sought for the key to the greatness and genius of America in her harbors, in her fertile fields and boundless forest, in her rich mines and vast world of commerce, in her public school system and institutions of learning. I sought for it in her Democratic Congress and matchless Constitution. Not until I went into the churches of America and heard her pulpits aflame with righteousness did I understand the secret of her genius and power. America is great because America is good. And if America ever ceases to be good, America will cease to be great."

Any nutritionist will tell you, you are what you eat. America, look in the mirror. Do you really like what you see? No. Did he hit the nail on the head? The reason we don't really like what we see is because what we see is unbiblical, ungodly, and unholy. We have sired a generation of people who have never heard the gospel, who have never been taught doctrine, who cannot think or reason and have no desire to learn or to be taught.

We have churches on every corner. But the truth is, most churches do not have enough gospel that would convert a gnat. You can go to church after church and never be taught anything. The average Christian cannot even quote the Ten Commandments. The average Christian does not even know how many books there are in the Bible and could never ever quote them.

I have said to some people, just joking, of course, and most of you know I very seldom drink coffee. I don't really like coffee. Sometimes I'm offered some, and I say, "No, thank you. I'm a Christian. I don't drink." They'll look at me and say, "Well, what's wrong with coffee?" I say, "Have you never read Hezekiah 3 and verse 15? It says, 'Thou shalt not partake of the coffee bean.'" "Well, no, I've never read that." I say, "Check it out in your Bible. It's in the book of Hezekiah." It never dawns on them that Hezekiah was a king, not a book. There's no book of Hezekiah in the Bible. I've had people come back to me and say, "You know, I can't find that book in the Bible." Then I get embarrassed because I've really shamed them. I say, "Well, there is no book in the Bible like that."

But we have sired a whole generation that has never heard the gospel, has never been taught doctrine, cannot reason or think, and,

sadly, has no desire to learn. We have a pleasure-oriented society that cannot even properly say, "Give me, give me, give me." They always say, "Gimme, gimme, gimme." They only know how to take; they don't know how to give. The only danger they face is a danger to themselves, their family, and their posterity. They're not a danger to tyranny, the New World Order, sin, unrighteousness, or ungodliness. The truth is, they're dupes, pawns, serfs, and slaves, and they don't even realize it. They're just a danger to themselves.

You know what we failed to do? We have failed to grasp a simple truth. Are you listening? If we do not have the mind of Christ, the only alternative is the mind of man. We either exercise a Christian worldview or we're humanists. We either have a biblical philosophy or a secular, worldly, humanistic philosophy. It's that simple. The average Christian simply plods along every day without thinking, reasoning, or even considering Scripture, and all he does is walk in the wisdom of the world. Let me show you.

The Two Wisdoms: From Above and From Below

In James chapter 3, there is a distinction between the wisdom that is from above and the wisdom that is from below. James begins by showing the contradiction: “Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?” “Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries?” “Either a vine, figs?” “So can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.” You do not mix those things. They are incompatible. You will have either one or the other. Then he asks, “Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you?”

“Let him shew out of a good conversation”—that is, good conduct—“his works with meekness of wisdom.” But “if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth.” This wisdom “descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish.” For where envying and strife are, there is confusion and every evil work. “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.”

“And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.” You have either the wisdom that is from below or the wisdom that is from above. How do you know which wisdom you have? Is it

earthly, sensual, or devilish? Is there envying, strife, confusion, and every evil work in your life? If so, very obviously, you do not have godly wisdom. You do not have the mind of Christ.

The mind of Christ produces peacefulness, gentleness, and an attitude easily to be intreated—that is, no one has to beg you to do what is right. It is full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. There is a vast difference between the mind of Christ and the mind of man. As a Christian, listen carefully: if you do not have the mind of Christ, you are unarmed and therefore not dangerous. He said, “Arm yourselves with the mind of Christ.”

By the way, what did he say in Ephesians 6? Help me out now. That you're to take the sword of the Spirit as a sort of weapon? You take up the sword of the Spirit, explain it, which is what? The Word of God. If we arm ourselves with the mind of Christ, it's the same as picking up the sword, which is indeed the Word of God.

Now, I want you to turn with me to several passages. I can quote these verses. I have quoted them in this pulpit a hundred times. But I want you to see them. Look in your Bibles to the book of Philippians chapter 2. Philippians chapter 2. Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians. Philippians chapter 2. Philippians 2. Look in verse 5: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." Is it that plain? "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." So Peter just said it, "Be armed with the mind of Christ." Here Paul just simply says, "Let this mind be in you, which also is in Christ Jesus." Turn in your Bibles to Romans 12.

Renewing the Mind Through Scripture

We'll go back and then go forward. Look in Romans 12 once again. You've heard me quote this verse or these two verses innumerable times. But look carefully. Romans 12 verse 1. Romans 12 verse 1, Paul writes, "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"—that is, don't be pressed into the mold of this world—"but be ye transformed,"

that is, literally, it's where we get our English word "metamorphosis" from, it means to go through changes. Literally, be you metamorphosized, how? "By the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." Now, if you and I are going to prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God, we must have our minds renewed. What does that mean? It means we must have our minds renovated.

Look in your Bibles to the book of Ephesians chapter 4 and verse 23. Ephesians 4, verse 23. Ephesians 4, verse 23: "And be renewed in the spirit of your mind." And the word there is *ananeoo* in the Greek, it literally means to have your mind renovated. To have your mind reconstructed. Now, go back in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians, chapter 10. 2 Corinthians, chapter 10. And look, if you would please, at verse four. 2 Corinthians, chapter 10, verse four.

The Apostle Paul writes, “For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal”—that is, they are not fleshly. He is not condemning fleshly weapons or saying, “Don’t have a rifle or a pistol or a shotgun at your house.” That is not what he is saying. Rather, regarding the type of war to which he refers, physical weapons are useless and worthless: “For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds.”

What is a stronghold? A stronghold is your place of defense, where you hide. If someone came through that door, waving a .357 Magnum and firing it, I would jump behind that bookcase. You might say, “That’s not much protection,” but it is better than what you have, isn’t it? I am closer to it and can get behind it more quickly than you. So your stronghold is your place of defense.

Now watch what he says: “For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds.” Where is our stronghold? “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.”

How many thoughts are you and I allowed that are unbiblical? None. What does that mean? That means we are required to have the mind of Christ.

I want to take the time to explain this. John Calvin, the old author of the Institutes, said it this way: "We must learn to view life through the spectacles of the Scripture." The spectacles of the Scripture. In other words, when you are going to view life, you put on the spectacles of the Scripture and you start looking. Simply put, it means this: We consider every issue, every act, and every subject in light of what the Bible teaches. We think according to what the Bible says. That is putting on the mind of Christ.

Unity Through the Mind of Christ

Let me ask another question. Have you ever wondered about the divisions in Christianity? I am not talking about the divisions between the liberals and the conservatives. I am talking about the divisions that exist between true believers. Have you ever wondered about that? Why in the world must there be so many divisions? Well, let me show you something. Look in your Bibles and go back to Romans chapter 12. I want you to think about this. Notice verse 16: "Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits."

"Be of the same mind one toward another." That is, we are to think the same things toward each other. Look in Romans 15, verses 5 and 6: "Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus," and "that ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

I do not care if we are fifty strong, five hundred strong, or fifty thousand strong. What does he say? "That ye may with one mind and one mouth." As God's people, we are to be able to think the same thing and speak the same thing, that we may glorify God, even the Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Paul writes to the Corinthian church, which had divisions within it: "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no

divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." The church ought to be together in the same mind and in the same judgment.

Again, in 2 Corinthians 13:11, 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." Note, "be of one mind." Isn't that interesting? The repeated command is not simply to agree on opinions, but to be of one mind in the Lord.

Paul writes to the Philippians, in Philippians 1:27, "Only let your conversation"—or your conduct—"be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel." They were to stand together with one mind. In Philippians 2:2, he says, "Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind." In Philippians 3:16, he also says, "Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing."

There were two women in the Philippian church who were having a little difference of opinion. In Philippians 4:2, Paul writes, "I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord." Sometimes I mispronounce their names and call them "Odious" and "Stinky." But he said, "I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord." How do you settle these differences? He says, "Let the mind of Christ be in you." "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." How could Euodias and Syntyche have the same mind? By each of them submitting their minds to the mind of Christ.

How in the world can you and I come up with one mind in the things of God? I'll tell you how. We each come to the Word of God, we study the Word of God, we see what the Word of God teaches, and we submit our minds to the Word of God. When you and I submit our minds to the Word of God, inevitably, inevitably, we're going to come up with the same thing. If we're willing to listen, if we're willing to learn, we might not see it exactly until someone else begins explaining and showing, but then all of a sudden it dawns on

us. We are to have one mind, and that one mind is the mind of Christ.

Applications: Mortification Begins in the Mind

Unless you're armed with the mind of Christ, you are not dangerous to sin. You're not dangerous to wickedness. You're not dangerous to tyranny. You're not dangerous to the New World Order. In order to be dangerous, you must be armed. First Peter 4:1–2 says, "Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God."

The Scripture then recommends to us a twofold likeness in the death of Christ. First of all, we're to be conformed to Him in reproaches and troubles, and also, that the old man being dead, we're to be renewed in a spiritual life. He therefore says, "Arm ye yourselves," or, "I command you to be armed." I command you to be invincibly and effectually supplied with the only weapon that will enable you to overcome sin and wickedness and tyranny, and that weapon is the mind of Christ. Now, let me give you some applications.

Without the mind of Christ, you are unarmed and therefore not dangerous. Look at verse one: "Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind." Some of the strongest and best arguments against all sorts of sin are taken from the sufferings of Christ. All sympathy and tenderness for Christ as a sufferer are lost to you if you do not put away sin. He died to destroy sin. Although Christ could cheerfully submit to the worst sufferings, He could never submit to the least sin. Christ had rather go through the sufferings of the cross than to sin.

The beginning of mortification is therefore in the mind. It is not in penance, as the Roman Catholics teach, nor in hardships of the body. It is in the mind. Ephesians 4:17–18 shows the unsaved mind: "This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity"—that is, in the uselessness and worthlessness—"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."

What is it like to be unconverted? It is to be blind, to be ignorant, and to have the mind alienated from God. You do not think like God; you do not act like God. When God saves us, there is a marvelous change in our life.

We are brought off from our old, fashionable and delightful lusts, the common ways of the world, and the vices of sin, and brought to the will of God. Conversion alters our mind, our judgment, our affections, and our actions, bringing us into the will of God. Why? Because our mind is renewed, and we begin to think biblically and scripturally.

Isaiah 55 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 the way we think. We must learn to submit our minds and think the way He thinks, and that is what salvation is all about. God brings us back to a new way of thinking. He sets our affections on that new way of thinking, and our conduct then conforms to the way we think.

The third application is that the mind is the battlefield. Proverbs 23:7 says, "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he." As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he. If you do not think rightly, you cannot act rightly. If you do not think biblically, you cannot act biblically. If you do not have the mind of Christ, all you have is the mind of man.

In 1 Corinthians 2:11, Paul asks, "For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him?" I can pretty well tell you sometimes how Hobie thinks and acts because I am a man and he is a man. I can identify with what he does because I know what I do, and with what he thinks because I know how I think as a man. Then Paul says, "Even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God." The Spirit of God is different from the spirit of man. "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world"—we did not receive a secular humanist spirit—"but the spirit

which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God."

"Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual"—that is, from the Word of God. "But the natural man"—that is, the unsaved man—"receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual"—that is, he that has been saved—"judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man."

"For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him?" No one has been able to instruct God. But, he says, "we have the mind of Christ." Where do we have the mind of Christ? In the Scriptures. As we take the Spirit of God, as He indwells us, listen to Him, and submit to the Word of God, we have the mind of Christ.

What does the Bible say in 1 John 4:17? "Because as he is, so are we in this world." If we are to act the way Christ acted, we must think the way Christ thought. We must have the mind of Christ.

Conclusion: The Greatest Weapon is Biblical Thinking

The fourth application is this: All godly Christians make the will of God, not their own lusts and desires, the rule of their lives and actions. Mortification is demanded in Scripture. Colossians 3:5 says, "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth." The word "mortify" is where we get the word "mortician" from. It means to make dead. Our lusts, wicked desires, and sinful delights have been crucified with Christ. Therefore, we are to reckon them dead and no longer live to those lusts, but live to the will of God.

What does that mean? You and I should always—it may be slow at first—be slowly but surely, constantly and continually developing the mind of Christ. We develop the mind of Christ as we study the Word, hear the Word taught, explained, and preached, and bring our lives into conformity to that Word.

We learn to think biblically and scripturally. When we hear a subject—whether abortion, sodomy, fraud, or anything else—we say, "Let's see what the Word of God says," and our attitude toward that

subject is based upon Scripture. I'll give you a clear illustration of what it does not mean to have the mind of Christ.

Presidential candidate Howard Dean said that his Christian faith led him to embrace sodomite marriages. My dear friend, he does not have the mind of Christ. Had he had the mind of Christ, he would have said with the Word of God that he that lieth with mankind as with womankind is to be put to death, because that is what the Bible teaches. If you have the mind of Christ, you think biblically, scripturally, and accurately. Error cannot stand exposure, and a lie cannot stand the truth.

The greatest weapon that you and I have at our disposal is learning to think biblically. Have you ever stopped to entertain this thought? If you know what the Bible teaches, you are not going to be deceived or led astray by all these promises of the politicians and the New World Order. Why? Because you know the truth based upon the Word of God.

You have the mind of Christ. What did He say? "I command you, arm yourself with the mind of Christ." The greatest weapon that we have is being able to think and act biblically and scripturally.

Let's pray. Father, we ask in the name of Jesus Christ for Your grace and Your mercy in our lives. Teach us and build us up in the most holy faith. Enable us, Lord, to think more scripturally and more biblically, and to bring our lives, our thoughts, and our actions into greater conformity to Your Word. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 2

Salvation Illustrated & Explained

January 2, 2005

Salvation Illustrated and Explained

Introduction: The Need for Clarity on Regeneration and Conversion

“There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. The same came to Jesus by night and said unto him, ‘We know that thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.’ Jesus answered and said unto him, ‘Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’ Nicodemus saith unto him, ‘How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb and be born?’ Jesus answered, ‘Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.’

“Marvel not that I said unto thee, Thou must be born again. The wind bloweth whither it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, or whither it goeth. So is every one that is born of the Spirit.” Nicodemus answered and said unto him, “How can these things be?” Jesus answered and said unto him, “Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? Verily, verily, we speak that we do know and testify that we have seen, and you receive not our witness. If I have told you earthly things and you believe not, how shall you believe if I tell you heavenly things?”

There are times of amusement and refreshment when I do my studying. As I was thinking about this message, I almost gave it another title: “Salvation for Dummies.” But do you understand, in truth, all of us are dummies apart from the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit?

Here was a master in Israel, a ruler in John 3, and he had no clue as to what our Lord was saying.

I’ve been asked to explain the relationship between regeneration and conversion. We need to have a proper understanding of these two distinct but separate works of God if we are going to distinguish or discern whether or not one is genuinely converted. Unhappily, most Christians can neither define nor distinguish between regeneration and conversion. The average Christian usually takes these two terms as synonymous and uses them interchangeably.

To show you the mass confusion on the subject, even Billy Graham wrote a book entitled "How to Be Born Again." The interesting thing is, nowhere in the Bible does God ever tell you how to be born again.

He tells you in John 3:3 and John 3:7 that you must be born again, but nowhere does the Bible tell you how to be born again. Why? The answer is very simple: because being born again, regeneration, or the new birth is a divine act of God alone. It is something that God does and not something that man does.

James 1:18 says, referring to God, "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures." Notice, "Of his own will begat he us."

Albert Barnes, in his commentary on James, gives a simple sentence in relationship to verse 18: "The idea that the fact that we are begotten to be his children is to be traced solely to his will. He purposed it and it was done. The antecedent in the case on which all depended was the sovereign will of God."

Let me put it to you very plainly. When God regenerates or begets, He does so based upon His own will and His own purpose. No one is ever begotten accidentally. When God moves, He moves deliberately and purposefully. The Bible says, "Of his own will begat he us."

The word "begat" is from the Greek word apokueo, which literally means to bring forth, to beget, to bring forth from the womb, to give birth, to cease being pregnant. Of his own will, He brought us forth from the womb; of his own will, He begat us. Moreover, this word "begat" is in the aorist tense in the Greek, which means it is something that happens one time. It is something that happened once for all.

It is not to be repeated over again. There is absolutely no such thing as someone being born again and again and again and again. No. What God does, He does once and for all because God's work is perfect. It needs not be repeated.

Regeneration and Conversion

In John chapter 3, we have one of the clearest evidences in the New Testament and one of the clearest teachings on the doctrine of regeneration proper. Before going too far in this study, understand that, in actuality, the first twelve verses in John chapter 3 deal with regeneration. You do not get to conversion until later, down to about verse 14. By way of introduction, there are several distinctions between regeneration and conversion, and these will be explained carefully.

Seven Distinctions Between Regeneration and Conversion

Some of these distinctions are almost repetition, but there is a little distinction between them. The most important thing to remember in this particular message is that there are seven distinctions between

regeneration and conversion. First, regeneration is the immediate act of God. Theologically speaking, when we use the term immediate, we mean that God does it alone. He does not use means. If God does something immediately, He does not use means. Would you call creation an immediate or mediate work of God? It would be an immediate work of God.

Regeneration, then, is the immediate act of God in imparting the principle of life. Conversion is the act of man by the power of the Holy Spirit in repenting and believing. In regeneration, man is inactive. Man has nothing to do with it; it is an immediate act of God. But in conversion, man is included and man is active, because he is the one who turns and believes in Jesus Christ.

Regeneration is an immediate act of God by which He imparts life. Here is the second distinction: regeneration is a single act of God and is never repeated. Conversion is the beginning of a holy life. There may also be many conversion experiences in the Christian's life. It is true that there is an initial conversion, and that is what we refer to most often. In that initial conversion, we repent of our sins and believe in Jesus Christ.

But consider how Jesus Christ was talking to Peter. Peter was already a believer and already an apostle. In Luke 22, beginning in verse 31: “And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat.”

"But I pray for thee, that thy faith fail not." He already has faith: "I pray for thee, that thy faith fail not. And when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." The word "converted" means to be turned back. You may be doing something in your Christian life that is unbiblical; then it is brought to your attention. Thus, it is proper to say that you were converted from that unbiblical act and brought your life into conformity to the Word of God.

We usually speak of the initial conversion, which is what most of us think of. But you can continue a life of conversion, converting your life into conformity to the Word of God. Conversion has an initial act, but it can be repeated throughout one's earthly pilgrimage. Regeneration, however, is a single act of God that is never repeated.

The position of the believer in Jesus Christ, by virtue of regeneration, can neither be increased nor decreased. The condition of the Christian's life can vary based upon one's own experiences. No one is more regenerated than anyone else, and no one is less regenerated than anyone else. Regeneration is perfect in and of itself. It is a single act of God, never to be repeated.

Number three, regeneration is in itself not an experience. Conversion is a series of Christian experiences. As there is no consciousness at the time of conception in the womb, regeneration is not a matter of consciousness to its recipient. A person knows nothing of the beginning of his existence. That is true physically, and it is true spiritually.

Conversion, however, is always accompanied by an awareness of what is taking place. Therefore, it is experiential. Repentance and faith are experiences known to the person born of God.

Regeneration is the cause of an individual turning to the Lord; conversion is the regenerate person actually turning. God may give life, but God does not turn for the individual. God does not repent for the individual, and God does not believe for the individual. That is something we do in conversion by the grace of God, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Regeneration is the Lord opening the heart. Conversion is the person whose heart has been opened turning to Christ in obedience and faith and following Him based upon the Word of God. Regeneration is a once-for-all cleansing; conversion is the continuation of the renewal that began in regeneration. In regeneration we have God's power, the power of the indwelling Spirit. In conversion, the power is not of us, but it is in us, by God's sovereign choice, grace, and mercy.

If you understand this series of simple distinctions between regeneration and conversion, it will remove all pride and all boasting from preachers and all other Christians who want to boast about their success in reaching others. If you understand this distinction, you will know that the only reason anyone is ever saved is because of the work of God. The Apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 3:6-7, "I have planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then,

neither is he that planteth anything, or he that watereth anything, but God that giveth the increase."

Remember this critical truth: regeneration is the implantation of divine life into the soul, and conversion is the evidence and exercise of that life having been planted by God. Regeneration is the implantation of divine life into the soul; conversion is the evidence and the exercise of that life having been planted by God.

How do we explain this simple truth? There are three simple illustrations of salvation in the New Testament, and only three. The first is birth in John 3, which is our text. The second is creation in 2 Corinthians 4:6 and 5:17. The third illustration is resurrection, found in Ephesians 2:1.

The Absolute Necessity of Divine Intervention

We are not going to take the time to look at all of those right now, but each illustration clearly demonstrates the absolute necessity of divine intervention. There can be no birth apart from the will of the Father. There can be no creation apart from the speaking of His word of power. In Psalm 33, the Bible says, “He spake,” and the world came into existence. Just as there can be no birth apart from the will and beginning of the Father, there can be no creation apart from His speaking the word of power, and there can be no resurrection apart from supernatural power outside the dead man. Listen carefully. Man does not beget himself, create himself, or resurrect himself. In each instance, there must be an outside power, a power independent of man.

In John 3:3, our Lord issues a very startling declaration to Nicodemus: “Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, or truly, truly, amen, amen, I say to thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

Now, consider what happens in verses 1 and 2. “There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.” Here was a man who was very scholarly and educated. He was a ruler. “The same came to Jesus by night”—he did not want to be seen, or perhaps he was very urgent in this business; either is possible. “The same came to Jesus by night and said to him, Rabbi, we know that

thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do these miracles that thou doest except God be with him."

And what does our Lord do? He says, "Nicodemus, let us not mince words. Let us cut to the chase. Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

There is something very important in this sentence. The Greek word translated "again" is anothen, and it literally means, first and foremost, "from above." So verse 3 could be read this way: "Verily, verily, I say to thee, Except a man be born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God." The same thing appears in verse 7: "Marvel not that I say unto thee, You must be born from above."

It is true that one must be born again. By virtue of his physical birth, one is born below; that is, he is of the earth, earthy. If one wishes to see the kingdom of God, he must be born again, or from above, by the supernatural power of God. Go back to verse 3: "Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, or born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Underline the word "cannot." The Greek word there is dunamai.

The word dunamai means to have power or ability in oneself, to be capable, strong, and powerful enough to do something. By this word we get our English words "dynamite," "dynamic," and "dynamo."

What is our Lord saying in verse 3? He says, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born from above, he has no power, he has no ability, and he cannot in and of himself see the kingdom of God."

Have you ever wondered what fallen man cannot do apart from regeneration? Let me show you from the book of John what natural man, unsaved man, fallen man, cannot do apart from regeneration. The first is found in verse 3: "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

That is, he cannot perceive it, grasp it, or understand it. He does not visualize its importance. A correlating verse is 1 Corinthians 2:14: "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them." Why? Because they are spiritually

discerned. Unless a man is regenerated, he cannot perceive, grasp, or understand the kingdom of God in any way.

Here is the second thing man cannot do apart from regeneration. Look in verse 5: "Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say to thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." Unless you are regenerated, you cannot see the kingdom of God, and you cannot even enter into the kingdom of God.

Look at John 6:44: "No man can come unto me, except the Father who sent me draw him." So far, fallen man cannot see, cannot enter, and cannot come. You say, "But people are invited to come to Christ." They may be invited, but that does not mean they have the ability. I was recently invited to a big bash down in Jacksonville, Florida.

There is a big difference between being invited to something and having the ability to go or to attend. The point I am trying to make is this: fallen man cannot see, he cannot enter, and he cannot come. That is not all.

In John 8:43, our Lord asked, “Why do you not understand my speech? Even because you cannot hear my word.” Were they hearing Him physically? Yes, they heard Him audibly, but they were not hearing Him spiritually. He said, “Why do you not understand my speech? Even because you cannot hear my word.” Then, in verse 47: “He that is of God heareth God's words. You therefore hear them not because you're not of God.”

So a fallen man cannot see, he cannot enter, he cannot come, and he cannot hear. If you look in John 12, beginning at verse 37, you will see that he cannot believe. “But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believe not on him, that the saying of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? And to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore they could not believe, because Isaiah said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their hearts, that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them.” Note what he said: “Therefore they could not believe.”

So apart from regeneration, what is it that unsaved man cannot do? He cannot see the kingdom of God. He cannot enter the kingdom of God. He cannot come to Christ. He cannot hear the words of God. He cannot believe savingly.

I hope you are getting the picture just from the book of John. The picture I am trying to draw for you is this: apart from divine intervention, man is helplessly and hopelessly lost. Man cannot save himself, and man cannot help save himself. I want to show you how abundantly clear our Lord made that simple truth. Look in the book of Mark, chapter 10, beginning at verse 23. Watch carefully. Everyone knows the story of the rich young ruler. The rich young ruler has just gone away exceedingly sorrowful.

The rich young ruler was sad at that saying, and went away grieved, for he had great possessions. In light of that, Jesus looked round about and said unto his disciples, "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!"

The disciples were astonished at his words. Jesus answered again and said to them, "Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God? It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." They were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, "Who then can be saved?" What is the context? Salvation. If the rich cannot be saved, with all of their wealth, power, and ability, who then can be saved? That is the question.

Look at our Lord's answer in verse 27: "And Jesus looking upon them said, With men it—" What is the "it"? Salvation. "With men it—salvation—is impossible. But not with God. For with God all things are possible." Now you see why man cannot save himself, nor can he help save himself. Salvation is impossible for man. That is why Jonah said truthfully, "Salvation is of the Lord."

There is a correlation between physical birth and the new birth, or regeneration. Regeneration is sometimes called the new birth because, in many respects, it has a striking analogy to natural birth. In John chapter 3, Nicodemus understood the necessity of the new birth, but he did not understand the comparison. After our Lord said, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, A man must be born again,"

Nicodemus said, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born?” Nicodemus understood that he must be born again; he simply did not understand how he could be born again. Our Lord then drew a comparison between spiritual birth and physical birth, between natural birth and regeneration.

We are thinking about a physical birth and a spiritual birth. The spiritual birth is called the new birth, regeneration, or being begotten. The word is gennao, which means “I beget.” Thus, it is variously translated as the new birth, being born again, or regeneration. It is the same thing. Here is the comparison between physical birth and spiritual birth.

The Analogy of Physical Birth: Implantation

First and foremost, there must be implantation. Physical birth begins with conception. A simple definition of conception is the implantation of life. Life is planted within the womb. It is not necessary for the father or mother to know when that life is implanted. In fact, most times they do not know; it is simply there. Both may be absolutely ignorant of the life that exists within the mother for a time. Nevertheless, that life is there, and it may exist without their knowledge or the knowledge of others. The only way a mother eventually discovers that she is pregnant is through the signs of life within her. There would never be signs or evidences of pregnancy if no life were present. Life must be there for there to be signs and evidences of life. Likewise, in the spiritual realm, there must be a divine conception, a divine implantation of life.

Scripture tells us in Ephesians 2:1, Ephesians 2:5, and Colossians 2:13 that we are dead in trespasses and sins. If we are dead spiritually, we have no spiritual life in and of ourselves. We are dead toward God. Do you remember what the father said concerning the prodigal son when he returned in Luke 15:32? “It was meet that we should make merry and be glad, for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again, was lost and is found.” The brother had physical life, but he did not have spiritual life. Sinners may have physical life, but they do not have spiritual life. They are dead toward God.

In John 3:3, when our Lord says, “Verily, verily, I say to thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God,” He uses the term gennao, which is an aorist passive of gennao, meaning “to beget.” An aorist means something is done once for all and is never to be repeated, and the passive means it is something that happens to you.

You are not active in it. It is an aorist passive. You were begotten; you had no part in it. You were passive. The same exact truth appears in 1 John 5:1: “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God. And everyone that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him.”

Literally, 1 John 5:1 says, “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ has been begotten of God. And everyone that loveth him that begat loveth him also that has been begotten of him.” In other words, based upon the Greek tense and the construction of this sentence, the reason we believe is because we have been begotten of God. It was God who regenerated us. It was God who begat us. It was God who gave us life. The word “born” in 1 John 5:1 is a perfect passive, which means, once again, that we had nothing to do with begetting. We were begotten.

Here is an analogy between the physical birth and the spiritual birth. Let me ask you some questions. How many of you decided to be born physically? What part did you play in your physical birth? Absolutely none. You were conceived and ultimately born based upon the wills of others. You did not make a decision. You did not take the first step. You did not coerce your parents into conceiving you. You could do none of those things because you had no existence. You were born—you were conceived totally and completely based upon their purpose and will.

What does the Bible say in James 1:18? You do not have to turn back there: “Of his own will begat he us.” I hope you are beginning to get the picture that regeneration is an act of God alone. God is the sovereign. God is the giver of life. God alone can give life—that is true physically, and it is true spiritually.

In fact, this is prophesied and spoken of very plainly in Ezekiel 11:19: “And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit

within you, and I will take away the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them a heart of flesh." Who is giving the new heart? Who is planting the new spirit within you? It is God.

John 1 gives us another plain passage. "He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name; which were born, not of blood, that is, your ancestry had nothing to do with it, nor of the will of the flesh, that is, your works had nothing to do with it, nor of the will of man, that is, your will had nothing to do with it, but of God."

Notice how to read this. "Not of blood, not of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man"—those are all negatives. Put the negatives in parentheses and do not read them. The positive statement is: "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name, which were born of God."

Why did you receive Him? Why did you believe on His name? Because you were begotten of God. You were regenerated by God. Regeneration is an act of God. In Acts 16, in regard to Lydia, the Lord opened her heart, with the result that she attended to the things spoken by Paul. Why did she listen to Paul? Why did she repent and believe? Because the Lord opened her heart.

Romans 9:16 says, "So then, it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy." Philippians 2:13 says, "For it is God who worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure." You say, "When I came to Christ, I willed to come to Christ." Yes. "And I want to serve Him." Yes. But why did you will to come to Christ? Because it is God who worked in you. He regenerated you. He gave you life.

Regeneration is that act of God by which the principle of new life is implanted in man. It is the secret and inscrutable work of God that is never directly perceived by man, but can be perceived only by its effects.

Can a husband and wife perceive conception? No. Conception is known only by its effects. Can we perceive God's act of implanting life? No; it is known only by its effects. Conversion is the evidence

and manifestation of regeneration. In regeneration, God works alone. There is no cooperation on the part of the sinner. How could there be? A child does not cooperate in its birth. The universe does not cooperate in its creation, and dead men do not cooperate in their resurrection. Just as it is impossible to know when conception takes place physically, it is impossible to know when regeneration takes place. Both regeneration and conception are known only by their effects.

First and foremost, there must be implantation. Secondly, there must be maturation. The implantation of life is insufficient in and of itself. You say, "But the life is there." I understand that. But in order for that life to be made manifest, there must be maturation; there must be a maturing. Once physical conception is accomplished, shortly thereafter there begins to be evidence of life. That evidence may be imperceptible at first. Originally, a wife may think that she is sick, that she has a virus.

The Analogy of Physical Birth: Maturation

A woman may suppose that her hormones are out of whack, or that she needs to go on a diet because she is gaining weight. But all of a sudden, two and two makes four, and she realizes that she is pregnant. I never will forget Barbara Stramer. She was forty-four and sick—morning after morning, she was sick.

Finally, she went to the doctor and said, “You’ve got to give me something. I’m so sick, I can’t hold my head up.” The doctor examined her and said, “Ma’am, you’re not sick. You’re pregnant.” She replied, “What? My baby is twenty-two years old.” He said, “I don’t care how old your baby is. You’re pregnant.” It may not necessarily be perceived at first, but all of a sudden it becomes obvious to the mother that she is with child; later, it becomes obvious to everyone.

It is similarly true in the spiritual realm. Once life is planted into the soul, there begins that which is called conviction. Conviction is the work of the Holy Spirit whereby He moves us to be grieved and broken for our sins and rebellions. He opens our eyes and enlightens our mind to our lost condition, shows us our need of Jesus Christ,

and empowers and enables us to turn from our sins unto faith in Jesus Christ.

Jeremiah gives us a beautiful picture of how regeneration and conversion, or conviction, go hand in hand. In Jeremiah 31:18–19, God says, “I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus, Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke. Turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God.” “Turn thou me, and I shall be turned.” In other words, “God, if You don’t turn me, I will never be turned. If You don’t implant life in me, I will never come to You.”

Then he says, “Surely after that I was turned”—after God did something for me—“I repented, and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh. I was ashamed, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth.” When does conviction and turning come? Only after the implantation of life.

How long does conviction take? The answer is, that is entirely up to the Father. How long does it take to have a baby? Nine months, you might say, but Dr. Bowen can tell you that many babies are born earlier than nine months, and some even after nine months. When is the baby born? That is up to the Father.

He is the giver of life. Just as physical birth is in the hands of a sovereign God, so spiritual birth is in the hands of a sovereign God. Just as He knows how to deliver a baby physically, He knows how to deliver a baby spiritually. Maturation, the development of life, like implantation, the giving of life, is equally the work of the Father. The Father not only implants life; our Heavenly Father matures that life. There must be an implantation, physically and spiritually, and there must be a maturation, physically and spiritually. Thirdly, there must be a manifestation. The ultimate proof that life has been given is that a real, live baby comes into being. Months of waiting and anticipation are finally over: a baby is born.

The Analogy of Physical Birth: Manifestation

Something would be terribly wrong if an expected mother always remained an expected mother. Something would be terribly wrong if a convicted sinner always and only remained a convicted sinner and

never came savingly to Christ. Just as a real, live baby is proof positive that the mother was pregnant, a real, genuine conversion is proof positive that an individual has been regenerated by God. In James 1:18, “Of his own will begat he us.” The word “begat” literally means to cease being pregnant. Those whom God regenerates, He converts. It is impossible to be regenerated and not converted, or to be regenerated and never be converted.

As a baby is brought forth in manifestation after implantation and maturation, so it is in the spiritual realm. Conversion is that act of God whereby He causes the regenerated person, in his conscious life, to turn to Him in repentance and faith. Those whom God regenerates, He converts. Sooner or later, someone who has been regenerated will turn from his sin and embrace Jesus Christ savingly. Conversion follows regeneration, just as birth follows nine months of pregnancy. It is inevitable. Regeneration and conversion are not necessarily simultaneous, just as conception and the giving of birth are not simultaneous.

The period in between, which we normally refer to theologically as conviction, is totally up to the Heavenly Father. The period between conception and the giving of birth physically is totally up to the Heavenly Father. This is vitally important. It is not how long one has been pregnant that counts. That which counts is this: Was there a real, live baby produced?

Suppose a mother of two children came up to my wife and asked, "Have you ever been in labor eight hours?" My wife replied, "Well, no, I haven't." The woman haughtily answered, "Well, then you've never had a baby." The truth is, my wife has had twice as many as she has had. It is not the duration of the pregnancy, the length of time in labor, or the length of time in conviction that matters.

The issue is, was there a real child produced? I run into so many people who say, "Did you go through this? Did you go through that? Did you have this experience? Do you have that experience?" If the answer is no, they conclude, "Well, then you're not a Christian." They are examining everybody by what happened to them. What if every child born at six months judged every other child by its birth experience and said, "If you hadn't been in the womb six months, you're not a real child," or, "If you've been in the womb over six

months, you're not a real child"? That's ridiculous. The issue is not how long you've been in the womb. The issue is, was there a real child born?

SCRIPTURE READING - John 11:39-42 (KJV)

> Those whom the Father regenerates, the Holy Spirit converts. Let me show you. Here is a perfect picture of regeneration and conversion. I am trying to tell you that these things go together. You cannot have one without the other.
>
> You know that Lazarus has died. Our Lord has told Mary and Martha that they shall see the power of God. John 11:39: "Jesus said, Take ye away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, said to him, Lord, by this time he stinketh, for he hath been dead four days. Jesus said unto her, Said I not unto thee, that if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God? Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always, but because of the people which stand by, I said it, that they may believe that

When Jesus had spoken, He cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come forth.” He that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes, his face bound with a napkin. Jesus said to them, “Loose him, and let him go.”

Did God give Lazarus life inside that tomb, enabling him to walk out, or did He give him life only after he got up and walked out? Had He not given him life in the tomb, he never would have gotten up and walked out. Giving him life in the tomb is a picture of regeneration. When he walks out of the darkness of death into light and takes off the graveclothes, that is a picture of conversion. Once our Lord said, “Lazarus, come forth,” he who was given life instinctively obeyed the voice of Christ. So those whom God regenerates, He converts. It is only because of regeneration that we can come to Christ in conversion, in repentance and faith.

The Analogy of Physical Birth: Assimilation

There must be an implantation, maturation, and manifestation; fourthly and lastly, there must be assimilation. In order to live and exercise life, one must be able to assimilate oxygen and food. In some cases, women have gone through implantation, maturation, and manifestation only to produce a stillborn child. While it is true that God does not produce any stillborn children, there are plenty of them in churches that men have produced. Our churches are full of individuals who have been converted, given assurance, and guaranteed a place in heaven by some pastor or Christian worker, yet have never been regenerated and converted by God.

I like the illustration of old Billy Sunday. He was the Presbyterian evangelist. One day, walking down the street, he met a drunken man who said, "Oh, Brother Sunday, don't you remember me?" Sunday replied, "I'm sorry, I don't believe I've ever seen you in my life." The man said, "I'm one of your converts." Billy Sunday kept right on walking.

He said, "Bless God, you must be. You're certainly not one of God's." There are plenty in our churches who are the converts of pastors and not one of God's.

Would you not think something was wrong with a newborn baby that never cried, was never hungry, never thirsted, never grew, and never developed? Wouldn't you think there was something wrong with a physical child like that? How is it that we understand this in the physical realm, but we don't put two and two together in the spiritual realm? We just assume that everybody sitting in church buildings are real, genuine Christians, although they never hunger after the Word of God, never thirst after righteousness, never grow, and never develop. They are just there. Something is wrong when a child is supposedly produced and yet never cries, hungers, thirsts, grows, or develops.

I can tell you the very first two things that happen in a real, live baby. What are they? The very first thing he does is cry, and the second thing is that he desires milk.

Turn in your Bibles to Galatians chapter 4 and look at verses 4 through 6: "But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent

forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." Now watch: "And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father."

Did you hear that? "And because ye are sons"—here is the reason why God sends His Spirit. Because you are sons, because you have been regenerated by Him, He has sent His Spirit into your heart whereby you cry, "Abba, Father." The most natural thing for a newborn child to do is cry. The most natural thing for a newborn Christian to do is cry to his Heavenly Father. "And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father."

The Hebrew word "Abba" literally means "Papa." Because you are sons, because you have been regenerated, God sent forth His Spirit, now in conversion, and you are enabled to look at your Heavenly Father and cry, "Papa." Papa is a term of endearment and intimacy. I love to hear my grandkids call me Papa. They know that whenever they have need of anything or are in trouble, they can always call Papa, and I am going to come running. Do you think I am any different from our Heavenly Father? Our Heavenly Father is far greater than I could ever be.

What do you say to this? "I am your heavenly Papa. You cry to me." We do it instinctively, naturally, instantaneously.

I remember when Henry and I were hauling lumber. I had my truck full of lumber and a trailer full of lumber. I was doing about fifteen miles an hour in second gear when the load on the trailer shifted. I looked in my rearview mirror, and the trailer was passing me. When it got almost even with my back bumper, it took my truck and pushed it off the road into the ditch and the pine trees. Instinctively, without even thinking, the first thing I cried was, "Help, Lord!" We stopped just off the road in the ditch, and within five minutes another truck came by, a four-wheel-drive truck. They helped us reload the lumber, pull us out of the ditch, and get us on our way.

The point is that you instinctively cry because He is your Father. The most natural thing for a real, living child of God to do is to pray.

The second thing is found in 1 Peter 2:1-2. Scripture says, “Wherefore, laying aside all malice and all guile and hypocrisies and envies and evil speakings”—that is conversion. You turn from all those things; you lay them aside. Then verse 2 says, “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.” There is something wrong with a professing Christian who never hungers for the Word of God. If we have been truly regenerated and converted by God, we will hunger after His Word. Why? It is our milk, our meat, our nourishment, and our sustenance. You cannot grow without it. You cannot grow without the Word of God.

Look in your Bibles to 2 Peter 3:18: “But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” You cannot grow in grace without growing in knowledge. Stillborns neither cry nor eat. Only those who have life cry and eat. The evidence that we have been begotten of God is that we have come to Him in repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. We have turned from our sins, we love His Word, and we grow in His Word. We cannot cease feeding upon His Word, because if we did so, we would cease growing and maturing.

The proof that we are genuinely children of our Heavenly Father is found in that we are continually being conformed to His image. Our Lord says, “But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you.” Why should we act the way God would have us to act? Why should we do what God would have us do? “That ye may be the children of your Father who is in heaven.” If you’re My children, you’re going to look like Me, act like Me, walk like Me, talk like Me. If we’re His children, we’ll be constantly and continually bringing our lives in conformity to the Word of God.

Just like in the physical life, there must be an implantation, a maturation, a manifestation, an assimilation for there to be a real living child. So in the spiritual realm, there must be an implantation, a maturation, a manifestation, and assimilation to be a real living Christian. It’s the work of God in regeneration. And when He regenerates us, in time, He births us. In conversion, we come to Him

in repentance and faith, turning from our sins and trusting only in Him, and then crying to Him and sustaining ourselves by His Word.

You can judge whether you're converted or whether others are converted. If you could figure out that something is wrong with a newborn baby that never moved, never cried, never hungered or thirsted, you can still figure it out in the spiritual realm. There's something wrong with Christians who do not want to do right, who do not love the Lord, who hate or despise His Word and His commands. There's something seriously wrong. The fact is, they're stillborns. Not of God. But a man.

Father, help us to understand Your Word, help us to believe it and bow to it. Help us to bring our lives in conformity to it. Give us grace that we may serve Thee acceptably with reverence and godly fear. Use this message to teach, to reach, and to save, and to build up Thy people. In Thy name we pray, Amen.

CHAPTER 3

The Primacy of Preaching

January 21, 2007

Introduction: The Primacy of Preaching

Isaiah 55, verses 8 through 11. God 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."

"For as the rain cometh down and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater." Now look at this: "So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth. It shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereunto I sent it."

Why in the world do you attend the preaching of the Word of God? What benefit do you have from the preached Word of God? You may also ask another question: How does God regard His preachers? And what should be your attitude toward God's preachers and preaching?

I want to begin with a quote today. Every quote that I am going to give you is by an old Puritan. These men usually lived in the 1500s or 1600s and were very serious scholars. The first quote is from Nehemiah Rogers, and it is about a good paragraph long. Listen carefully.

Puritan Imagery of Preachers

The great benefit we have by the Word preached, few do or indeed can conceive. Therefore, the Lord teaches it to us by sundry comparisons and similitudes, such as every man can understand and judge thereof.

Sometimes God's people are called the Lord's building, His house and temple, as in 1 Corinthians 3:9 and 2 Corinthians 6:16. Preachers, therefore, are resembled to builders and carpenters who must both lay the foundation and set up the frame, 1 Corinthians 3:10.

Sometimes God's people are called God's household, as in Galatians 6:10 and Ephesians 2:19. Then ministers of God's Word are resembled as stewards who must give everyone their portion of meat in due season, Luke 12:42.

Sometimes the godly are called the sons and daughters of God, as in 2 Corinthians 6:18. Then preachers are called spiritual fathers, by whom they are begotten unto God, 1 Corinthians 4:15; spiritual mothers, who travail in birth with them, Galatians 4:19; and nurses, by whom they are fed while they are babes in Christ, 1 Thessalonians 2:7.

Fourthly, sometimes the people are called the Lord's pleasant garden and fruitful orchard, as in the Song of Solomon 4:12-13, and ministers are called the planters and waterers of it. Fifthly, sometimes a church is called the Lord's husbandry—that is, His cultivated soil and cornfield, 1 Corinthians 3:9. We are called both laborers who, by stubbing and dunging and plowing, must prepare it, 1 Corinthians 3:9; seedsmen who must sow it, Mark 4:26; and reapers who must cut the corn down and bring it into the barn, John 4:38.

Sixthly, sometimes the people are called pilgrims who travel in a way unknown and dangerous, 1 Peter 2:11. We ministers are compared to guides, Hebrews 3:7, and to lights, Matthew 5:14, because we light the candle and hold it forth to direct you in the way of life. These six pictures show the relationship between preachers and the people. Preaching the Word of God is the chief duty of preachers. God's preachers must either preach or perish.

The Necessity of Preaching

I've probably told you this before, but I remember Henry joking with me when I turned sixty-two. He said, "Well, boy, now you can retire." We laughed about it. I am not saying I will never retire, because God can retire me, but I cannot even envision myself not preaching and teaching. That is beyond my scope of imagination. Do you realize that if God has called a man to preach, this must be done, or he is going to be undone? The Bible tells us clearly that there is a necessity in preaching because it is backed with a woe. In 1 Corinthians 9:16, the Apostle Paul said, "For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of, for necessity is laid upon me. Yea, woe is me if I preach not the gospel." He is saying, "I've got to preach or else."

Robert Trail, another old Puritan, asked, "By what means may ministers best win souls?" His answer was, "The principal work of a preacher is preaching. The principal benefit the people have by them is to hear the Word of the Lord from them." Ask yourself: Why is preaching so important? Why is there so much emphasis laid upon preaching in the Word of God? Why is preaching primary? Why should you faithfully attend the preached Word of God? I want to answer those questions for you and show you why preaching is so paramount and important in the Word of God.

Reason 1: God the Father Ordained Preaching

Number one, God the Father ordained the preaching of the Gospel. In 1 Corinthians 1, beginning with verse 18, the Apostle Paul writes: "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness. But to us who are saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and will bring to nothing the

understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe."

I want to show you five things from this verse, or from this passage. Notice that last phrase in verse 21: "it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." Do you realize what God could have done had he been so pleased? He could have written the gospel in the sky with clouds that would have remained there forever. He could have carved it on the rocks of the mountains, but he did not. He ordained the preaching of the gospel. Here are five things in this passage that preaching does. If you notice in verse 18, he says, "For the preaching of the cross to them that perish is foolishness."

The first thing it does is doom and damn the unbelievers. It is foolishness to them, a waste of time. They would not drive three hours one way to hear a preached message; they would not even walk across the street. And so preaching dooms and damns the unbeliever.

Secondly, if you look in verse 19, it confounds the wise. He says, "For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent." So it confounds the wise. It also destroys carnal reasoning. That is when he says that he will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. All the worldly wise men, their carnal reasoning shall fail. Then, in verse 20, we find out that the preaching of the gospel silences the disputers by revealing their foolishness. "Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?" In comparing it to the preached word of God, yes, the wisdom of the world is foolish.

Lastly, number five, in verse 21, the preaching of the gospel calls out those who believe, for "it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." Notice, then, that God was pleased to ordain the preaching of the gospel.

Do you realize that, in a very unique way, God the Father himself engaged in preaching the gospel? If you look in your Bibles to Galatians chapter 3 and verse 8, this passage refers back to Genesis chapter 12, where God is preaching to Abraham. So you do not need many people to preach.

You've just got to have one. Notice if you would, Galatians 3 and verse 8, the Bible says this, "And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed." Note what the Bible specifically says, God preached the gospel to Abraham. And that refers back to Genesis chapter 12.

Now, I want you to turn to two other passages. I want you to turn to Isaiah 61 and Luke chapter 4. Go ahead and find Luke 4 and just hold it because we're going to come back there and we're going to read Isaiah 61 first. Okay? Isaiah 61 is a very important passage and I'll show you why. In Isaiah 61 there is a statement made and a promise given that was applied directly to Jesus Christ. Now, it's certainly true in one sense the word of all of God's preachers, but it's primarily true of Jesus Christ. In Isaiah 61 and verse 1, look what the scripture says.

"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me." Now, stop and ask yourself this question. Why was the Spirit of the Lord God upon him? Here's why. "Because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all that mourn." Now, note this verse. "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach."

Now, if you will turn in your Bibles to Luke chapter 4 and skip down to verse 16. Luke 4 and verse 16. "And he came to Nazareth where he'd been brought up," where of course we're talking about Jesus Christ. "And he came to Nazareth where he'd been brought up, and as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and stood up for to read."

"And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Isaiah, and look at this next statement. And when he had opened the book, he found the place," that is he looked for it, he turned there deliberately, "he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." Look! "And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down."

"And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears." Do you realize God the Father ordained the preaching of the gospel? God the Father himself, in a very unique way, engaged in preaching the gospel. As you read through the New Testament, the Messiah's chief joy and chief delight was preaching the word of God.

Every time they tried to get him to stay in one city, He would say, "I must preach to other cities also." His chief joy was preaching the Word of God. As you read through the Bible, the servants of the Father and the servants of Jesus Christ are ordained and sent forth for one reason: the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Mark chapter 3 and verse 13 says that Jesus goeth up into a mountain and calleth unto himself whom he would. That is, he selected them. Verse 14 says, "and he sent them forth to preach." Why did Jesus Christ call his disciples? The answer is to send them forth to preach. He did not call them to be administrators of a large business or corporation. He did not call them to be entertainers and let people enjoy the services. He called them to preach the gospel.

John 20 and verse 21 says, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost, as my Father hath sent me, so send I you." What did the Father send Christ to do? He sent Him forth to preach. Paul says in 1 Timothy 2 and verse 7 that he is ordained by God to be an apostle and a preacher. In 2 Timothy 1 and verse 11, he says he is ordained by God to be a teacher.

God has in a very unique, purposeful, and deliberate way ordained the preaching of the gospel. He engaged in it. It was the chief joy of Christ, and it is the chief joy of every true servant of Christ. Sometimes people say, "Well, I really enjoyed the message." I say, "You know, it really doesn't matter to me whether you do or not. I do. I just enjoy preaching. I like preaching." Somebody should get something out of it. Even if you do not, I do, because I like preaching. That is what God has called me to do, and I should enjoy it. I should like it.

Reason 2: God the Son Prayed for Preaching

As you read through the Bible, all the disciples wanted to preach. They were ready to preach. If there were no other reason given in the Word of God for you to listen to preaching, to faithfully attend the preaching of the Word of God, or for the primacy of preaching, this one would be sufficient: God ordained it. If we want to honor Him, we are going to follow His ordination.

The second reason why preaching is so primary and important is found in John 17, the high priestly prayer of Jesus Christ. Everybody knows that in this passage Jesus Christ is praying for His disciples and for His people. But notice specifically what He prays for: "And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth. Neither pray I for these alone," that is, His then-living disciples, "but for them also which shall believe on me through their word."

Our Lord, in His high priestly prayer, not only prays for the men, but He also prays for the method—for those who shall believe on Him through their word, that is, through their preaching and teaching. Our Lord finds preaching important enough that He prays for its success. The ordination of God the Father and the prayer of God the Son are indeed the foundation of the success of the preaching of the gospel.

I want to give you a quote by John Flavel. If you have never read anything by John Flavel, he is undoubtedly one of the sweetest Puritans that ever wrote.

I have all of his works in my library, and I would highly recommend his books. But here is what he said concerning the ministry. I can assure you, I can identify with this paragraph:

"The labors of the ministry will exhaust the very marrow from your bones, hasten to old age and death. They, God's preachers, are fitly compared to the toil of men in harvest, to the labors of a woman in travail, and to the agonies of soldiers in the extremity of a battle.

"We must watch while others sleep. And indeed, it is not so much the expense of our labors as the loss of them that kill us. It is not with us as with other laborers. They find their work as they leave it. So do not we. Sin and Satan unravel almost all we do. The impressions we make on our people's souls in one sermon vanish before the next.

"How many truths have we to study? How many wiles of Satan and mysteries of corruption to detect? How many cases of conscience to resolve? Yea, we must fight in defense of the truths we preach, as well as study them to paleness and preach them and all, but welcome pained breasts and aching backs and trembling legs, if we can all but approve ourselves Christ's faithful servants, and hear that joyful voice from his mouth, well done, thou good and faithful servant, all will be well."

Think about this: "It is not so much the expense of our labors as the loss of them that kill us. It is not with us as with other laborers. They find their work as they leave it."

I have been in Dr. Holmes' clinic. He can be operating on an animal and be interrupted. As long as that animal is asleep and as long as that gas keeps coming, he may be interrupted ten, fifteen, twenty, or even thirty minutes; but when he comes back, he will find that animal exactly as he left it. A carpenter will find his work just as he left it.

But try counseling someone, try preaching to someone, and drive a truth home to him. The next day, when you talk to him, he has already forgotten everything you said. That is why I have said that the average preacher, really and truly, only needs about fifteen or twenty sermons. He can keep re-preaching them, and most folks will

never know. Some of you cannot even tell me what I preached here last Sunday. Think!

It is not the expense of the labor, but the loss of the labor. Think how much we have forgotten and how much we have lost. Preaching, then, must be important. It was important enough for God the Father to ordain it, important enough for God the Son to pray for it. Our Lord's prayers and our Father's ordination are the basis, ground, and foundation of the success of the preaching of the gospel.

This ought to be a gracious encouragement to preachers. God has never promised to bless my joke telling. He has never promised to bless my administrative skills, if I ever had any. But He has promised to bless the preaching of the Word of God. Why should I not preach with the blessing of God upon it and the prayers of Christ the Son for it? How many of our Lord's prayers have ever been denied? Not one. If He has prayed for the success of the preaching of the gospel, would you care to guess whether or not it will succeed?

Reason 3: God the Holy Spirit Honors Preaching

What did our Lord say in Isaiah 55? “My word shall not return unto me void.” It is going to accomplish everything that God has purposed for it to accomplish.

Here is the third reason why preaching is so primary: God the Holy Ghost is covenantally engaged to honor the preaching of the Word of God. God the Father has ordained it. God the Son has prayed for it. Now God the Holy Spirit is covenantally engaged to honor the preaching of the Word of God.

Look at Isaiah 59, verse 21: “As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the Lord, my spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the Lord from henceforth and forever.” Note the covenant: “my spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth shall not depart.” Interestingly enough, when you read Isaiah 61, it ought to have new meaning now: “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me.” Why?

Because the Holy Ghost is covenantally engaged to honor the preaching of the gospel, turn to 2 Corinthians 3. The Apostle Paul asks, “Do we begin again to commend ourselves? Or need we, as some others, epistles of commendation to you, or letters of commendation from you?” Then he says, “You are our epistle, written in our hearts, known and read of all men. Forasmuch as you 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 fleshly tables of the heart.”

“And such trust have we through Christ in God, not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God, who also hath made us able ministers of the New Testament; not of the letter, but of the Spirit. For the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life.”

What is he saying? These Corinthians are our epistle because they were written upon by the Spirit of God. It was God, the Holy Spirit, who convicted them and converted them. If you read Jeremiah 31:31–34 and Ezekiel 36:22–32, you will find in each of those Old Testament passages the promise and prophecy of the new covenant, which we have in the New Testament: “I will put my Spirit within you.”

The Holy Spirit of God is covenantally engaged to honor the preaching of the Word of God. When people are converted under preaching, it is not because of the preacher, his oration, his outline, or his illustration. It is because of the Spirit of God. Paul said, “Not that we have a sufficiency of ourselves.” We do not have it; our sufficiency is of God.

I like to liken preachers to those rotten cast clouts, rotten rags, that Ebed-melech used to pull Jeremiah out of the dungeon. He told the Ethiopian, “Put those rotten cast clouts down there, and put them under your arms. I’m going to pull you out.” Rotten rags are worthless in themselves, but when activated by the Spirit of God, they are successful for the deliverance of prisoners. That is what it takes in the ministry—not man, but the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Thankfully, He is covenantally engaged to honor the preaching and teaching of the Word of God.

Pastor Teachers: Gifts of Christ to His Church

These three reasons should show us the primacy of preaching: God the Father ordained it, God the Son prayed for it, and God the Holy Spirit is covenantally engaged to honor it. But there is a fourth reason: pastor teachers are the gifts of Christ to His church.

Reason 4: Pastor-Teachers Are Christ's Gifts

Look in Ephesians 4, verse 8: “Wherefore he saith, when he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive and gave gifts unto men.” If you were to go back to the Psalms, you would find this applied directly to Jesus Christ. “Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens that he might fill all things.”

Here are some of the gifts that He gave: “And he gave some apostles and some prophets and some evangelists and some pastor teachers.” Pastor teachers is one group. So He gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastor teachers. Why? “For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying or the building up of the body of Christ, till we all come in the unity of the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure, the stature, the fullness of Christ, that we henceforth be no more children tossed to and fro, carried about with every wind of doctrine by the sleight of man, and cunning craftiness whereby they lie in wait to deceive.”

“But speaking the truth in love may grow up in him in all things, which is the head even Christ.” Verse 16 tells us that He is going to make the whole body work together.

Pastor teachers are the gifts of Jesus Christ to His church. Based upon Ephesians chapter four, I am not talking about hirelings, professionals, or men who are mama called and papa sent. I am talking about those whom God has sovereignly selected and called out to preach and teach His Word, and to whom He has given His stamp of approval.

You say, “How in the world can you tell whether or not a man is called of God?” It is very simple. Those who are called of God, as the

Bible says, labor in the Word and doctrine. There is a big difference: they labor in the Word and doctrine.

What do you think of the ministers of Christ? Are they to be despised, maligned, hated, or rejected? Are they someone you should look up to, someone you should follow, someone you should respect, and someone you should try to emulate? Regardless of what men think of God's preachers, God calls them His angels, His messengers, His servants, His mouthpieces, and His prophets.

Are God's preachers contemptible persons? How can you tell when the blessing of God is upon a person, a family, a church, a people, or a nation? Look at God's promise in Jeremiah 3:15, when God promises to bless: "And I will give you pastors according to my heart who shall feed you with knowledge and understanding." You know you are blessed when you have preachers who feed you with knowledge and understanding.

Now ask the question in the opposite sense. How can you tell when a person, a family, a church, or a nation is cursed by God? If God blesses them, He gives them pastors who teach them. If God curses them, He does one of two things. Number one, He will remove His pastors. That does not necessarily mean by death. But do you remember when Israel was under a curse in the time of Elijah? What did God tell Elijah? "Get out of the land." Elijah went to Zarephath and stayed with a widow for three and a half years. What did God do? God showed that that physical drought was just a picture of a spiritual reality. The curse of God was upon the land; therefore, God removed His preacher from the land. Therefore, they had no word of God.

The second thing God can do is leave His preachers in the land and silence them. Jeremiah was known as the weeping prophet. Jeremiah really cared for the people and really wanted to reach them, but they would not listen to him. Look at what God told Jeremiah in chapter 7, verse 16: "Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up crying or prayer for them, neither make intercession to me, for I will not hear thee."

Why would God not hear Jeremiah when he prayed for those people? God says, “Yet they hearken not unto me.” He had said,

“Since the day that your fathers came forth out of the land of Egypt unto this day, have I even sent unto you all my servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them? Yet they hearken not to me, nor incline their ear, but harden their neck, and did worse than their fathers. Therefore thou shalt speak all these words unto them, and they will not hearken to thee. Thou shalt also call unto them, but they will not answer thee. But thou shalt say unto them, This is a nation that obeyeth not the voice of the Lord their God, nor receiveth correction.”

“Truth is perished, and is cut off from their mouth.” What did God do? God left him in the land. He said, “Jeremiah, just don’t pray for them.”

Jeremiah still wanted to pray for the people because he loved his people. But in Jeremiah 11:14, God said to him, “Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up a cry or prayer for them, for I will not hear them in the time that they cry unto me for their trouble.” God said, “Jeremiah, don’t pray to me for them. I’m not going to listen to you. And I’m not going to listen to them.”

Jeremiah still wanted to pray. In Jeremiah 14:11, God said, “Then said the Lord unto me, Pray not for this people for their good.” In other words, if Jeremiah wanted to pray for them, he was to pray that God would destroy them, because that was exactly what God was going to do. In the case of Elijah, God took him out of the land. In the case of Jeremiah, God left him in the land. He just shut his mouth, except for praying for their destruction.

Since pastor-teachers are God's gift to His church, can you disdain and despise the gift without despising the giver of the gift? No. Remember 2 Kings chapter 2. There was a man by the name of Elisha, and like me, he was bald headed. Those young teenagers came out of the woods, or came up to Elisha, and said, "Go up, old baldy, go up, old baldy." They were making fun not just of Elisha, but of Elijah, who had been translated to heaven. In other words, if you're God's preacher, you go up just like him. What did Elisha do? He turned around and cursed them in the name of the Lord. Two she bears came out of the woods, the Bible said, and tare forty and two of them.

I don't think I want to make fun of a preacher's bald head. That's all right for me to make fun of, because it's mine. But you understand what I'm saying? They had no respect for the man of God. They were despising God's gift. God judged them.

It is impossible to have one attitude toward God and a different attitude toward God's preachers. In 2 Chronicles 36:15, we read, "And the Lord God of their fathers sent to them by His messengers, rising up betimes and sending, because He had compassion on His people." When God is blessing a people, what does He do? He sends in His preachers. He's going to tell them the truth. So God had mercy upon them and sent them His messengers. Why? Because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place.

But verse 16 says, "But they, the people, mocked the messengers of God and despised his words." Notice, his is singular, while messengers is plural. What word were the messengers carrying? God's Word. They mocked the messengers of God and despised His, that is, God's, words, and misused His prophets until the wrath of the Lord rose against His people till there was no remedy.

“Therefore He brought upon them the king of the Chaldees, who slew their young men with a sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young men or old men or him that stooped for age. He gave them all into His hand.” What did God do? God judged the people because they would not listen to Him through the words of His preachers. You cannot despise the gift without despising the giver of the gift.

Do you remember what our Lord said in Matthew 10:40? “He that receiveth you,” as He was sending out His disciples, “he that receiveth you receiveth me. And he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.” Jesus Christ said, “You’re My representative, you’re My disciples, I’m sending you out. Those that receive you are receiving Me, just like those that receive Me receive My Father.” So when we receive Christ, we receive the Father.

But the opposite is also true. He who despises and does not receive Christ does not receive the Father. And he who receives not the messengers of God or the messengers of Christ does not receive Christ. It is impossible to have one attitude toward Christ and a

different attitude toward His preachers. You cannot love one and hate the other. You cannot despise the gift without despising the giver of the gift.

Reason 5: Christ Preaches Through Preachers

Why is preaching so important? God the Father ordained it. God the Son prayed for it. God the Holy Spirit is covenantally engaged to honor the preaching of the Word of God, and pastor-teachers are the gifts of Christ to His church.

Fifthly, it is through or by means of God's preachers that Christ actually preaches Himself. In 2 Corinthians 5:20, Paul says, "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ."

"As though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ's stead be you reconciled to God." If you were to take 2 Corinthians 5 and read verses 11 through 19, you would see that the ambassadors Paul is talking about would be preachers. We are not talking about anyone and everyone here, but primarily about preachers. The context gives us that. He says, "Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ's stead, be you reconciled unto God." When he says, "as though God did beseech you by us," the little word "by" is the Greek word dia, D-I-A, which literally means through us or in us. Literally, he says, "Now we beseech you as ambassadors of Christ, as though God did beseech you through us or in us."

What does the apostle say? He is saying that our message is to be regarded as the message of God. It is God who speaks. When the messenger comes in God's name and in God's authority, the message should be received with respect, as from God, in whose name the messenger has come and by whose authority he is speaking. The preaching of the Word of God is the message of God speaking to men through the ministry. It is the Word of God.

If you understand this passage, you will see not only the dignity but also the authority involved in the preaching of the gospel. I have rebuked some people in times past, and one or two challenged me, saying, "By what authority are you saying that to me?" I said, "On the highest, based upon the Word of God. God Himself says it, and I'll

give you the Scripture," and I quoted the Scripture to them. The authority is from God.

Now look at what He said in verse 20: "Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ. As though God did beseech you through us, we pray you in Christ's stead be you reconciled to God." In verse 20, when he says, "now then we are ambassadors for Christ," you can circle the little word "for." Then, where he says, "we pray you in Christ's stead," you can circle the little word "stead." The Greek word used for "for" and the Greek word used for "stead" are the same word: huper. Huper is a primary preposition, and it is also translated in our Bibles as "in one's stead."

I want to make this clear: “We pray you in Christ’s stead.” What does that mean? Let me show you how the Apostle Paul used it in Philemon, chapter 1, verse 13. Philemon is the little book right before Hebrews.

Onesimus was the runaway slave, and Paul sent him back to Philemon. Look what Paul says as he sends Onesimus back: “Whom I would have retained with me that in thy stead he might have ministered unto me in the bonds of the gospel.”

Paul was saying, “Onesimus, I’m sending you back. Philemon, I really need you. I really need you here. But you’re not here. I started to keep Onesimus so that, in your stead, or in your place, he might be here.” In other words, Onesimus would take Philemon’s place. Onesimus for Philemon. We say Christ died in our stead. What does that mean? He died in our place. We should have died, but He took our place; He is in our stead.

Now, what does it mean when the Apostle Paul says, “we pray you in Christ’s stead”? What he is saying is, we are here in the place of Christ, in behalf of Christ, for the sake of Christ, and in the place of Christ. We are now doing on earth what Christ would be doing were He here on earth.

That is preaching the word of the Father. Paul says, “Now then, we are ambassadors in the stead of Christ. As though God did beseech you in or through or by us, we pray to you in Christ’s stead, be reconciled unto God.”

You know what the Pope claims? The Pope claims to be the vicar of Christ. Look up the word vicar: one appointed in the place of, ordained in the stead of. The Pope is not the vicar of Christ. Every true preacher is the vicar of Christ. He is here in the stead of Christ.

I want to make this exceedingly clear because it is vitally important. Look in your Bibles to Ephesians chapter 2. We are talking about preachers being in the stead of Christ. Let us begin reading with verse 13, so that you can see the context is Christ: "But now in Christ Jesus, ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ." Now we are talking about Christ: "For He is our peace, who hath broken down both one and the broken down the middle wall of partition between us." Skip down to verse 16, so we are still talking about Christ: "And that He might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby."

Now watch verse 17: "And came and preached peace to you, which were afar off and to them that were nigh." Did you read verse 17 the way I read it? "And came and preached peace to you that were far off and to them that were nigh." Do you know that this book is written to the Ephesians? The Ephesians lived in Ephesus, and Ephesus was in Asia Minor. In Romans chapter 15, verse 8, the Bible tells us that Jesus Christ was a minister to the circumcision. Matthew 15:24 tells us that He was not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. The Bible also tells us that He never left the land of Palestine. How did He preach to those people who were in Ephesus? How did Christ preach peace to those people when He never left Palestine? This was after Christ had died, been raised, and seated at the right hand of God. What is the answer? Through Paul and the other apostles, because they were there in His stead, in His name, and by His authority.

Let me show you another one. Look in your Bibles at 1 Peter chapter 3. Very obviously, when we look at verse 18, we know we are talking about Jesus Christ; Christ is named specifically: "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit." So, verse 18, everybody concurs that we are talking about Christ, right? Well, look at verse 19: "...by which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison, which sometimes were

disobedient when once the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing wherein few, that is, eight souls, were saved by water." Whoa! What's this? Verse 19 says, "...by which He, Christ, went and preached unto the spirits in prison, which were sometimes disobedient when once the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah." Here is a verse telling us that Christ preached to those antediluvians, those people who lived before the flood.

Christ had not even become incarnate. How did Christ preach to those antediluvians? What's the answer? Through Noah. In fact, the Bible in 2 Peter 2:5 explicitly calls Noah a preacher of righteousness. What God's preachers did was attributed to Christ. Why? For they were in His name, by His authority, and they were His representatives.

Now turn back in your Bibles to Romans chapter 10. You talk about a passage that is so powerful. If you ever see this, it will make you sit up and pay attention when you hear the preaching of the Word of God. Romans chapter 10, verse 13. Everyone can quote verse 13: "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." We have heard that verse all of our lives. We witnessed to other people and quoted that verse left and right: "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

Let me ask you a question: Is calling upon the name of the Lord that which saves you? The Bible does say, "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." Well, that's true. But is it calling that saves you, or is it faith that saves you? The Bible says, "by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast." So that now brings me to another question: Is calling, then, salvation, or is it the evidence of salvation?

There is a difference between calling and salvation. Calling cannot be salvation, because we are saved by grace through faith. If calling is the evidence of salvation, then something must precede calling. Romans 10:13 says, "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." But verse 14 asks, "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed?" What must precede calling?

Faith. It is not the calling that saves you; it is the calling that evidences that you are saved. In order to call, you must first believe.

What makes a man believe? Something must happen to make him believe. Verse 14 continues, “and how shall they believe in him whom they have not heard?” In order to believe, you must hear Christ.

Now watch carefully what the Bible does not say. Do not let me read it incorrectly: “How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard about?” What word did I add? “About.” What is the difference? If you hear about someone, he is not there. If you hear someone, he is there.

In order to believe, you must hear Christ; in order to call, you must believe. If you call, your calling is evidence of your belief because you have already believed. What made you believe? You heard Christ. How did you hear Christ? “And how shall they hear without a preacher?” Christ speaks through His preachers as they preach His Word. As they preach His Word, He speaks to His people. They hear not merely my voice or my outline; they hear Him. They believe and call upon Him, which evidences their salvation. Then they ask, “How shall they preach?”

Verse 15 answers, “except they be sent.” To be the instrument God uses, you must be called of God and sent of God. Everything we are and everything we have, spiritually speaking, comes from God. All God does is simply use men.

In 1 Thessalonians 2 and verse 13, the Apostle Paul says, “For this cause also thank we God without ceasing,” because the Thessalonians received the word of God which they heard from the apostles: “you receive it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also on you that believe.” What was Paul saying? It is not my word; it is God’s word. And when you received it, that which you believed, that which made you call, was the word of God that you heard from Christ himself. What does that mean? It means that in all preaching, we must look beyond the preacher to Christ, who is the true Prophet and the true Preacher, who gives the true Word of God.

What I may do outwardly and externally, Christ does internally and spiritually through the preaching of the Word of God. So when someone says to me, “Well, Brother Weaver, that was a real blessing today,” that means you heard Christ. You may have heard me, but you heard Him. I am not able to bless anybody, but He is. The blessing does not come from the preacher; Christ does the work internally and spiritually through the Word.

You remember that Ethiopian eunuch in Acts chapter 8? The Holy Spirit told Philip to go join himself to the chariot. The eunuch was reading from Isaiah. Philip said, “Understandest thou what thou readest?” And what did he say? “How can I except some man guide me?” Philip got into the chariot, and the next verse says, “and preached unto him Jesus.” God was speaking through Philip. Philip was the outward instrument, but Christ was the true Preacher whose Word was heard.

Ordinarily, there is no salvation apart from the preached Word of God. Listen carefully: ordinarily, there is no salvation apart from the preached Word of God. Look in your Bibles to the book of Romans, chapter 1, and what the Apostle Paul said in verses 15 and 16.

Reason 6: No Salvation Apart from Preaching

Paul said, “So much as in me is, I’m ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also. For I’m not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. For it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.” He said, “so much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel.” Do you realize that God said in 1 Corinthians 1:21 that it was by the foolishness of preaching that He chose to save those that believe? First Peter 1:23 says, “being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth forever.”

Psalm 19:7 says, “the law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul, making wise the simple.” That which brings the Word of God with power is the preaching of the Word of God. Thomas White, another Puritan, said, “The most ordinary means of our effectual calling is the preaching of the word, and though by other means some men may be called, yet seldom or never are any called who neglect this means or condemn this means.”

Nobody is going to be saved who neglects, despises, and rejects the preaching of the Word of God. Nathan Parr said it like this: "The gospel is the power of God unto salvation not written in leaves, but preached." As the Apostle Paul said, "the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life." Without the preaching of the gospel, ordinarily there is no salvation. In his catechetical instruction, Nathan Parr asked, "Shall none be saved but those who hear sermons?" The answer is no, ordinarily. Thomas Godwin called preaching God's great converting ordinance. The Bible knows nothing of individuals being converted who hate, despise, and reject the preaching and teaching of the Word of God.

You must remember that in Romans chapter 10, hearing unto salvation is peculiarly connected to Christ. Preaching the Word of God is likewise peculiarly connected to Christ for those who hear unto salvation. Ordinarily, therefore, there is no salvation apart from the preached Word of God.

Seventhly, preaching is the means used by God to sanctify, settle, establish, and strengthen the saints of God. In Ephesians 4, He gave some pastor-teachers for the perfecting of the saints and for the building up of the body of Christ. Paul said in Acts 20 and verse 32, "And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among them that are sanctified." In 1 Thessalonians 3 and verse 10, Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, "Night and day pray exceedingly that we might see your face and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith." Here is my question: How could Paul perfect that which was lacking in their faith?

Reason 7: Preaching Sanctifies and Strengthens

Through the preaching and teaching of the Word of God, he would give them the truth they needed to become more mature in the things of God. In Philippians chapter 1, Paul was in prison and said he was in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which was far better for him. Nevertheless, he said, "To abide in the flesh is more needful for you." If the Lord let him live, he would stay around so he could preach and teach the Word of God.

In 2 Corinthians chapter 1, Paul writes to the Corinthians, “In this confidence, I was minded to come unto you before that you might have a second benefit.”

Some will tell you the second benefit is speaking in tongues, or that it is something else. But what did Paul mean when he said, “I wanted to give you a second benefit”? He explains: “And in this confidence I was minded to come unto you before that you might have a second benefit, and to pass by you into Macedonia, to come again out of Macedonia unto you, and of you to be brought on my way to Judea. When I therefore was thus minded, did I use lightness, or the things that I purposed, do I purpose according to flesh, that with me there should be yea, yea, and nay, nay? But as God is true, and our word toward you was not yea and nay, for the Son of God, Jesus Christ who was preached among you by us, even by me and Silvanus and Timotheus, was not yea and nay, but in him was yea. For all the promises of God in him are yea and in him amen to the glory of God by us.”

What was the second benefit Paul meant? He had visited them once and preached to them; he wanted to visit them a second time and preach again. If he had gone a third time, it would have been a third benefit, because he would have preached then. If he had gone a fourth time, it would have been a fourth benefit. The benefit was preaching the Word of God.

In Colossians 1:28, Paul tells us what is necessary to be a mature Christian: “Whom we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom that we may present every man perfect or mature in Christ Jesus.” Everyone needs three things: preaching, warning—that is, admonition—and teaching in wisdom. You need preaching, teaching, and admonition to be mature in Jesus Christ. That is why God has ordained the preaching of the gospel.

It is the means whereby the saints are strengthened, established, and settled in the faith.

Let me make a couple of applications. The first one is this. Think about the first four reasons. God the Father ordained preaching; God the Son prayed for it; God the Holy Ghost is covenantally engaged to honor it; and pastor-teachers are the gifts of Christ to His church. I

am not even talking about the other three right now, just those first four. Listen to this: to neglect, reject, despise, and disregard the preaching of the Word of God is, number one, to deny the purpose of the Father; number two, to despise the prayer of the Son; number three, to dishonor the ministry of the Holy Spirit; and number four, to disregard the gifts that Christ gave to His church. That is sin multiplied. You cannot maintain one attitude toward the gifts and the ordination and the prayer and the ministry without maintaining the same attitude toward God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, who gave those gifts.

Applications and Conclusion

Let me point out something else. Your response to the preaching and teaching of the Word of God is good evidence of where you are in your life, in your spiritual life, and whose side you are really on. You say, "What am I, what are you talking about?" Look in your Bible at John chapter 8. Let me show you this. In John chapter 8, first of all in verse 2, Jesus Christ is teaching: "And early in the morning he came again into the temple, and all the people came unto him; and he sat down, and taught them." Jesus Christ is teaching all through John chapter 8. Now skip down to verses 58 and 59. In our Lord's preaching, He said unto them, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am." Then took they up stones to cast at him. But Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple, passing through the midst of them, and so passed by.

In the preaching of the Word of God, you are going to find two major responses: some will get mad, and some will get glad. Some got so mad they were willing to kill Christ. Look in Acts 13, verse 39. Paul is preaching: "And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses."

"Beware therefore, lest that come upon you which is spoken in the prophets; Behold, you despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which you shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you."

When the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath. It was as though they had received a promise from Paul

that he would come back and preach. When the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes who followed Paul and Barnabas persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.

The sermon was over, but some said, “You have got to promise to come back.” Paul promised that he would. Others kept following and said, “We want more.” So he spoke to them about continuing in the grace of God. “And the next Sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God. And when the Jews saw the multitude, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming. Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you.”

“But seeing you put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth.” When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord; and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.

What happened in the preaching? Some got mad, and some got glad. How do you respond to the preaching and teaching of the Word of God? If you get mad, you are in the wrong company. The preaching and teaching of the Word of God will reveal where we are and which side we are on. We need to hear God.

You do not need entertainment. You can live without it. You do not need huge, fancy buildings with all kinds of programs. You can live without them. It is not the ministry of the church to entertain people or to provide services for our youth; that is the family's ministry. It is the ministry of the church to preach and teach the Word of God. The reason we are in the mess we are in this country is that there is very little preaching and a lot of entertainment.

And we have sold our souls for Madison Avenue success. We need to return to the primacy of preaching.

Let us pray. Father, speak to our hearts. Above all, give us a love for Your Word and for You. Give us a desire to hear, know, understand, and comprehend the Word of God, and to be faithful to it, for You have ordained it. Christ the Son has prayed for it, and God

the Holy Spirit is covenantally engaged to honor it. Give us grace, Lord, to serve Thee acceptably, with reverence and godly fear. In Thy name we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 4

Stonewall Jackson & Self Control

February 2, 2013

The Christian Grace of Self-Control

Introduction: The Biblical Call to Self-Control

In 1 Corinthians 9:24, Paul says, "Know you not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize, so run that you may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate or self-controlled in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run not as uncertainly, so fight I, not as one that beateth the air, but I keep under my body and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."

In 2 Peter 1:6, the Apostle tells us what we are to add to our faith: "And to knowledge you're to add temperance, and to temperance you're to add patience, and to patience you're to add godliness." The word temperance here is also the word self-control. Self-control is a term easily pronounced. It is often given as advice, but it is very

seldom acted upon. Self-control is a virtue that everyone wishes to possess, but no one wishes to exercise.

The reason we do not wish to exercise self-control is simply that we are selfish and want what we want when we want it. I have heard people say, "I want it and I want it right now." But the Bible tells us in Romans 13:14, "But put you on the Lord Jesus Christ and make not provision for the flesh to fulfill the lust thereof."

The truth is that most people make provisions for their flesh. They want to satisfy their flesh. If you have lived very long, you have discovered one truth: our flesh will not lie as silently and obediently upon the altar as Isaac, because our flesh will scream and cry and demand satisfaction. I am talking about self-control. Understand that self-control in the Bible is listed under the terms temperate and temperance.

The Meaning and Importance of Self-Control in Scripture

You could say they are synonyms. The Greek word for self-control is egkrateia, which literally means to be strong in a thing, to have mastery over, to be self-controlled. When we are talking about self-control, we are talking about having mastery over yourself.

According to the Word of God, temperance is indeed a fruit of the Spirit, and you will find that in Galatians 5:23. Temperance, or self-control, is also a Christian grace being added to our biblical character in 2 Peter 1:6. Moreover, according to Titus 1:8, self-control is a qualification for a pastor. It may also surprise you that in Titus 2:2, self-control is to be a characteristic of aged men, old men, older men. Obviously, there is a great deal in the Bible about self-control.

When you look at 1 Corinthians chapter 9, the Apostle Paul says in verse 24, and this is the classic passage on self-control, “Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize.” There is only going to be one winner, so run that you may obtain. Then, in verse 25: “And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate or self-controlled in all things.”

If you are going to be running in a race, you are not going to load up on a special meal, ice cream, and hamburgers right before you run. It is impossible. You are going to be temperate in all things. “Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we, an incorruptible one.” In other words, here is the spiritual truth: “I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air.” He is not a shadow boxer. “But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.”

Obviously, there is a great truth here in the Bible concerning self-control. Paul makes it exceedingly clear that if we are going to accomplish anything, especially a spiritual goal, there has to be self-control. If there is no self-control, you are simply beating the air.

Stonewall Jackson is an excellent study in the biblical truth of self-control. Even as an unconverted youth, he understood and realized the necessity of self-control. It was only after his conversion to Jesus Christ that self-control became one of the most prominent graces in his life.

Stonewall Jackson's Early Training in Self-Government

It was Stonewall Jackson's uncle, Cummings Jackson, who helped mold and develop young Thomas's character. Stonewall's father had died earlier, and his mother died when he was seven years old. He then went to live with his uncle Cummings, who raised and taught him.

Robert L. Dabney was aide de camp to Stonewall Jackson. He was a Presbyterian pastor, a theologian, and a scholar. Concerning the raising of Stonewall Jackson, he wrote, "He received all the privileges of a son of the family. The relation existing between him and his uncle was, from the first, remarkable."

"He treated the little boy more as a companion than as a child, soothing for him all the ruggedness of his nature, imparting to him his plans and thoughts as though he was an equal or counselor, making him his delighted pupil in the rural arts in which he himself was an unrivaled adept, and always rather requesting than

demanding his compliance with the discipline of a household. The child was thus stimulated to work for his own self-government at a very early period, and left to an independence of action more suited for a man."

"But he did not disappoint his uncle's confidence. His peculiar method with the boy may be perhaps accounted for in part by the singular temperament of the race, passionately attached to the idea of independence, in part by the relaxation of parental restraints which usually prevailed in new countries, and partly by the profound sagacity of the guardian who saw at a glance the noble nature with which he had to deal."

In other words, here was a young boy being taught from seven years old the absolute importance of self-control. When Stonewall Jackson went to West Point, he demonstrated the consistency of self-control over and over.

Self-Control in Education: Mastering Lessons at West Point

Dabney says, "Thomas showed no quickness of aptitude for any of his studies except arithmetic. In this, he always outstripped his schoolmates, seemingly without effort. In all other branches, his acquisitions were made only by patient labor."

"If he professed to be prepared for a recitation, all might be certain that he was thoroughly prepared. From the first, the intense honesty of his nature and the sober judgment with which he preferred the substance to the name of an acquisition were singular. Nothing could induce him to leave a lesson behind him unmastered."

He preferred the substance to the name of an acquisition. He was not satisfied with merely having the name; he wanted the substance. If you were to apply this today, I could give you a number of illustrations. I know people who have graduated from college. They have a degree, and they cannot teach their way out of a wet paper bag. They simply got the degree; that is all they wanted. I know people who have black belts in the martial arts, but they cannot fight.

I know people who claim to be expert marksmen who really cannot even shoot.

Here is what is being emphasized: Stonewall did not want a title. Stonewall did not want the name. Stonewall wanted the substance. He wanted reality. Now listen to this:

"If he had not been able to finish a previous lesson at the same time with his classmates, he would continue to study the old lesson while they proceeded to the next. And when called upon for his share of the succeeding or the new recitation, he would flatly declare that he knew nothing about it, that he had not yet had time to begin it, and that all of his time had been occupied upon the other."

"He was thus not seldom nominally behind his class, but whatever he once gained was his forever. His knowledge, though limited, was perfect as far as it went. His temperament at that time was cheerful, amiable, and generous, and his demeanor instinctively courteous. His truthfulness was at all times proverbial."

What he studied, he grasped. What he studied, he understood. He may have been behind the others, but in the end he was probably far ahead of them, simply because they may have had the name, but not necessarily the substance.

Nothing could induce Stonewall Jackson to leave a lesson unmastered. He must master it, and he would master it. One of his maxims throughout the rest of his life was this: "One could always do what he will to accomplish." On one occasion, Jackson met a friend from West Point and admitted that he regretted being ignorant of Latin. He added, "But I think it probable that I shall someday repair this and become as familiar with Latin as with Spanish." His friend doubted this, believing that languages not impressed upon the memory from childhood would be impossible to learn. Jackson replied, "No, if I tip it, I will become a master of the language. I can accomplish whatever I will to do."

Jackson understood not only determination, but self-control. His self-control was manifested in the educational, moral, and physical realms. He always preferred the simplest foods and never took any stimulant. He did not use tobacco, nor did he drink coffee, tea, or wine. His abstinence was from principle.

Self-Control in Morals and Physical Appetites

During the winter of 1862, while Stonewall was reconnoitering in front of the enemy, a fire was absolutely out of the question, and he became so chilled that his medical attendant was concerned. The doctor urged him to take some type of stimulant. The only thing available was brandy or some other spirits, so he insisted that Stonewall take some to prevent his becoming sick. Finally, Jackson consented. As he drank the brandy, he made all kinds of faces and sounds and almost gagged. The doctor said, "I'm sorry, General Jackson, is it that unpleasant?" Jackson replied, "No, no, I like it. I always did. That's why I never touch the stuff."

On another occasion, Jackson had been walking with a brother officer who was also a godly man. At the end of their walk, since they were tired, the officer suggested that they have a glass of brandy and water. Jackson replied, "No. I'm much obliged, but I never use it. I'm more afraid of it than federal bullets."

Jackson's strength was that he was afraid of temptation. He knew his weaknesses and would not yield in areas where he knew he was weak. Consequently, his weaknesses became his strengths. He always had absolute control over himself, even in regard to food. He controlled his appetite.

He had very little sympathy for people who overindulged or ate things they should not eat. People say, "Well, I'm going to eat this because I like it, but I know that I'll pay for it later," or, "I know this is not good for me, but I want it. I'm going to eat it anyhow." Jackson had no sympathy for anyone who overindulged or ate things they should not.

When those around him complained of headaches and stomach problems resulting from indulgence, he said, “Do as I do: govern yourself absolutely, and you will not suffer. My head never aches. If a thing disagrees with me, I never eat it.” He knew what he could eat and what he could not eat.

When Jackson was in Mexico, his self-control was exhibited in two distinct ways: one regarding beautiful women and the other regarding military danger. During the war with Mexico, a Spanish family there regularly extended hospitality to Stonewall. He was

always grateful for it, thanking and admiring the family. But Stonewall reluctantly and positively discontinued his visits. He would not return, no matter how much he enjoyed their hospitality or how good a friend he was with the man who owned the home. Later, when asked why he had ceased visiting, he answered with a blush.

He found that the fascination of some of the female charms he met there was more likely to become too strong for his prudence unless he escaped them in due time. Stonewall was observing a biblical principle. The Apostle Paul wrote Timothy in 2 Timothy, chapter 2, verse 22, "Flee youthful lust." When Paul wrote that to Timothy, Timothy was probably in his forties.

If it refers to lust, our duty is to flee. Get out of there; get out of the way. If Satan is bothering us, according to James 4:7, "Submit yourself unto God, resist the devil, and he'll flee from you." When it comes to the devil, it is fight: resist him, and he'll flee from you. When it comes to the world, 1 John 5:4 says, "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world, and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."

Self-Control in Duty and Danger

So what are these three things? If it is lust or temptation, flee. If it is Satan, fight. If it is the world, faith. When Stonewall said those women were too beautiful and too charming for him, and that unless he escaped in due time he was being careful not to sin against God, he was controlling himself.

During the war with Mexico, Stonewall was in charge of a section of artillery which, for all practical purposes, was totally disabled. Many of his men and animals had been killed, and only a couple of artillery pieces were functioning. It looked as though the Mexicans would overwhelm him. He continued to man those guns and fire on the approaching Mexicans until they finally turned to run back within the gates of the city. When Stonewall saw that, he attached those artillery pieces to the limbers of the ammunition box, followed more closely, and continued to fire upon the retreating Mexicans.

Years later, while teaching at Virginia Military Institute, one of his students asked him, “Major, why did you not run when your command was disabled?” Stonewall smiled and said, “I was not ordered to do so. Had I been ordered to run, I would have run. But I was ordered to hold my position and I had no right to abandon it.”

In the face of overwhelming odds and danger, Stonewall Jackson still held his position. His pastor, Dr. White, encouraged all his men to lead in public devotions and prayer. Stonewall had never really prayed publicly, so he came to his pastor and said, "You're my pastor and the spiritual guide of the church, and if you think it my duty that I shall pray, then I shall waive my reluctance and make the effort to lead in prayer, however painful."

A short time later, Dr. White called on Stonewall Jackson to lead in public prayer. Jackson arose to do so, finding it painful and embarrassing to himself and to the church, but he finally made it through his first public prayer. Seeing the distress it caused him, Dr. White did not call on him for several weeks. Finally, Stonewall asked why. Dr. White replied, "I saw the distress that it placed upon you. I was willing to spare your feelings and spare you your embarrassment. So I did not call upon you anymore."

Jackson answered, "Listen, yes, but my comfort or discomfort is not the question. If it is my duty to lead my brethren in prayer, then I must persevere in it until I learn to do it right. And I wish you to discard all consideration of my feelings in the matter and call upon me." Dr. White later did so, and Jackson continued leading the church in public prayer until he became eminent in public praying as well as private praying.

Here was a man who said, "I'm going to control my emotions. I'm going to do my duty regardless of my feelings." Stonewall Jackson was married twice. His first wife, Eleanor Junkin, died suddenly after only fourteen months of marriage. Jackson was most concerned that he did not question God's wisdom or justice in taking his wife, and that he would always maintain a Christian attitude regarding her death. Throughout the whole ordeal, he never for a moment lost the dignity of a Christian in grieving for his wife.

He understood 1 Thessalonians 4:13, where Paul said, “But I would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.” If I said nothing else, does not Stonewall Jackson’s self-control rebuke us? Stop and think how impatient we are. We scream, murmur, and complain when things do not go our way or according to our plans. We are so impatient and so out of control. Thinking about the grace of God in his life should convict us.

Self-Control in Delays, War, and Victory

One of my greatest sins is impatience, and I know that. I used to tell people, though I still do, that I hate railroads and railroad tracks. Even trying to come to church this morning, a train was blocking the road and standing still. When you get to a railroad track and see four or five engines, you know the train is a mile or two long, and you simply have to sit there. I have learned to pray while I sit there. If I had a book with me, it would not bother me. I always tell people that if there is ever another revolution, I want to be the one who blows up the railroad tracks and trains, simply because I despise them. I know they are necessary; I am teasing. But are we not all like that to a certain extent? How impatient we are.

After Stonewall’s first wife died, he took a cruise that lasted for a number of months. He had scheduled his return in time for his classes at VMI, the Virginia Military Institute. But when school began and Stonewall was supposed to be teaching, he was not there. One week passed, then two, then three, and finally the ship came limping in. Stonewall’s first visit was to his deceased wife’s parents and family. While he was there, one of his sisters-in-law said, after they excitedly hugged each other, “But Major, have you not been miserable? Have you not been perfectly wretched since the beginning of the month?”

“Why, no,” he answered in amazement. “Why should I be?” She replied, “You know that you are so dreadfully punctual, and the session had begun, and the time you promised to return had passed. We supposed that you were beside yourself with impatience.” “By no means,” he replied. “I had set out to return at the proper time.”

"I had done my duty. The steamer was delayed by an act of divine providence. I was perfectly satisfied." I usually tell people that, the way I was raised, if you're not fifteen minutes early, you're late. I hate not being on time. Suppose Henry and I agree to meet tomorrow at 10 a.m., and Henry shows up at 10:30. Henry has just stolen thirty minutes of my time. It's theft. When God sovereignly delays you, that's one thing; but if you're not on time because of your own laziness or lack of planning, then that's sin. Stonewall said, "No, I was perfectly satisfied."

When the drums of war began to beat loudly, Jackson discussed the inevitability of war with a friend who was visiting and spent the night with him. After their frank and open discussion, both went to bed. The next morning, his friend was depressed and melancholy, but he was surprised to see Jackson as cheerful as ever. Explaining his anxieties, he asked Jackson how he could remain so calm and cheerful, knowing that war was imminent. Jackson replied, "Why should the peace of a true Christian be disturbed by anything which man can do unto him? Has not God promised to make all things work together for good to them that love him?" He wasn't upset. He trusted in God.

Stonewall evidenced self-control even in his great and plentiful victories, which would have caused most men to gloat, boast, and brag. Stonewall remarried; he married Anna Morrison. During the war, he wrote to Anna, "Yesterday we fought a great battle and gained a great victory for which all the glory is due to God alone. Though under a heavy fire for several continuous hours, I only received one wound, the breaking of the largest finger on my left hand. But the doctor says the finger can be saved. My horse was wounded but not killed. My coat got an ugly wound near the hip. My preservation was entirely due, as was the glorious victory, to our God to whom be all the glory, honor, and praise. While great credit is due to other parts of our gallant army, God made my brigade the more instrumental than any other in repulsing the attack. Now listen, let this be for your information only. Say nothing about it. Let another speak praise and not myself."

Stonewall was saying, "God used me, and God used my brigade. But this is just for your information. Don't say anything about it to anybody."

Stonewall understood the principle expressed in Proverbs 20:6: “Most men will proclaim everyone his own goodness, but a faithful man who can find?” Proverbs 27:2 says, “Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips.” Thus, even in the realm of his great victories, Stonewall exercised self-control. He did not brag or boast, but gave honor and glory to God for what God had done.

Self-Control Under Injustice and in Refusing Furlough

During the entire war, while he was alive, he never took a furlough. He was encouraged to take one, but refused. His wife, Anna, and their daughter did visit him, but he would not take time off. When encouraged to obtain a furlough, he said, “I can’t be absent, as my attention is necessary in preparing my troops for hard fighting, should it be required, and as my officers and soldiers are not permitted to visit their wives and families, I ought not to see mine. It might make the troops feel that they are being badly treated, and that I consult my own comfort regardless of theirs. Every officer and soldier who is able to do duty ought to be busily engaged in military preparation by hard drilling, in order that, through the blessing of God, we may be victorious in the battles which in His all-wise providence may await us. If the war is carried on with vigor, I think, under the blessing of God, it will not last long.”

Here was a man who loved his wife and child, but would not ask for a furlough when other men could not get one. He would not make them think he preferred his own comfort over theirs. When Stonewall was wronged by the powers above him, he maintained his self-control. He did not whine, complain, or bellyache; he simply offered his resignation. The government at Richmond, Virginia, had endeavored to move his troops from a desk in Richmond, without firsthand knowledge of battlefield conditions and without consulting him. Therefore, Stonewall simply offered his resignation.

No one wanted him to resign, not even the governor. The governor therefore sent an ambassador to Stonewall to ask him not to resign. Stonewall replied concerning the order:

“The order was given without consulting me. It is abandoning to the enemy what has cost much preparation, expense, and exposure to secure. It is in direct conflict with my military plans. It implies a warrant of confidence in my capacity to judge when General Loring’s troops should fall back, and it is an attempt to control military operations in detail from the Secretary’s desk at a distance.”

He added that he had no personal grudge to satisfy, though he believed he was wronged. He did not lodge a complaint against the Secretary of War. He believed the Secretary of War was firm and considerate, and inferred that the order exemplified the Secretary’s intended system of management, to which General Jackson could not submit.

Therefore, he merely offered his resignation. His self-control in this incident exemplifies biblical truth. Proverbs 16:32 says, "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city." If you are slow to anger, you are better than the mighty. If you rule your own spirit, you have a greater ability than the greatest warrior who is able to capture an entire city. Stonewall was ruling his spirit.

Proverbs 25:28 says, "He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down without walls." If a city is broken down without walls, you can walk in, get what you want, and walk out. If you can control your spirit, I cannot make you angry, upset you, or make you mad. I cannot make you jealous. I cannot do anything to you. If you can control your spirit, I cannot control you. If you cannot control your spirit, then I can control you. It is just that simple.

Stonewall understood this. The odious order was rescinded, and when it was, Jackson withdrew his resignation. After the incident was over, he forgot it. He did not hold a grudge, try to retaliate, or hold any animosity toward the Secretary of War. He stood on principle and did not allow his emotions to rule him.

You must remember that Stonewall Jackson was a very deliberate man. He did not do things in haste. General Banks, the Union general, was in that area, and Stonewall was planning to attack General Banks and wipe him out, he and his men. Then Stonewall received information that General Shields, with a large body of troops, was marching rapidly to reinforce General Banks. Dabney records that when Stonewall received this information, he was in his tent.

Controlling Even Tenderness and Mercy

He instantly started pacing back and forth and said aloud, "But let me think. May I not execute my purpose still?" His hand went to the hilt of his sword. Dabney said fire was shooting out of his eyes. Finally, he released the hilt and said, "No, no, I must not do it. It may cost the lives of too many of my brave men. I must retreat and wait for a better time."

He was not going to be provoked or pushed into doing something he knew he should not do. Jackson always seemed to be in control. He would never allow his desires or emotions to force his hand.

Now, let me ask you a question. How different is General Jackson from us? Do you realize that most of us live by our feelings and emotions? We're not run by principle. "Well, why were you not in church last Sunday?" "Oh, I just didn't feel like going." So now your feelings determine what's right and wrong, what you should do and what you should not do. "Well, why didn't you fulfill your duty today? Why didn't you work? Why didn't you do?" "Well, I just didn't feel like doing it." God demands that we run our lives by principle, not by feelings, emotions, circumstances, or situations. You do what you're required to do.

Stonewall Jackson was one of the most loving, kind, gracious, and compassionate men that you will ever meet. But Stonewall Jackson would never allow his tenderness, loving-kindness, or mercy to be out of control. He always kept those things within their proper bounds. For instance, consider Deuteronomy chapter 19. This concerns the avenger of blood. Here is a man who is a murderer, and he flees to the city of refuge. A trial is held, the murderer is found guilty, and he is handed over to the avenger of blood. Deuteronomy

19:12 says, "Then the elders of his city shall send and fetch him thence"—that is, the murderer—"and deliver him into the hand of the avenger of blood that he may die."

Then God says, "Thine eye shall not pity him, but thou shalt put away the guilt of innocent blood from Israel, that it may go well with thee." Thine eye shall not pity him. I have heard people say, "Boy, I pity those murderers on death row." I don't. God says there are some times when you are to have no pity, no mercy, and no sympathy. Jackson's compassion was controlled; he would not allow tenderness or mercy to violate God's righteous bounds.

I could multiply illustrations here, but these two will be sufficient. Look at 2 Chronicles 19:2. Jehoshaphat was the king. "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 the king, to King Jehoshaphat, 'Shouldest thou help the ungodly and love them that hate the Lord? Therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord.'" Jehoshaphat had gone up to help the king of Israel, who was a wicked reprobate.

Here is what Hanani was saying: Jehoshaphat, you have to understand something. There are some people upon whom you cannot have mercy. There are some people toward whom you cannot be sympathetic. There are some people whom you absolutely cannot help.

Dr. Hunter McGuire was Stonewall Jackson's personal physician and was with him daily for two years. Dr. McGuire said that what impressed him most greatly concerning Stonewall Jackson was his tenderness, love, and sympathy. It impressed him far more than Jackson's great prowess as a warrior.

There was a time during a retreat when Union batteries were shelling the Confederate rear as the Confederate Army withdrew. Since the shells were hitting among Confederate soldiers, they fell into temporary confusion. The Union cavalry noticed this and charged into the rear of the Confederate ranks. General Turner Ashby saw what was coming, so he took a number of soldiers, dismounted some of those who were on horses, and lined the others behind trees and rocks.

As the Union cavalry came through, Ashby's men unleashed a torrent of fire upon them. The cavalrymen were running so fast that their momentum carried them past Ashby's men to the next regiment, commanded by Colonel Patton. Patton had his men lined up. When the few Yankee cavalrymen who got through Turner Ashby's men reached Colonel Patton's regiment, they were all mowed down or captured except one man. Out of the entire Yankee cavalry charge, only one man escaped with his life; all the rest were either killed or captured.

Colonel Patton was giving a report to General Jackson and stated that he had seen a party of Federal soldiers shot down with regret. Jackson took note of it, but finished taking the official report. Then he asked, “Colonel, why do you say that you saw those Federal soldiers fall with regret?” Patton answered, “They exhibited more vigor and courage than anything which had been attempted by any part of the Federal Army, and that natural sympathy with brave men led me to wish that in the fortunes of the fight, their lives might have been spared.” Jackson replied, “No, kill them all. I don’t want any of them to be brave.” You say, “How could he say that?”

On another occasion, Jackson saw a brave Union soldier upon his horse and told his men, “Shoot the brave officers. And the cowards will flee, taking the rest of the men with them.” There is indeed a time for tenderness and mercy, but not during the heat of battle. The more quickly and decisively a victory is won, the fewer lives will be lost. Jackson understood that.

He was a tender man, a compassionate man, and a sympathetic man. But he understood that even our sympathies, mercies, and tenderness had to be controlled. That is why God said concerning the murderer, “Thine eye shall not pity him.” That is why God said, “If any man will not work, neither should he eat.” I have no pity or sympathy for someone who is too lazy and slothful to work.

If a man has lost his job through no fault of his own, I do not mind helping him. I do not mind helping someone who is sick or someone in real and genuine need. But I do not want to help somebody merely because—when I was in Los Angeles, California, preaching and riding with the pastor, I saw a man holding a cardboard sign that said, “Help destitute. Need money.” I asked the pastor, “Do you ever

give to these people?" He said, "No. They make more money than I do. Some of these people make over $100,000 a year begging."

For four or five years in a row, where were we? What state was that—California? I saw one woman with her children beside a Volkswagen bus, holding a sign: "Help, broke down, need gas money." She had been there five years with the same sign and the same children. That is what she did. I am simply saying that you have to understand there are times when your sympathy and tenderness have to be controlled. You cannot give indiscriminately to people who are wicked and wrong and are basically stealing.

But in every area of his life, Jackson evidenced and exhibited the grace of self-control. He added to his knowledge temperance, or self-control. However, there was one time—one time—when the poised, collected, cool, and controlled General Jackson said he had no control.

The One Time Jackson Lost Control: His Mortal Wounding

At Chancellorsville, he was wounded and shot several times. One bullet shattered the bone in his left arm. As four men carried him from the battlefield on a litter toward a waiting ambulance, Lieutenant Smith's foot caught in a vine and he tripped, dropping his end of the litter. General Jackson struck the ground on that already broken arm, renewing the flow of blood. Jackson let out one piteous groan. Lieutenant Smith asked, "General Jackson, are you all right?" Jackson replied, "Mr. Smith, do not concern yourself about me." They took him to the hospital, where his arm was amputated.

Later, he told his chaplain, Beverly Tucker Lacy: "After a little while, he said that he thought when he fell from the litter that he should die upon the field. And he was able to get himself up in the hands of his heavenly father without a fear. He declared that he was in possession of perfect peace while expecting immediate death. It has been a precious experience to me that I was brought face to face with death and found all was well."

"I then learned an important lesson. That one who has been the subject of converting grace and is the child of God can, in the midst

of the severest sufferings, fix the thoughts upon God and heavenly things and derive great comfort and peace. But that one who has never made his peace with God would be unable to control his mind under such sufferings, so as to understand properly the way of salvation and repent and believe on Christ. I felt that if I had neglected the salvation of my soul before, it would have been too late then." He had no control.

He was in such pain and suffering that his mind could not understand what was being said. He was being witnessed to, or preached to. Thus the gallant, self-controlled Stonewall Jackson admitted at the time of his death that it is possible to be in so much pain that one is unable to control one's mind or thoughts.

Applications: Urgency of Salvation and Living by Principle

We must understand with Stonewall the fallacy of putting off salvation. God has not promised us another day, or even an easy death. Some say, "I'm going to repent and believe right before I die." First, repentance and faith do not belong to you; they are the gift of God. If God does not give them to you, you do not have them. Second, how do you know you will possess your mind before you die? You do not know that.

The Bible says in Acts 17, verses 30 and 31: "And the times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent." Why does God command every man to repent? "Because He, God, hath appointed a day in which He, God, will judge the world in righteousness by that man, Jesus Christ, whom He hath ordained, whereof He hath given assurance unto all men in that He hath raised Him from the dead."

Just as surely as God has raised Jesus Christ from the dead, He is going to judge every man by Jesus Christ. It is insane and wicked, as well as demonstrating a lack of self-control, to put off seeking Christ for salvation. God does not promise us another day or an easy death. I have known people who went into a coma and never awoke. If you put off seeking Christ, you will suffer for your lack of obedience and self-control.

The second application is this: We must learn to live by principles, not by emotions or feelings. Do right because it is right to do right. Principles never change; your feelings change every day. I woke up with sinus. I can feel it. I do not like it, and I cannot speak well with all the drainage. Yet the principle by which I am to live does not change, whether I feel good or bad. We have to learn to live by principles.

The third application is this: Self-control is not only a grace and a fruit to be added to our lives; it is a virtue learned and increased through patience and practice. Other than by the grace and power of God, the only way to gain self-control is through patience and practice. I will not allow my emotions, thoughts, or feelings to run wild. I will control them in every instance and circumstance. As you do this repeatedly, you develop a habit of self-control.

It must be learned and added to our faith. Whenever I think of Stonewall Jackson and the way he controlled himself, I am convicted, because I see where I fail. I hope you see where you fail and your need of the Christian grace of self-control.

Closing Prayer

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee this day. We thank You for Your love, grace, mercy, goodness, and kindness. Help us learn and emulate the graces in good and godly men. The Apostle Paul said, "Follow me as I follow the Lord Jesus Christ." There is nothing wrong with following men who follow Christ. Jesus Christ is our most excellent example, but He has also given us others to whom we can look for encouragement. We are thankful for the self-control exhibited in Stonewall Jackson's life. Help us today to be more holy and godly.

In Christ's name we pray. Amen. This program was produced by Dominion Ministry. For information about Pastor Weaver's sermons, contact Dominion Ministry by mail at 7400 Abercorn Street, Suite 705, PMB 175, Savannah, Georgia, 31406; by telephone at 912-925-7000; or at the website www.dominionministry.com.

CHAPTER 5

Being Properly Armed

November 21, 2013

Properly Armed

Introduction: The Call to Be Armed with the Mind of Christ

Peter writes: “Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God. For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries.”

Some of you probably have seen the recent photo that appeared on the Internet of a properly dressed woman shopping at Walmart. She was indeed a very attractive older woman—not an old woman, but an older woman—with a Colt .45 on her hip. Obviously, she was normally properly dressed, but she was properly armed as well.

When we think of being properly armed, we normally think in terms of physical weaponry. Someone with a good rifle, a good shotgun, and a couple of pistols is probably properly armed. However, this title speaks more of spiritual armament than physical armament. If we look at the context of this passage, being properly armed actually refers to being armed with the mind of Christ. We may need physical weaponry occasionally, but we need the mind of Christ constantly.

Look closely at verse one: "Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind." The word "arm" here is the Greek word hoplizo, and it literally means to arm. It means to furnish yourself with arms, to provide yourself with something. He is telling us to arm ourselves. What are we to arm ourselves with? He says, with the mind of Christ.

The word "mind" there is ennoia, which literally means the mind, the intent. It means the act of thinking or conception or understanding or consideration. We are to arm ourselves with the thinking of Jesus Christ, with His mind. The Scripture teaches us this: a Christian is not properly armed apart from, or without, the mind of Jesus Christ.

Biblical Commands Concerning the Mind of Christ

We must learn to think the way he thought in order that we may act the way he acted. Here is a simple truth that you need to remember: thinking and actions go together. We always act out that which we think. So, obviously, our thinking and acting do indeed go together.

There are numerous commands in the Bible concerning the mind of Christ or concerning our minds as well. The motive behind every one of these commands is that you and I should possess the mind of Christ. Before expounding on 1 Peter chapter 4, consider Philippians chapter 2 and verse 5, a verse that probably most of you can quote. The Bible says, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." Notice that he said, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." Actually, the phrase "Let this mind be in you" is a command. It is not a suggestion.

It is an imperative, which means that God is commanding us. Hence, we must simply obey. Naturally, any and every Christian should desire and want the mind of Christ. Why in the world are we commanded in this passage to have the mind of Christ? The answer is that it happens to be the mind of humility, the mind of submission, and the mind of obedience.

If you read the context of the passage, the Bible teaches us that Jesus Christ came. He humbled himself. He became a servant. He was made in the likeness of man. He came that he might honor his Father and obey him. He lived a sinless life. His life was a life of obedience to the Father. So he says, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.”

I am talking about a properly armed Christian, because our text in 1 Peter 4 and verse 1 says, “Let this mind be in you,” or “arm yourselves with the mind of Christ.” In 2 Corinthians chapter 10 and verse 5, the Bible says, “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.” Notice that every thought is to be brought into captivity in Jesus Christ.

So I could ask you this question: How many thoughts are you and I allowed that are contrary to Scripture? How many thoughts are you and I allowed that are contrary to the Lord Jesus Christ? The answer is absolutely none. He says that we're to bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, I would ask that you turn to Romans chapter 12 and look at verses 1 and 2.

Again, this is a very familiar passage. Many of you can quote it, but look at it in light of what I'm talking about: being properly armed. In fact, let's read verse 1. Romans 12, verse 1, Paul says, "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."

Now watch carefully: "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." In this instance, the Apostle Paul tells us that we're not to be conformed to this world. The word "conformed" literally means to be pressed into

a mold. My wife used to make butter, and we had butter molds. You would press it into that mold, and whenever you took the mold away, the butter was in the exact same shape of the mold. So God says, "Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed"—how? "By the renewing of your mind." Why? "That ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."

Now I want you to note that here is a negative and here is a positive. Here is why we should be renewed in our mind. Number one, the negative is that we should not be conformed to this world. Number two, the positive is that we might prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. God tells us very clearly that every one of these passages dealing with the mind teaches that our minds are to be submitted to Christ. When we talk about renewing our minds and submitting every thought to the captivity of Christ, it is equal, therefore, to letting the mind of Christ be in us.

In other words, we learn to submit and obey our heavenly Father. Now, if you look back at our text in 1 Peter 4, verse 1, he tells us this: "Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind."

The Combat Readiness of the Armed Christian

Since we have looked at several passages—“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus”; bringing every thought into captivity and obedience to Jesus Christ; and being renewed in the spirit of our mind—let me ask a question. I have pointed out how renewing our mind and bringing every thought into captivity is equal to having the mind of Christ. Is there a difference between letting the mind of Christ be in us and being armed with the mind of Christ?

Technically, I suppose you could say there is no difference, because having the mind of Christ is having the mind of Christ. However, there is a difference. When you understand that you are armed with the mind of Christ, being armed means that you are ready for combat.

Combat may be defensive or offensive, but it does not matter which it is. If you are armed with the mind of Christ, you are ready for defensive combat and also for offensive combat. You are either

ready to defend or ready to attack. You may ask, “What in the world are you talking about me attacking someone if I have the mind of Christ?” Let me show you what I mean.

Hold 1 Peter chapter 4, but look in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 16. In this passage, Jesus Christ asks His disciples, “Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?” They answer, “Some say that thou art Elijah, or one of the prophets.” Our Lord then asks, “But whom say ye that I am?” Matthew 16:16 says, “And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Then Jesus answered, “Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock”—that is, Peter’s confession—“upon this rock I will build my church; and the

“The gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” Look at that phrase: “The gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” Gates are normally associated with a wall, rulership, and authority. If the gates of hell shall not prevail, what does that mean? It means we are at the gates of hell. We are attacking hell; hell is not attacking us.

So, if we are armed with the mind of Christ, we are ready to go into offensive combat. We are ready to attack sin, wickedness, corruption, rebellion, and everything contrary to the Lord Jesus Christ and His Word. In other words, it is offensive combat. With the mind of Christ, we will be ready and able not only to defend but also to attack. So here is my question: Are you armed with the mind of Christ?

Here is another question: Is there any way that I can know whether I am armed with the mind of Christ, or whether you are armed with the mind of Christ? There is a principle in Scripture. The Bible says in Proverbs 23:7, “For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he.” Our lives will evidence and manifest our way of thinking. In other words, our lives will ultimately reveal our mindset. Our lives will reveal whether or not we are armed with the mind of Christ.

Look carefully with me back in 1 Peter chapter 4, and let me give you several things from the Scripture that will evidence and manifest whether or not we are armed with the mind of Christ. First of all, in 1

Peter chapter 4, verse 1, if we are armed with the mind of Christ, we will be ready and able to submit to the will of God.

Evidence 1: Submission to the Will of God

Look what he said in verse 2: “That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God.” Do you realize that our Lord Jesus Christ first and foremost submitted himself to the Father’s will? He said in John chapter 4 and verse 34, “Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.” Our Lord also 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 9 and verse 4, he said, “I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.” Jesus Christ came to do the will of God. Even in the garden, he prayed, “Not my will, but thine be done.”

Let me take you back to Romans 12 and verse 2: “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.” In other words, if you and I are armed with the mind of Christ, we are going to be ready and able to do the will of God. The man armed with the mind of Christ is not going to argue with God, fight against God, or rebel against God’s will in his life. He is going to be in submission to that will, content and satisfied with obeying the Father, even as Christ obeyed his Father. If we are armed with the mind of Christ, then we are going to be in submission to the will of God.

How then do we know the will of God for our lives? We must understand that God's will is revealed in His Word. We do not have to speculate, debate, or question. The truth of the matter is that we simply must obey. If you have not memorized Deuteronomy 29:29, you should memorize it: "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."

Note that the secret things belong to God. There are some things you and I do not know, some things we do not understand, and some things we never will know or understand until glory. But the things

that He has revealed belong to us and our children, that we may do all the words of this law. The revealed will of God is not given merely for information; it is given so that we may do it.

Many times in Scripture, we are explicitly told what the will of God is. First Thessalonians 4:3-4 gives one of those clear passages: "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"—or his body—"in sanctification and honour."

How can that be unclear? This is the will of God: that we abstain from fornication. We automatically know that it is God's will that we are not adulterers, that we are not fornicators, and that we are not immoral. It is God's will that we do not covet or desire our neighbor's wife, our neighbor's daughter, or anything like that. That is God's will. He made it very plain. He also said that it is His will that we know how to possess our bodies in sanctification and honor.

There is no question about that and no debating it. It is very plain, very simple, and laid out clearly. First Thessalonians 5:18 gives another clear passage: "In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." In everything give thanks. That is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.

That is not as difficult as it may seem. You say, "Well, Brother Weaver, how can I thank God that I lost my wife or I lost my husband or I lost my father or my mother?" Have you ever stopped to think that you could thank God for all the years that He allowed you to have them? You could thank God for all the blessed times and all the memories that you have. There are plenty of reasons that we can thank God in everything. I've been sick, and I tried to thank God in my sickness. You need to stop and think: we may have been sick, but we haven't been as sick as we could have been. That is certainly something to be thankful for.

I remember one man who literally tried to obey this command in every area of his life. He was walking one day under a stairwell, and the stairwell was a little lower than he anticipated. He walked into it, hit himself in the forehead, and was knocked all the way down. He said, "Thank God I didn't knock my head off—almost, but not quite."

There are reasons that you can rejoice. This is the will of God: that we are thankful in everything. The Bible says in Ephesians 6:6, "Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart." Whatever you do unto God, you do it from the heart. You do it willingly. You do it readily.

You do it heartily as unto the Lord. You do not do things halfway, sloppily, or merely to get them over with. Whatever you do, you do it heartily and as unto the Lord. First Peter 2:15 gives another very plain statement: "For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men."

How many times have you been slandered? You've been lied about. Gossip has spread rumors about you. Everybody's been lied about; everyone has been slandered. What does God say? "Here's the will, my will for you in this situation: You live your life so pure and so holy."

Those who are slandering you, lying about you, and spreading rumors about you will eventually be exposed as liars, gossipers, and rumor mongers. This is God's will concerning you. There are so many passages in the Bible where it simply says, “This is the will of God.” There are plenty of other areas in our lives that we may not actually know. Do you realize, however, that there are principles we may deduce from Scripture?

I know that everything is not spelled out in the Bible. When I say that, people have said, “I wish it was spelled out. I know what to do now, what to do next time, and what to do tomorrow.” But if God spelled everything out, you could not even carry your Bibles; they would be so thick. What God does is give principles and precepts that cover every area of life.

There is no guessing or debating it. The principle is there; we simply obey it. If you are armed with the mind of Christ, first and foremost, you will be willing to obey God. You will not fight with Him, fuss with Him, or argue with Him. You will submit to Him. Moreover, if you are armed with the mind of Christ, you will be willing and ready to suffer for God's honor and glory. Scripture says, “Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm

yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin."

Evidence 2: Willingness to Suffer for God's Honor

This is a truth from which our flesh naturally recoils. If I asked how many people actually enjoy suffering, probably no one would raise a hand. I have known a few people who really seemed to enjoy suffering; they were never happy unless they were suffering. Still, it is true that our flesh recoils at suffering. We do not want to suffer. We wish to have our flesh pampered, satisfied, and soothed. Yet suffering normally comes to each one of us in one fashion or another.

The Bible tells us that Christ suffered in the flesh. It was not simply His crucifixion that caused His sufferings, though that aspect of His suffering was very great. The Bible says in Hebrews 12:2, "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." What does the Bible say? Jesus Christ endured the cross, despising the shame.

Our Lord was mocked, ridiculed, spat upon, hated, and rejected. He had people turn against Him, not only family, but friends. "He that hath eaten bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me," the psalmist said, which pictured Judas as well. Our Lord also suffered hunger and thirst during His humiliation. From the point of His birth to the point of His death is known as the period of humiliation.

In other words, the Bible says He humbled Himself, took upon Himself the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of a man. Remember, Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He is perfect God and perfect man. He is the sinless Son of God. Yet Hebrews 5:8 says, "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered."

What kind of obedience have you learned from the suffering of Jesus Christ? What kind of obedience have you learned from your own suffering? What kind of obedience have you learned from the sufferings of other people? You may say, "Brother Weaver, I'm not those other people." I understand. But do you realize God holds you

accountable and responsible to learn from the experiences of other people? You say, "What?"

Look at what our Lord tells these Pharisees in Matthew 21:32: "For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him." You did not believe John. The Pharisees rejected the preaching and teaching of John, but the publicans and the harlots believed. Our Lord said, "You saw what I did in their lives. You saw how they were changed. And when you saw it, you still did not repent." What is He saying? You are responsible to profit from the work of God in the lives of other people. So I can legitimately ask you, what have you learned not only from your own suffering, but from the suffering of other people?

Each of us realizes that faith is the gift of God. We can quote Ephesians 2:8-9: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast." But let me tell you something else: suffering is also the gift of God, and He gives that gift to some people more than others.

If you do not believe that, read Hebrews chapter 11, and also Fox's Book of Martyrs. You will find that there have been plenty of people who suffered enormously. Philippians 1:29 says, "For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake." Just as faith is the gift of God, and God does not give it to every man, so suffering is the gift of God, and God does not give that gift to every man.

Now I can hear you, and probably most Christians say, “That’s one gift I really do not want.” I understand your position, but you have to understand something else: the child who suffers the most always receives the greater grace, greater consolation, and greater attention.

I have only one sister. When I was a little boy and she was a little girl, she came down with yellow jaundice. Back in those days, they treated it by giving you candy. I was probably four or five years old, and we did not get candy because we could not afford it. But my

sister got to lie on the couch and eat candy. I could not have any because I was not sick. Mother and Dad would come around, talk to her, pamper her, and give her candy. I never will forget it. Every time she got up to go to the bathroom, I would jump on that couch and wallow in it, trying to get yellow jaundice so I could get candy.

But I never could get either the candy or the yellow jaundice. You have to understand: the child who suffers the most always gets the most attention. Remember that the Apostle Paul had a thorn in the flesh? He said, “Three times I besought the Lord to remove this thing.” What did God tell him in 2 Corinthians 12:9? “My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.” And what did Paul say?

"Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities." Moreover, you have got to understand this: God has promised never to put more upon us than we are able to bear. I do not care what your burden, heartache, or cross is. If God has placed it upon you, you can bear it.

He said in 1 Corinthians 10:13, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." He has promised us that He will never put more upon us than we are able to bear. There is no temptation, test, or trial taking us but such as is common to man.

Everybody else has those same tests. Every time we start suffering, we think, "Whoa, it's me. I'm the only one that's ever gone through this." No, multitudes have gone through it. There is no temptation taking you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, and He will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it. If I suffer, I want it to be for righteousness' sake and not because of my own stupidity, sin, or rebellion.

The Bible says in 1 Peter 3:17, "For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing." That is the will of God for you: if you have to suffer, suffer for doing that which is right and holy. Whatever suffering God allows to come our way, we

must lean upon Him, trust in Him, and believe that He knows best what is for His glory and our good.

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 suffer according to the will of God, commit your soul to Him.

I recently brought a message on the martyrdom of Thomas Hawkes. If you have not heard it, I encourage you to listen to it. When Hawkes learned that he was to be burned alive at the stake, some Christian friends were so distressed that they thought it impossible for anyone to endure such suffering. They asked him whether, if it were possible to endure it, he would try to raise one hand toward heaven as a sign to them while he was burning.

Thomas Hawkes was burned, and fire engulfed his body. His body was charred, his feet began to drop off, the flesh fell from his legs, and his head drooped. Everyone thought he was dead. Suddenly, before he died, he raised both hands toward heaven. Yes, it is possible to suffer according to the will of God and at the same time commit yourself unto Him. If we are properly armed, we will not only be ready and willing to do the will of God; we will also be ready and willing to suffer for God's honor and glory.

Thirdly, if we are properly armed with the mind of Christ, we will be ready and willing to cease from sin. First Peter 4:1 says, "Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God."

Evidence 3: Ceasing from Sin

The phrase "suffering in the flesh," or "he that hath suffered in the flesh," is a euphemism for death. A euphemism is an easy or light way of saying something painful. We may say that someone "had an affair," but he did not merely have an affair; he committed adultery. "He that hath suffered in the flesh" is a gentle way of saying that he died.

Paul stated it plainly in Romans 6:6-7: "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."

We may be alive physically, but spiritually speaking, we are to be dead to sin and alive unto God through Jesus Christ. In Romans 6:11, he says, “Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.” The word “reckon” means to count. Count yourself dead indeed unto sin. In other words, act like a dead man. What power does sin have over a dead man? You can go to any cemetery in this town, hold up a fifth of liquor, and ask the dead man to get drunk. He will not do it. Ask him to commit adultery or steal. He will not do it. He cannot do it. He is dead.

The Bible says that is exactly our position in relation to sin. The lordship of sin has been canceled; it has been broken. Jesus Christ is our Lord. Therefore, Galatians 5:24 says, “And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.”

If we are armed with the mind of Christ, we are going to cease from sin. That does not mean we are going to be perfect, but it does mean that we are not going to purposefully and deliberately sin. We have seen what sin has done to Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, the sinless Son of God, was made sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him, as 2 Corinthians 5:21 says. We know what sin has done to us, our families, and our friends. The wage of sin is death.

I have no idea how many funerals I have performed in fifty years, but every time I look into a casket—and I did it for my father, my mother, and my father-in-law—I say to myself, “Sin did that. The wages of sin is death. Sin did that.” If we have seen what sin has done to Christ and what it has done to our families and friends, we should be sick of it.

We should have our fill of sin. We should hate it and detest it, even as God our Father does. In Jeremiah 44:4, He said, "Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate." God calls sin an abomination and says He hates it. In light of that truth, Romans 13:14 commands us,

"But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof." Do not make provision to sin. Do not plan it or think about it.

We are in 1 Peter 4. If you are armed with the mind of Christ, you will be willing and ready to cease from sin. Peter says, "For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries: wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you."

There was a time past in your life when you did all these things. Now that you do not do them, other people think you are strange. "What's wrong with him? He doesn't get drunk anymore. He doesn't run around anymore. He doesn't steal anymore. He doesn't cheat anymore. What's wrong with this man?"

Peter says, "For the time past of our life may suffice us." The word "suffice" means enough or sufficiency. Literally, the time past in our lives, before conversion, should have been enough to give us a belly full of sin. We ought to have been so full of it and so sick of it that we do not want it anymore.

When I was twelve years old, I spent a week with my aunt and uncle in Savannah, Georgia. They owned a bakery. I ate cake doughnuts, cream-filled doughnuts, jelly doughnuts, and chocolate doughnuts until I became physically sick of them. From age twelve until probably my thirties, I never ate another doughnut. I did not even want to look at one. Since then, I have probably not eaten a dozen doughnuts in my life. Why? I got my belly full of them. I did not want them anymore.

And that's exactly what our Lord is saying. We ought not to want it anymore. Paul says essentially the same thing in Ephesians 2:3: “Among whom also we all had our conversation”—or conduct—“in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.”

We've had our fill of it. We were just like the ungodly, but we know what sin does. We know how it destroys. I have seen more

homes wrecked by sin. I've seen more children, more lives destroyed. This is what he's talking about. If we're properly armed with the mind of Christ, we'll take the attitude that we're through with sin. Yes, we're sinners. No, we're not perfect.

But on the other hand, we don't love it, desire it, or want it. We certainly are not going to let it rule over us. Properly armed with the mind of Christ, we will fight against sin and resist it with every ounce of our being. It no longer has dominion over us, and consequently, we don't want it in our lives.

If you've gotten anywhere in your Christian life, you've gotten to the point where you're not only sick and tired of it, you're very embarrassed and very hurt over some of the things that you have done in the past. Although God has forgiven you, it's still in your mind, and you still apologize and ask His forgiveness. But if we're properly armed with the mind of Christ, we'll be ready and willing to cease from sin.

Evidence 4: Defending God's Word

Fourthly, if we're properly armed with the mind of Christ, we will be willing and ready to defend God's Word. Fallen man loves error, religion, and tradition. Christ and His followers love the Word of God. One of the greatest conflicts between believers and unbelievers, between real Christians and Pharisees, is over the Word of God. The child of God believes that God's Word is authoritative, inerrant, inspired, and infallible. Nothing is to be placed above the Word of God, beside the Word of God, or equal to it. The Word of God is our rule for faith and practice.

Many are willing to put not only their rationalism but their traditionalism on a par with, or above, the Word of God. Matthew 15:1 records: "Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying, Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread. But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be

profited by me; and honour not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition. Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me; but in vain"

"Do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." Christ and His disciples were concerned with God's Word and God's law. The Pharisees were concerned with their tradition. So it is today. I used to tell people I can go into the average church and preach one sermon and split it right down the middle. All I have to do is preach against tradition.

There's nothing wrong with tradition as long as, number one, it's scriptural; or number two, if it's a tradition of man, you understand that it's not binding on anyone and has no authority. But most people want to put their tradition or their rationalism on a par with the Word of God. Christ demonstrated the utter nonsense and incompatibility of man's religion and rationalism as compared to God's Word.

If we're armed with the mind of Christ, we're not going to be seeking rationalism, nor are we going to be seeking traditionalism. We're going to be seeking the Word of God. If you're willing and ready to defend the Word of God, you'll be willing and ready to defend it in the face of all opposition. I don't care if it's the president, the Congress, a king, or a queen.

Do you remember what Peter and the rest of the apostles said to those religious leaders in Acts chapter 5 and verse 29? "We ought to obey God rather than men." In other words, it doesn't matter what you say. We are going to obey God and not man. We'll do what God tells us. If you're armed with the mind of Christ, you're going to be ready and willing to defend the Word of God.

Fifthly, if we're properly armed with the mind of Christ, we will be ready and willing to resist Satan and his wiles. Consider Matthew chapter 4, and notice this one truth: "Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil."

Evidence 5: Resisting Satan and His Wiles

When he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred. And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God—actually, it is a first-class condition, which means "since"—"since thou art the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread." But he answered and said, "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, and saith unto him, "If thou be the Son of God"—or "since"—"cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone." Satan can quote Scripture. He may take it out of context, but he can quote it. Notice verse 7: "Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."

Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and saith unto him, "All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me." Then saith Jesus unto him, "Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve."

In each instance, our Lord uses the Word of God to resist the temptation. Our Lord is thwarting the enemy. There are two elements, and they are very important: submission and resistance. Submission without resistance is a denial of our responsibility. Resistance without submission is foolish and futile. According to Scripture, both submission and resistance must go together. We must submit ourselves unto God, and we must resist the devil.

Compassion and Forgiveness

James 4:7 says, "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." First Peter 5:8–9 says, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your

brethren that are in the world." Resist, yes, but how? Stedfast in the faith. First John 4:4 says, "Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world." If we are properly armed with the mind of Christ, we will be able to resist Satan and his wiles. We will learn the truth of Romans 16:20: "And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you." If you want Satan bruised under your feet, you must learn to submit to God and resist the devil.

Sixthly, if we are properly armed with the mind of Christ, we will be ready and willing to exercise compassion and forgiveness. You cannot read the New Testament very long before you encounter the words concerning Jesus Christ: He was moved with compassion. He was moved with compassion concerning the sick, the afflicted, the blind, the hungry, and the thirsty. Matthew 9:36 says, "But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them." Why? Because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.

Evidence 6: Exercising Compassion and Forgiveness

Christ observed and saw the needs of the people. He healed the sick, raised the dead, fed the multitudes, and ministered wherever there was a need. If we are armed with the mind of Christ, we will also have compassion like Christ. First Peter 3:8 says, "Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another."

"Love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous." Notice "having compassion one of another." In 1 John 3:16–18, we read: "Hereby perceive we the love of God"—and the word "perceive" means to understand, to comprehend, to lay hold of. He says, "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth."

If we have the mind of Christ, if we are armed with that mind, we will be compassionate individuals. But we will not only be compassionate; we will also be forgiving. Christ was not only

compassionate; He was forgiving. He freely and gladly forgave sinners because He was indeed the sacrifice and the substitute for our sins.

Forgiveness is very important. Ephesians 4:30 and 32 tells us, "And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption." Here is something to put off: "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice." Here is something to put on: "And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." When we forgive someone, we are to do it as God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven us.

Does Christ hold grudges? Does Christ hold resentment and bitterness and ill will and anger? Is Christ hard hearted and unforgiving? Of course not. If I say I forgive you—if I forgive you the way God, for Christ's sake, forgives—it means whatever I have forgiven you for is over and done with. I do not hold it against you, use it against you, or remind you of it. It is gone.

Mark says something to me, he sins against me. And guess what I say? "I forgive you." He asked for forgiveness, and I said, "I forgive you." A week later, he happens to do the same thing. I say, "Oh, I knew you would do it again. I was just waiting on you." Did I ever forgive him the first time? Of course not.

Let me tell you something: we do not have the power to obliterate things from our mind, but we do have the power not to think about them and not to speak about them. So if Mark has done something and I say I forgive him, then two days later I get to thinking about it, I must put that out of my mind: "Lord, that's been dealt with. That's over. That's done with. Let me think on something else."

Or I am talking to his pastor and something comes up about Mark and that incident. I have control of my tongue. I do not have to speak about it or say one word about it. If somebody asks me something about it, I could say, "That's old stuff. That's over. That's done with." I do not have to explain anything to anybody.

Do you realize most husbands and most wives get in trouble right here? They tell each other they forgive each other, and the next thing

you know, another day or two, a week or two, or a month or two later, they are bringing it up all over again. God says, "Oh, no, when we forgive, we forgive the way God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven us." God warns us that we must be forgiving. If we have the mind of Christ, we are ready and willing, and we want to be forgiving.

You know what our Lord said in Matthew 6, verses 14 and 15? Here is the warning: "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." In other words, the principle is this: If we have received mercy, we should be able to show mercy.

Let me ask you: If Mark did sin against me, who am I and what am I? How could his sin be so great, especially if I compare what my sin has done to Christ and my rebellion against God the Father? If God has forgiven me the greatest of all in my life, can I not be willing to forgive someone who sins a great deal lesser against me? Well, of course. And if we are armed with the mind of Christ, we will have that.

Two Applications

Applications: The Simplicity and Necessity of the Mind of Christ

The Christian life is simple and easy. All you need is the mind of Christ. The difficult part is acquiring the mind of Christ, because the only way we can acquire it is by study and application of His Word. Do you realize that the more we mature in our Christian walk and in faith, the easier it ought to be to have the mind of Christ?

I used to get so aggravated when it was popular for all these necklaces and chains and WWJD—“What would Jesus do?” I would say, “I know what he would do. He would obey his Father.” There is no question about that. The question is, would you obey? Will you bring your life in conformity with the word of God? The Christian life is really simple and easy. It is just having the mind of Christ.

The difficult part is denying our flesh and bringing every thought and every imagination into captivity and subjection to Jesus Christ,

learning to think the way Christ thought so that we may act the way Christ would act.

Here is the second application. If we would be more holy, more obedient, and more submissive to our heavenly Father, we must have the mind of Christ. What did he say? “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.” Do you realize it is only the mind of Christ that will enable us to live in obedience to our Heavenly Father?

One of my favorite verses, and one I quote all the time, is John 8:29: “The Father that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him.” The cry of our hearts should be, “Oh God, let me do always those things which please you. I’m sorry that I’m a sinner. I’m sorry that I’m ignorant. I’m sorry that I don’t understand. I’m sorry I fail. Lord, I still want to do always those things which please you.”

You are to be armed with the mind of Christ. Properly armed, you will be ready for defensive or offensive combat. The only way to be properly armed in the Christian faith is to have the mind of Jesus Christ, who always willingly submitted to and obeyed the Heavenly Father.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee tonight. We must confess that we need the mind of Christ; I need and want the mind of Christ. So many things happening in this world are wicked, wrong, and ungodly. Unless we learn to think as Christ would have us think, we will go off the deep end one way or the other. Teach us by principles, precept, and word, and enable us to order our lives according to that truth. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 6

The Life Of Ahithophel

June 6, 2017

SCRIPTURE READING - 2 Samuel 15:31–16:21 (KJV)

Introduction and Scripture Reading

I'm going to read a number of verses because I'm going to be preaching mainly about the life of Ahithophel. So you need the background.

“And one told David, saying, Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom. And David said, O LORD, I pray thee, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness.”

And it came to pass that when David was come to the top of the mount where he worshipped God, behold, Hushai the Archite came to meet him with his coat rent and earth upon his head. Unto whom David said, “If thou passest on with me, then thou shalt be a burden unto me: but if thou return to the city, and say to Absalom, I will be thy servant, O king; as I have been thy father's servant hitherto, so will I now also be thy servant.”

“Then mayest thou for me defeat the counsel of Ahithophel. And hast thou not there with thee Zadok and Abiathar the

priests? Therefore it shall be, that what thing soever thou shalt hear out of the king's house, thou shalt tell it to Zadok and Abiathar the priests. Behold, they have there with them their two sons, Ahimaaz Zadok's son, and Jonathan Abiathar's son; and by them ye shall send unto me every thing that ye can hear."

So Hushai David's friend came into the city, and Absalom came into Jerusalem.

"And Absalom, and all the people the men of Israel, came to Jerusalem, and Ahithophel with him. And it came to pass, when Hushai the Archite, David's friend, was come unto Absalom, that Hushai said unto Absalom, God save the king, God save the king. And Absalom said to Hushai, Is this thy kindness to thy friend? why wentest thou not with thy friend? And Hushai said unto Absalom, Nay; but whom the LORD, and this people, and all the men of Israel, choose, his will I be, and with him will I abide.

"And again, whom should I serve? should I not serve in the presence of his son? as I have served in thy father's presence, so will I be in thy presence." Then said Absalom to Ahithophel, "Give counsel among you what we shall do." And Ahithophel said unto Absalom, "Go in unto thy father's concubines, which he hath left to keep the house; and all Israel shall hear that thou art abhorred of thy father: then shall the hands of all that"

SCRIPTURE READING - 2 Samuel 16:21-17:12 (KJV)

"are with thee be strong." So they spread Absalom a tent upon the top of the house; and Absalom went in unto his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel. And the counsel of Ahithophel, which he counselled in those days, was as if a man had inquired at the oracle of God: so was all the counsel of Ahithophel both with David and with Absalom.

Moreover Ahithophel said unto Absalom, "Let me now choose out twelve thousand men, and I will arise and pursue after David this night. And I will come upon him while he is weary and weak handed, and will make him afraid: and all the people that are with him shall flee; and I will smite the king only: and I

> will bring back all the people unto thee: the man whom thou seekest is as if all returned: so all the people shall be in peace." And the saying pleased Absalom well, and all the elders of Israel. Then said Absalom, "Call now Hushai the Archite also. Let us hear likewise what he saith."
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> And when Hushai was come to Absalom, Absalom spake unto him, saying, "Ahithophel hath spoken after this manner: shall we do after his saying? if not; speak thou." And Hushai said unto Absalom, "The counsel that Ahithophel hath given is not good at this time. For," said Hushai, "thou knowest thy father and his men, that they be mighty men, and they be chafed in their minds, as a bear robbed of her whelps in the field: and thy father is a man of war, and will not lodge with the people. Behold, he is hid now in some pit, or in some other place: and it will come to pass, when some of them be overthrown at the first, that whosoever heareth it will say, There is a slaughter among the people that follow Absalom. And he also that is valiant, whose heart is as the heart of a lion, shall utterly melt: for all Israel knoweth that thy father is a mighty man, and they which be with him are valiant men. Therefore I counsel that all Israel be generally gathered unto thee, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, as the sand that is by the sea for multitude; and that thou go to battle in thine own person. So shall we come upon him in some place where he shall be found, and we will light upon him as the dew falleth on the ground: and of him and of all the men that are with him there shall not be left so much as one. Moreover, if he be gotten into a city, then shall all Israel bring ropes to that city, and we will draw it into the river, until there be not one small stone found there."

“The counsel of Hushai the Archite is better than the counsel of Ahithophel.” For the LORD had appointed to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, to the intent that the LORD might bring evil upon Absalom. When Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not followed, he saddled his ass, arose, and went home to his house, to his city. He put his household in order, hanged himself, died, and was buried in the sepulchre of his father.

Ahithophel is a name that is not very well known, nor is it easily pronounced. Yet Ahithophel is known as the Judas of the Old Testament. As Judas in the New Testament betrayed his master and went out and hanged himself, likewise Ahithophel betrayed his master David and went out and hanged himself as well. Ahithophel was a very complex individual.

Ahithophel: The Judas of the Old Testament

He was indeed a man of wisdom, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, a man full of absolute foolishness at the same time. He had common sense, rationality, and stability; yet he was also a very unstable individual, and a very resentful and bitter individual. Ahithophel is difficult to understand until you find the full light of Scripture. Once Scripture reveals what was really going on in this man's life, then you can understand his actions.

The Backdrop: Absalom's Rebellion

The setting for this history of intrigue is the rebellion of Absalom. Absalom was David's son, and he sought not only to run his own father off the throne, but also to kill him. Absalom prepared chariots and horses, with fifty men to run before him. He rose early and stood beside the way of the gate. When any man who had a controversy came to the king for judgment, Absalom called to him and asked, "Of what city art thou?" When the man answered that he was of one of the tribes of Israel, Absalom said, "See, thy matters are good and right; but there is no man deputed of the king to hear thee." Thus Absalom began insinuating himself upon the people of Israel.

"Absalom said moreover, Oh that I were made judge in the land, that every man which hath any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice!" Absalom is already politicking. Everyone who comes, he tells that his matter is good and right. If he were made judge, he would see that justice was done in the land. Yet while saying that with his mouth, he is doing an injustice, not only to his father, but also to the kingdom. Simply because someone speaks of that which is right does not necessarily mean that their heart is in that which is right.

Notice the politician in him: "And it was so, that when any man came nigh unto him to do him obeisance, he put forth his hand, and took him, and kissed him. And on this manner did Absalom to all Israel that came to the king for judgment: so Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel. And it came to pass after forty years, that Absalom said unto the king, I pray thee, let me go and pay my vow, which I have vowed unto the LORD, in Hebron. For thy servant vowed a vow while I abode at Geshur in Syria, saying, If the LORD shall bring me again indeed to Jerusalem, then I will serve the LORD. And the king said unto him, Go in peace."

He had already lied to David again. So he rose and went to Hebron. But Absalom sent spies throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, "As soon as ye hear the sound of the trumpet, then ye shall say, Absalom reigneth in Hebron." And with Absalom went two hundred men out of Jerusalem, that were called; and they went in their simplicity, and they knew not any thing. And Absalom sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counsellor, from his city, even from Giloh, while he offered sacrifices. And the conspiracy was strong; for the people increased continually with Absalom. And there came a messenger to David, saying, "The hearts of the men of Israel are after Absalom." And David said unto all his servants that were with him at Jerusalem, "Arise, and let us flee; for we shall not else escape from Absalom."

"Make speed to depart, lest he overtake us suddenly, and bring evil upon us, and smite the city with the edge of the sword." Absalom is not only rebelling against his father; he is seeking his father's life. He has deceived the men of Israel, even the two hundred who went with him in their simplicity and did not know what was happening.

Is it not exceedingly strange that Absalom would call David's own personal counsellor to his side? In verse 12, the Bible says, "And Absalom sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counsellor, from his city, even from Giloh, while he offered sacrifices." It is very strange that Absalom would want David's personal counsellor to come and be with him. It is even stranger that Ahithophel not only went to Absalom, but went voluntarily and willingly, eager and ready to join the rebellion. You have to ask, What in the world is going on? What in the world is wrong with Ahithophel?

David's Flight and Wise Responses

Ahithophel has now joined Absalom, and the conspiracy is so strong that when David hears about it, he says they must get out of Jerusalem promptly, or Absalom will come and kill everybody. So David takes his family and servants and begins to flee. Why would David flee? We know that David was a man of war. Even the ladies of Israel said, Saul has killed his thousands, and David his tens of thousands. Hushai also admitted that David was a man of war. Everyone knew that. So why would David flee?

There are only two possible answers. Number one, David was not ready to fight it out with Absalom in Jerusalem. Or number two, David did not really want to fight his own son. To be honest, I think it was the latter. When it actually came down to battle, David gave his captains this command in 2 Samuel 18:5: "And the king commanded Joab and Abishai and Ittai, saying, Deal gently for my sake with the young man, even with Absalom. And all the people heard when the king gave all the captains charge concerning Absalom." In other words, "Do not kill my son."

You know how Joab heard that Absalom's hair had become caught in an oak tree. When the man told Joab this, Joab asked, "Why did you not kill him?" He replied that he would have given him a girdle—that is, so much money—and a promotion as well. But Joab said, "I heard the king when he told you to deal gently with the young man." Then Joab took three darts and thrust them through Absalom's heart, killing him.

When David received the message that Absalom was dead, 2 Samuel 18:33 says, "And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept: and as he went, thus he said, O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" David was mourning for Absalom.

It took Joab, who was a wicked man, to bring David back to his senses. Joab told him it would have been all right with him if all his people, Joab himself, and David's family had died, so long as Absalom lived. If David did not go back and show his face to the

people, who had fled, it would be worse now than it was in the beginning.

David went back, but he simply did not want to fight his own son. At any rate, the conspiracy was so strong that David absolutely had to flee. While fleeing, he learned that Ahithophel was among the conspirators. At this point, David stopped and did two very wise things.

First, in 2 Samuel 15:31, we read: “And one told David, saying, Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom.” David stopped and prayed: “O LORD, I pray thee, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness.” He specifically asked God to confound Ahithophel. He asked God to confound Ahithophel because he understood the danger of that counsel.

The second wise thing he did was send his friend Hushai the Archite back into the capital, back into the palace, so that Hushai could be his eyes and ears. Notice verse 32: “And it came to pass, that when David was come to the top of the mount, where he worshipped God.” David was fleeing, but he stopped to pray and stopped to worship.

Hushai the Archite came to meet him “with his coat rent, and earth upon his head.” David said to him, “If thou passest on with me, then thou shalt be a burden unto me: but if thou return to the city, and say unto Absalom, I will be thy servant, O king; as I have been thy father's servant hitherto, so will I now also be thy servant: then mayest thou for me defeat the counsel of Ahithophel.” David left Hushai there to be his eyes and ears and to help defeat Ahithophel’s counsel.

Ahithophel's Counsel and Its Wickedness

David also told him about the priests and their sons: “Everything you hear, you tell the priests. They'll send their sons. I'll find out exactly what is going on.”

Ahithophel was a very wise and sagacious individual. The Bible says in 2 Samuel 16:23: “And the counsel of Ahithophel, which he counselled in those days, was as if a man had inquired at the oracle

of God: so was all the counsel of Ahithophel both with David and with Absalom."

Ahithophel was so wise, so knowledgeable, and so sagacious that whenever he spoke and gave counsel, it was practically as if one had inquired of God himself. Here was a man who undoubtedly had a very great intellect and a very great understanding.

If the counsel of Ahithophel was as if a man had inquired of God, how could Ahithophel give such wicked counsel to Absalom? In 2 Samuel 16:20, Absalom said to Ahithophel, "Give counsel among you what we shall do." Ahithophel had come into Jerusalem with Absalom. Verse 15 says, "And Absalom, and all the people the men of Israel, came to Jerusalem, and Ahithophel with him." Ahithophel was by his side all the way.

Ahithophel answered Absalom, "Go in unto thy father's concubines, which he hath left to keep the house; and all Israel shall hear that thou art abhorred of thy father. Then shall the hands of all that are with thee be strong." They spread Absalom a tent upon the top of the house, and Absalom went in unto his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel.

If Ahithophel's counsel was right, how could he counsel Absalom to go into his father's concubines? The counsel was designed to accomplish a specific purpose. It was not biblical. It was certainly contrary to the seventh commandment, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." It was also contrary to the eighth commandment, "Thou shalt not steal." It was contrary to the fifth commandment, "Honour thy father and thy mother." It was contrary to the law of God, that is true.

But Ahithophel gave this counsel for one specific reason: "Go in unto thy father's concubines, which he hath left to keep the house; and all Israel shall hear that thou art abhorred, thou art hated of thy father. Then shall the hands of all that are with thee be strong." A son might be forgiven by his father, but those who help the son may not be forgiven by the father. Therefore, the people would be reticent as long as there was not a real, full, and final break.

What Absalom did was not only dishonorable and disobedient; it was disgusting to the nth degree. It was an insult to his father.

When he committed that act, he was saying, “This is it. I’m not backing up. I’m not backing off. I will either kill my father or he will kill me. This is it. You will follow me to the end.” That is exactly why Ahithophel told him to do that.

This act was also part and parcel of David’s punishment for his sin with Bathsheba. In 2 Samuel chapter 12, beginning with verse 9, we read: “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. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife. Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house.” That is Absalom. “And I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbour.” That is Absalom. “And he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun.” That is Absalom. “For thou didst it secretly: but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun.”

What Absalom did in 2 Samuel chapter 16 was therefore part and parcel of David’s punishment for the sin he had committed secretly with Bathsheba. Absalom then took that final step. He went into his father’s concubines, so everyone now knew that this was a war to the death. Nothing was going to change. David was either going to kill Absalom or Absalom was going to kill David. The men with Absalom would now have strong hands. After this act was committed, they turned to dealing with David. This was the full and final conflict.

The Defeat of Good Counsel

Ahithophel said unto Absalom, “Let me now choose out twelve thousand men, and I will arise and pursue after David this night: and I will come upon him while he is weary and weak handed, and will make him afraid: and all the people that are with him shall flee; and I will smite the king only: and I will bring back all the people unto thee: the man whom thou seekest is as if all returned: so all the people shall be in peace.”

That is Ahithophel's counsel. Hushai gives his counsel beginning with verse 7: "The counsel that Ahithophel hath given is not good at

this time." Note that he did not say Ahithophel had not given good counsel. He simply said, "It's not good at this time."

Hushai said, "For he said, Hushai, thou knowest thy father and his men, that they be mighty men, and they be chafed in their minds, as a bear robbed of her whelps in the field: and thy father is a man of war, and will not lodge with the people. Behold, he is hid now in some pit, or in some other place: and it will come to pass, when some of them be overthrown at the first, that whosoever heareth it will say, There is a slaughter among the people that follow Absalom. And he also that is valiant, whose heart is as the heart of a lion, shall utterly melt: for all Israel knoweth that thy father is a mighty man, and they which be with him are valiant men. Therefore I counsel that all Israel be generally gathered unto thee, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, as the sand that is by the sea for multitude; and that thou go to battle in thine own person."

"So shall we come upon him in some place where he shall be found, and we will light upon him as the dew falleth on the ground: and of him and of all the men that are with him there shall not be left so much as one. Moreover, if he be gotten into a city, then shall all Israel bring ropes to that city, and we will draw it into the river, until there be not one small stone found there."

Absalom and all the men of Israel said, "The counsel of Hushai the Archite is better than the counsel of Ahithophel." Whose counsel was right? Ahithophel's counsel was right. They needed to strike quickly and forcefully, before David could regroup, obtain supplies, or receive extra help. They needed to do it right then. That was the right counsel.

Hushai's counsel was bad, but God had appointed to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel. How did He defeat it? By appealing to Absalom's pride. Hushai told Absalom to gather all Israel from Dan to Beer-sheba. Dan was the northernmost tribe, and Beer-sheba the southernmost city. Gathering Israel from Dan to Beer-sheba would take time, as messengers had to be sent throughout the land and all the men brought together. Then Hushai told Absalom that he would lead this vast army and be at its head. And guess what? "We will light upon them as the dew falleth upon the ground. We will kill every one of them. And if they're in a city, we'll pull those stones down into the

river. Don't worry, we will get them because there are so many of us and so few of them." So the men of Israel and Absalom said that the counsel Hushai had given was better than the counsel of Ahithophel.

Now look at verse 23 of 2 Samuel 17: "And when Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not followed, he saddled his ass, and arose, and gat him home to his house, to his city, and put his household in order, and hanged himself, and died, and was buried in the sepulchre of his father." Ahithophel was smart enough and wise enough to know that when they did not follow his counsel, it was all over. He knew Absalom was going to fail, and he also knew that he would be put to death.

Ahithophel's Suicide and Its Motivation

Why did Ahithophel go and hang himself? He knew that when David came back, he would undoubtedly be killed as a traitor. There were no two ways about that. But why did Ahithophel not want to be killed by David? Why would he desire to die earlier rather than later? Suppose it took a month or three months for Absalom to gather all the men and for there to be a battle. If I know I am going to die sooner or later, and could probably die three months later, would I not rather spend those three months enjoying my life? Why would I go out and hang myself now, even if I knew I was going to die three months later?

Let me show you something else. In all these passages, Ahithophel was a counsellor and a diplomat. Watch what he volunteers to do. In chapter 17, verse 1:

“Moreover Ahithophel said unto Absalom, Let me now choose out twelve thousand men, and I will arise and pursue after David this night: and I will come upon him while he is weary and weak handed, and will make him afraid: and all the people that are with him shall flee; and I will smite the king only: and I will bring back all the people unto thee: the man whom thou seekest is as if all returned: so all the people shall be in peace.”

Here is a counsellor and diplomat, yet he volunteers to lead a fighting force at night, attack David’s group, personally kill David, and bring all the other people back. “All we want is David dead, and I

will kill him." Ahithophel was eager, willing, and ready to join the rebellion with Absalom.

He was now eager, willing, and ready to kill David. He was willing to kill David, but he was not willing to be killed by David. What was it that motivated and pushed Ahithophel? Why would he join with Absalom when he knew that Absalom was wicked and wrong? He knew what Absalom had done. Why would he volunteer to kill David? Ahithophel was a man who was full of bitterness, resentment, anger, hatred, and ill will. All of those things pushed and drove Ahithophel.

The Root of Bitterness: David's Sin Against Bathsheba

Look in your Bibles to 2 Samuel chapter 23 and verse 34. In this passage, you have a listing of some of the mighty men of David. These were men of war, men who fought. Some are named: "Eliphelet, the son of Ahasbai, the son of the Maachathite," and then Eliam, the son of Ahithophel the Gilonite. Eliam was the son of Ahithophel. He was one of David's mighty men.

Someone may suggest that Eliam was killed in battle, and therefore Ahithophel was very upset with David. I do not think that is true. A lot of individuals were killed in battle. Why would Ahithophel, a man of wisdom, knowledge, and understanding, be upset with David just because his son may have been killed in a certain battle? That is not the answer. What made Ahithophel so bitter, angry, and resentful toward David? Why did he hate him so much?

Look in your Bibles to 2 Samuel chapter 11. "And it came to pass, after the year was expired, at the time when kings go forth to battle, that David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the children of Ammon, and besieged Rabbah. But David tarried still at Jerusalem. And it came to pass in an eveningtide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king's house: and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon. And David sent and inquired after the woman. And one said, Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" Bathsheba was Ahithophel's granddaughter.

David seduced her, tarnished her, destroyed her family, and murdered her husband. There is one area in which Ahithophel was right: he viewed any crime or sin against his family as a sin against himself. We have to do that. If you came to me and said, “Brother Weaver, I love you, but I don't like your wife at all,” I would say, “Wait a minute. The two are one. You can't love me and dislike my wife.” If you said, “I love you, but I don't like your children,” my children are an extension of myself. When you despise my children, you despise me.

I had four daughters, and I understand girls. I also have three granddaughters and two great-granddaughters. If you messed with my girls, I could hurt you. My girls used to go hunting with me. I would put the twins in one tree, perhaps a hundred yards apart, put my baby girl in another tree a hundred yards away, and stand a couple hundred yards from them.

I always gave them specific instructions: “Girls, if any man comes to your tree and tries to hurt you or harm you in any way, or if you think that, you shoot him. When I get there, I'll question him and find out what his motives were.” If you hurt my girls, I could hurt you. But if you hurt my granddaughters, I could chew you up and spit you out and smile while I did it. You know what the Bible says? “Children's children are the crown of old men.”

When my oldest granddaughter was two years old, I was riding a horse with her in front of me. We had ridden together for five or ten minutes without saying anything. Suddenly she looked up at me and said, “Papa, you're my very best friend.” Even today, at twenty-eight, I could call her and ask, “Is this my very best friend?” She would answer, “Yes.” There is something special between grandfathers and granddaughters. Ahithophel was right in viewing any crime against his family as a crime against himself. That is the only area where he was right.

Refusing God's Forgiveness and Chastisement

Secondly, Ahithophel would not accept or bow to God's forgiveness and pardon of David. If you look back in your Bibles to 2 Samuel chapter 12 and verse 13, David, of course, deserved to die on two counts. Number one, he had committed adultery, for which the

penalty in the Bible is death. Moreover, he killed Uriah with the sword of the children of Ammon, and God charged him with the murder of Uriah. The murderer shall surely be put to death.

So here is my question: Why was David not put to death? He deserved to die on two specific counts. In verse 13, you find out: "And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD. And Nathan said unto David, The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die." In other words, God sovereignly pardoned David. The only reason he did not die was that God simply gave him a pardon. He deserved to die, but God pardoned him.

Ahithophel was unwilling to accept this. He was unwilling to accept God's forgiveness of David. Let me explain something to you. Each one of us is a sinner. Each one of us has sinned. We have done things that were stupid, wicked, wrong, and ungodly. If you and I were honest, we deserve to have died a long time ago, and we deserve to have been killed by the righteous wrath, anger, and judgment of God because of our sin. How many in here would raise their hand and say, "I want to die, and I am ready to die for my sin right now"?

Nobody is going to do that. And you know why? Because you want mercy. You want grace. You do not want God's judgment, anger, or wrath upon you. You want mercy for yourself. I understand that. I want mercy for myself. But is it not amazing that when someone sins against us and does us wrong, or at least what we consider wrong, we do not want that person forgiven? We want them dead.

So that is Ahithophel. He did not care about God's forgiveness or pardon. Ahithophel wanted David dead so badly that he was not only willing to join the conspiracy against him; he was willing to volunteer personally to kill David himself because he did not accept God's pardon or forgiveness of David. He wanted him dead, and that was all he cared about. Thirdly, Ahithophel was not content with God's judgment and chastisement upon David.

There are many people who want to identify with David's sin, but they do not want to identify with David's repentance and David's chastisement. It is true that David committed adultery. It is true that he had Uriah the Hittite killed with the sword of the children of

Ammon. He planned it. He did not do it himself, but he planned it, and God charged him with it.

But the truth of the matter is this: David did not escape. Do you realize that the child born of David and Bathsheba, which would have been Ahithophel's great-grandchild, died? It was not enough for Ahithophel that the child died. It was not enough that David's daughter Tamar was raped by her own brother Amnon. It was not enough that Absalom, David's son, then murdered his own brother Amnon for what he did to Tamar. It was not enough that Absalom had gone in and dishonored his father and fornicated with his concubines.

It was not enough that Absalom had run his father off the throne and was trying to kill him. He wanted to kill him, and he wanted him dead. He was not content with God's chastisement; he wanted to chastise him. Ahithophel, in his unwillingness to forgive David, was led to the bitterness, resentment, hatred, anger, and ill will that were in his heart. Now you can see why Ahithophel was willing to kill David, but was not willing to be killed by David. He would not give David the pleasure. He would hang himself; he would kill himself.

The Danger of Unforgiveness and Spiritual Sins

The problem in the average Christian church, the average Christian home, and the average Christian is our cold, hard, unforgiving hearts that lead to our bitterness, resentment, and ill will. Let me show you. Hold, if you would, 2 Samuel, but turn in your Bibles to Romans chapter 12. Look, if you would please, beginning at verse 17. God says, "Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men." Recompense no man evil for evil. So if Brother Christman stood up tonight and cursed me, and everyone in this room heard him curse me, does that give me the right to curse him back? Recompense no man evil for evil.

Just because he does me wrong, does that mean I've got to do him wrong? God says no. Recompense no man evil for evil. “If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.” It takes two to argue and two to fight. The Bible says, “A soft answer turneth away wrath, but grievous words stir up anger.”

I never will forget that I used to be at a large, very large Christian school. I was the chaplain there while I was preaching everywhere in the country. When I went back there, all I had to do was preach to the teachers and students and do any counseling that needed to be done. Right next to my office was a woman whose sole duty was to deal with irate parents.

I don't know how many times I heard men and women go into her office mad, angry, with loud voices screaming. Miss Sherry would say, “I'm sorry that you're upset. If you will settle down, I'll be glad to help you work out your problem.” They would get louder. She would get so low that they would have to say, “What? What did you say?” Then they would see the vast discrepancy between how loud they were and how quiet she was. They would become embarrassed, and she would be able to work out the problem. A soft answer turns away wrath, but grievous words stir up anger.

“Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.” What does he mean when he says, “Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves”? He is not talking about refusing to defend yourself if your life is in danger. That is not the context. He is talking about taking vengeance into your own hand and paying people back in kind.

Most of us as Christians, if somebody irritates and upsets us and does things we do not like, would never draw back our fist and punch him and knock him out. But we will smile and, under our breath, say, “You just wait. Now your time's coming. I'll lay it on you. You just wait.” This is what God is saying: Avenge not yourselves.

I can take vengeance, but if I take vengeance, then God's not going to take vengeance, because God is a just God. He's not going to allow vengeance to be exacted twice. You have to understand this: God can clean someone's plow a whole lot better than I can clean someone's plow. So he says, "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath." In other words, you just suffer with it. Vengeance, why? Because it is written, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay."

"Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head." How do I prove that I'm not vindictive? How do I prove that I'm not full of bitterness and ill will? If my enemy's hungry, I feed him.

That doesn't mean I have to go out and buy him a T-bone steak. If I have peas, I can feed him peas. If I have broccoli, I can feed him broccoli. I don't have to buy him a Starbucks coffee; I can give him water. All I'm doing is showing I'm not full of resentment, bitterness, or ill will. I'm willing to obey God and do what's right, even if he's willing to do what's wrong. Therefore, "if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink."

"For in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head." I remember hearing years ago about a woman who went to the pastor complaining about her husband. He was not doing right and was not treating her right, at least she did not think so. Finally, thinking of this passage, the pastor smiled and asked, "Well, have you ever tried heaping coals of fire upon his head?" She said, "No, but I've tried hot water, and that don't work either."

Of course, heaping coals of fire means that you return goodness for evil. That is what he says in verse 21: "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." The way we do not exact vengeance is simply to obey God, keep our hearts right, and do that which is right ourselves.

In 1 Peter chapter 3, beginning with verse 8, the Bible says: "Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous: not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing. For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: let him eschew evil, and do good. Let him seek peace, and ensue it. For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil."

God says that if you want to render evil for evil and railing for railing, cussing for cussing, His face will be against you, and He will reward you accordingly. But if you will reward good for evil, keep

your heart, do what is right, control your lips and tongue, spit out evil, do good, seek peace, and follow it, His ears are open unto your prayers. He will hear you and help you.

I want to show you the biggest problem that we have as Christians. In 2 Corinthians 7:1, Paul 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.” Do you realize the greatest sins that we have as Christians are sins of the spirit? God doesn't have any drunkards. He might have some that used to be drunkards. God doesn't have any whoremongers. He might have some that used to be whoremongers. God doesn't have any thieves. He might have some that used to have been thieves.

Here's what I'm showing you. Look in 1 Corinthians 6, beginning at verse 9: “Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.”

You might have used to do those things, but you don't do them now. But the biggest sin now is not the fact that men are out chasing women and men are out robbing banks. No, no. The biggest thing now is our own attitude. Our own spirit. Our own resentfulness, our own bitterness. It's our own anger. It's our own ill will. It literally destroyed Ahithophel. We take pride sometime with saying, “I don't drink and I don't chew and I don't go with the girls that do.”

But we will be just as bitter and hateful and ugly and resentful, holding hard, cold, unforgiving hearts day after day, week after week, month after month. Ahithophel was unwilling to forgive David and unwilling to accept God's judgment and chastisement of David. He personally wanted David dead. He could care less what God desired or what God's will was. Ahithophel wanted his desire and his will.

Let me tell you something, folks: we get into trouble when you and I try to assume the role of God as judge and father. We may

know that God is going to chastise, and we may know that God is going to judge, but it is not my right or my place to tell God how to judge His own.

Usurping God's Role as Judge

Hebrews 10:30 says, "For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people."

Years ago, my mother-in-law, who is now dead, lived with us for seventeen years before she died, after Pop died. When my girls were young, the twins especially, they had done something that I had told them not to do. I told them that if they did it, I was going to whip them, so I sent them to get a switch. I made them pick their own switch. If they brought back a little flimsy thing, I went out and got one, and they did not want Daddy to go out and get one, so they would usually bring a good one.

While they were out picking the switch, my mother-in-law said, "You shouldn't whip those sweet little girls." I looked at her and said, "Granny, let me tell you something. If I had been alive, and an adult, when you were raising your children, and I told you how to discipline them or how not to discipline them."

"Would you think I was butting in and interfering in your life and in your family?" She said, "Yeah." I said, "Well, so you're doing that right now. I told them I was going to whip them, and that's exactly what I'm going to do." That was the last time she ever said one thing to me about trying to discipline my children. I resented it because I was their father. I already knew what I had told them, already knew what they had done, and I was going to discipline them.

It is one thing to say, "Father, I want you to judge someone," or, "Father, please, if this individual is your child, chastise him." But it is another thing for you to dictate to God how to chastise and how to judge. Now you are usurping God's throne rights and God's crown rights. You are usurping His position as Father. He is Judge, and He is Father.

What God forbids us to do is act out of personal, private revenge. That does not mean that we cannot pray against the wicked. It does

not mean that we cannot pray imprecatory prayers. It does not mean that we cannot ask God to judge the wicked or even ask God to chastise His own. But we cannot tell Him exactly how to do it. That is up to Him. He knows all the motives, all the desires, and everything. We do not. He knows how best to deal with them.

One last thing: it was Ahithophel's bitterness, resentment, ill will, and hatefulness that led to the destruction of himself, his family, and his nation. Remember that passage we read last night in Hebrews about Esau? God said, "Lest there be any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled." Ahithophel was a very bitter and vindictive man.

Conclusion: Cleansing from Filthiness of Spirit

I have often thought about what Mrs. Ahithophel thought when her husband went up and hanged himself, and what his son thought. I know he had one before he was named in Scripture. I wonder what Bathsheba thought: Why did Granddad do this? I have preached for fifty-two years. I have seen individuals destroy themselves, their families, and churches, all because of bitterness, resentment, and an unforgiving heart. I have yet to see someone destroy a nation, but Ahithophel almost did.

Go back in your Bibles to 2 Samuel chapter 18, beginning with verse 6. Remember, Ahithophel could probably have prevented this, but he did not. “So the people went out into the field against Israel: and the battle was in the wood of Ephraim; where the people of Israel were slain before the servants of David, and there was a great slaughter that day of twenty thousand men. For the battle was there scattered over the face of all the country: and the wood devoured more people that day than the sword devoured.” If the twenty thousand is not all-inclusive, that is twenty thousand dead. Verse 8 says, “the wood devoured more people than the sword.” If the sword killed twenty thousand, then thirty thousand died in the wood. Fifty thousand people were possibly dead.

Ahithophel was so bitter, resentful, hateful, and unforgiving that he personally wanted David dead. He could have stopped Absalom, but he did not. The Bible teaches in Romans 14:7, “For none of us

liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself." What you do always affects others, whether it is right or wrong. It always affects others.

Everyone has heard the old drunk say, "Well, if I want to get drunk, it's just me. It's not affecting or hurting anybody else"—until he drives that car head-on and kills a mother and children. Yes, it affects somebody else. Your sin always affects others. I cannot sin without affecting my wife and children, the Lord, the ministry, and people who know me throughout this country.

Remember when Peter asked our Lord in Matthew 18, "If my brother sin against me, shall I forgive him seven times?" Our Lord said, "No. Seventy times seven." Do not stop at 490. What our Lord was saying is that if he repents, you forgive him. If it is a thousand times, you forgive him.

What we do with bitterness and resentment matters. If we hold ill will in our hearts, it will inevitably come out.

God wants us to be a holy people, a special people, a peculiar people. We are living in very desperate, very wicked times, as wicked as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities of the plain were. God was willing to spare all of those cities if he found ten righteous people. The greatest test of our genuineness and sincerity is not merely what we are outwardly in front of everyone else, but what we are inwardly when we are alone with God. He alone knows the depths and desires of our hearts.

Our greatest sins are not physical; they are spiritual. "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." I can never say that I am holy unless I am willing to forgive, get rid of bitterness, resentment, and ill will, and have my spirit right with God.

I may not be a bank robber, but if I hate and grudge and hold an unforgiving heart, I am Ahithophel. Inevitably, it will destroy me, my family, my friends, my church, and possibly my nation.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow before thee this night. We thank you for your word and your truth. O God, make us holy. Deal with our spirits, Lord; deal with our minds and our understandings. Give us a compassionate, broken heart, a heart that

loves Thee and loves Thy people, and loves righteousness, holiness, and truth. Help us to live for Thee. In Thy name we pray, amen.

CHAPTER 7

The Intercessory Work of Christ & Our Prayers

August 18, 2017

Introduction: The Need for Scripture and History

I appreciate the fact that you are here. If you missed Dr. Grant's message, I pray that you will get it and listen to it, because it is a wonderful combination of Scripture and history. I love Scripture, and I love history. I want to tell you two very quick stories. They do not relate to the message, but they will prove my point about Scripture and history.

I heard about one pastor who was teaching and came to the passage, “And all Israel gathered from Dan to Beersheba.” He began to explain how Dan was the most northern tribe and Beersheba was the most southern city. One man raised his hand and said, “What? What? Do I understand that you are saying that Dan is a tribe and a country and Beersheba a city?” The pastor said, “Yeah, that's right.” He said, “That's funny. I always thought they were husband and wife, like Solomon and Gomorrah were.”

And then, of course, you heard about the American tourists visiting Runnymede. There was a sign that said, “Magna Carta signed here at 1215.” He looked at his watch and said, “Wouldn't you know it, we missed it by forty-five minutes.” We need Scripture, and we need to study history, because history is nothing less than God's eternal decree coming to pass in time.

The Central Text: Hebrews 7:25

I want you to open your Bibles to Hebrews, chapter 7 and verse 25. I have been asked to deal with the intercession of Jesus Christ and prayer. The Scripture makes a wonderful statement concerning Jesus Christ: “Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.” Let that verse sink into your hearts. The Scripture does not say that He is able to save them to the uttermost because He gave Himself as a sacrifice for them. He did give Himself as a sacrifice. But the Scripture says here that He is able to save, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for the saints.

The Neglected Doctrine of Christ's Intercession

The truth is that very few Christians have ever considered the heavenly session of Christ or the intercession of Christ, much less prayer and the intercession of Christ. Most of us have probably never understood that the efficacy of our prayers does not lie within us. Have you ever asked yourself this simple question: Why are any of our prayers answered? Most people want to know why some prayers are unanswered, and I could give reasons for that. But it is an absolute wonder and a marvelous miracle that any of our prayers are answered, because our prayers are made effectual through the intercession of the Lord Jesus Christ.

There are requirements for prayer mentioned in the Bible. We must pray in faith, and we must pray according to the will of God. But have you considered the sin involved in our prayers, even when we endeavor to pray biblically? None of us can pray perfectly. We cannot have faith perfectly or do anything perfectly, because we are sinners. As one old pastor said, “There’s enough sin in our prayers to

send us to hell if it were not for the priestly work of the Lord Jesus Christ." Only Jesus Christ prays perfectly.

Confessional Affirmations of Christ's Priestly Work

He is our prophet, our priest, and our king. I want to give you two quick quotes. The first is from the Philadelphia Baptist Confession, though I am not reading all of it, and the second is from the Westminster Confession. Here is paragraph number eight:

"To all those whom Christ hath obtained eternal redemption, he doth certainly and effectually apply and communicate the same, making intercession for them, uniting them to himself by his Spirit, revealing unto them in and by the Word the mystery of salvation, persuading them to believe and obey, governing their hearts by the Word and Spirit, and overcoming all their enemies by his almighty power and wisdom, in such manner and ways as are most consonant to His wonderful and unsearchable dispensation, in all the free and absolute grace, without any condition foreseen in them to procure it. The office of mediator between God and man is proper only to Christ, who is prophet, priest, and King of the church of God, and may not be, either in whole or any part thereof, transferred from Him to any other."

The number and order of Christ's offices is necessary. In respect of our ignorance, we stand in need of His prophetical office. In respect of our alienation from God and the imperfection of even our best services, we need His priestly office to reconcile us and present us acceptable unto God. In respect of our averseness, our utter inability to return to God, and our need for rescue and security from our spiritual adversaries, we need His kingly office to convince, subdue, draw, uphold, deliver, and preserve us to His heavenly kingdom.

Interestingly, if you read the Philadelphia Baptist Confession or the Old London Confession of 1689, you will find that they are almost word for word identical with the Westminster Confession. Originally, Baptists and Presbyterians were much alike; they mainly differed on baptism and ecclesiology. Many Baptists used the Westminster Confession until 1689, when they decided to have their own and produced the Old London Confession. Then, in 17, I think it

was, 47, a hundred Baptist ministers met in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, adopted the Old London Confession, and it became known as the Philadelphia Baptist Confession of Faith.

Here is the eighth chapter of the Westminster Confession. Listen carefully to all those for whom Christ hath purchased redemption: "He does certainly and effectually apply and communicate the same, making intercession for them, and revealing unto them in and by the Word the mysteries of salvation, effectually persuading them by His Spirit to believe and obey, and governing their hearts by His Word and Spirit, overcoming all their enemies by His almighty power and wisdom in such manner and ways are consonant to His wonderful and unsearchable dispensation." Paragraph 8 of the Philadelphia Confession of Faith and paragraph 8 of the Westminster Confession of Faith, on the intercession of Christ, are identical. But the Bible is here talking about the intercession of Jesus Christ.

Christ as the Only Mediator and Our Bold Access

Each individual understands that there is only one approach to God the Father. Jesus Christ said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life, and no man cometh to the Father but by me." No one can get to Jesus Christ or to God the Father except by Jesus Christ. I do not care what your ancestry is, who you were born from, or from whom you descended. The only way you can get to God the Father is through Jesus Christ. That is it. You cannot come any other way. Ephesians 2:18 tells us, "For through him we both have access unto the Father in one spirit," or by the Spirit. Obviously, the correct way to come to God the Father is through the Son and in the Spirit.

As one old preacher said, he who might have been placing a vial of wrath in the hand of every angel around his throne, with a commission to pour it out upon this rebellious world until it was utterly consumed, is standing at this moment at the altar of incense, presenting our prayers for mercy and officiating there as our great high priest. Isn't that amazing? The absolute holiness and justice of God were satisfied in the Lord Jesus Christ.

In Romans 8:34, the Bible says, "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather than is risen again, who is even at the

right hand of God the Father, who also maketh intercession for us." Now let that sink in: He also maketh intercession for us.

In Hebrews 9:24, "For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true, but in heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us." For us. It should encourage us greatly, and it should certainly encourage us in prayer when we grasp the fact that Jesus Christ is our intercessor and our advocate.

In 1 John 2:1, the Bible says, "My little children, these things I write of you, that you sin not. But if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous." So He is our attorney. He is our advocate. He pleads our cause. He prays in our behalf. Consequently, if we really understood the intercession of Jesus Christ, it would give us exactly what Chalmers was talking about when Dr. Grant quoted him. It would give us a holy boldness to enter into the presence of God with joy.

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 a high priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full.

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. Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, what would have happened to any Israelite who boldly ran to the holiest of all in the tabernacle? You know as well as I do: only the high priest went in there once a year, and not without the shedding of blood.

The Father Always Hears the Son

He would have been instantly killed. What would have happened to any Israelite who had done the same to the temple? He would have been instantly killed. In fact, he probably never would have gotten there, because the Levites were charged with guarding Aaron and the tabernacle. They would have killed him before he ever got there. But

here, through Jesus Christ, we have boldness to enter into the holiest of all by a new and living way. That is through Jesus Christ.

Have you ever stopped to think that Jesus Christ is the one who makes our prayers effectual unto the Father? Jesus Christ always is heard by the Father, and always has His prayers answered. You remember that passage in John chapter 11, when Jesus Christ was about to raise Lazarus from the dead. He told Mary that if she would believe, she would see the glory of God. That is true. Then He raised Lazarus from the dead, and after Lazarus was raised, He said, "Father, I thank Thee that Thou hast heard me."

The Father always hears the Son. In fact, you might put it like this: the Father gave the Son a blank check. In Psalm 2, verse 8, the Father said to the Son, "Ask of Me, and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth." He said, "I'll give you whatever you ask. I'll give you the heathen for your possession, and the uttermost parts of the earth for your inheritance." Whatever You ask, I will give it to You.

The Bible says, "Wherefore, we're safe to the uttermost. How? Seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for us."

Christ's High Priestly Prayer in John 17

John 17 contains our Lord's high priestly prayer. Though there is not time to deal with all of this passage, we should observe its opening and its concern. Beginning with verse 1, the Lord says, "These words spake Jesus, and lifted up His eyes into heaven, and said, Father, the hours come, glorify Thy Son, that Thy Son may also glorify Thee." Thus, our Lord is praying. In verses 6–9, He first prays for His people. He says, "I have manifested by name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world, thine they were, and thou gavest them me, and they have kept thy word." This is the beginning of the Lord's prayer for those whom the Father gave Him out of the world.

"Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee. For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me, and they have received them and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send

me. I pray for them. I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me. Notice, for they are thine."

In this brief passage, we see not only our Lord's priestly office, but also His prophetical office. As prophet, He gave us His word; as priest, He now intercedes for us.

Matthew Henry said that the elect whom the Father gave to Christ were His own in three ways. First, they were creatures, their lives being derived from Him. When they were given to Christ to be vessels of honor, they were in His hand as clay in the hand of the potter, to be disposed of as God's wisdom saw fit for His own glory.

Secondly, they were criminals, and their lives and beings were forfeited to Him. It was a remnant of fallen mankind that was given to Christ to be redeemed. They might have been made sacrifices of justice, but were chosen to be monuments of mercy; they might justly have been delivered to the tormentors, but were delivered to the Savior.

Thirdly, they were chosen, and their lives and beings were designed for Him. They were set apart for God and consigned to Christ as His agent.

Now stop and think about that. We were gods by virtue of the fact that we were His creatures. We were gods by virtue of the fact that we were criminals, in His hand, and He could justly have destroyed us. But then He chose us, gave us to Jesus Christ, and chose Jesus Christ as His agent.

Jesus Christ is not only the agent of the Father. In one sense, He is also our agent because He is our surety. When we think of our Lord's so great salvation, we always think of His substitutionary and sacrificial death. It is true that He died a sacrificial, substitutionary death. But very seldom do we think of His priestly intercession.

When the Scripture says that He is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by Him, it gives the reason: seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them. It is not just our Lord's death; it is also His life. Romans 5:10 says, "For if when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." We are not just saved by a sacrificial death; we are saved by His life.

As the mediator of the new covenant, and as the antitype of the high priest under the old covenant, the ministry of Christ has two aspects. Not only is He the suffering substitute and sacrifice who made atonement for us while He was upon the earth, He is now our high priest, engaged in His heavenly session on behalf of His people.

Romans 8:32–34 says: “He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.”

The Philadelphia Confession and the Westminster Confession acknowledge that, to all those for whom Christ has purchased redemption, He does certainly and effectually apply and communicate the same, making intercession for them and revealing unto them in and by the Word the mysteries of His salvation. It is not just the sacrificial death of Christ; it is also His intercession that is saving in power. We are brought to God the Father not only because of the work of the Holy Spirit, but also because of the intercession of Jesus Christ. Salvation is being brought to God the Father, not simply by the work of the Holy Spirit, but also by the intercession of Jesus Christ.

John Owen, who is known as the Prince of Preachers, lists three divisions of the work of Christ in redemption: the incarnation of Christ—that is, He became flesh, His humiliation; the oblation of Christ—that is, His sacrifice; and then the intercession of Christ. He makes this statement: “His intercession is for all and every one of those for whom He gave Himself as an oblation.”

The Intercession as Application of Salvation

He did not suffer for them and then refuse to intercede for them. He did not do the greater and then omit the lesser. If Christ gave Himself as a sacrifice, then He is certainly going to pray for those for whom He died. We are just as saved by the intercession of Jesus Christ as by His sacrifice. His intercession could be explained as nothing more than the application of His salvation.

Look first in Hebrews 9, beginning with verse 15: “And for this cause he, that is Jesus Christ, is the mediator of the New Testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance. For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is a force after men are dead. Otherwise, it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth.”

Suppose just momentarily that I am a multimillionaire. I am not, but let us suppose that. I say, “I am going to leave all my millions to one Jacob Frank,” and I put it in my will. Although I have willed it to Jacob, is it his? No, at least not until I am dead. While I am alive, it is mine. He does not get it until I die.

Now, what if I made some technical, legal mistake in making my will, and a smart lawyer caught it? He says, “This now has to be probated, and this has to have this, and this has to have that.” That requires time and money. Out of all my millions, Jacob may end up getting a few hundred thousand, while the corrupt attorney gets practically all of it. We understand that. Jesus Christ made a New Testament.

It did not go into effect until after He died. Then what did Jesus Christ do? He rose from the dead in order to administer that Testament Himself. Thus there would be no corruption or theft, and He would absolutely guarantee that those for whom He gave His life would indeed inherit everything. Acts chapter 5, verses 30 and 31, tells us: “The God of our father's race of Jesus, whom you slew and hanged on a tree, Him hath God exalted with or at His right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.”

So Jesus Christ, as our great intercessor, actually gives repentance and forgiveness. He actually gives us faith. The great intercessor is the one who gave Himself as a sacrifice, and now He is applying this so great salvation. Jesus Christ executed the first part of His priestly work by giving Himself as a sacrifice. Now He is executing His second part, assurity, standing or sitting at the right hand, interceding for His own.

The Dual Intercession: Christ and the Spirit

Matthew Henry said that we were gods in three ways: first, we were His creatures; second, we were criminals, having forfeited our lives; and third, we were chosen and given to Jesus Christ as His agent. Jesus Christ was the agent of God the Father to suffer, bleed, and die, to rise again from the dead, and to intercede for us. But He is also our agent because He is here on our behalf. Earlier I quoted 1 John 2 and verse 1: “My little children, these things I write unto you that ye sin not.”

If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous. The interesting thing is that the Greek word for advocate is parakletos. It is translated in our Bibles as comforter and as advocate. It literally means one called alongside to help; one called alongside to plead one's case before a judge; a counsel for the defense, a helper, and an aid. That same exact word is used for the Holy Spirit.

Jesus Christ said in John 14 and John 15, “If I go away, I will not leave you comfortless, I will send you another comforter.” The word comforter there is parakletos. The Holy Spirit is often referred to as the paraclete: one called alongside to help. Interestingly, it is also the Holy Spirit who makes intercession for us. Romans 8 says, “Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities. For we know not what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself maketh intercession for us with groanings which can't be uttered. And he that searches the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.” The Holy Spirit is an intercessor in us.

Has there ever been a time in your life when you were so burdened that all you could do was simply lie on your face and groan? There have been many times in my life like that. All I could say was, “Oh, Lord. Oh, Lord. Oh, Lord. I don't know, Lord. I don't know.” The Bible tells us that the Holy Spirit takes these groanings which cannot be uttered, interprets them, makes intercession, and presents them according to the will of God. The Holy Spirit is our paraclete in us, and Jesus Christ is our paraclete for us. The Holy Spirit is in us, and Jesus Christ is before the throne of God.

Jesus Christ prays for His people. First, He stands as our agent and surety for our prayers. Secondly, He stands as agent and surety for our preservation. John 17:11 says, “And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world.”

Christ Prays for Preservation, Protection, and Preachers

Christ prayed, “Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one as we are.” According to 1 Peter 1:5, we are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time. It is true that we are kept by the power of God. But why are we kept by the power of God? One answer is that Jesus Christ prayed that we would be kept by God the Father.

Jude 1:1 says, “Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, the brother of James, to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ.” Jesus Christ, our great Intercessor, prayed for our preservation.

Have you ever wondered about Peter? He was an impetuous man, and he denied the Lord three times. Why did Peter not absolutely fail, stumble, and fall permanently? The answer is simple. In Luke 22:31–32, our Lord said, “Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired thee, that he may sift thee as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.”

The only reason that we are preserved is because of the intercession of Jesus Christ. We are preserved in Him. Our hearts are so deceitful and desperately wicked. God's people cannot and will not apostatize. You say, “But I know people who professed to be Christians, and they left the faith and left the church.” That is it: they professed to be. You know what John said in 1 John 2:19? John said it like this: “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, no doubt they would have continued with us: but they went out, that it might be made manifest that they were not all of us.”

The proof that you have ever been genuinely converted is that you will continue in faith and repentance. Preservation and perseverance go together. Those who are preserved in Jesus Christ persevere in faith and repentance. Jesus Christ prayed for our preservation; therefore, we are preserved in Him.

Notice, if you would please, in verses 14 and 15, He also prays for our protection. He is our agent, our surety, and our protection. “I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.” Our Lord is praying for our protection. Have you ever wondered how we do not succumb to the flesh, the world, and the devil? The answer is because our Lord is afraid.

You remember in Revelation 12:10, Satan is called the accuser of the brethren. We do not only have the world, the flesh, and Satan; we also have wicked rulers and the ungodly who hate us and seek to overthrow us. Psalm 37:12 says, “The wicked ploddeth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth.” There is a conspiracy and a confederacy. The wicked unite to overthrow that which is godly, righteous, and holy. But they cannot succeed, and they will never overthrow the people of God.

You remember that in 1 John 2, John wrote to fathers because they had known Him from the beginning, and to young men because they had overcome the wicked one. He also wrote to children and fathers, repeatedly speaking of overcoming the wicked one. Then, in 1 John 4:4, he said, “Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.”

It is our Lord who intercedes for us in our prayers. We do not go to Mary or to the saints; we go to the one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. He prayed for our preservation and protection. Jesus Christ, as the great Intercessor, prays for His people. Look in verse 20. Secondly, He also prays for His preachers. He says, “Neither pray I for these alone,” that is, the disciples He had at that particular time, “but for them also which shall believe on me through their word.” Every preacher desires success in his ministry,

but one's definition of success may be extremely faulty and unbiblical. I have seen church buildings—one in particular that my wife and I would drive past frequently—and thought, Oh, to have one Federal Reserve note for each brick in that building.

It is such a monstrosity, and the problem is that it is probably only used once a week. We have equated success with big buildings, big money, and big attendance. If you were to examine some biblical preachers under today's definition of success, they were epic failures. Noah preached for 120 years and never had one convert, but God put him among the heroes of faith. Look at Jeremiah. Look at Isaiah. "Oh, Lord, have mercy. Isaiah, here are my lords, send me." And then Isaiah got to thinking, "I better check. I've already volunteered. Lord, how long shall I go until the land be uninhabited and the houses desolate, and no man dwelleth therein?" What was God's state? They're not going to listen to you, Isaiah. What about Jeremiah?

He was a brazen wall to those. They wouldn't listen to him. Jeremiah and Isaiah were epic failures according to today's standard of success, but you and I know they were godly men. So the question has to be asked: What is our ground or foundation for success in the ministry? The answer comes back: it is nothing else and nothing less than the intercession of Jesus Christ.

It is invigorating, encouraging, and edifying to know that Jesus Christ prays and intercedes for the preaching of the gospel. If you examine this verse, verse 20, you will find that our Lord prays not only for the method, those which believe only through their word, but also for the men. John Flavel, one of my favorite authors, explains the ministry in this eloquent quote: "The labors of the ministry will exhaust the very marrow from your bones, hasten old age and death."

Then God's preachers are fitly compared to the toil of men in harvest, to the labors of a woman in travail, and to the agonies of soldiers in the extremity of a battle. We must watch while others sleep. Indeed, it is not so much the expense of our labors as the loss of them that kills us. It is not with us as with other laborers. They find their work as they leave it. So do not we. Sin and Satan unravel almost all that we do. The impressions we make on our people's

souls in one sermon vanish before the next. How many truths have we to study? How many wiles of Satan and mysteries of corruption to detect? How many cases of conscience to resolve! Yea, we must fight in defense of the truths we preach, as well as study them to paleness, and preach them, and all, welcome pain, breast, aching backs, and trembling legs."

If we can by all but approve ourselves Christ's faithful servants and hear that joyful voice from His mouth, "Well done, by good and faithful servant," all will be well. But did you hear what He said? It is indeed not so much the expense of our labors as the loss of them that kills us. It is not with us as with other laborers. They find their work as they leave it. So do not we.

You may be a carpenter building a house, and you have only stood up one wall. When night comes, or quitting time, you lay your tools down and go home, get a good night's rest, return the next morning, and find it exactly as you left it. It is not that way with preachers. Most of you probably could not tell me what your pastor preached last Sunday, or two Sundays ago, because the impressions made by one sermon usually vanish before the next: because of sin, flesh, Satan, the world, and concerns.

I had one brother whom I counseled, he and his wife, over and over. One day he came into my office with the same exact complaint. I listened, looked at him, and said, "May I tell you what I would like to do to you?" He said, "Yes." I said, "I would like to take my hand and catch you by the shirt, hold you up against that wall, and slap you silly." His mouth fell open. He said, "Pastor, would you do that?"

I said, "If I thought it would help, I really would. But let me tell you: I have given you the answers and shown you from Scripture, but I cannot live for you, and I cannot make you do right. If you do not apply the Word of God in your life, your situation, and your home, I cannot do it." He looked at me and said, "I understand." He never had another problem after that, at least not in that same area.

But how many times did I tell him? How many times do we have to hear? It is not just our labor; it is the loss that often kills us. Arthur W. Pink said it like this: "A hundred preachers are unable to make an unregenerate person realize a dreadful nature of sin."

Only the Spirit can show a man that he has been a lifelong rebel against God, change his heart so that he hates himself and longs to please God and serve Christ, and bring him to forsake every idol, cut off a hindering right hand, or pluck out an offending right eye.

It was Jesus Christ who sent the Holy Spirit. The Father is unbegotten, the Son is the only begotten, and the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. It is Jesus Christ alone who guarantees the success of the ministry. In 1 Corinthians 2:1–5, Paul said to the Corinthians: "And I, brethren, when I came unto you, I came not with excellency of speech or wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God."

The mighty Apostle Paul was in weakness, fear, and much trembling. One of my favorite passages is when God told him to go to Corinth: "Be not afraid, I have much people in this city." That means Paul was afraid, for God told him not to be afraid. If you understood the history of Corinth, any godly man ought to have been afraid to go there when it had five seaports.

Paul also said in 2 Corinthians 4:5–7: "For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us."

Have you ever considered how weak, wicked, and helpless are the most brilliant, godly, and wise pastors? We cannot convict or convert one sinner, nor console or comfort one saint, in our own strength and power, for we have none. Our only hope of success in ministering to people lies in the intercession of Jesus Christ.

Christ Prays for Our Perfection

Our Lord said, “I pray not just for these, but for them also who are going to believe on Me through their word.” The ministry will always succeed and never fail. Here is why: God the Father ordained it, God the Son prayed for it, and God the Holy Spirit is covenantally engaged to honor it. As weak, helpless, and sinful as we are in and of ourselves, God the Father is never frustrated. God the Son has never had a prayer that failed, and God the Holy Spirit is able to overpower any enemy. Our Lord not only prays for His people; He also prays for His preachers.

Christ Prays for Our Perfection and Glorification

If you look in John 17, verses 21 through 24, thirdly, He prays for our perfection. “That they all may be one as thou, Father, art in me and I in thee, and they also may be one in us, that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me, I have given them, that they may be one even as we are, I in them and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them as thou hast loved me.”

“Father, I will that they also who thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me, for thou lovest me before the foundation of the world.” Can you fathom being with the Lord Jesus Christ in all of His glory, beholding Him, worshiping Him, and glorifying Him in a body capable of constant, consistent, and continuous praise and worship? The assurance that we will indeed behold Him is based upon His intercession.

Hold John 17, but look in your Bibles to Romans chapter 8. Look at Romans 8, beginning with verse 30. “Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. What shall we say then to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? If God is for us, it really does not matter who is against us. He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also free to give us all things?”

“Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifies. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather than is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.”

In verse 30 we read: “Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called. And whom he called, them he also justified, and whom he justified, them he also glorified.” Notice that called, justified, and glorified are all in the past tense. They are in the aorist tense in the Greek, which means completed action.

How many of you have been glorified? You have been glorified in Christ Jesus, but you have not yet been personally glorified. You have been glorified positionally, but not personally. When God predestinated you, called you, and justified you, your glorification was so absolutely certain and assured that He put it in the past tense. It is based upon the intercession of Jesus Christ.

Paul’s argument is very precious: “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” If God has done the greater in giving His only begotten Son as our sacrifice, shall He not do the lesser in finishing that so great salvation and glorifying us in the Lord Jesus Christ?

His session at God’s right hand denotes His power to save and perfect us, and His intercession assures it. The glorified Redeemer is absolutely conscious of His claims, and He expressly signifies His will that the efficacy of His death should be made good to the uttermost: “Wherefore, he is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.”

In John 17:24, how do I know that His people will be ultimately, completely, totally glorified? “Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory.” Has it ever sunk into your soul that Jesus Christ prays for you? He ever liveth to make intercession for you. Faith finds joy and triumph not just in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, but also in His session at the right hand of God, where He ever liveth to make intercession for us. So here is my question.

Conclusion: Boldness to Pray

Since this entire conference has been about prayer, how can we refuse to be constant and continuous in prayer when we understand, first, that the Holy Spirit is an intercessor in us and that Jesus Christ is a great intercessor for us? When we come to God the Father through Jesus Christ in the Spirit, we are within the veil. We have the absolute right, privilege, and joy to boldly run to God the Father through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit and say, "My Father."

Those of you who are fathers and have small children know that, no matter how busy you are, if your child runs to you and wants to jump in your lap, you will stop what you are doing, pick up your child, and love that child. "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give good things to them that ask him?" If you know how to love your child who comes running to jump in your arms and beg you for help or mercy, how much more does your heavenly Father know that? How can you refuse to pray when you know what Jesus Christ has accomplished?

That is why the Bible says in Hebrews 10:22, "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith." We need to remember, "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." For "if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life."

Everything that Jesus Christ is is ours. We have been made joint heirs with Jesus Christ. What should thrill your heart and, at the same time, produce excruciating humility in you is when Jesus Christ says, "Father, I will that those whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory." Oh, what a joy and privilege—and yet, who are we that we can satisfy the heart of God?

Look at our sins, not just before our conversion, but after our conversion. Look at all that our Lord has forgiven, cleansed, and atoned for. And yet He said, "Father, I will that those that have given me be with me where I am." If we want to be with Jesus Christ, one

of the best ways we can be with Him now is in prayer to Him, recognizing that He is the one who supplicates on our behalf.

If my prayers are answered, it is not because of my righteousness, works, or good deeds. But only because of the person and work of Jesus Christ, who ever liveth to make intercession.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank Thee for His so great work. We thank Thee that He is our surety, our agent, and stands on our behalf; that He pleads His finished atonement and presents our petitions unto Thee.

And Father, we thank Thee for the Holy Spirit, who is our intercessor in us, and for Jesus Christ, who is our intercessor before the throne. Give us grace that we may serve Thee acceptably with reverence and godly fear. In Thy name we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 8

Salvation Illustrated and Explained

October 7, 2020

Regeneration and Conversion

Introduction: The Need to Distinguish Regeneration and Conversion

There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. The same came to Jesus by night and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Nicodemus said unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of the water and of the spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I say to thee, you must

be born again. The wind bloweth whither it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but thou canst not tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth. So is everyone that is born of the Spirit.

Nicodemus answered and said to him, How can these things be? Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel and knowest not these things? Verily I say unto thee, We speak that we do know and testify that we have seen, and you receive not our witness. If I have told you earthly things and you believe not, how shall you believe if I tell you heavenly things?

I wanted to explain the difference, or the relationship, between regeneration and conversion. In the past two weeks, three individuals came to me and told me they were unsure whether they were genuinely saved. I tried to answer their questions and share some things with them from Scripture. But we must have a proper understanding of regeneration and conversion. These are two distinct and different works of God, yet they are intimately related. If we are going to discern whether or not we are genuinely converted, we certainly need to know these differences.

Unhappily, most Christians can neither define nor distinguish between regeneration and conversion. Most Christians believe that these terms are synonymous and may therefore be used interchangeably. They are not synonymous, and they are not interchangeable.

Many years ago, Billy Graham wrote a book entitled How to Be Born Again. Interestingly enough, nowhere in the Bible does it tell us how to be born again. The Bible tells us that we must be born again, but it never tells us how. The reason is that only God can regenerate; only God can give us the new birth.

James 1:18 says, "Of His own will begat He us," with the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits. The Bible says that of His own will He begat us. Albert Barnes, in his commentary, says of that verse, "The idea is that the fact that we are begotten to be his children is to be traced solely to His will." He purposed it, and it was done. "The antecedent in the case on which all depended was the sovereign will of God."

So when God regenerates, He actually begets. His regeneration, His begetting, is based upon His own will and His own purpose. There has never been anyone saved on accident. Whatever God does, He does purposely and deliberately, and when He moves, He always moves according to His purpose.

The interesting thing about the word begat is that the Greek word is apokueo. It literally means to bring forth, to bring forth unto birth, to bring forth from the womb, to give birth, and to cease being pregnant. Thus, the Bible says, "of his own will, begat he us," that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures. The word begat is also in the Aorist tense, which means that it happens once and for all.

When God regenerates, it is not repeated in the individual's life. There is no such thing as being born again and again. When God works, His work is perfect, and He regenerates only one time.

In John 3:8, you have a wonderful illustration of God's sovereignty and of regeneration proper: "The wind bloweth whither it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth. So is every one that is born of the Spirit." You may hear the wind, but you have no idea where it originated or where it is going. The only way that you can really discern the wind is by its effects. The same is true in regeneration. The way that you can discern regeneration is simply by its effects.

Seven Distinctions Between Regeneration and Conversion

Let me give you several distinctions between regeneration and conversion. Number one, regeneration is the immediate act of God in imparting the principle of life. Conversion is the act of man, by the power of the indwelling Spirit, repenting and believing. Number two, regeneration is the single act of God, and it is never repeated. Conversion is the beginning of a holy life. But there are many conversion experiences throughout one's life's journey.

For instance, in Luke chapter 22, verses 31 through 34, our Lord said, "Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have thee, that he may sift thee as wheat." But He said, "I pray for thee, listen carefully, that thy faith fail not. And when thou art converted, strengthen thy

brethren." Peter was already a believer. Our Lord said, "I pray for you that your faith fail not," and yet, "when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." In other words, you are going to deny Me, but when you are turned back, then strengthen your brethren.

There are times in our lives, not just counting our initial conversion to Jesus Christ, when we get off the path and have to turn back into the path. Regeneration is a single act of God, while conversion can occur several times during one's life. Number three, regeneration is not in itself an experience, while conversion is a series of Christian experiences.

In this chapter, our Lord compares the new birth with being born physically. Just as there is no consciousness in the child when the child is conceived—he does not know he is conceived or that there is life there—there is not any consciousness particularly in the individual when God imparts life into his soul.

Later on I am going to explain how the effects of regeneration are made known. Repentance and faith are experiential; they are something that you experience. Regeneration is something that is done in you, but you do not experience it as such.

Regeneration is the cause of an individual turning to the Lord. Conversion is when the individual actually turns to the Lord in repentance and faith through the power of the Holy Spirit. Repentance is God's gift, and faith is likewise God's gift. But God is not going to repent for us, and He is not going to believe for us. The difference, then, is that regeneration is the cause of our conversion, while conversion is the fruit and evidence of being regenerated. Regeneration is the Lord opening the heart; conversion is when the individual turns to Christ in obedience.

For instance, in Acts 16, verses 14 and 15, Paul went down by the river where women gathered together to pray and spoke to them. The Bible says that there was a certain woman there named Lydia, a seller of purple of the city of Thyatira, whose heart the Lord opened, with the result that she listened to the words spoken by Paul. Lydia then repented and was baptized. She said, “If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house.” She constrained them,

and they came in. The Lord opened her heart, with the result that she heard what Paul said, repented and believed, and was baptized.

Regeneration is a once-and-for-all cleansing, while conversion is the continuation of the renewal which began in regeneration. In John chapter 13, our Lord was going to wash the feet of His disciples. When He came to Peter, Peter said, “Lord, thou shalt never wash my feet.” Our Lord answered, “If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.” Peter then said, “Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head.” Our Lord said, “They that be whole need not to be washed, save their feet.” In other words, your feet are where you walk.

In those days, most people wore sandals, and it was their feet that became dirty. Part of the hospitality of that time was to present a bowl when someone entered a house so that he could wash his feet. Thus our Lord said, “They that be whole need not to be cleaned but their feet.”

If you have been saved, you have been saved. But there is the everyday nitty-gritty and dirtiness of life; that is what you have to take care of. Regeneration is once for all, but conversion is a continual cleansing in the Sabbath life. In regeneration, we have God's power, the power of the Holy Spirit. In conversion, the power is not of us, but in us by God's sovereign choice.

If we recognized the difference between regeneration and conversion, it would save an awful lot of sin in the lives of pastors and Christians in general whom God has used to reach others. No one is going to be converted unless he has first been regenerated. Regeneration is by the power of God, of course, and conversion is also by the power of God. But you remember what the Apostle Paul said in First Corinthians, chapter 3: “I have planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.” Then he said, “Who then is Apollos, and who then is Paul?” What are we? We are nothing. The One who is important is God, who gave the increase.

That means anybody I am able to reach for the Lord Jesus Christ is in the hands of God. God receives all the honor and all the glory, and the same is true with you. Regeneration is the implantation of divine life into the soul, and conversion is the evidence and exercise of that life implanted by God.

Three New Testament Illustrations of Salvation

How do we illustrate and explain this? There are only three illustrations of salvation in the New Testament. The first is given in John chapter 3: the illustration of a new birth. The second is creation, found in 2 Corinthians chapter 4 and verse 6, and 2 Corinthians 5 and verse 17. The third is resurrection, found in Ephesians chapter 2 and verse 1. Each illustration demonstrates clearly the absolute necessity of divine intervention. There can be no birth apart from the will and the beginning of the Father. There can be no creation except God speaks the world into existence.

That is what He did according to Psalm 33, verses 6 through 9: He spoke, and it happened; it came to pass. There can be no resurrection apart from a power outside of us. It does not matter whether we are talking about a birth, a creation, or a resurrection. Each illustration demonstrates the necessity of an outside power. No one can beget himself. No one and nothing can create itself or himself. Certainly, no one can resurrect himself from the dead. You never pass a graveyard and see an arm or a foot sticking up, or somebody trying to raise himself. No, it does not work like that. If any of these things happen, there must, of necessity, be an outside power.

In John chapter 3 and verse 3, Nicodemus comes to the Lord and says that He is a great teacher, and that they know God sent Him because no man can do the miracles He does except God be with him. Our Lord cut to the chase: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, you must be born again.” The Greek word for “again” is anothen, which literally means “born from above.” It is true that one must be born again, but being born again is being born from above.

Look at verse 5 to see the distinction between the natural and the spiritual: “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water,” which would be the physical birth, “and of the spirit,” which is the spiritual birth, “he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” Then verse 6 says, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the spirit is spirit.”

There is obviously a comparison here between physical birth and spiritual birth. They are distinct, but there are similarities at the same time.

The Inability of Natural Man

Go back to verse 3: “Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” The word cannot, of course, is a negative. It comes from the Greek word dunamai, which means to be able, to have power, or to do something of one's own ability or resources. Thus, Jesus is saying that no man, in his own power, ability, or resources, can even see the Kingdom of God. This is where we get our English words dynamite, dynamic, and dynamo.

Consider what natural man, or unsaved man, cannot do, even in the book of John. In John 3:3, Jesus says, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” An unsaved man simply cannot see the kingdom of God; he cannot perceive it. In verse 5, Jesus says, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” Unless a man is begotten of God, he cannot see the kingdom, and he cannot enter the kingdom.

John 6:44 says, “No man can come unto Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him, and I will raise him up in the last day.” Man, in his own strength, ability, and nature, cannot see the Kingdom, enter the Kingdom, or come to Jesus Christ.

Now look at John 8:43. Here is another cannot. Our Lord looks at the Pharisees and says, “Why do you not understand My speech? Even because you cannot hear My word.” Wow! Skip down to verse 47.

He that is of God heareth God's words. You therefore hear them not, because you're not of God. A fallen man cannot see, enter, come, hear, or believe. John 12 says, "But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him, that the saying of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who have believed our report and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed. Therefore, they could not believe. Because that Isaiah said

again, he hath blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, that they should not see with their eyes nor understand with their heart and be converted, and I should heal them." According to John, an unsaved man cannot see, enter, come, hear, or believe.

Very clearly, then, we are seeing someone who is absolutely, totally, and completely dependent upon God. Unless God intervenes, man is totally, helplessly, and hopelessly lost. A good illustration is in Mark chapter 10. You remember the rich young ruler who came running to our Lord? He said, "Good master, what must I do that I may inherit eternal life?" Our Lord said, "Why call you me good? There's none good, but one, that is God." In other words, if I am good, I am God; and if I am God, you do not come running into my presence demanding something of me. The young man went away extremely sorrowful because he was very rich. Our Lord said, "How hardly shall they that have riches enter the kingdom of God."

His disciples were astonished, and they asked, "Who then can be saved?" Our Lord responded, "With men, it, salvation, is impossible, but not with God. With God, all things are possible." It is impossible for a man to save himself. That is why Jonah 2:9 says, "Salvation is of the Lord."

There is a correlation in John chapter 3 between physical birth and spiritual birth. Although there are dissimilarities, there are similarities as well. When our Lord said, "Verily, verily, I say to you, you must be born again," Nicodemus asked, "How then can a man be born a second time? Can he enter into his mother's womb and be born again?" Our Lord said, "No, that which is born of the flesh is flesh, that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

Implantation: The Beginning of Life

First of all, there must be implantation for life. Let us consider physical birth. Physical birth begins with conception. What is conception? Conception is nothing more than the implantation of life. Life is implanted into the womb. It is not necessary for the father and mother to know that life has been implanted; it is simply there.

Both may be completely ignorant of the fact that life is there for a while, and yet that life exists without their knowledge or the knowledge of others. The only way a mother discovers that she is pregnant is that there begin to be signs of life within her body. There would never be any signs or evidences of pregnancy if no life were present. Life has to be present for there to be evidences.

Likewise, this is true in the spiritual realm. The Bible says in Ephesians 2 and verse 1, "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and in sins." We have no life in and of ourselves. If all of a sudden there begins to be evidence of life, that life had to come from somewhere.

You remember the passage in Luke chapter 15, when the prodigal son returned. The father slew the fatted calf, and there was rejoicing. The elder brother came back, heard the rejoicing, and became angry because, he said, "You've never killed a fatted calf for me. When your son comes home after being with the harlots and wasting your money, you killed the fatted calf." You know what the father said? "It was meet that we should make merry and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found." Our Lord compares the return of this boy with being alive.

In John chapter 3, when our Lord says in verse 3, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, ye must be born again," that is actually an aorist passive from gennao. The aorist tells you that it happened one time and is over, and the passive tells you that you were not active; you were simply the recipient. It happened to you. If I said, "James hit me," James was doing the action, and I was receiving it. I was passive. When the Bible says that we were born, God birthed us, but we were passive in it, which I will explain momentarily.

The same thing is true in 1 John 5:1: "Whosoever believeth in Jesus Christ is born of God," or has been begotten of God. The result of having been begotten of God is that you are now believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. We believe because we have been regenerated. Thus, in John 3, our Lord compares the new birth with physical birth.

How many of you decided to be born physically? What part did you play in your physical birth? The answer is absolutely none. Your

physical birth was the result of your parents' actions and was based upon their wills. You did not make a decision, take the first step, or coerce your parents into having you. You could not have, because you did not even exist. It was totally and completely their purpose that brought you into the world.

The same is true spiritually. We looked at James 1:18: "Of His own will beget He us." Regeneration is the act of God alone. He is sovereign; He alone has the ability to give life. Remember John 1:12–13: "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. But to as many as received Him, to them He gave power to become the sons of God, even to those that believed on His name, who were born, not of the will of man, nor of the flesh, but of God." When you take the negatives out, they were born of God. God began the work. That is why Romans 9:16 says, "It is neither of him that runneth, nor of him that willeth, but of God that sheweth mercy." Philippians 2:13 says that it is God who works in you both to will and to do His good pleasure.

Regeneration is the act of God in which He implants divine life in the soul. It is His secret and inscrutable work, never directly perceived by man, but perceived only by its effects. It is the same with conception: conception is not perceived by the person who is conceived. Conversion is the evidence and manifestation of regeneration, but in regeneration God works alone.

There is no cooperation of the sinner. How can a child cooperate with his parents in conception? He cannot. How can the thing that is created cooperate with the Creator? It cannot. How can the dead man cooperate with his resurrection? He cannot, because he is absolutely, totally dead.

Just as it is impossible to know when conception takes place physically, it is likewise impossible to know when regeneration takes place. Both conception and regeneration are known only by their effects. In order for a sinner to be saved, there must first be implantation. In order for a child to be born, there must first be implantation. Regeneration is the implantation of life in the soul of man by a sovereign act of God.

Maturation: The Process of Conviction

Secondly, there must be maturation. The life must mature; there is never going to be any manifestation without maturation. Once physical conception is accomplished, shortly thereafter evidences of life begin. A husband and wife may conceive, and the woman may not know it, nor may the husband know it, at least for a while. Shortly thereafter, there may be signs demonstrating that life is there. A woman may think she has a virus, that her hormones are out of order, or that she needs to go on a diet because she is suddenly gaining weight.

We had a dear friend, now dead, who went to the doctor because she was feeling sick. She said she was sick every morning and sick to her stomach. He examined her and said, "You're not sick. You're pregnant." She was about forty-five. She said, "What? My baby is twenty-one." He said, "I don't care. You're pregnant."

The life may be there without your knowing it, but shortly there will be physical maturation. The mother will know she is with child, the husband will know, and after a few months everybody will know. The same is true in the spiritual realm. Once life is implanted in the soul, conviction begins. Conviction is the work of the Holy Spirit, whereby He moves us and shows us our sins, moves us to be grieved and broken over them, shows us their just penalty, shows us their wickedness and violence, and shows us our depravity.

He brings us to the end of ourselves. And then He opens our eyes and shows us that Jesus Christ is the answer, and Jesus Christ alone is the answer. Let me give you a good, clear illustration of this. I want you to turn, holding John 3, to the book of Jeremiah, chapter 31, and look at verses 18 and 19.

Here is a wonderful picture, not only of regeneration and conversion, but actually a conviction after regeneration. Jeremiah 31, verse 18: "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus. Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised as a bullock, unaccustomed to yoke." There is confessing of sin.

Now look what he says: "Turn thou me, and I shall be turned. For thou art the Lord my God." Now watch carefully: "Surely after that I was turned, I repented. And after that I was instructed, I smote upon

my thigh, I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth." So after God turned him, he was turned, and after he was turned, he repented.

In other words, here is a picture of conviction after regeneration: "I smote upon my thigh, I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth." Here is maturation in conviction. How long does conviction take? The answer is, that is entirely up to the Father.

How long does it take to have a baby? You can usually answer nine months, but many women have babies in less than nine months, while for some it takes well over nine months. When Alice was pregnant, I thought she had been pregnant for twenty years. The baby is going to be born when the baby is going to be born. The doctors can say, "Your due date is October the 5th," but that does not mean a thing. It can be October the 3rd, October the 12th, or October the 18th. That is totally up into God's hands.

The same is true spiritually. It depends upon how God works with an individual as to whether he is convicted and that conviction is over shortly, or whether there is a long time of conviction. Just as God knows how to deliver a physical baby, so God knows how to deliver a spiritual baby. He knows exactly when that maturity is at its apex, at its zenith.

Manifestation: Conversion as the Evidence of Regeneration

So there must be implantation, and there must be maturation. Thirdly, there must be a manifestation. The ultimate proof that life has been given is that a real, live baby comes into being. Months and months of waiting are finally over, and a baby is born. Something would be terribly wrong if an expectant mother was always expected and never delivered a baby. Likewise, something would be terribly wrong if a convicted sinner was always convicted, but never savingly came to Jesus Christ in repentance and faith. Just as a real, living baby proves that a woman was pregnant, a real, genuine conversion is proof positive that a sinner has been regenerated.

What does the Bible say? James 1:18 says, “Of his own will begat he us.” The word “begat” literally means to cease being pregnant. In other words, once God spiritually matures us, that sinner will come forth, just as a child comes forth at the end of nine months. Those whom God regenerates, He converts. It is impossible to be regenerated without being converted.

As a baby is brought forth in manifestation after implantation and maturation, so it is in the spiritual realm. Conversion is the act of God whereby He causes the regenerated person, in his conscious life, to turn to Him in repentance and faith. Conversion follows regeneration just as a baby follows nine months of pregnancy. Regeneration and conversion are not necessarily simultaneous. You may be regenerated on a particular date but not converted until months later. A woman may conceive on a particular date, but she does not have the baby immediately after conception. It may be seven months, eight months, nine months, or nine and a half months.

I am simply pointing out that regeneration and conversion are not necessarily simultaneous, just as conception and birth are not simultaneous. The period of conviction is totally up to the Father. The period between conception and birth varies, and the period between regeneration and conversion varies as well.

It does not matter how long someone was pregnant. The issue is whether a real, living child was born. Likewise, it does not matter how long someone has been convicted. The issue is whether someone was genuinely converted. Neither does it matter how long someone was in labor or how long someone was under conviction. Suppose a woman who had only two children told my wife, “I have two children. I was in labor for eight hours with each one. Have you ever been in labor for eight hours?” My wife would answer, “No.” The woman might say heartily, “Then you have never had a baby.” But the truth is that my wife would have had two times as many children as she had. The issue is not how long you were in labor or pregnant, but whether a real child was born. The issue is not how long you have been convicted; the issue is whether a real sinner was converted to Jesus Christ. Those whom the Father regenerates, the Holy Spirit always convicts.

Let me give you a good, clear illustration. In John chapter 11, Lazarus dies. When our Lord hears that he is sick, He abides four days, still in the same spot. Finally, He tells His disciples, "Let us go again into Judea, that I may awaken Lazarus. Lazarus sleepeth." They said, "Lord, if he sleeps, he is doing well." Our Lord said, "No, you do not understand. He is dead. I go to awaken him." Of course, Mary and Martha come, and our Lord weeps.

They take Him to the tomb. He says, "Roll ye away the stone." Martha said, "Lord, by this time he stinketh, for he hath been dead four days." Our Lord said, "Did I not tell you that, if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" They roll the stone away, and in a loud voice Jesus Christ says, "Lazarus, come forth."

Now, here is the question: Did God give Lazarus life in that tomb, enabling him to walk out of that tomb? Or did God give Lazarus life only after he got up and walked out? I think you know the answer. If God had not given him life in that tomb, he would never have gotten up and walked out. When God gave Lazarus life in that tomb, that is a picture of regeneration. When Lazarus got up and walked out, that is the picture of conversion.

He came forth wrapped in grave clothes, and our Lord said, "Loose him, and let him go." Once you have been converted, the old dead grave clothes are cast off; your old habits are broken, your old ways of thinking and doing are broken, and you put on a new life in Jesus Christ. The raising of Lazarus from the dead is an excellent picture of what we call regeneration and conversion.

There is always a manifestation. Just as a woman will never be pregnant forever, a sinner will not be convicted forever. If he is truly and genuinely convicted, sooner or later there will be a conversion. He will repent of his sins and exercise faith in Jesus Christ. There must be implantation, maturation, manifestation, and, lastly, assimilation.

Assimilation: The Evidence of New Life

In order to live and exercise life, one must be able to assimilate oxygen and food. In some cases, women have gone through implantation, maturation, and manifestation and produced a

stillborn child. While it is true that God never produces any stillborn children, there are still plenty of stillborn children in our churches today. These are people to whom pastors and Christian workers have converted, given assurance, and granted a place in heaven all by their own efforts. The people have never been regenerated by the grace and power of God.

I've told you, I'm sure, about Billy Sunday, the Presbyterian evangelist. He was walking down the street when an old drunk came staggering up to him. “Why, Mr. Sunday, don't you recognize me?” Billy said, “No, I'm sorry, I do not.” The man insisted, “Mr. Sunday, surely you must recognize me.” “Why?” “I'm one of your converts.” Billy Sunday said, “Bless God, you must be. You're surely not one of God's.”

That is the way it is. We have a lot of converts ourselves whom God never regenerated.

Would you not think something was wrong—dreadfully wrong—if a newborn child never cried, was never hungry, was never thirsty, and never grew or developed? You would put two and two together and say, “If that child never cries, never hungers, never thirsts, and never grows, he's dead.” And that is true. Isn't it strange that we can put two plus two together and get four in the natural realm, but cannot do so in the spiritual realm? Here we have multitudes of people who never cry and never hunger. What is the first thing a baby does when he is born? He cries. What is the first thing a baby wants and desires when he is born? Milk.

So let me show you. Look in your Bibles to Galatians chapter 4, and then we will go to 1 Peter chapter 2. Galatians 4, verse 4, says: “But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.” Now watch verse 6: “And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.” Because you are sons, you are already regenerated; you are already adopted. God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, “Abba, Father.”

Just like it is normal and natural for a real, live, first-born baby to cry, it is normal and natural for a real-born child of God who has been converted by the grace of God to call God Father and to pray. He said, “He sent the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.” Abba is a Hebrew word which simply means Papa, a term of endearment and love. So we cry, “Papa, Father.”

In other words, we understand that a relationship exists. It is an intimate relationship because of God’s grace. The first thing we do once we are converted is learn to call God our Father and learn to pray to Him.

Note, if you would, in First Peter, chapter two and verse one, what the Bible says: “Wherefore, laying aside all malice and all guile and hypocrisies and envies and evil speakings, as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby.”

There is something wrong with a professing Christian who never prays, who never calls God his Father, or who never, ever hungers for the Word of God. If we have been truly regenerated and converted by God, we will hunger after His Word. It is our milk, our meat, and our nourishment. As physical babies cannot grow without milk, spiritual babies cannot grow without the milk of the Word of God.

It is absolutely necessary and essential. Second Peter 3:18 says, “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, which is translated many times as “even.” Thus, one could read it, “But grow in grace, even in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” In other words, if you are not growing in knowledge, you are not growing in grace. The only way you will grow in knowledge is to have the milk of the Word and the meat of the Word.

One evidence that a child is genuinely born alive is that he cries. The next evidence is that he desires milk. The same is true of a spiritual child: we cry, and we desire the milk of the words. Stillborns do not cry, neither do they eat; those who are born alive do both. Look around at church members who have no desire to pray,

no desire to study, and no desire to learn. They are never hungry for the Word of God. Something is seriously wrong.

Regeneration is the implantation of life. Conversion is the evidence and fruit of that life. We can know regeneration by its effects. A child should be like his father and want to be like his father. Matthew 5:45 says, "Therefore be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." It is true that we are not perfect in this life, and never will be. That does not negate the fact that we desire to be perfect. I do not want to sin against God. I know I do sin, but I do not want to. We will be perfect in heaven, but not until we get into glory. Meanwhile, we should constantly and continually bring our lives into conformity to the Word of God by crying to our Heavenly Father in prayer and being nourished on the milk and meat of His Word.

Just as in physical birth there must be implantation, maturation, manifestation, and assimilation, the same is true spiritually. God must regenerate us. He must mature us through conviction. Then He manifests His regenerating grace in conversion, and we live on the milk and meat of His Word as we cry to Him.

How do I know whether or not I am genuinely saved? John answers in 1 John 2:3: "And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments." Verse 4 says, "He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." The man who has been genuinely converted is constantly and continually endeavoring to bring his life into conformity to the Word of God in obedience, so that he might honor his heavenly Father.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to You this day. We thank You for Your Word.

We thank You for Your truth and that salvation is by grace through faith alone. Help us understand, comprehend, and see the absolute necessity of prayer, thanksgiving, reading, studying, and nourishing our lives on Your Word. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 9

No, You Are Normal

October 25, 2020

Introduction: The Normal Christian Struggle

In Galatians 5:17, the Bible says, “For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh. And these are contrary the one to the other so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.”

When you hear the word normal, most people would think, Who wants to be normal? I want to be different. I want to be the exception. It was Vance Havner years ago who said that Christians have lived subnormal for so long that when one gets normal, everyone else thinks he is abnormal. That is just about the truth.

In one sense of the word, we are all normal: we are sinners and sinful. As Christians, we do indeed struggle against the flesh. We have wicked thoughts, evil desires, lust of the flesh, pride, unbiblical yearnings, and a propensity to sin. We struggle with anger, bitterness, resentment, and unbelief.

The Flesh Has Not Been Redeemed

So we need to learn a very important lesson: the flesh has not been redeemed. The Lord said through the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:51, "Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God, neither doth corruption inherit incorruption." When our Lord revealed Himself to His disciples, they thought He was a spirit. Then, in Luke 24:39, our Lord said, "Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see Me have."

His new body was not flesh and blood, but flesh and bone. In the truest sense of the word, our flesh must perish. We will leave this mortal body behind because it will not enter into the Kingdom of God. We must have a new glorified body there.

Until then, we have to learn this biblical truth: there are no perfect Christians, no perfect pastors, no perfect husbands—do not tell her—no perfect wives, and no perfect friends. In fact, there is no one perfect on earth at this particular time. Even our most fervent faith is mixed with unbelief, and our most selfless sacrifices are mixed with selfishness.

No Perfect Christians

Our most ardent prayers and supplications are marred by our sins and our infirmities. Our most spiritual moments are contaminated by our carnality. Our meekest submission and dependence upon God are corrupted by our self-will and pride. Our clearest views of Christ are darkened by error, misconception, and preconceived ideas. When we are at our best, the worst is still in us. When we contemplate eternity, we still have the world in our hearts because we are mortal. Oftentimes, when we are longing to be holy, wicked thoughts, desires, and pride flood our minds.

I'm sure that you have prayed often and discovered something as you pray. Many times, your mind wanders. You can't concentrate. You can't focus. Sometimes, when you're really praying, all of a sudden a wicked, vain, vile thought will enter your mind. You think, "Where in the world did that come from?" Here I am trying to pray and honor God, and all of a sudden here's this dishonoring,

deceitful, and wicked thought entering my mind even while I am praying. The truth of the matter is, we oftentimes think, "Something is wrong with me."

This doesn't happen to anybody else, we think. Nobody else goes through what I'm going through. No one is struggling with what I'm going through and what I'm struggling with. No, no, no. But the truth of the matter is, everybody has basically the same problem with the flesh, because the flesh is indeed contrary to God.

Denying Sin Makes Us Liars

It is true that we should never be complacent or satisfied with our faults, our failings, and our sins. But we have not yet been glorified, so therefore we are not yet perfect. How in the world do we deal with these sins? There are some people who try simply to deny the reality of sin, and others try to deny the actuality of sin. Let me show you what I'm talking about.

John is writing in 1 John 1, beginning with verse 8: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar and his word is not in us."

Anyone who denies the reality and actuality of sin, God calls a liar. If we say that we have no sin, that is a denial of the principle of sin, original sin, total depravity, and our corrupt and vicious defilement. If we say that we have no sin nature, that the principle of sin is not in us, God says that we are not only deceiving ourselves, but that the truth is not in us. In other words, we are liars.

Then, when we say that we have not sinned, that refers to actual sin. We make God a liar, because God tells us that we are indeed sinners, and his word is not in us. So it is not merely that we are lying; we call God a liar because we deny what he tells us about ourselves. When anyone denies the sin nature, original sin, or total depravity, the next step is to deny actual sin. When we say that we are not sinners or that we have not sinned, we call God a liar and lie at the same time, because we violate the law of God.

Galatians 5:17 reveals a very important truth, repeated a number of times in Scripture: “For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh.” These are contrary to one another, so that you cannot do the things that you would.

The War Between Flesh and Spirit

Let me be very blunt. What we are being taught is very plain: our flesh hates God. Our flesh hates truth, righteousness, and holiness. Our flesh loves itself, its satisfaction, its fulfillments, its desires, and its enjoyment. It cares absolutely nothing for the things of God—for holiness, righteousness, or obedience.

The Bible says in verse 17, “For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit.” The interesting thing is the word “lusteth” here, epithumeo in the Greek. It literally means to lust upon, to set one’s sights upon, to seek those things which are forbidden by God and forbidden by the Holy Spirit in this context. “For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit.” In other words, the flesh is seeking to dominate the Holy Spirit, to control Him, in order that the flesh may fulfill itself.

Look carefully at verse 17: “For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh,” and then he makes this statement: “and these are contrary the one to the other.” The word “contrary” is the Greek word antikeimai, and it literally means to be an adversary, to be contrary to, to oppose, to fight against, to withstand. These are adversaries, fighting one against the other, trying to withstand and oppose the other. In other words, your flesh and the Holy Spirit are enemies. There is a war being waged in our bodies and in our minds—a war between the flesh and the Spirit. The war is real.

What truly irritates a true believer and causes acute consternation is that he knows his flesh is still active and demanding, even though the old man has been crucified. Here is a principle: Abraham took his son Isaac and was going to offer him upon the altar. Isaac lay upon that altar quietly, silently, obediently. Our flesh will not do that. Our flesh will not be sacrificed so easily. It will cry and scream and yell and demand satisfaction and demand to be fulfilled.

Look at verse 17 again: “For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary”—their enemies,

their adversaries—"the one to the other." Here it is: "so that you cannot do the things that you would." Doing the things that you would—doing the things that you will, I'll explain in just a moment—doing the things that are natural and fleshly and carnal are nothing but sin.

The Law of Sin and Death vs. the Spirit

The Greek word for "would" is the word thelo, which means to will, to have in mind, to intend, to love, to delight in, to have pleasure in, and a purpose. So watch it in verse 17: "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh. And these are adversaries, the one to the other, so that ye cannot do the things that ye wish to do to fulfill the lust of your flesh." In other words, that you intend to do.

Anything that is fleshly, carnal, and natural is simple. Now look in verse 18: "If ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law." The question we must ask at this point is: Which law? Whose law? What law?

Someone has tried to say that this law refers to the law of God. If it does refer to the law of God, it would have to refer to the aspect of death and condemnation because of being contrary to God. But remember this: The Holy Spirit of God never nullifies or negates the law of God. He leads us into obedience to that law. He does not seek to overthrow it or abrogate it.

The Greek word for law is nomos. If you look up nomos, you will find that it refers to God's law, man's law, or any rule or principle. In this context, when he says, "If ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law," I think the word law refers to the law of sin and death. Is there such a law? Obviously there is, because the Apostle Paul talked about it so often.

Paul said in Romans 7:21, "I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me." Here is a law that deals with evil. In verse 23 he says, "But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members." There is the law of sin of which he has spoken. Then, in verse 25, he says, "I thank God through Jesus

Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin."

Romans 8:1-2 says, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." There is a law of sin, and there is a law of sin and death.

Now return to Galatians 5. Verse 17 says, "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, the Spirit against the flesh. And these are contrary, the one to the other, so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law."

What does the law of sin and death produce? What does the flesh desire and delight in? What does it mean to walk in the flesh, and what does it mean to walk in the Spirit?

Remember, according to verse 17, the flesh and the Spirit are contrary to one another. They are adversaries; they fight against each other. God is showing us the strengths of the flesh and the strengths of the Spirit. If you are going to fulfill the flesh, certain things will be apparent. If you are going to walk in the Spirit, certain things will be apparent.

In the context, he said in verse 17, "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, the Spirit against the flesh. These are contrary, the one to the other, so that you cannot do the things that you would. But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law." That is the law of sin and death. What does the law of the flesh produce? Verse 19: "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." That's the flesh.

Now watch the Spirit: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. Against such there is no law. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts."

Anytime that you pamper and fulfill the desires of your flesh, it's going to manifest itself in verses 19 through 21. Any time that you're walking in the Spirit, or being led of the Spirit, it's going to manifest itself in verses 22 through 23. So if you're a child of God, you want to be led of the Spirit and you want to deny your flesh.

Crucifixion and Mortification of the Flesh

The flesh must be killed, it must be crucified, and it must continue to be crucified. Look in Romans 6 and verse 6: "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." Our old man was crucified with him. What we were in Adam is crucified in Jesus Christ. The reason was "that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin."

John Trapp said, “To crucify is not absolutely to outright kill. Crucifixion is a lingering death, no member being free from pain. If then we so repent of sin as that which crucified Christ, we so pierce the old man that we are sure he will die of it, though he be not presently dead. This is mortification.” Thus, just because we have been crucified does not mean that everything in us—the body of sin—has been killed. It is dead, but it is a lingering death.

Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown made this statement: “Man, by faith, is dead to the former standing point of a sinful life and rises to a new life of communion with Christ. The act by which they have crucified the flesh with its lust is already accomplished, ideally in principle, but in practice or outward confirmation of the life must harmonize with the tendency given to the inward life.” We are to be executioners dealing cruelly with the body of sin, which has caused the acting of all cruelties on Christ’s body.

The Bible talks about mortification. We are to mortify the deeds of the body and our members which are upon earth. How do we mortify, and what does that mean? The word mortify actually means to make dead. People say, “I was mortified,” when something embarrassing happens. You were really embarrassed, but you were not mortified, because if you were mortified, you would be dead. “It almost killed me” is what they are saying, really.

We get our English word mortician. There is another word most of us know: mortgage. Do you know what mortgage means? It means dead pledge. That is what it means. Mortgage, mortician, and mortified all have to do with death.

It is true that our old man has been crucified, yet the principle of sin has some lingering elements in our lives which must be destroyed. Romans 8:13 says, “For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.” The word “mortify” in this verse is from the Greek word thanatoo. Thanatoo is the Greek word.

The noun for death is thanatos. Thanatoo means to kill, to make dead, to put to death, to destroy, to render extinct. So he says in verse 13, "If ye through—if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do kill, make extinct, destroy the deeds of the body, ye shall live." Moreover, it is a present active indicative, which means it is a truth. It is something that should be done now and continue to be done, and you are actively engaged in it. "As many then as through the Spirit do mortify"—to make dead—"the deeds of the body, they shall live."

In Colossians 3:5, he says, "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: for which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience."

The Greek word here is nekroo. The noun is nekros, which means dead. Nekroo literally means to make dead, to put to death, to slay, to deprive of power or strength. If I went to Gary and said, "Look, here's an old cut right here. I need you to clean it up and doctor it for me," he would look at it and say, "Well, the first thing I need to do is cut away all the necrotic tissue." All that means is the dead tissue upfront. The word nekros literally means to make dead. We have the English word necrophilia, someone who's in love with dead people. So that's basically what it is. Here is the word nekroo, and he says that we are to make dead our members which are upon the earth.

The members here are the deeds of the body back in Romans 8:13. The deeds of the body and the members here would be identical;

they would be one and the same. So the question must be asked: How do I mortify? How do I make dead the deeds of the body? How do I mortify my members which are upon the earth?

We Do Not Have to Sin

Before I answer that, I want to show you another passage, and then, Lord willing, connect these two principles with mortification. Turn in your Bibles to 1 John, chapter 2, and look at verse 1. John writes to believers, saying, "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." The purpose of his writing is that they sin not. He is writing to say that they do not need to sin. That is what he said: "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not." He is writing this to keep them from sinning. Here is a principle: We are not required to sin. We are not compelled to sin. We do not need to sin, and we do not have to sin.

It is true that we are sinners. But just because you are a sinner does not mean that you sin all of the time. Unless your minds are engaged in something wicked right now, for the last few minutes you have not been sinning.

Everyone in this room has known a drunkard. Let me ask you a question about a drunkard. Is a drunkard a drunkard twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week? No. He cannot be. If a man stayed drunk all the time, day after day, he would soon be dead. I have a friend who used to be a drunkard. He would only pitch a drunk about once a month, but every month he was going to pitch a drunk until God saved him. Just because a man is a drunkard does not mean that he is always drunk.

How about a thief? A thief does not steal incessantly. A man could walk into a store with the intent of stealing, see forty policemen standing around, and think, "Hmm, it might not be wise for me to steal in this store." Just because he did not steal does not mean that he is not a thief. Just because a man is a thief does not mean that he is always stealing. He is still a thief, but he is not stealing.

Just because we are sinners does not mean that we have to sin, must sin, or are always sinning.

He said that you might not sin. You need to set this in your mind: I do not have to sin. Here is the second principle. He said in verse 1, "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."

We have our attorney, our lawyer, the one who pleads our case and our cause. He says, “I’m writing this, number one, that you do not sin. But number two, since you are sinners and you will probably slip up and sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” John is writing to them, first, that none would presume to sin; second, that if they did sin, they need not despair, because they have the Advocate, Jesus Christ the Righteous.

Dead to Sin, Alive to God (Romans 6)

Now, what do these truths have to do with mortification? Turn back in your Bibles to Romans chapter 6. I want to read this entire chapter and then point out several truths that apply to what I am talking about today. Watch this and try to follow the reasoning of the apostle. Romans 6, verse 1: "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid." That is, perish the thought; do not even let that enter your mind. "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."

SCRIPTURE READING - Romans 6:10-23 (KJV)

> 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. For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid. 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? But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.
>
> Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness. I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness. For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness. What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death. But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Romans chapter 6, I believe, is one of the most important chapters in the book of Romans. Yes, I love Romans chapter 8. I love Romans chapter 5. I love Romans 9, 10, 11, and 12. I love them all. But if you understand what the Apostle Paul is stating in Romans chapter 6, it should change your life. Why? Because in this passage, the Apostle Paul is showing us that we are no longer under the lordship of sin. Sin no longer has dominion over us. Sin no longer has control over us. We are now under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Before we were converted, before we were saved, when sin hollered, we jumped. When sin demanded that we do something, we did it. Because we obeyed it, it ruled our life. It ruined our life. But

now, since our conversion, we have a new master, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 6:6 says, "Knowing this, that our old man"—what we were in Adam—"is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed"—that is, whatever remains—"that henceforth we should not serve sin." Sin is not our master; we do not owe it anything. Verse 7 says, "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." So if we are dead to sin, we are alive to Jesus Christ. We died in Jesus Christ. We were resurrected in Jesus Christ. We are no longer obligated to serve sin because we are dead to sin. Our life now is found in Jesus Christ. We have a new Lord. We have a new master.

How do we apply this truth? Romans 6:11–12 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." He says, "Likewise reckon yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin." He also says, "Likewise reckon yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin and alive unto God through the Lord Jesus Christ."

How do you reckon yourself dead? The Greek word for "reckon" here is logizomai. It literally means to think, to impute, to reckon, to count, to deem, to judge, to purpose, and determine. When he says, "Reckon yourselves also to be dead indeed unto sin," you are counting yourself dead. You are judging yourself dead. You are deeming yourself dead. When you reckon yourself alive unto God through the Lord Jesus Christ, you are judging yourself alive. You are simply saying, "Yes, I'm deeming myself alive. I'm counting myself alive."

I am imputing myself alive. So, here is the important thing about the Greek word logizomai. Logizomai is a word that deals with reality. It does not deal with suppositions. It is not a play word or a pretend word. When we were kids, we would say, "Let's pretend we're cowboys and Indians. Let's pretend we're Confederates and Yankees," but nobody ever wanted to be the Yankees. We were just pretending.

Practical Obedience: Yielding to Christ

But when you get to the word logizomai, it is not a word that pretends or plays. It is a word that deals with reality. Here is a good illustration. If I reckon, using the word logizomai, that I have 5,000 Federal Reserve notes in my bank account, I have 5,000 Federal Reserve notes in my bank account. It is not a pretend thing, a wishful thing, or a hopeful thing. It is a thing of reality and truth. So when he says, “Reckon yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin and alive unto God,” it is something real. It is a principle of truth. You count yourself, impute yourself, judge yourself, deem yourself, and determine yourself dead unto sin and alive unto God through Jesus Christ.

Now, look at verse 12. He says, “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.” What he has just gotten through saying is this: We do not owe sin anything because we have a new Lord, a new Master, the Lord Jesus Christ. The only thing sin ever did for us was condemn us and make us dead to God. We owe nothing to sin; we owe everything now to the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, he says, “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.”

Notice carefully that he did not say, “Let not sin therefore be in your mortal bodies.” It is in our bodies because we have flesh. But he said, “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body.” It is not to hold mastery, dominate, or rule over us. In other words, sin is not our master. We do not owe it anything. We do not have to obey sin or jump when sin tempts us. We do not need sin. Sin has been killed as far as its lordship.

Look in verse 18: "Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness." Really? Are you totally free from sin? How about verse 22: "But now being made free from sin." Has sin totally been eradicated from your life? No. Then what is he talking about? "Being then made free from sin" means being made free from the dominion of sin, from the mastery of sin. That is what he is talking about, because he has just gotten through saying, "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body."

How does this apply? Look in verse 16: "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?" To show you how practical this is, here is a good illustration. Suppose I went to Francis and said, "Francis, I'm going to be your servant. I'm going to be your slave. You just tell me what to do, and I'll do it."

Everything Francis told me to do, I did. He would tell me when to go to bed, when to get up, when to dress, when not to dress, when to go to work, when not to work, and what to do. Would I be his servant? Of course I would, because I was rendering to him a practical obedience.

Now watch what he said: "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." In other words, if you jump at sin's command, you are sin's servant. If you jump at our Lord's command, you are his servant. What Paul is telling us is that we are either going to obey the flesh, or we are going to obey Jesus Christ. You cannot obey both at the same time. It is impossible.

Here it is very practically explained. In verse 19, he says, "I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh." Yes, we have infirmities. "For as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness."

He is breaking this down so that we can understand it. Think about when you were unsaved, before your conversion. When you sinned, you did so willingly, gladly, eagerly, and delightfully. You wanted to do it. Your heart was engaged in it, and you gave yourself to it.

He said, “You’re no longer the servant of sin. You’re now the servant of Jesus Christ.” So render to Jesus Christ the same that you rendered unto sin. Serve Jesus Christ willingly, eagerly, readily, and delightfully. In other words, to whom you yield yourselves servants, His servant you are, whether it is sin unto death or whether it is righteousness unto life.

In Galatians 5:16, he says, “This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.” Verse 25 says, “If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.” Going back to verse 16, he says, “Walk in the Spirit and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.”

Walking in the Spirit

I did not write down the Greek word. I think it is peripateo, but it literally means to regulate or to conduct one’s life. Thus, “This I say, regulate or conduct your life in the Spirit and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.” It is the Holy Spirit’s power and enabling that allows us to regulate and conduct our lives so as to walk in the Spirit. In verse 25, however, the word “walk” is stoicheo.

What is different about that? It means to walk orderly: to march as a soldier, to direct one’s life with order and discipline. “If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.” Let us live not just a regulated life, but a disciplined life—the life of a soldier strictly walking in the Holy Spirit.

The same truth is given to us in Romans 8:14: “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” Walking in the Spirit and being led of the Spirit happen to be one and the same thing, because the Holy Spirit leads us to walk in obedience to God, to the Lord Jesus Christ, and to the written Word of God. He leads us to walk holily and righteously before God. That is why Colossians 1:10 says that we are to walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing. In other words, it is the Holy Spirit who enables us, who leads us, to walk pleasing unto Him.

I've had so many Christians tell me, “I'm not normal.” I say, “You're not normal?” They reply, “What are you talking about? I have these bad thoughts. I have these evil desires. I have these wicked propensities. I think of things I should never think of. I can't pray as I ought to pray. I can't study the way I ought to study. I can't live the way I want to live.”

Let me tell you something: You're normal. Because every Christian has to fight. Would it surprise you if I told you that the Apostle Paul went through the same exact thing that we go through? The Apostle Paul had to fight as well. In Romans 7:14 he says, “For

we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I."

Paul's Struggle and Our Hope

"I don't want to do these things, but I end up doing them. I must be stupid. I must not be normal." That's what he's saying. "If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good."

SCRIPTURE READING - Romans 7:14-25 (KJV)

> That is when I deny my flesh. "Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me." That's that principle of sin. "I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me." The law of sin and death.
>
> "For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members." And then he says this, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" And then he says, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin." Now, note if you would, he said, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

In ancient times, if a man murdered another man and they caught the murderer right away, they would take the murdered man and tie him face to face with the living murderer, chest to chest, arm to arm, leg to leg, and stomach to stomach, until the worms in the dead man ate the living man alive. It was a body of death that he was carrying around.

That is the picture Paul is talking about with the remaining sin in his flesh. He said, "O wretched man that I am! who will deliver me

from this body of death?" And then he says, "I thank God, it is through Jesus Christ." The answer is Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone. The Apostle Paul had a struggle just as we have a struggle.

What we must learn to do is what Paul said. We must reckon ourselves dead indeed unto sin and alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. We must learn that sin is not to dominate us, master us, or control us. We are no longer under the dominion of sin; we are under the dominion of the Lord Jesus Christ. We must learn to bring our lives into conformity to His Word.

With all the evil and lust and fighting our fleshly body has produced and put us through while we are on this earth, it should be a relief and a joy to drop it off and leave it to rot in the grave. If we viewed death as did the Apostle Paul, we would understand this, because Paul thought to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. In other words, when we die, this body of sin drops off. That is it. We will no longer have to fight. We will be free from the body of this death.

Practically and theologically, we must learn to count ourselves dead indeed unto sin. When sin tempts us, when our flesh entices us, and when our desires arise contrary to God, we need to respond, "I'm sorry. I'm dead." What can sin do with a dead man? Here is a man who died a drunkard. He has been dead for thirty minutes or thirty years. It does not matter.

Go to his grave, hold a fifth of liquor over the grave, and say, "Come on out and I'll let you have it." It doesn't bother him. He's dead. Sin cannot tempt the dead man. That's what he's talking about in Romans chapter 6: He that is dead is free from sin. We died in Christ. If we count ourselves dead, sin cannot do one thing with us. We have to learn that we are dead men when it comes to sin.

We also have to learn that we are alive unto God through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who gives us the power, grace, and mercy to say, "I'm dead to sin." Now, we are alive unto God, and we are to respond only to Him because He is our Master and our Lord. We have to learn to walk in the Spirit; and as we walk in the Spirit, we are being led by the Holy Spirit of God.

Two of the greatest truths that I have ever learned in my entire ministry are, number one, the sovereignty of God. When I found out that God was really and truly God, it changed my life and my ministry. Most people serve a God of their imagination and not the God of the Bible. The God of the Bible is absolutely, totally, completely sovereign. "Our Lord is in the heavens; he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased" (Psalm 115:3).

The second truth that really changed my life was when I found out that I had been set free from the dominion of sin. That doesn't mean that I do not sin, or that I am not a sinner. It means that sin has no right to tyrannize me, dominate me, or be my master. As long as I recognize that truth, I do not have to serve sin; I have to serve the Lord Jesus Christ.

When a wicked thought comes into my mind, I can repel it and say, "But God says..." Then I come back with a Scriptural truth, a Biblical truth, a truth from God. I am to be dead to that sin and alive unto the Lord Jesus Christ. I do not need to obey sin; I need to obey the Lord Jesus Christ.

Someone says, "But you don't understand. I still have evil thoughts. I still have evil desires. I still have wrong motives." I know. You're normal, because the flesh is fighting against the Spirit, and the Spirit is fighting against the flesh; and they are contrary, the one to the other. You will have to fight until the day that you die. What did the Apostle Paul say? "I die daily."

For some of us, it might be hourly; for some, minute by minute. But he said, “I die daily.” I have to fight. I have to fight. I have to fight. The struggle will never be over until we die. Until then, we have to keep saying, “Sin is not my master. My flesh is not my master. Jesus Christ is my master. I must obey Him.”

“Likewise reckon ye yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, and alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.” If sin reigns in you, you’re not converted. If Jesus Christ reigns in you, you are converted. Sin may be in our bodies, but it does not and should not control us because Jesus Christ is our Lord.

The struggles we have just prove that we're normal. We're not abnormal because we'll have to fight with our flesh till the day that we die.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to You today. We thank You for Your Word and Your truth. We thank You, Father, that we are indeed free from the tyranny and domination of sin and that we're under the sovereignty and Lordship of Jesus Christ. Help us, Lord, to recognize Him as our Lord and Master and obey Him in all things. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray, Amen.

CHAPTER 10

Four Things Needed for Renewal and Restoration

Part Two

October 12, 2025

SCRIPTURE READING - 1 Samuel 11:1-8 (KJV)

Introduction and Review

Today we're on part 2 of the message that I began last week on four things that are needed for renewal and restoration.

Then Nahash the Ammonite came up and encamped against Jabesh Gilead. And all the men of Jabesh said unto Nahash, Make a covenant with us, and we will serve thee. And Nahash the Ammonite answered them, On this condition will I make a covenant with you, that I may thrust out all of your right eyes, and lay it for a reproach upon all Israel. And the elders of Jabesh said unto him, Give us seven days' respite, that we may send messengers unto all the coasts of Israel, and then if there be no man to save us, we will come out to thee. Then came the

> messengers to Gibeah of Saul, and told the tidings in the ears of the people. And all the people lifted up their voices and wept.

And, behold, Saul came after the herd out of the field. And Saul said, What aileth the people that they weep? And they told him the tidings of the men of Jabesh. And the Spirit of God came upon Saul when he heard those tidings, and his anger was greatly kindled. And he took a yoke of oxen and hewed them in pieces, and sent them throughout all the coasts of Israel by the hands of messengers, saying, Whosoever cometh not forth after Saul and after Samuel, so shall it be done unto his oxen. And the fear of the Lord fell on all the people, and they came out with one consent. And when he numbered them in Bezek, the children of Israel were three hundred thousand, and the men of Judah thirty thousand.

Every American, and especially every Christian, should eagerly desire a renewal and a restoration of our nation. Only the old heads remember what we used to be before the modern transformation of our nation into a multicultural, multi-faith, multi-lingual, and multi-allegiance nation. Most children and younger folks born in the last 40 years have no idea what this nation used to be. I have often said that my generation was the last generation that really tasted the last little bit of freedom we had in this country. Today, we are not really a nation.

And when I say that, when you look at the biblical definition of a nation, a nation in the Bible is someone that comes from the same ancestor. They speak the same language. They have the same culture. They basically have the same faith. In that sense of the word, today we're not a nation. What we are, we are an empire of divided people ruled over by an elite who are concerned only with their power and their position and their wealth.

I want to give you a quote by President Theodore Roosevelt. And then I'm going to add my two cents to his quote. I want you to listen carefully to what he said. In the first place, we should insist that if the immigrant who comes here in good faith becomes an American and assimilates himself to us, he shall be treated on an exact equality with everyone else, for it is an outrage to discriminate against any such man because of creed, birthplace, or origin. But this is

predicated upon the person becoming in every facet an American, and nothing but an American.

There can be no divided allegiance here. Any man who says he's an American, but something else also, isn't an American at all. We have room but for one flag, the American flag. We have room but for one language here, and that is the English language. And we have room but for one sole loyalty, and that loyalty is to the American people. I would certainly add to that and say that our first and foremost loyalty is to the sovereign God of heaven and earth and to His law and to His word. Scripture shows us that the only real source of unity is God and His law.

So we can ask these questions: What will it take to bring us back to where we should be? What will it take for renewal and restoration? What will it take to transform this nation into what it was in the beginning, even when men were men and women were women? What will it take to bring us back to a biblical work ethic, biblical money, and biblical morality? The answer is that it will take a real work of God in the lives of our people.

In fact, the Scripture teaches us that we must be turned and we must be quickened. I want you to hold 1 Samuel chapter 11, but look in your Bibles to Psalm 80. We will look at Psalm 85, one verse there. Look in Psalm 80 at what is repeated there several times, beginning with verse 3.

Note what the psalmist prays for: “Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine, and we shall be saved.” Note how plain that is.

In verse 7, he says, “Turn us again, O God of hosts, and cause thy face to shine, and we shall be saved.” In verse 19, he says, “Turn us again, O Lord God of hosts, and cause thy face to shine, and we shall be saved.” So three times in Psalm 80 we have been given this same exact truth. Now look to Psalm 85, but hold Psalm 80. In verse 4 he says, “Turn us, O God of our salvation, and cause thine anger toward us to cease.”

Four times, then—three times in Psalm 80 and once in Psalm 85—the psalmist said, “Turn us, O God,” and we shall be saved. Going back to Psalm 80, verse 18, he said, “So will we not go back

from thee? Quicken us, and we will call upon thy name." He said, "Quicken us, O God, and we shall call upon thy name." The truth is, if God does not quicken us, if God does not turn us, then we will never be quickened, and we will certainly never be turned. We will continue down the road to self-destruction.

I want to emphasize that the two points I covered last week are both found in 1 Samuel chapter 11. The first point concerning renewal and restoration is that there must be a realization of what I would call an imminent danger—a present danger.

Here Nahash the Ammonite has encircled the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead. They cannot defend themselves; they are either going to have to surrender to him and to his demands or else be killed. It is just that simple.

When I talk about recognizing the imminence of present danger, we have not really been looking at that in our lives. Thankfully, in one sense of the word, some people are getting awakened, because more people now are observing all the murders, all the rapes, all the robberies, all the muggings, all the violence, all the riots. Everything is going on that never used to happen in this country whatsoever.

In fact, I do not remember a riot when I was a child, a teenager, or even a young adult. Those things have come later on. But in progress, this metal building. Frankly, the metal building is probably the reason. So we keep whining and crying, and I understand this about inflation. Many people think inflation means higher prices, when higher prices are actually the result of inflation. Inflation is caused by the fact that the Feds continue to print fiat money—money with nothing backing it. The more money they print, the less valuable the money already printed becomes. In other words, its value keeps decreasing, and consequently, more and more money is required because the money becomes increasingly worthless.

When I first bought my very first new car at sixteen, it cost me $3,000, and that was a brand-new car. Obviously, we have all kinds of problems going on in this country. When you consider what you and I would call the government schools, or the public schools, what we are actually doing is indoctrinating morons and idiots who cannot read and cannot think. Consequently, this newer generation

and the one before it now think that socialism and communism are somehow the answer to all our problems.

The elite, those who are in control, are seeking total control over every aspect of our lives, while we simply sit silently by without speaking out. The truth is, I do not think Americans, and especially Christians, have their backs against the wall yet. So many people tend to think that as long as we have our beer, ball games, picnics, and entertainment, all is well. The truth of the matter is that this is certainly not so, not by any stretch of the imagination.

Every aspect of our life today is licensed. Stop and think about this. If you want to know the definition of a license, you may look it up in Black's Law Dictionary, Bouvier's Law Dictionary, or any law dictionary. You will find this definition: permission from a competent authority to do that which otherwise would be unlawful to do.

Now consider that we have a marriage license. Does this mean it is unlawful to get married without permission from the state? We have a driver's license. Is it unlawful to drive an automobile without permission from the state? There is a hunting license; it is now unlawful to hunt without permission from the state. What about a fishing license? If you are a professional or a worker, you have to have a license: doctor, nurse, mechanic—it does not matter.

All this is telling us: Every aspect of our lives happens to be controlled or is being controlled. Just stop and think about this. Why in the world would you need a license? Why in the world would you need permission to do what God has commanded you to do—to marry? Why would you need a license to do what God has commanded you to do—to work? Why would you need a license to do what God has commanded you to do—to support your family? I am simply pointing out the fact that none of this would be needed or necessary if we were following biblical law. So let me give you a quick illustration. God's law, of course, is far more conservative than state law.

For instance, according to state law in Georgia, and probably other places as well, if I happen to go hunting and see a doe and her yearling, a little buck with little antlers about two inches above his

head, on a doe day, I could kill the doe and also kill the little buck on the same day. According to God's law, God says, no, you cannot kill the mother and the young on the same day. In other words, I am simply pointing out the fact that if people would follow the Word of God and obey God and His law, then a lot of these other laws would certainly not be absolutely necessary whatsoever.

So I'm saying we have to realize that there is indeed an imminent danger, a present danger, and look at the tyranny, at every aspect of control being pressed upon us. The second point I made last week is this: there must be a recognition or realization of our utter helplessness. These people had absolutely no way to defend themselves.

He had surrounded their town. Today, we are surrounded by psychopathic politicians who want to be a Nahash. They want to put out our right eyes and keep us from defending ourselves.

In Bible times, they fought with swords and spears, but also had a shield. They held it in the left hand, covering the face and left eye, while the right eye was on the right side of the shield and the right hand held the sword. When that right eye was plucked out, the individuals were defenseless.

That is exactly the way the politicians and our congressmen want us to be: absolutely defenseless. They want us to be their slaves, their tributaries, but they do not want us able to resist them.

Righteous Indignation

With these two points fully understood, we come to the third point today. Look at verse 6: “And the Spirit of God came upon Saul when he heard those tidings, and his anger was greatly kindled.” Here is the third thing that is needed: there must be a real sense of righteous indignation and anger. Note, if you would, the statement: “his anger was greatly kindled.”

The Need for Righteous Indignation

Some object that anger is extremely wicked and vile and ought not to be in any Christian. I am going to tell you that this is not only a weak and wicked, but also an unbiblical position, and I am going to show

you that from the Bible. We have been trained and taught from our youth that we are never to be angry, never to be upset, and are to control ourselves in every situation. It is true that human anger is usually wicked, wrong, and sinful. But that does not negate the fact that there is a righteous, godly, and biblical anger. The Bible even commands anger.

Anger is a normal, natural human emotion. Since it is a normal, natural human emotion, it may be used either in a biblical manner or in an unbiblical manner. When we use our anger against each other instead of aiming that anger at sin, that is when we become sinful and wicked in ourselves.

Biblical Basis for Righteous Anger

It is true that wicked anger stems from fallen individuals. You cannot have unbiblical anger without having an unbiblical person. We have heard the old adage, “We must hate the sin, but love the sinner.” But have you ever stopped to think that there would not be any sin if there were not sinners? Obviously, you are going to have sinners producing wicked, ungodly, and unbiblical anger. When we talk about sin, we must remember that sin is not some ethereal, indefinable essence somehow floating around somewhere in the atmosphere.

No, sin is definable because the Bible says in 1 John chapter 3 and verse 4, “Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.” If someone is not transgressing God's law, it is not sin. Sin is defined by the law of God. We know that because Romans 3 and verse 20 tells us, “Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.” By the law is the knowledge of sin.

If you try to tell me, “Pastor, anger is sinful in and of itself,” then you have a major theological problem. How is that? God is infinitely holy, infinitely righteous, and there is absolutely no sin in God whatsoever. Yet the truth is that we read over and over of God's anger in the Bible. Let me show you.

I want you to hold 1 Samuel chapter 11, but look in your Bibles first of all to the book of Numbers chapter 32, and look if you would

please at verse 10. Numbers chapter 32 and verse 10. Look at this: “And the Lord's anger was kindled at the same time, and he sware, saying, Surely none of the men that came up out of Egypt from twenty years old and upward shall see the land which I sware unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, because they have not wholly followed me.” But note, if you would, “And the Lord's anger was kindled.” Now skip down to verse 13: “And the Lord's anger was kindled against Israel. And he made them wander in the wilderness forty years until all that generation that had done evil in the sight of the Lord was consumed.”

So now we're reading about God's anger. Was God sinful? Was God unholy? Because the Bible says that he was indeed full of anger. I was pointing out the fact that the third thing we needed was a righteous anger based upon 1 Samuel 11, verse 6: “When King Saul heard these tidings, his anger was kindled greatly.” And I was pointing out that anger in and of itself is a natural, normal human emotion. The fact is that anger can be sinful, but not all anger is necessarily sinful. If you say that all anger is sinful, then you have problems, because I was just showing how the Bible speaks about the anger of the Lord.

And we're in Deuteronomy chapter 32 and verse 16 now. Deuteronomy chapter 32, look if you would at verse 16. Notice what the Bible says: “They provoked him to jealousy with strange gods, with abominations provoked they him to anger.” So now we're talking about God's anger. If God is holy, then his anger is not sinful. So now look in Deuteronomy chapter 32, beginning there with verse 21: “They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God. They have provoked me to anger with their vanities, that is their idols. Now I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people.”

God says, “I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation. For a fire is kindled in mine anger, and shall burn unto the lowest hell, and shall consume the earth with her increase, and set on fire the foundations of the mountains.” So again, God is speaking about His anger. You do not have to turn there, but Zephaniah 2:3 says, “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." Over and over, we are reading about God's anger. Psalm 7:11 says, "God judgeth the righteous, but God is angry with the wicked every day." Notice, then, that the Bible teaches very plainly that God the Father is angry, and it is a righteous, holy anger.

Let me show you another passage concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. In Mark 3, beginning with verse 1, we read: "And he entered again into the synagogue, and there was a man there which had a withered hand. And they watched him, that is, the Pharisees and the scribes, whether he would heal him on the Sabbath day, that they might accuse him. And he saith unto the man which had the withered hand, Stand forth. And he saith unto them, Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath days, or to do evil? to save life, or to kill?"

"But they held their peace. And when he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, he saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it out: and his hand was restored whole as the other." Note that our Lord was angry. If you try to tell me that all anger is inherently sinful, you are going to have to re-evaluate your thinking, because the Bible tells us over and over about the anger of God, and our Lord Jesus Christ was angry as well.

Moreover, turn to Ephesians 4. There is a verse where God commands us to anger. Ephesians 4:26-27 says, "Be ye angry, and sin not."

"Be ye angry, and sin not: Let not the sun go down upon your wrath, neither give place to the devil." Now look at the word angry. The word angry there is orgizō. In the Greek, it means to be angry, to be provoked into anger, and to be wrathful. Moreover, the Greek construction is a present passive imperative, and an imperative is a command. Literally, we are being commanded to be angry, not to sin, and to let not the sun go down upon our wrath. God is commanding us to be provoked to anger, to be angry, and to be filled with wrath against sin. If we are angry and sin, if we have a sinful anger, not only does the sun go down upon our wrath, but we give place unto the devil. If we sin in our anger, then we are giving place to the devil.

Now consider three other passages. Ephesians 4:31 says, “Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice.” This should create a question in your mind. We are commanded to anger in verse 26, yet in verse 31 anger is to be put away. Colossians 3:8 says, “But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth.” Again, anger is to be put off. Then verse 21 says, “Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged.” Notice that one portion of Scripture commands anger, while another portion of Scripture tells us to put off anger.

Is there a contradiction? The answer is no. How is it explained? The answer is very simple. We are to put on a righteous, biblical anger, but we are to put off an unrighteous, unbiblical, humanistic, and fleshly anger. Biblical and righteous anger is designed by God to deal with sin. That is why God tells us to reprove, to rebuke, to expose, and to judge sin in a biblical manner.

On the other hand, fallen man always perverts anger into a fleshly and sinful act. Therefore, the anger that is to be put off and put away is fleshly and unbiblical anger; that which is to be put on is righteous anger.

Two Sinful Perversions of Anger

In Proverbs 25:23, we read: “The north wind driveth away rain: so doth an angry countenance a backbiting tongue.” Now, is a backbiting tongue sinful? The answer is yes. What does it take to drive away a backbiting tongue? An angry countenance. Would that be sinful anger? Of course not. It would be biblical anger.

Let me tell you how we sin in two different ways in relationship to our anger. The very first way that we sin against God is when we explode in our anger like a powerful grenade, when we turn to those who hurt us, who insult us, who provoke us, or who just happen to be in our way. A volcanic eruption is a good illustration. In the volcano, below, you have lava that is boiling, boiling, boiling, boiling.

Once it reaches a certain temperature or a certain degree of volume, all of a sudden it erupts and blows out. There you have all the poisonous fumes and all the poisonous gases, as well as the hot,

devastating lava. That is what we do when we act like a volcano. We rip somebody to shreds, cuss them out, so to speak, go up one side and down the other, tell them off, or, to use an expression, give them a piece of our mind. Someone has aptly said that is why we do not have much mind left: we have given pieces of it to too many people.

That is probably true. But I read years ago about one woman who was confessing to her pastor. She said she had a very, very bad temper and got angry very quickly, but thankfully it was over with quickly. He responded, "Yes. And so was the shotgun blast. But it blows apart everything in front of it." You see, we have this volcanic eruption, and that is what we do many, many times. Let me show you.

Proverbs 14:17 says, "He that is soon angry dealeth foolishly: and a man of wicked devices is hated." Notice the warning: "He that is soon angry." If you cannot control your anger, you cannot control yourself; you are dealing foolishly.

Proverbs 22:24–25 says, "Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man thou shalt not go: Lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul." God therefore commands us not to make friendship with an angry man or to go with a furious man, because we may learn his ways and bring a snare upon our souls.

Proverbs 29:22 adds, "An angry man stirreth up strife, and a furious man aboundeth in transgression." An angry man is always stirring up trouble, while a furious man abounds in transgression. So this is the type of anger: this volcanic anger that is erupting all the time, that creates all these problems.

The second way that we turn anger into sinful anger is through internalization. Why do we internalize our anger at times? Usually, we explode like a volcano. But sometimes we think, "Maybe I should not explode. Maybe this is not proper or the right way to handle this." You can explode in front of the wrong person. We normally explode with people we believe we can get away with it.

What do you think would happen to me, being eighty-one years of age, if I exploded and cussed out a young man in his thirties who happened to be a martial arts expert? There might be serious repercussions. He might knock me out, put me in the hospital, or kill

me. There are times when you and I are not going to explode like that. Instead, we internalize the anger. I cannot whip Steve, and I am afraid to explode in front of him because he might do me harm.

What do I do? I am really angry, upset, and mad. I smile at him and say to myself, "Yeah, you're just a little boy. I'm going to get you back. I'm planning it right now. Your day's coming. Just hang on." I am smiling, but I have internalized all that anger. That internalization of anger always produces colitis, digestive problems, ulcers, insomnia, and a host of other diseases or problems—physical, mental, and emotional. The truth of the matter is that internalization of anger always leads to bitterness and resentment. In other words, unbiblical anger never helps anything. It always produces more sin and more problems.

Saul's Spirit-Inspired Anger

Now go back to 1 Samuel chapter 11 and verse 6, and look at our text: "And the Spirit of God came upon Saul when he heard those tidings, and his anger was greatly kindled." What produced this anger? The Spirit of God. If the Holy Spirit of God produced the anger, then obviously it is not unbiblical anger. It is something that God the Spirit produced in the life of Saul.

The Hebrew word for anger here is charah, which means to be hot, to be furious, to burn with anger, or to be incensed. In other words, he was eaten up with anger. Verse 6 says, "his anger was kindled greatly." The word greatly is meod in Hebrew, meaning exceedingly, abundantly, greatly, and to a great degree.

The Holy Spirit of God came upon King Saul and infuriated him against Nahash and the Ammonites for what they were doing. Nahash had given such an insolent and barbarous proposition: "You come out to me, and I will make you slaves. You can be my tributaries, but I am going to put your right eye out. I am going to fix it so that you can never resist me or fight against me. Moreover, it will be a reproach upon all Israel." He thought no one would come to help the people of Jabesh Gilead. Saul was incensed against Nahash and the Ammonites for trying to destroy a people who had no means of fighting back. Nahash was dishonoring God and dishonoring the nation.

Saul could also have been angry with the people of Jabesh Gilead, asking, Why did they not let us know about this sooner? Why did they wait until they were surrounded before getting into this position? This is a truth we need to understand: most of the time, the reason we do not ask for help is our stinking pride. We do not want to appear weak, helpless, or impotent. But if we need help, we need to ask for it as early as possible. The people of Jabesh Gilead waited until they were surrounded.

Saul certainly had the right idea that they should not have waited so long. But the Spirit of God came upon King Saul so that his anger was greatly kindled over the entire situation. I believe that, at the same time, the Holy Spirit not only produced that anger in Saul, but gave him courage, determination, and faith to work and relieve the people in Jabesh Gilead.

This is an application of God's law when it tells us that we are to love our neighbor as ourself. That phrase occurs nine times in the Bible. The first time is Leviticus 19:18: “Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the Lord.”

Application: Love Your Neighbor as Yourself

There are eight more occurrences in the New Testament. In Romans 13:9, the Bible says: “For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” Again, in Galatians 5:14: “For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” And in James 2:8: “If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well.”

Over and over in the New Testament, the Bible tells us to love our neighbors as ourselves. What does that mean? If I came up and attacked you, would you defend yourself? Would you fight back? Of course you would. But suppose I went over and attacked someone else. If I attacked you, you would defend yourself; but if I attacked her, would you be willing to come to her aid? “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” If you are willing to defend yourself, you should

also be willing to defend your neighbor. You should be able to defend those who are defenseless, those who are innocent, and those who need help. That is for sure.

The Bible teaches that there must not only be a recognition of our present danger and our helplessness, but also a real, genuine, Holy Spirit-inspired, godly anger. That is the problem we have today. No one wants to get angry at what is going on. We do not want to get angry at tyrants, our economy, or anything and everything. But notice: it was the Holy Spirit who stirred up this anger.

A Righteous Realization of the Fear of the Lord

The Need for the Fear of the Lord

The fourth thing we need is a righteous realization of the fear of the Lord. In 1 Samuel 11:7, Saul took a yoke of oxen and hewed them in pieces and sent them through all the coasts of Israel by the hands of messengers, saying, "Whosoever cometh not forth after Saul and after Samuel, so shall it be done unto his oxen." The fear of the Lord fell on the people, and they came out with one consent.

Jamieson-Fausset-Brown commentary says this particular form of war summons was suited to the character and habits of an agricultural and pastoral people. A similar one, and the annunciation that accompanied it, carried a terrible threat to those that neglected to obey it. Saul conjoins the name of Samuel with his own to lend a greater influence to the measure and to strike greater terror into all the condemners of the order. Anyone who condemned the order would be fighting Samuel and Saul also.

Note that Saul cut this oxen in pieces and sent it to all the tribes. There is a Scripture that deals with this in Deuteronomy 28:31. It is part of the curse when people disobey. The Word of God says, "Thine ox shall be slain before thine eyes, and thou shalt not eat thereof. Thine ass shall be violently taken away from before thy face, and shall not be restored to thee. Thy sheep shall be given unto thine enemies, and thou shalt have none to rescue them."

Notice, "Thine ox shall be slain before thy face." In other words, if you do not do something, the enemy is going to prevail. Matthew

Henry said the effect of this summons was that the militia, or trained bands of the nation, came out as one man.

Although we talk about the nation of Israel, each tribe was a mini-nation in and of itself. Each tribe had its own militia and trained men. Before the children of Israel entered Canaan, Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh said they wanted the land on the east of Jordan because it was good for cattle. They did not want the land across Jordan where they were supposed to go. Moses said they could have this land if their men would go over and fight until the other land was conquered.

They agreed to do exactly that. Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh therefore had trained armies and militiamen. The effect of this summons was that the militia, or trained bands, of the nation came out as one man. The reason given is that the fear of the Lord fell upon them. Saul did not affect to make them fear him; they were influenced to observe his orders by the fear of God and regard to Him who had made Saul their king and them members one of another.

Religion and the fear of God will make men good subjects, good soldiers, and good friends to the public interest of the country. Those who fear God will make conscience of their duty to all men, particularly to their rulers. I would add, to their Christian rulers, because the Word of God does require Christian rulers. The militia then came together as one man.

They already had a place of rendezvous: Bezek. Saul cut up this oxen and sent it to all the different tribes. Three hundred thousand Israelites came, and thirty thousand Judeans came as one man to one place at the same time. Why? The Bible tells you in verse 7 that the fear of the Lord fell on the people, and they came out with one consent.

The Fear of the Lord in Scripture

It is only the fear of the Lord falling upon us that will unite us and make us work together for the salvation of our land, for the salvation of our society, for the salvation of our homes, our churches, and even for a nation. It takes the fear of the Lord falling upon us. All of these

programs, all of these schemes, and all of these plans of man will ultimately fail. They may provide a lot of excitement, a lot of danger, and a lot of death, but they will ultimately fail. It is only the fear of God that can bring forth unity.

Let me show you something about the fear of God. Go back in your Bibles to the book of Genesis, chapter 35, and look at verse 5. You remember how Jacob and his family were trying to get away because Simeon and Levi had gone in to the men of Shechem and murdered them and killed them all.

Jacob's idea was this: “Boys, you've won the battle, but you've stirred up a hornet's nest. You haven't won the war.” And so Jacob and his family went back to Bethel, getting away from there. Genesis 35:5 says: “And they journeyed: and the terror of God, or the fear of God, was upon the cities that were round about them, and they did not pursue after the sons of Jacob.”

Why were Jacob and his family not destroyed when those boys slew the men of Shechem? The answer is that the fear of God fell upon them. Turn in your Bibles to 2 Chronicles, chapter 17. Look at verse 10. “And the fear of the Lord fell upon all the kingdoms of the lands that were round about Judah, so that they made no war against Jehoshaphat.”

God is able to put His fear upon the nations that surround us, so that they will not attack us. In Acts 19:17 we read, “And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified.” The fear of God fell in such a way that the Lord Jesus Christ was magnified. The fear of God fell upon Jacob and his company and protected them. It fell upon Jehoshaphat, and he was free from war. Now the fear of God has fallen, and the Lord Jesus Christ is magnified.

In 2 Corinthians 5:11, the Apostle Paul says, “Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences.” Notice that he said, “knowing therefore the terror of the Lord.” The word terror is the Greek word phobos, from which we get our English word phobia. Phobos literally means a fear, a dread, or a

terror. Therefore, we could read it, “Knowing therefore the fear of the Lord,” or “the terror of the Lord,” or “the dread of the Lord, we persuade men.” Anytime you see the word phobia in another word, it means fear of whatever word is before it. Hydrophobia is a fear of water, arachnophobia a fear of spiders, and canine phobia a fear of dogs. The point is simply the word phobia.

The interesting thing is that the fear of the Lord fell and united all these people, so that they came out as one man, to one place, at the same time, to protect innocent people and prevent Nahash from doing what he intended to do. In fact, Saul defeated the Ammonites left and right.

Put these four things together, four things that are needed. We need, number one, an awareness of our present and imminent danger. We need an awareness of our utter helplessness. We need a realization of a real, genuine, biblical anger. Then we need the fear of the Lord to fall upon all His people.

Applications and Conclusion

The fear of the Lord should drive us, motivate us, and control us. We should learn to act under His principles, precepts, and truth. We move when He says move, and we stay when He says stay, just as the pillar of cloud led Israel in the daytime and the pillar of fire by night. When the pillar stayed, they stayed; when it moved, they moved. We need the grace and mercy of God and the fear of God in our lives like that.

A proper fear of the Lord will result in a diminishing of our natural, fleshly anger and a desire to have a biblical and righteous anger that deals with sin and wickedness and resolves it in a biblical manner. I have often said, “If you can’t be part of the solution, don’t be part of the problem.” Your anger, unless it is directed at sin and a biblical resolution, is wrong. Anger is designed to correct the problem and deal with the sin.

We cannot be more compassionate and more merciful than God. Adam Smith, who wrote The Wealth of Nations, made this statement: “Mercy to the guilty is cruelty to the innocent.” All you have to do to understand that is look at the mercy shown to

murderers, rapists, and robbers by our judicial system, where they have been released and raped, robbed, and murdered again over and over. The man who murdered the young white lady in Charlotte, North Carolina, had been arrested thirty-three times and was released. Mercy to the guilty is cruelty to the innocent.

Do you realize that God forbids mercy and pity upon some people? In Deuteronomy chapter 19, verse 13, concerning the murderer, He said, "Thine eye shall not pity him, but thou shalt put away the guilt of innocent blood from Israel, that it may go well with thee."

So we must be like Saul, filled with a righteous anger when the lives and freedoms of innocent men and women are endangered by tyrants. Look at what is happening to the children in this country—the children being trafficked and led astray. At the same time, we must seek the fear of the Lord to fall upon His people.

David had a very unusual prayer request. In Psalm 86:11 he prayed, "Teach me thy way, O Lord; I will walk in thy truth." Then he prayed, "Unite my heart to fear thy name." If we are praying, "Lord, unite my heart to fear thy name," how long will it take us to be united? We want to be united in the Lord. Unite our hearts to fear thy name.

What will it take to restore our nation and our society? Put these four things together and meditate upon them this week. First, a realization of our present, imminent danger. Second, a realization of our utter helplessness. Third, a realization of our need for a real, genuine, biblical, Holy Ghost anger. When you get angry, you are ready to do something. Lastly, it will take the fear of the Lord falling upon our people and uniting us. Then we will come together to vindicate our God, to vindicate His cause, to vindicate His people, and to work and pray for their benefit and blessings.

Dwell upon these four truths. We need them in our lives. We need each one of them.

Father, help us, we pray today, in the name of Jesus Christ. Teach us and build us up in the most holy faith. In Thy holy name we ask.

CHAPTER 11

The Grace of Patience

January 27, 2012

Introduction: The Need for Patience

Let us open our Bibles to Romans chapter 15. I will tell you a quick story, which is a true story. Sunday morning is very busy for us, and I try to have everything ready on Saturday evening. This morning I was a little bit rushed. I took the outline I had studied and prepared for, put it in my Bible, and put my Bible in the car. Usually, when I get to Douglas, I stop and let Alice drive while I go over my notes. But when I got my Bible, there were no notes in it.

I did not understand it. I had put those notes in that Bible, but it was too late to turn around and go back home. I immediately thought of two or three other passages in the Bible that I wanted to preach from, so I turned to one of them and thought, "That'll work. That'll preach." When I got here, Granny Doris said, "Here's your notes." They had fallen out of the Bible between the door, and I never even saw them.

So I am not going to preach those notes. I am going to preach what I studied on the way over here; I will have to preach the other a

little bit later. I assume the Lord wanted me to preach this since I could not find the other. Romans 15. Notice verse one.

“We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification. For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me. For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.”

The Grace of Patience

"Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus: that ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God. Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers."

Romans 15:1 says, "We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves." The message is entitled "The Grace of Patience." I do not like to preach this message because I can assure you that patience is one thing I am lacking in.

I can be patient with people, but I cannot be patient with anything mechanical. I tried to do something to the car yesterday, just for a few moments, and told Alice, "Hand me the hammer." After about fifteen minutes of fuming, I said, "Now I remember why I'm not a mechanic."

I tell people I hate trains. The reason I hate trains is that you pull up there, have to wait on that train, and sit there wasting time. If I had a book and could read it, it would not be any problem. But if there is ever another revolution and I am part of it, I want to be the man who blows up the train tracks. I understand the need for patience.

Definitions: Grace, Mercy, and Longsuffering

Let me give you a couple of familiar definitions. Grace is simply God's unmerited favor: God giving us that which we do not deserve. Mercy is God keeping us from getting what we do deserve. In between, you have longsuffering. Interestingly enough, the word longsuffering literally means to be long-nostriled or long-nosed.

When you start to get angry and upset, you begin breathing, and those nostrils start flaring. But the bigger the nostril and the bigger the nose, the less you can tell the flaring. To be long-nostriled, or long-nosed, is therefore equivalent to being patient. In other words, you are not showing your irritation.

As you think about patience, consider these Scriptures. Luke 8:15 says that we are to bring forth fruit with patience. You and I both know that fruit does not immediately appear overnight when we plant a garden. We have to be patient. He is speaking not merely of garden fruit, but of spiritual fruit as well. First Timothy 6:11 tells us that we are to follow after patience. That is something we are to run after. Hebrews 10:36 says, "Ye have need of patience."

You heard about the woman who was impatient. She realized her impatience was sin, so she went to the Lord in prayer and said, "Lord, I'm impatient. I know it's sin. And I need patience. And Lord, I want it right now." That is the way we are. That is why He says, "Ye have need of patience." Hebrews 12:1 tells us that we are to run the race with patience.

Consider Romans 15. Verse 5 says, "Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus." God is called the God of patience. Verse 13 says, "Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost." Verse 33 says, "Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen."

In verse 5, God is called the God of patience; in verse 13, the God of hope; and finally, in verse 33, the God of peace. You have to know God as the God of patience before you can ever know Him as the God of hope. And you have to know Him as the God of hope before you can ever know Him as the God of peace. There is indeed a direct

correlation between these names given us: the God of patience, the God of hope, and finally the God of peace.

Why We Need Patience

Why We Need Patience: Unity in the Body

In light of this passage teaching us about patience, why in the world would we need patience? Begin with verse 5: “Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus.” The word grant means to be given. We are talking about the grace, or gift, of patience.

“That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God. Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers.”

Here is why God tells us we need patience. First, that we may have one mind; that is, we must think alike. I wish I had time to preach on the subject of one mind. The Bible says, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.” We are to have the mind of Christ. We are to be likeminded, so we need patience to have one mind.

Then he says, “and one mouth.” When you think alike, you speak alike. When you think the same thoughts, you come out with the same words. Thus, we need patience that we may have one mind and one mouth, and one motive: “that ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God.”

Why should we have one mind? Why should we have one mouth? So that we may have one motive: to glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In verse 7, you have one ministry: “Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God.” To receive one another means that if someone is a Christian, we must receive them in a biblical manner, no matter whether we agree with them, like them, or whether they irritate us. Notice the qualification: we are to receive one another as Christ also received us, to the glory of God. There is a biblical doctrine of learning to receive each other in

Christ. If we think alike, if we have one mind, one mouth, and one motive, we will have one ministry: we will be receiving each other.

Do you not remember that passage in Matthew 25? What did our Lord say? “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.” There is the ministry of learning to receive each other. Then he talks about one mission in verse 8: “Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers.” We have one mind, one mouth, one motive, one ministry, and one mission: that we might confirm the promises made unto the fathers. In other words, we demonstrate the reality and truth of the Word of God in our lives.

Where in the world would you and I ever learn patience? The Bible gives us the answer. First of all, we are to learn patience from the sovereign God. Look in Romans 15:5: “Now the God of patience and consolation.” Have you ever stopped to think about God as the God of patience? Turn back to Genesis chapter 6. Let me give you an illustration showing that God is the God of patience. Notice Genesis 6 and verse 3.

Learning Patience from the Sovereign God

“And the LORD said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years.” Notice verse 5: “And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” So what does God see in Genesis chapter 6? He sees an absolutely corrupt group of people—totally, absolutely perverse.

And yet God says, “My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years.” Instead of destroying those people instantly and immediately, God still waited 120 years. If you go to 2 Peter, Noah was building that ark during that time, and Noah was a preacher of righteousness. The amazing thing is that God waited 120 years before he destroyed them. If you simply watch the news in this day and time, you will have enough prayer material to pray those

imprecatory prayers and ask God to destroy the wicked. And yet God is so absolutely amazing when it comes to patience.

You do not have to turn there, but do you remember Genesis 18 and 19? What did God do? He sent His Son and two angels to Abraham. He said, "The cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and their sin is very grievous." He said, "I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it." Of course, you know the story: Abraham interceded and got God down to ten righteous people. If there had been ten righteous people, He would not have destroyed those cities. Of course, there were not ten righteous there. But the amazing thing is that God put up with that trash, filth, wickedness, and rebellion for as long as He did.

You remember the book of Jonah? What did God do? God sent Jonah, and he ran through Nineveh preaching, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown." Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian Empire. The Assyrians were known for wickedness and cruelty. Crucifixion began with the Assyrians—not the Roman type. King Ashurbanipal boasted of how many men he had crucified. They would take a pole and stick it in the ground with a sharp point.

The soldiers would strip a man naked, hold him over the pole, and pull him down upon it through his anus and guts, leaving him to writhe in pain until he died. That is how they crucified. The Assyrians had entire mountains of human heads belonging to those they had decapitated. They would literally skin people alive, and Ashurbanipal boasted about it. Yet Jonah preached in the capital of the Assyrian Empire, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown," and they repented. God spared them for another two hundred years. Then He wiped them out.

The amazing thing to me is that God could be so gracious, kind, and patient toward wicked, ungodly, rebellious sinners. Look in your Bible at Genesis 15. God had entered into a covenant with Abraham, and He told him, "Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years." God was telling Abram that he and his seed would go into Egypt for four hundred years, where they would be afflicted and enslaved. Why must Abraham and his seed go into Egypt and be slaves for four hundred years? "And also that nation,

whom they shall serve, will I judge." God said, "I'll take care of the Egyptians."

"And afterward shall they come out with great substance. And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age." Here is why Israel would remain in Egypt four hundred years: "But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full." What happened in those four hundred years? God brought the children of Israel out of Egypt. He put a sword in their hand and said, "Kill every one of them."

The amazing thing is that God was patient with those wicked people for four hundred years. When I think of Israel, I am amazed. I can read the book of Judges and put my hands on my forehead, wondering how it could be. Here was a people who thumbed their nose at God, hated Him, turned against Him, and fell into idolatry; yet whenever they cried, God redeemed them from their enemies. He gave them a little space and breathing room, and they turned around and did the same thing all over again. People never learn. It seems that God could simply have wiped some of them off the face of the earth.

But what about us? Do you realize that God was just as merciful toward us? What if God had smitten you down the very first time that you sinned against Him? Where would you be? What if God had slapped you down the second time that you sinned against Him, or the third time, or the fourth time? You get the idea.

Romans 2:4 says, "Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness?" This is an amazing passage, showing the absolute patience of God. What happens when you despise God's goodness? He ought to slap you down; He ought to kill you, but He does not. "Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance?" In other words, when you despise God's goodness, His forbearance comes into play. He forbears with you a little longer. He still does not instantly and immediately smite you down.

What happens when you then continue to despise not only His goodness, but His forbearance? Here is what: "and longsuffering." After you despise His goodness and His forbearance, that longsuffering, or that long-nose, comes into play. God is

longsuffering, and you do not know that the goodness of God is designed to lead you to repentance. But now watch this: if you continue to despise even the longsuffering of God, verse 5, what are you doing?

“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; who will render to every man according to his deeds.” Note, if you would please, there is indeed a limit to God’s patience. What do we do on a daily basis? We despise the goodness of God. We despise the forbearance of God. The Scripture says in Lamentations chapter 3, verses 22 and 23—let me just quote it. But listen carefully; you know this passage.

"It is of the LORD's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness." You know why you were allowed to wake up this morning? God was merciful, God was compassionate, God was faithful. The reason we did not die in our sleep last night was that God was merciful, God was compassionate, and God was faithful. Yet look how many days we go without thanking Him for life, protection, and provision. Look how many days we go despising his goodness, his forbearance, and his longsuffering. Every day that we live is because of God's patience with us.

Now here's the point. If God was patient, and if God is patient with you and me as sinners, can we not learn to be patient with other people who are sinners? That doesn't mean that we like their sins, put up with their sins, endorse their sins, or subsidize their sins. But each of us has family members who are lost and irritate the living daylights out of us. If I were to ask you how many of you had rather be around your Christian family, your church family, than around your physical family who are lost, I know the answer. You'd rather be with your Christian family. Why? Because we have the one mind, the one mouth, the one motive, the one ministry, and the one mission. We think alike.

We have to learn patience from the sovereign God. This also applies between Christians. It is not only an application between you and me and sinners; there is also an application between you and me as believers in Christ. The Bible says, "And grieve not the holy Spirit

of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption." How do we not grieve the Holy Spirit of God? We do not grieve Him by putting all these things off and putting them away. He says, "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."

I can assure you there are probably things about me that you don't like, and probably things about you that I don't like. That's immaterial. We cannot be bitter and wrathful and angry and speak evil of each other. In other words, we have to learn to be patient with each other until graces are developed in each one's life.

Children will always tell on you. We had a Christian school, and every year when school started, we had all the parents and students there for orientation. I always told the parents, “I’ll make a deal with you: If you don’t believe everything your child tells you about us, we will not believe everything your child tells us about you.” Because they will tell.

I was preaching in Alabama, and the pastor and I were invited to dinner with a family. The pastor, his wife, and I were sitting at the table with the husband, wife, and their two children. The lady had her hair all done up on her head and came down in ringlets, like the antebellum women. I have always been a sucker for that. I have always liked that. So I said, “Ma’am, I really like your hair,” giving her an honest compliment.

By the time I said that, her little boy said, “It ain’t hers.” She flushed red. I said, “Now, son, whether she bought it or whether she grew it, it is hers,” just trying to smooth things over. He said, “You should have seen the fight she had with Daddy to get it.” She said, “Now, now, Johnny. Mom and Daddy don’t fight. Sometimes they have words, but they don’t really fight.” He answered, “Ha! I’ve seen you slap at him and try to scratch him before.”

The point is this: We can be patient with other people and more impatient with our families. I can put up with things from some of you folks more than I could from Alice, and she could do the same

with me. We need to learn patience from the Sovereign God. God has been patient with sinners.

How many of us are perfect? None. So if God, the Sovereign God, was patient with us, we can be patient with each other.

The second place we are to learn patience is from the Scriptures of God. Romans 15:4 says, "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope." The Scriptures are designed to teach us patience. Everything that happened in the Old Testament, if we understand it, has an application to each of us today. Paul took what happened to Old Testament Israel and applied it to the Corinthian church in 1 Corinthians chapter 10. We should learn patience not only from the sovereign God, but also from the Scriptures of God.

Learning Patience from the Scriptures of God

Look at Romans chapter 5, beginning with verse 1: "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and we rejoice. The word rejoice literally means to exult—to jump up and down in. We have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice, exult, and jump up and down in hope of the glory of God.

We could preach on God's eternal deliverance, His eternal glory, and all the gifts He has given us, and it would be enough to jump up and down in. But verse 3 says, "And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope: and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us."

The word glory in verse 3 is the exact same Greek word translated rejoice in verse 2. Thus, "And not only so, but we exalt, we jump up and down and we glory in tribulation also." Why? Because tribulation worketh patience; patience, experience; and experience,

hope. Hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

All these bad things that come our way, which we interpret as bad, are not really bad. They are for our good. They teach us patience, give us experience, give us hope, and make us not ashamed, so that the love of God would be shed abroad in our hearts.

“My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations,” that is, different kinds of tests and tribulations. Why? “Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire,” that is, mature and complete, “wanting nothing.” What? “My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations.”

I have to admit, folks, it is very difficult for me to say, “Thank God I’ve got to sit here and wait on this train for 30 minutes.” It is difficult for me to say, “Thank God I’m $500 short this month,” or, “Thank God I’m having this complication and that complication.” But look what he said: “Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations.” Why? Because the trying of faith worketh patience, and patience has its perfect work.

"Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh" what? "Patience. And let patience have her" what? "Her perfect work." What is God doing to us through tribulation, through trials? He is maturing us, that we may be mature and complete, wanting or lacking absolutely nothing.

I am not a blacksmith, but I have watched men who are blacksmiths. They will take metal that you could not bend for the life of you because it is so tough, and they will put that piece of metal in the fire. When it becomes red hot, they can take forceps and make pretzels out of it if they want. It is the tribulation, the heat of trouble, that makes us malleable and bendable.

If you want patience, you need to expect tribulations, because it is only through tribulations that we get patience. That is why Scripture says, "My brethren, count it all joy." It is hard and difficult, and yet that is what Scripture teaches. Romans 12:12 says, "Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer."

Think of those brethren who have been wrongly, wickedly, and unjustly convicted and are spending three, four, five, or ten years in prison for doing nothing wrong. Look at the life of Joseph: from the pit, to the prison, finally to the palace. See how long he was in prison for doing nothing, and yet the Bible says, "tribulation."

Here is the third place from which we are to learn patience. We are to learn patience not only from the sovereign God and the Scriptures of God, but also, as verse 2 says, "Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification." God did not say to do whatever your neighbour wants or whatever pleases your neighbour. We please him by doing that which is edifying, biblical, and godly.

Learning Patience from the Saints of God

James 5 shows us how we are to learn patience from the saints of God: “Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord.” That is a long time to be patient, isn't it? “Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it,” speaking of God the Father, “until he receive the early and latter rain.”

Now look at this command: “Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door.” Then verse 10 says, “Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure.”

“Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.” Notice how many times this passage tells us to be patient. Then, in verse 9, he says, “Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned.” What does it mean to grudge? How can grudging be related to patience? “Grudge not.”

Let me give you an illustration. When I was a boy raised on a farm, we had hogs. Outside our back door was a slop bucket. What

you did not eat for breakfast went in that slop bucket; what you did not eat for dinner went in it, and what you did not eat for supper went in it. By the next morning, it was full—a five-gallon bucket. Daddy would say, "Son, go out and slop the hogs." That meant taking the bucket out, pouring it into the trough, and watching all those big old hogs and sows come up, stick their snouts down in the trough, and pull and swig it down, kind of like the way Ron drinks his coffee. Then, all of a sudden, one of those big old sows would hit an ear of corn in all that slop. You know what she does?

She grunts, turns, and runs. Guess what the other hogs do? Do they stay there and continue to drink their slop until they find their piece of corn? No. They run after her, hitting her, knocking her, and trying to take away that which she had. They are grudging the fact that she had something they did not.

You could have fifteen dogs out here and fifteen T-bone steaks. You say to those dogs, "Now boys, sit still; I've got a steak for each one of you." You throw the first one out. Guess what? One is going to get it and run. Where are the other fourteen? Are they sitting there wagging, waiting for their steak? No. They are chasing him down, trying to take his steak away from him. They are grudging because he had it.

Now I want to show you how grudging is related to patience. Here is a young couple who have just gotten married. They think, "Mother and Daddy have a nice house. We want a nice house too." So they go into debt and get a fine house. They say, "Mom and Daddy have nice furniture. We want to have nice furniture too." They go into more debt and fill their house with furniture—not content with a refrigerator, stove, bed, and table. "Mom and Daddy drive a new car. I don't see why we can't drive a new car." So they go into debt for that. Anything they want, they go into debt for.

"Mom and Daddy have it; why can't we have it?" It never dawns on them to think, Yes, Mom and Daddy have some of those things, but it took them forty years to get them. They are begrudging the fact that their parents have something they do not. They are refusing to be patient, work for it, earn it, and pay cash for it. "I don't like so-and-so; he knows more than I do." What? He has probably

studied more than you have. That is why he knows more than you do.

I told you about the missionary who came to our church in Jessup. He was a concert pianist. He sat down at the piano without one note of music in front of him and played for an hour. It looked as though his fingers were simply running up and down the piano, and as though music were coming out of his fingertips. I could not believe it. After an hour, he stopped, and I said, "Brother, I'd give anything to be able to play the piano like that." "Really?" he said. I said, "Yes, sir, I'd give anything to play the piano like that." "Really?" he said. "Well, I practice eight hours a day, six days a week."

All of a sudden, I did not want to be a concert pianist anymore. That is why he could play the piano like that and I could not: he had the patience to do it, and I did not. I can begrudge him the fact that he can do that, but look what he paid to be able to do it. I am simply saying, folks, we are to learn patience from the saints.

I could go through the Bible. Look at Job; he is mentioned here. Look at Isaiah and Jeremiah. Every young preacher wants a big ministry. Well, follow Isaiah and follow Jeremiah. They never had a big ministry. In fact, they were hated and despised. The people they loved hated them. They were thrown into a dungeon. How about swapping places with Noah? Noah preached 120 years and never had one convert.

Adoniram Judson was a missionary to Burma. He was in Burma for 15 years without one convert. Finally, a lady wrote him and asked whether there was anything he needed over there that he could not get there, which she could send him from England. He wrote back, "Yes, send me a communion set." He never even had one convert! But by the time the set arrived, he had plenty of converts after 15 years.

Look in your Bibles at Hebrews chapter 11. We are talking about something that ought to convict us—learning patience from the saints. Begin reading at verse 32: "And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness,

obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens."

“Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: and others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.”

“And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.” Note what these people went through. We complain when our air conditioning system goes down for a day. Polycarp was a disciple of John the Apostle. If I am not mistaken, he was in his nineties when he was put to death by the Emperor.

He was called upon to renounce Christ. If he renounced Christ, his life would be spared. Polycarp said, “Lo, these eighty and six years have I served Him, and He's done me no wrong. Must I then now at the last be called upon to deny my Lord and my Saviour? I cannot, and I will not.” And he was put to death. None of us have had to endure things like Hebrews 11. We can learn patience from the saints of God.

In 2 Peter chapter 1, beginning with verse 4: “Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. And beside this, giving all diligence, 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. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the

knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." We are responsible to add to our faith patience.

Patience from the Spirit of God

You did not get the knowledge that you have overnight. Why would you expect someone who does not have your background, who has never had your time or materials to study, to know instantly what you know? It is impossible. As the saints have been patient through the years, even through suffering, we can be patient with one another in teaching, learning, and sharing. We must learn patience from the sovereign God, the Scriptures of God, the saints of God, and the Spirit of God.

Learning Patience from the Spirit and the Son of God

How many of you repented the very first time the Holy Spirit of God convicted you? Do not raise your hand, because you do not even know the first time God, the Holy Spirit, convicted you. The Bible says in the book of Job, "God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not." When you were being convicted by the Holy Spirit, you did not like it. You did not want it. You were miserable. You wanted to get away from it and out of there.

What if the Holy Spirit had said, "Well, if that's the way you're going to do, you can go. I don't care"? Where would you be if, when you fought and resisted the convicting power of the Holy Spirit, He had given up and let you go your way? The truth is, the Holy Spirit worked on you and convicted you until you were of all men most miserable, until you wanted to die.

When you reached the end of your rope, He opened your eyes, illuminated your mind, and showed you the beauty, wonder, and salvation that are in Jesus Christ. If the Holy Spirit had stopped with half His work—if He had stopped when He convicted you and showed you what a wicked, miserable, low-down, ungodly, filthy sinner you were—you really would not want to live.

But He didn't stop there. He showed you the grace of God in Jesus Christ. So we can learn patience from the Spirit of God. Then, if you will go back in your Bibles to Romans 15, let me show you verse 3.

Here's the fifth place where to learn patience: from the Son of God, our Savior. "For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me." Notice, "For even Christ pleased not himself."

Now turn to 1 Peter chapter 2, beginning with verse 21. "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps." Notice Christ is our example. We are to follow His steps. "Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth."

"Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: 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. For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls."

Christ is called our example; we should follow His steps. "Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not." Now turn to Matthew chapter 27, verse 24. "When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it. Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children."

"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. And when they had platted 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 on the head.

It seems to me that at that time his holy soul would have been filled with absolute revulsion. He could have prayed, “Lord, just kill them all. Father, slay them now.” If he had prayed that prayer, would

it have been answered? You better believe it would have. Yet here he is, hated and rejected.

After that they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify him. As they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name: him they compelled to bear his cross. When they were come unto a place called Golgotha, that is to say, a place of a skull, they gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink. And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots.

Sitting down they watched him there; and set up over his head his accusation written, THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS. Then were there two thieves crucified with him, one on the right hand, and another on the left. They that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, and saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross.

Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God. The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth.

Could our Lord have come off that cross had he wanted to?

Have you ever wondered how He could put up with such blasphemy, rejection, and hatred? To me, it seems as if the holy, sinless Son of God could have said, “I've had it up to here with you wicked reprobates. Send those angels, Father. Kill them all.” But He didn't. Why did our Lord stay patiently, enduring the blasphemy, the pain, the wickedness, and the rebellion of sinners?

“Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” What

was the joy that was set before Christ? The joy of saving His people. He patiently endured that He might save His people.

No wonder Scripture tells us, “Ye have need of patience.” If we really want to learn patience, we need to study the Sovereign God, the Scriptures of God, the Saints of God, the Spirit of God, and the Son of God, for they teach patience, grace, and mercy. We ought to want to be more like Christ.

Conclusion: Prayer for Patience

Father, we ask in the name of Jesus Christ that You would forgive us for our impatience. We acknowledge and confess, Lord, that impatience is sin. We have complained and bellyached about our tribulations. Each one of us has plenty of them, and we have not understood that it has been for our good and for Your glory. In that tribulation, You are teaching us patience. Patience will give us experience, experience will give us hope, and hope makes us not ashamed, because Thou dost shed the love of God abroad in our hearts. If we want the love of God shed abroad in our hearts, we cannot get it without being ashamed, and we cannot get without being ashamed without having hope. We cannot have hope without experience, and we cannot have experience without tribulation. Lord, make us more like unto Thyself. Thank You for Your marvelous, wonderful patience with each of us. Thank You for letting us live. Thank You, Father, that it is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed. Because Thy compassions, they fail not. They are new every morning. Great is Thy faithfulness. We give Thee praise in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

CHAPTER 12

Do You Want More Grace?

July 22, 2013

Introduction: The Desire for More Grace

The title of the message is a question: Do you want more grace? In 2 Peter 1:1–2, the Bible says, “Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us, through the righteousness of God and our Savior Jesus Christ: grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.” Grace is not only a wonderful word and a glorious concept; it is also exceedingly desirable, especially to those who have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

First Peter 2:2–3 says, “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if so be that you've tasted that the Lord is gracious.” Once a babe has suckled his mother and gotten a taste of milk, he always wants more. Likewise, those who have tasted the grace of God in Christ Jesus always desire more. As babes grow and mature on their mother's milk, Christians grow and mature on the milk of His Word.

Grace has been defined as unmerited favor. While that definition is obviously true, it is far more than simply unmerited favor. It is unmerited favor to those who are positively undeserving. It is easy to understand how grace could be bestowed upon someone who is good, upright, and moral. Yet it is altogether different when we consider that we were enemies of God, haters of God, transgressors of His law, and despisers of His Son.

Once you've tasted grace, you should never get over the grace of God. It is grace that has bought us, drawn us, justified us, regenerated us, converted us, and sanctifies us. It is grace that will ultimately glorify us. Since grace has done and is doing all of these things, is there any reason why we should not desire more grace? Since God has placed us in the Lord Jesus Christ and made us heirs of God, why do we not seek more grace? Do you realize there is much more in store for us according to the Word of God? Do you not desire all that the Lord has for you? Do you not desire to honor Him more?

God Gives More Grace

Do you not desire grace in your life to a greater degree—to serve Him more efficiently and to worship Him more effectively? Let me show you something. James 4:6 is a very interesting verse, especially in light of 2 Peter 1:2: “But he giveth more grace.” So the question is, how much do you want? The word “more” here is the Greek word meizon, which means greater, larger, more. He gives a larger portion of grace, a greater portion of grace, and more grace.

Hebrews 4:16 refers to His throne as a throne of grace: “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” The Bible teaches us that He not only gives more grace; He has a throne of grace. We may come to Him, obtain mercy, and find more grace to help in the time of need.

Romans 3:24 says, “Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. If God has given us initial grace in Christ Jesus, what makes you think He will not give us additional grace in Christ Jesus? If He has given us initial grace in salvation, surely, since He has given us His greatest gift, the

Lord Jesus Christ, how shall He not also with Him freely give us all things?

Romans 8:32 says, “He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not also with Him freely give us all things?” Since He has given us His greatest gift, the Lord Jesus Christ, how shall He not also with Him freely give us all things? He will give us sanctifying grace. He will give us living grace. He will give us all kind of grace and mercy. I’ve read many accounts of dying grace.

Wherein martyred saints have died with ease and joy. But let me tell you something. We do not really need dying grace until it comes our time to die. Until then, we need living grace. So what we need to do is seek more grace.

Remember, the Bible says that He gives more grace, and remember that He has a throne of grace. In Acts 20 and verse 32, the Apostle Paul says, "And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the Word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you an inheritance among all them that are sanctified." He commends them to the Word of His grace. What is the grace of God and the Word of His grace to do? It is able to build us up, to strengthen us, and to edify us.

The Word of His Grace Builds Us Up

If you are a child of God, you certainly should desire to be built up in the faith. You should desire to be strengthened and edified and to be made more holy and more godly. In fact, the truth of the matter is this: the ultimate end of our sanctification is to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. The Bible says in Romans 8 and verse 29, "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."

So what is God's ultimate goal for you? The answer is that you might be conformed to the image of His Son, Jesus Christ. How are we to be conformed to His image? The first answer, obviously, is by His grace. The second answer is by the Word of His grace. It is that Word that gives us understanding and builds us up.

God's Goal: Conformity to Christ

Ephesians 4, verse 11, says, "And he gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastor teachers." Why? "For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect or complete and mature man, unto the measure of the stature of the

He gave some pastor teachers for the edification of the saints, to build them up so that they may do the work of the ministry, so that the body of Christ may be edified, till we all come in the unity of the faith and to the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect, or mature or complete, man, according to the measure of the fullness of Christ. So the Bible is teaching us that God's goal for us is to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ.

Therefore, He has given us His Word that we might be built up in Christ. Have you ever considered why there is so much emphasis in the Bible concerning truth? You remember that passage in 2 Timothy chapter 2 and verse 15, where we are commanded: "Study to show yourselves approved unto God, rightly dividing the Word of Truth." Study to show yourselves approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth.

God's Bible is not only called the Word of His Grace; it is also called the Word of His Truth. God is Truth. When you hear theologians speak about the veracity of God, they are teaching about the truthfulness of God. God is the God of truth. He is truth personified.

Deuteronomy 32 and verse 4 says, "He is the rock. His work is perfect. For all of His ways are judgment. A God of truth, just and right is He." He is a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He. So the Bible says that God is the God of truth.

We know that God cannot lie, because God is a God of truth. He is truth personified. Hebrews 6:17 says, “Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability, that is the unchangeableness of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath.” The oath is one thing; in two immutable things—the oath, in which it was impossible for God to lie, that is the second thing—we might

have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.

The Bible tells us very clearly that it is impossible for God to lie. God is the God of truth. The veracity of God speaks of the truthfulness of God. I am laying this foundation in order that you might understand that every grace that you and I possess has come to us through the righteousness of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and the Word of His grace and the Word of His truth.

Grace and Truth Come Through Jesus Christ

Moreover, Jesus Christ is the fullness of grace and the fullness of truth. The Bible teaches in John 1:17, “For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” This verse does not teach us that there was no grace and no truth in the Old Testament. Surely there was. The Bible says that Noah was saved by grace: Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. Anyone and everyone who was saved in the Old Testament were saved by grace through faith, exactly the way you and I are saved by grace through faith. Everything in the Old Testament, as far as it was revealed, was truth.

But the fullness of truth and the fullness of grace came only in Jesus Christ. He is the personification of truth; He is the personification of grace. The reason is found in Colossians 2:3: “In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” In Jesus Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Again, Colossians 2:9 says, “For in him dwelleth the fullness of the Godhead bodily.” Jesus Christ is God incarnate, God in the flesh. Jesus Christ is everything that the Father is. In John 10:30 He said, “I and the Father are one.”

You remember what He told Thomas? In John chapter 14 and verse 9, He said, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." So Jesus Christ then is God in the flesh. The Bible tells us in 1 Timothy 3 and verse 16, "And without all controversy, great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh." Jesus Christ, as God, is truth personified and grace personified.

Now, in 2 Peter chapter 1, verse 1, we read: "Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Savior Jesus Christ." So here is a question: How did we obtain a like precious faith with those who have formerly believed? The answer is through the righteousness of God and our Savior, Jesus Christ. What were the means that God used to bring us to the righteousness of God and our Savior, Jesus Christ?

And the answer is His grace and His Word. Since God has initially brought us to saving grace through the righteousness of Christ and the Word of His grace and the Word of His truth, is there any other way that we can progress in the Christian faith other than the Word of His grace and the Word of His truth? The answer is absolutely not. So if you and I wish to grow in grace, if we wish to be more holy, more godly, and more sanctified, we must not only have grace, but we must have knowledge.

Let me quote Colossians 2 in verse 6: “As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk you in him.” We received Him by grace, through faith, in obedience to His Word, and therefore, in order to mature, we must continue in the same way.

Grace and Peace Multiplied Through Knowledge

The message today actually centers around verse 2. I was reading through this book, and this thought struck me. He says in verse 2, “Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God and of Jesus, our Lord.” Let me show you a couple of simple truths. First of all, consider that grace and peace may be multiplied. Grace never comes alone. It always brings other graces and other blessings with it. In this instance, in verse 2, it brings peace with it. So it says, “Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord.”

What is multiplication? Multiplication simply means that something may be increased at a phenomenal rate. The Greek word here, plethuno, literally means to multiply, to abound, to increase, and cause to be increased.

Now here's what I want to do. I want to take you very quickly through some other passages in the Bible and just show you where this word "multiplied" is used over and over. It's exactly the same Greek word, but I want you to see how it literally means to multiply. I could go 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6. That's slow. I could go 2 times 3 is 6. That's faster. I get the same answer, but when you multiply, you speed things up. Things are increased at a phenomenal rate. So, I want you to hold 2 Peter chapter 1, but turn back in your Bibles, first of all, to Acts chapter 6. I'm going to show you how this word "multiplied" is used throughout Scripture, and then I want to come back and apply it to the truth that we're enunciating. So look in Acts chapter 6, if you would please, and verse 1. Acts 6, verse 1.

The Bible says, "And in those days when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there was a murmuring of the Grecians among the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration." Note if you would, in those days when the number of the disciples was multiplied. Well, you've got to remember on the day of Pentecost, 3,000 were converted at one time. Now it is multiplied. I don't know by what numeral, but it was multiplied. It was greatly increased.

Look in Acts 6 and verse 7. "And the word of God increased. And the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly. And a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith." So here again, the believers are multiplying, they're growing at a phenomenal rate. Look in Acts 7 and verse 17. "But when the time of the promise drew nigh, which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt." You stop and think, and I forget the exact number, but when Jacob went down into Egypt, about 76 people went with him. And guess what? Several million came out. So you got from 76 to several million. Now, I want you to note, he said, "and the people multiplied greatly." It's the same truth. Look in Acts chapter 9 and verse 31. Acts 9 verse 31. Here it is.

“Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria and were edified and walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost were multiplied.” Again, they are increasing; they are growing phenomenally. Look in Acts chapter 12 and verse 24. The Bible says, “But the Word of God grew and

multiplied." That is the effect of it. Then, in 1 Peter 1 and verse 2, the Bible says, "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ, grace unto you, and peace be multiplied."

Let me quote one more. In Jude, verse 2, "Mercy unto you and peace and love be multiplied." In each one of these verses, the word "multiplied" is exactly the same as the word in 2 Peter chapter 1 and verse 2. He says, "Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord." The word "multiplied" means to multiply. It means to increase, to abound, to be greater than ever before. Has it ever dawned upon you that God's grace may be multiplied in our lives? That God's peace may be multiplied in our lives?

This one concept, this one truth, should excite every believer. Really. You know what God's grace has already done for you. If God has done so great for you in giving you initial grace, what in the world will He do for you when He gives you additional grace? How do we go about obtaining additional grace? That is a good question, isn't it? You remember the Bible says, "For he giveth more grace."

James 4 and verse 6 speaks of God giving more grace. Hebrews 4 talks about the throne of His grace. We read about the Word of His grace. The only way that we can get additional grace is the same way we received initial grace: through the knowledge of God and Jesus Christ our Lord. That is what He said: "Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord."

Two Kinds of Knowledge: Gnosis vs. Epignosis

This is the third thing, and I want to emphasize it today: additional grace and peace are bestowed upon us through the knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord. What does the word "knowledge" mean? In order to explain this concept, I have to differentiate between two Greek words, both of which are translated as "knowledge" in the Bible.

The first word translated as "knowledge" is gnosis—G-N-O-S-I-S, gnosis. It simply refers to knowledge as a general understanding, a

general knowledge, or what you and I would call a general intelligence. There is nothing special about this word. It is used both in a good and a bad sense in the Bible, and it is used many times in the Bible.

For instance, in Romans 15:14, the Apostle Paul says concerning these Roman Christians: "Now I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another." When he says "filled with all knowledge," it is filled with all gnosis—that is, general knowledge, a general intelligence, able also to admonish one another.

You do not need a theological degree to know what is right and what is wrong. If I were to come up to Henry and say, "Henry, I want you to pray for me, because I'm thinking about having an affair with another woman," Henry does not need a theological degree to say, "Pastor, God says, 'Thou shalt not commit adultery.' God says, 'Thou shalt not covet.' God says, 'No!'"

That is plain and simple. You do not need a lot of understanding to know what is right and what is wrong if you have basic general intelligence. That is what the Apostle Paul is saying: you are able to admonish one another if you understand basic principles.

What is the bad sense of the word gnosis? In 1 Corinthians 8:1-2, the Apostle Paul says, "Now as touching things offered unto idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth. If any man think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing, yet is he ought to know." Here is a problem with gnosis. Gnosis puffeth up. It causes pride, arrogance, and a haughty attitude. When you think that you have arrived, when you think you really have knowledge, you do not know anything.

Obviously, this word can be used in a good and a bad sense. The word "puffeth up" is the Greek word phusioo, meaning to inflate, to blow up, to cause a swell up, to puff up, and to be proud—to bear oneself loftily and heartily. That is not the kind of knowledge that brings additional grace and peace. It is the kind of knowledge that brings heartache, trouble, and problems. Several groups in the New Testament era thought themselves to be super spiritual with super

intelligence. They were known as the Gnostics. There were Cerinthian Gnostics and Docetic Gnostics, but I am not going to get into that right now.

Two books in the New Testament were written against Gnosticism. You cannot understand Colossians or 1 John until you realize that these books were written against the Gnostics, who thought they were super spiritual and super intelligent and possessed secretive knowledge. Unless you could get in on their knowledge, you were

You had to have their knowledge. It is just like all the secret organizations and secret religions today that want to tap you into their special knowledge. No, no, no. There is a second word for knowledge. It is not gnosis; it is epignosis. It is gnosis with the preposition epi in front of it, and it refers to knowledge on top of knowledge, or what we would explain as full knowledge. More precisely, it refers to precise and correct knowledge—knowledge that is ethical and divine.

Now, I want to show you a number of passages in the New Testament where this word epignosis is used. I also want to include one passage that has the word gnosis in it so I can show you and explain the difference. Turn, first of all, to Ephesians chapter 1, and look at verse 17.

Remember, we are talking about epignosis, a precise and correct knowledge of God and our Savior Jesus Christ. In Ephesians 1:17, Paul is praying for the Ephesians. He says in verse 16 that he ceases not to give thanks for them, making mention of them in his prayers. Verse 17 says, "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him."

So he prays that God would give them a more precise and correct knowledge of God. Now, if you look in Ephesians 3:19, here is where the word gnosis is used, to show you a truth. Beginning with verse 17, he says that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith, that you being rooted and grounded in love may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, length, and depth, and height and to

know the love of Christ, which passeth gnosis, knowledge, that you might be filled with all the fullness of God.

If you know the love of Christ, you have something more than a general knowledge or a general intelligence, for the love of Christ passes that. What he wants is for you to be filled with the fullness of God.

Look at Ephesians 4:13. Here again is the word epignosis. Why did God give some pastor teachers? “Till we all come in the unity of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, a mature, complete man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” Would you not think that Christ had precise and correct knowledge?

Of course He does. He is God incarnate. What does He want us to do? He wants us to come to the full knowledge of the Son of God, that we may be mature and complete as well.

Turn to Colossians chapter 1 and look at verses 9 and 10. Remember, this is the word epignosis, which means a full, precise, and correct knowledge. The Apostle Paul is speaking about how he is praying for the Colossians: "For this cause we also, since the day we heard of it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that you might be filled with the full knowledge, or precise knowledge, of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, that you might walk worthy of the Lord in all pleasing, being fruitful unto every good work, and increasing in the full, precise, correct knowledge of God." Do you understand that there is a general knowledge, which most Christians have, but beyond that there is a precise and correct knowledge of God, which brings us to maturity and completeness in Christ?

In each of these passages that I just quoted, with the exception of Ephesians 3:19, the word epignosis is used. Let me point something out. When I use the word epignosis, or speak of a full, complete, or precise knowledge, I am not introducing a new notion, nor am I speaking about some mysterious secret knowledge. No. The knowledge I am talking about has been revealed in Jesus Christ, clearly in the Word of His grace and in the Word of His truth.

Eternal Life Is Knowing God

Turn back in your Bibles to John 17. This may surprise you, because He tells us exactly what eternal life really is. John 17 is the high priestly prayer of our Lord. In verse 1 we read, "These words spake Jesus and lifted up His eyes to heaven and said, Father, the hour has come. Glorify Thy Son that Thy Son also may glorify Thee." Look at verse 3: "And this is life eternal, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent." What is eternal life? It is not simply living somewhere forever. If you define eternal life as living forever, then the unsaved have it as well, for they will live forever in punishment. Eternal life is not just living forever. It is true that those who possess eternal life do live eternally.

But eternal life is a personal, intimate knowledge of God the Father through Jesus Christ our Lord. We have eternal life here and now, and we will have it far greater when we have a glorified body and a purified understanding. He says, “And this is life eternal that they might know thee the only true God and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.” This word “know” is used throughout the Bible, and it always speaks of personal intimacy.

Adam knew his wife, and she conceived. Joseph did not know Mary until after our Lord was born. When our Lord said that this is life eternal, that they may know thee, He meant that there may be a personal, intimate relationship with the one true and living God through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The question remains: How do I acquire such a relationship? How does anyone acquire such a relationship?

I suppose the clearest and best answer is found in Matthew 11:27. Our Lord says, “All things are delivered unto me of my Father. And no man knoweth, that is, no man has full knowledge of the Son, but the Father. Neither knoweth hath full knowledge of any man of the Father, save the Son. And he whomsoever the Son will reveal him.”

Who knows the Father fully? The Son. Who knows the Son fully? The Father. Our Lord says that no one can know the Father except the Son revealing Him. The word “knoweth” there means full knowledge. Neither can anyone know the Son except the Father revealing Him. The word there is epignosis, which means a full,

precise, and correct knowledge. It is only the revelation of God, the grace of God, that will give us this full, precise, and correct knowledge.

Adam Clarke said, “But the Lord Jesus Christ has given us the knowledge of God, His Father, as He knew Him, generally in the days of His flesh, fully in His resurrection and ascension, that we might know Him as His Father and our Father, His God and our God, in the new creation consequent on His atoning death.”

What was all before, in many modes and many measures, compared with this fullness? As the beloved disciple says in his first epistle, 1 John 5:20: “We know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.”

Is anything so wonderful, gracious, and practical as the truth now made fully known? It could not be until He came who knew it Himself perfectly, and died, rose, and ascended, that we might be brought as far as possible into His relationships and have the Holy Spirit given to us to know it this day. Such is Christian knowledge of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. As the Father is revealed, so the Son reveals; and this is known in its living reality only by the Holy Spirit.

It is the full revelation of God. Confession and our baptism and needed as it ought to be enjoyed every step of our way till our pilgrimage closes and He comes to take us on high where He is, and we also may be. He is simply saying that Jesus Christ has revealed everything in His life, death, and resurrection. He has given us this knowledge.

Do you remember the passage in Matthew 16? Our Lord looked at His disciples and said, “Whom say men that I the Son of Man am?” They answered, “Some say that thou art Elias,” or Elijah, “or one of the prophets.” Then He asked, “But whom say ye that I am?” Peter responded, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And what did our Lord say to Peter? “Thou art Peter. Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.”

It was the God of grace who used the Word of grace to reveal an accurate, correct, and precise knowledge concerning Jesus Christ. If we wish to mature and progress in our Christian lives, we must labor to have a more precise, correct, and full knowledge of God through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We cannot be content with a general knowledge or a simple general understanding. We must labor to have a precise and correct knowledge of God. Let me show you.

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 loving kindness, judgment and righteousness in the earth, for in these things I delight, saith the Lord." He said, "But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me."

No one can understand or know God perfectly, totally, and completely. Only God can understand God; only God can comprehend God. But the limited knowledge we now have and are able to acquire by His grace can, by His grace, be precise and correct knowledge. What we know about Him we can know accurately, precisely, and correctly because it is revealed in His Word. This is part of the glory of eternity.

Many in this room are close to my age, and some are younger. Have you noticed that when you get closer to 70, you tend to be a little forgetful? You walk into a room and turn around, saying, "Now why did I come in this room?" Think with me: when we have glorified bodies and glorified minds, we will never forget anything.

Everything that we learn will be perfect righteousness and perfect knowledge. We will retain it perfectly, completely, and totally. Throughout eternity, we will forever learn new truths about our gracious and glorious God, never fully comprehending Him. Yet all the knowledge we have will be precise, accurate, and correct, and we will never forget it. We can begin today with that precise knowledge. On the Emmaus road, Luke 24:45 says, after our Lord had walked with the two disciples, opened the Scriptures, and explained

Himself, "Then opened He their understanding that they might understand the Scriptures."

Applications: Grow Up and Seek Precise Knowledge

We need to pray, “O Lord God, open my understanding. Give me a precise and correct knowledge of Thyself and of Thy Son Jesus Christ as Thou art revealed in His Word.” There is a difference between general knowledge and a full, accurate, precise knowledge.

Our Lord bids us to grow up and mature. We can only mature and grow up as we mature in knowledge and understanding. A four- or five-year-old child is happy and content knowing his ABCs and being able to count to twenty-five. An adult should never be satisfied with such an accomplishment. Likewise, babes in Christ may be satisfied with gnosis, having a general knowledge and understanding, but a mature individual, a mature Christian, a father in the faith, should have a more precise and accurate knowledge and never be satisfied with rudimentary truths. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 14:20, “Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men.”

Secondly, when we grow in grace, we grow in every other area of our lives as well. Grace never travels alone. It always brings with it peace, mercy, and a multitude of other blessings and attributes. It also brings repentance and a deeper knowledge of sin. Job 28:28 says, “And unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.” As we grow in grace and knowledge, we grow in our understanding of that which is evil and wicked, and we turn from it.

Are you really desirous of having a full, precise knowledge of God and of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ? Do you really want to be mature in the faith? When God finds people who are truly desirous of living a godly and obedient life, who want truth more than anything else, He sends them a special blessing. What is it? Jeremiah 3:15 says, “And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding.”

If you're fed, you should grow. If you grow, you should mature. If you mature, you should have knowledge and understanding, and it's

only through the grace of God, the Word of His grace, and the Word of His truth, that we can ever expect to have a precise and accurate knowledge of God. Do you want more grace? Peter said, "Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and our Savior, Jesus Christ."

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank You for Your Word, for Your truth, for Your grace, for Your mercy. And Lord, I pray that You would indeed enable us to mature in the faith and have a more precise and accurate knowledge of God. Give us grace, Lord, that we may serve Thee acceptably with reverence and godly fear. And we ask, Father, that Your will would be done in our lives. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

If you're fed, you should grow. If you grow, you should mature. If you mature, you should have knowledge and understanding, and it's only through the grace of God, the Word of His grace, and the Word of His truth, that we can ever expect to have a precise and accurate knowledge of God. Do you want more grace? Peter said, grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and our Savior, Jesus Christ. Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank You for Your Word, for Your truth, for Your grace, for Your mercy. And Lord, I pray that You would indeed enable us to mature in the faith and have a more precise and accurate knowledge of God. Give us grace, Lord, that we may serve Thee acceptably with reverence and godly fear. And we ask, Father, that Your will would be done in our lives. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 13

The Intercession Of Christ And Prayer

September 22, 2017

Introduction: The Neglected Doctrine of Christ's Intercession

Hebrews chapter 7, verse 25, says, “Wherefore he,” that is, the Lord Jesus, “he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.”

There is an amazing thought here. The Bible does not say, “Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he gave his life a ransom or a sacrifice for them.” Now, he did give his life a ransom and a sacrifice, but the Bible says he is able to save us to the uttermost, seeing that he ever liveth to make intercession for us.

Why Are Any Prayers Answered?

Most people hardly ever consider the intercession of Christ, and very few, if any, ever consider the intercession of Christ and prayer. We

pray oftentimes, but we have never really understood that the efficacy or the power of prayer does not lie within us. Here is a good question for you to ponder: Have you ever asked yourself, why are any of our prayers answered?

Most people want to know why their prayers are unanswered, and certainly that is a legitimate question from time to time. But we need to consider why any of our prayers are ever answered. I understand that there are certain requirements in the Bible for prayer. We must pray in faith, and we must pray according to the will of God. But have you ever considered the sin that is actually involved in our prayer even when we endeavor to pray biblically? None of us pray perfectly.

Oftentimes there are wicked, vile, humanistic, and fleshly thoughts. We are bothered; we cannot concentrate or think. There is absolutely nothing in us that is perfect. One old preacher said it like this: “There is enough sin in our prayers to send us to hell if it were not for the priestly work of the Lord Jesus Christ.” Stop and think about that: it is true. We cannot fulfill any responsible action, nor can we do anything really and truly solidly biblical because of our sin, weakness, and wickedness. No one but Jesus Christ prays perfectly. And Jesus Christ is prophet, priest, and king.

Confessional Foundations on Christ's Mediation

I want to begin with two quotes: the first from the Philadelphia Baptist Confession of Faith, and the second from the Westminster Confession of Faith. In one area, they are basically the same. Listen to what they are talking about when we speak of the session, the heavenly session—that is, Christ seated at the right hand of God—and His intercession.

The Philadelphia Baptist Confession says, "To all those for whom Christ hath obtained eternal redemption, He doth certainly and effectually apply and communicate the same, making intercession for them, uniting them to Himself by His Spirit, revealing unto them in and by the Word the mystery of salvation, persuading them to believe and obey, governing their hearts by His Word and Spirit, and overcoming all of their enemies by His almighty power and wisdom, in such manner and ways as are most consonant to His wonderful

and unsearchable dispensation, and all of free and absolute grace, without any condition foreseen in them to procure it. The office of mediator between God and man is proper only to Christ, who is prophet, priest, and King of the Church of God, and may not be, either in whole or in any part, transferred from Him to any other."

"This number and order of offices is necessary. For in respect of our ignorance, we stand in need of his prophetical office. And in respect of our alienation from God and imperfection of the best of our services, we need his priestly office to reconcile us and present us acceptable unto God. And in respect of our averseness and our utter inability to return to God, and for our rescue and security from our spiritual adversaries, we need His kingly office to convince, subdue, draw, uphold, deliver, and preserve us to His heavenly kingdom."

Those are a few paragraphs from the Philadelphia Baptist Confession of Faith concerning the intercession of Christ. Paragraph 8 from the Westminster Confession is almost word for word with the Philadelphia. Listen carefully: "To all those for whom Christ has purchased redemption, He does certainly and effectually apply and communicate the same, making intercession for them and revealing unto them in and by the Word the mysteries of salvation, effectually persuading them by His Spirit to believe and obey, and governing their hearts by His Word and Spirit, overcoming all their enemies by His almighty power and wisdom in such manner and ways as are most consonant

Christ as Our Access and Advocate

Based upon the Word of God, we believe that the only approach to the one true and living God, the only approach to our heavenly Father, is through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. We can have no access unto God except through Jesus Christ. In John 14:6, He said, “I am the way, the life, and the truth, and no man cometh unto the Father except by me.” The only way to God the Father is through Jesus Christ. The Bible teaches that the proper approach to God is through the Son and in the Spirit. Ephesians 2:18 says, “For through Him”—that is, through Jesus Christ—“we both have access by one

Spirit unto the Father." Thus, the proper avenue of approach to the Father is through the Son and the Spirit.

One author said this concerning Jesus Christ: "He who might have been placing a vial of wrath in the hand of every angel around his throne, with a commission to pour it out upon this rebellious world until it was utterly consumed, is standing at this moment at the altar of incense, presenting our prayers for mercy and officiating there as our great High Priest." And that is certainly true. Christ could have rightly and justly condemned us, but He did not.

Romans 8:34 says, "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, and yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." Jesus Christ is at the right hand of God, and the Bible says He maketh intercession for us.

Hebrews 9:24 says, "For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands." It is not the tabernacle, and it is not the temple, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us. Jesus Christ is at the right hand of God, appearing there for us. This should encourage us greatly, as well as encourage us in prayer, when we grasp the fact that Jesus Christ is our intercessor and our advocate.

In other words, He actually represents us before the Father. In 1 John 2:1, a passage we will also look at a little bit later, the Bible says, "My little children, these things I write unto you that ye sin not. But if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."

The word advocate literally means that He is our attorney. He pleads our cause and prays in our behalf. Consequently, because of this, we should have boldness to enter into the holiest of all. You remember that in the Old Testament, the only one who could go into the holiest of all was the high priest. Then only once a year, and that not without the shedding of blood. But Hebrews 10:19 says, "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, and 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."

The Bible continues, "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." Look at verse 19 again: "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus." Please remember again, no one but the high priest went in the holiest of all. If any other man ran into that, he would have been instantly killed. And now the Bible says that we have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus Christ.

The High Priestly Prayer: Christ Prays for His People

It is Jesus Christ who makes our prayers effectual, for the Father always hears Jesus Christ. You remember that passage in John 11:41, where our Lord raised Lazarus from the dead. He said in that passage, "And Jesus looked at his eyes and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me." God the Father always hears God the Son. There is a tremendous passage in Psalm 2:8, where the Father said to the Son, "Ask of me and I will give thee the heathen for thy possession and the uttermost parts of the earth for thine inheritance." In other words, the Father said to the Son, "All you have to do is ask and I will give it to you. Whatever you ask you may have."

Christ Prays for His People

In John 17, we see several aspects of the intercessory work of Christ. We cannot cover everything, but this chapter gives us an idea and an example of our Lord's intercession.

John 17 is the high priestly prayer of our Lord. Last week, I dealt with the sovereignty of God in prayer and with what is commonly referred to as the Lord's Prayer, which is really the model prayer in which our Lord taught His disciples to pray, "Our Father which art in heaven." John 17, however, is indeed the high priestly prayer of our Lord. In verse 1, the Bible says, "These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee."

The entire chapter is the prayer of our Lord. The first thing to see in verses 6–9 is that Jesus Christ prays for His people. He says, "I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world. Thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word. Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee. For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me."

Then, in verse 9, He says, "I pray for them," that is, the ones the Father gave the Son. "I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine." In this brief passage, we see the prophetical office of Christ as well as His priestly office. In His prophetical office, He says, "I have declared unto them the words which thou gavest me." In other words, He preached, taught, and gave His disciples the truth that God had given Him to declare. But we also see His priestly work, because He is now praying. He prays for those whom the Father has given Him, and not for the world.

Matthew Henry points out three things concerning this passage. He said, "The elect whom the Father gave to Christ were His own in three ways."

First, they were creatures, and their lives and beings were derived from Him. When they were given to Christ to be vessels of honor, they were in His hand as clay in the hand of the potter, to be disposed of as God's wisdom saw most for God's glory.

Secondly, they were criminals, and their lives and beings were forfeited to Him. It was a remnant of fallen mankind given to Christ to be redeemed, that might have been made sacrifices to justice when they were pitched upon to be the monuments of mercy, might justly have been delivered to the tormentors when they were delivered to the Savior.

Thirdly, they were chosen, and their lives and beings were designed for Him. They were set apart for God and consigned to Christ as His agent.

Matthew Henry said that we belong to God in three ways. First, we were His creatures. Second, we were His criminals, in that we had sinned against Him and were delivered into His hand for justice. Then, of course, we are chosen, because He delivered us out of that criminality and brought us to Jesus Christ. He said, “And they were set apart for God and were consigned to Christ as his agent.” Have you ever stopped to think that Jesus Christ is the agent of God the Father? He received us as God the Father’s agents. But I might point out that He is also our agent, because He is our surety and undertook on our behalf to guarantee everything.

Intercession as Application of Salvation

Isn’t it amazing that when we think of our Lord’s salvation, we automatically think of His sacrifice and His substitutionary death? Very seldom do we think about His priestly intercession. Yet the truth is that He not only died in our place; He now lives to intercede for us. That is why I read Hebrews 7:25: “Wherefore he is able to save to the uttermost them that come to God by him,” not merely because He gave His life for them, but because He ever liveth to make intercession for them. In other words, the priestly work of Jesus Christ is just as important in salvation as His substitutionary and sacrificial work.

As our suffering Substitute, He made atonement for our sins while on earth. As our High Priest, He now maketh intercession for us, on behalf of each of us, unto the Father. Romans 8:32–34 says: “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not also with him freely give us all things? Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.”

Let me give you the one paragraph that was exactly the same in the Philadelphia Confession of Faith and the Westminster Confession of Faith: "To all those for whom Christ has purchased redemption He does certainly and effectually apply and communicate the same, making intercession for them and revealing unto them in and by His words the mystery of His salvation." Notice

how they tie the intercession of Christ with the salvation of Christ. You might say it like this: His sacrifice merited and earned salvation, but His priestly intercession enables Him to apply that salvation.

Has it ever dawned upon you that you were brought to God the Father savingly, not simply because of the work of God the Holy Spirit, but also because of the priestly work of God the Son? His intercession is just as important as His sacrifice. I usually ask a question when preaching on Matthew chapter 5: Which is more important, the circumcision of Jesus Christ or the crucifixion of Jesus Christ? Most people are going to say, “The crucifixion.” But the crucifixion would have been ineffective had He not kept the law of God perfectly. Both are equally important. It is like that when you come to the intercession of Christ and the sacrifice of Christ as well.

John Owen, the old Puritan, was known as the Prince of Preachers. He lists three divisions of the work of Christ in redemption: first, the incarnation of Christ, when Jesus Christ became flesh and dwelt among us; secondly, His oblation, or His sacrifice; and thirdly, His intercession for those for whom He made atonement. He says, "His intercession is for all and every one of those for whom He gave Himself for an oblation. He did not suffer for them and then refused to intercede for them. He did not do the greater and omit the lesser." Owen is saying that we are saved just as much by our Lord’s intercession as we are by His sacrifice.

His intercession is simply the application of His purchased salvation. Christ executed the first element of His priestly office as surety when He gave Himself as a sacrifice. He likewise administers the second element of His priestly office as He is still our surety and intercedes for us. He is not merely standing before the throne of God saying, “Father, these are my friends.” Scripture does call us His friends, but He stands there as our surety, guaranteeing everything for us.

Christ Prays for Preservation, Protection, and Preachers

Christ is our surety. If Steve wanted to buy something from Gary but did not have enough money, I could stand behind him and say to Gary, “I will be a surety.” In other words, I would guarantee that

Gary would receive his money: if Steve could not pay, I would. Jesus Christ is our surety in the sense that He pleads before the Father the perfection of His work and the purity of His sacrifice.

Matthew Henry said that we were, first, God's creatures; secondly, God's criminals—and we were that; but thirdly, God's chosen. Their lives and beings were designed for Him. They were set apart for God and consigned to Christ as His agent. Jesus Christ, as the agent of the Father, guarantees that those whom the Father has given Him will indeed end up in glory. Since we have been given to Him, He is not only the agent of the Father; He is also our agent and our surety. He undertakes for us. He is our advocate.

First John 2:1 says, "My little children, these things write unto you that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." The word for advocate is very interesting. It is parakletos, which literally means one who is called alongside to help. Para means alongside, and kletos comes from the word called. It is translated in our Bibles as advocate and as comforter. The parakletos is the one called alongside to plead our cause before a judge, to be our counsel for defense, our helper, and our aid.

The same word is used of the Holy Spirit. In John 14 and 15, Jesus said that He was going to the Father, but, "If I go to the Father, I will not leave you comfortless. I will send you another comforter." The word comforter there is parakletos, and He was speaking about the Holy Spirit.

Romans 8 shows us one of the things the Holy Spirit does for us. In verses 26 and 27 we read: "Likewise, the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities. For we know not what we should pray for as we ought. But the Spirit himself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit because he maketh intercession for the Saints according to the will of God."

So the Holy Spirit is a comforter. He is the paraclete, the one called alongside of to help, because we do not know how to pray as we ought. The Bible tells us that He makes intercession for the saints

according to the will of God. Why, then, is the Holy Spirit called the Paracletos? And why, then, is Jesus Christ called the Paracletos?

The answer is very simple: the Holy Spirit is an intercessor in us, and God the Son is the intercessor for us. Both do intercessory work. Both are paracletes. Both are called alongside of to help.

Jesus Christ is our intercessor and our advocate. In John 17:11, He stands as surety for our preservation. He said, “And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou has given me, that they may be one as we are.” Our Lord is saying, “I’m leaving, I’m going back to you now; keep them in. They are in the world, but they need to be kept.”

The Scripture tells us very clearly in 1 Peter 1:5 that we are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed unto the last time. But why would God keep us? The answer is because God the Son prayed for us and asked the Father to keep us and preserve us.

Jude writes: “Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, the brother of James, to them that are sanctified by God the Father and preserved in Christ Jesus.” God the Father heard the prayer for our preservation, and we are preserved in Christ Jesus.

Why did Peter not fail utterly, totally, and completely? We know that he denied Christ three times. In Luke 22, verses 31 and 32, Jesus Christ said, "Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have thee, that he may sift thee as wheat. But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith does not fail, and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." The reason Peter did not falter and fail totally, completely, and permanently is because Christ interceded for him. The only reason you and I do not fail and falter completely, totally, and permanently is because of the intercessory prayer of our Lord Jesus Christ. Do you realize it is impossible for God's people to apostatize totally and completely? It is impossible.

How can I say that? First, because of the prayer of Jesus Christ. He asked the Father to keep us, and the Father always hears His prayer and always answers His prayer. The Bible says in 1 John 2:19, "They went out from us, but they were not of us. For if they had been

of us, they would no doubt have continued with us, but they went out that it might be made manifest that they were not of us." If anyone ever leaves the faith permanently and apostatizes, it is evidence that he was never in the faith to begin with. "They went out from us, for they were not of us, for had they been of us, no doubt they would have continued with us." Obviously.

Our Lord prays for our preservation, so we will be preserved and are preserved in Jesus Christ.

He also prays for our protection. In verses 14 and 15 He says, "I have given them thy word, and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but thou shouldest keep them from the evil." Actually, "that thou shouldest keep them from the evil"—is that *ho ponēros*? Is there a definite article there? Not? So, keep us from the evil. Satan is referred to in the Bible as the accuser of the brethren in Revelation 12 and verse 10. But we not only have the accuser of the brethren; we have the world, the flesh, the ungodly, and wicked rulers. All of these seek to overthrow us and destroy us.

And the amazing thing is this: they will never, ever prevail. The Bible says in Psalm 37:12, “The wicked plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth.” Note the word plotteth: they scheme, plan, and conspire to destroy us, but they shall not do so.

John wrote in 1 John 2:13–14, “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.”

And in 1 John 4:4: “Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them,” plural, “because greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world.”

Our preservation and protection rest upon the great High Priest, our Intercessor, the Lord Jesus Christ. He prays for His people. If

you would stop and think about that, how could you not be encouraged to pray when you realize the Son of God prays for you?

Look in verse 20 of John 17. He not only prays for His people; He prays for His preachers. He says, "Neither pray I for these alone," that is, His then-living disciples, "but for them also which shall believe on me through their word." He prays for future believers, but He is also praying for His preachers, who will preach, teach, and tell others, and they will believe on Him through their word.

Every preacher desires success in the ministry. The problem is that one's definition of success may be faulty; it may not be biblical. If you examined Noah by the standards of success today in the ministry, he was an epic failure. He preached for 120 years and never had one convert. When you think of Jeremiah and Isaiah, they too were epic failures. And yet these people are listed as heroes of faith.

Here is a good question to consider: What is the ground or foundation of success in the ministry? Is it the oratorical ability of the preacher? Is it the charisma of the preacher? Is it the ability of the preacher? Is it the knowledge of the preacher? No. The foundation of success in the ministry is the intercession of Jesus Christ. It is invigorating, encouraging, and edifying to know that Jesus Christ intercedes and prays for the preaching of the gospel.

In our Lord's High Priestly Prayer, in verse 20, He not only prays for the men who will be preaching; He also prays for the method—that is, the preaching itself: "Those who will believe on me through their word." Have you ever really considered the ministry? John Flavel, one of the earlier Puritans and one of the most delightful to read, explains the problems in the ministry. He said, "The labors of the ministry will exhaust the very marrow from your bones, hasten to old age and death. They, God's preachers, are fitly compared to the toil of men in harvest, to the labors of a woman in travail, and to the agonies of soldiers in the extremity of a battle."

We must watch while others sleep. Indeed, it is not so much the expense of our labors as the loss of them that kills us. It is not with us as with other laborers. They find their work as they leave it; so do not we. Sin and Satan unravel almost all we do. The impressions we make on our people's souls in one sermon vanish before the next.

How many truths have we to study? How many wiles of Satan and mysteries of corruption to detect? How many cases of conscience to resolve? We must fight in defense of the truth we preach, as well as study it to paleness, and preach it and all. We welcome pained breasts, aching backs, and trembling legs if, by all this, we can approve ourselves Christ's faithful servants and hear that joyful voice from His mouth, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.” All will be well.

But notice what he said: that which kills preachers most is not just putting forth the labor, but the loss of it. If you are building a house, studding up the wall, and night comes so that you are tired, you can quit, go home, eat supper, go to bed, and return the next morning; the wall is still standing. You find your work exactly as you left it.

That is not true in the ministry. Sin and Satan unravel almost all we do, and the impressions we make on our people's souls in one sermon vanish before the next. Many people cannot remember what the preacher preached last Sunday, much less a month ago. It is gone; it has evaporated. The Bible tells us Satan steals the seed. It also tells us that the flesh, the world, and all kinds of things work to destroy it. The point is this: the power is not in the preacher.

Arthur W. Pink said it like this: “A hundred preachers are unable to make an unregenerate person realize the dreadful nature of sin, or show him that he has been a lifelong rebel against God, or change his heart so that now he hates himself and longs to please God and serve Christ. Only the Spirit can bring a man to the place where he is willing to forsake every idol, cut off a hindering right hand, or pluck out an offending right eye.”

You could take all the preachers in America, and we could not convert one lost sinner in and of ourselves. It is impossible. It is Jesus Christ who sent the Holy Spirit, and Jesus Christ who prays for the success of His preachers. Listen to what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 2:1–5.

Paul said, “And I, brethren, came not unto you with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in

much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in God.”

It was not his oratory or his wisdom. That is worthless. He said it again in 2 Corinthians 4, verses 5 through 7: “For we preach not ourselves but Jesus Christ the Lord and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake.” Then he said, “For God who has commended the light to shine out of darkness has shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels that the power and the excellency might be of God and not of us.”

When you stop and think how weak, how wicked, and how helpless are the most brilliant, the most wise, and the most godly preachers, we cannot convert one sinner. We cannot comfort, console, or encourage one saint in and of ourselves, in our strength and power, because we have none. The only hope of success in the ministry lies in the intercession of Jesus Christ.

Christ Prays for Our Perfection and Glorification

I know that the ministry is going to be successful for three reasons. First, because God the Father ordained it. Second, because God the Son prayed for it. Third, because God the Holy Spirit is covenantally engaged to honor the preaching and teaching of the Word of God. In this intercessory prayer, our Lord prays for His people—for our preservation and protection. He prays for His preachers, and He is the ground of our success in the ministry. He also prays for our perfection.

Our Lord is praying: "That they all may be one as thou, Father, art in me and I in thee, that they also may be one in us, that the world may believe that thou hast sent me, and the glory which thou gavest me I have given them, that they may be one even as we are one. I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them as thou hast loved me." Then He says, "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 lovest me before the foundation of the world."

Can you fathom, can you even begin to think of being with Jesus Christ and beholding Him in all of His glory, worshipping Him and glorifying Him in a body that is capable of constant and continuous praise? He prayed for our perfection.

Now turn over to Romans 8. I want to tie this together for you. Romans 8, beginning with verse 30: "Moreover whom he did predestinate them he also called and whom he called them he also justified and whom he justified them he also glorified. What shall we say then to these things if God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather that is risen again, who is at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."

Go back to verse 30 and observe something unusual: "Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called, and whom he called, them he also justified, and whom he justified, them he also glorified." Do you notice anything peculiar about the three words called, justified, glorified?

They are all past tense. In the Greek, they are all in the aorist tense, which means it is a completed action. Now, here is my question: Have you yet been glorified? No. But your glorification is just as absolutely certain and sure as if it had already been done. In fact, God the Father views it as a completed action. He called you. He justified you. He glorified you.

Now, let us work our way down. In verse 30, he is saying, You have been called, you have been justified, you have been glorified. Watch verse 31: “What shall we then say to these things if God be for us, who can be against us?” If God is for us, it really does not matter who is against us, because no one can overthrow God, thwart Him, or hinder Him.

Verse 32 says, “He that spared not his own son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?”

Notice the argument the Apostle Paul is using. It is an argument from the greater to the lesser. If God has done the greatest in giving His only begotten Son to be our sacrifice, our substitute, and our surety, will He not do the lesser? Would He not follow through with the completion of His purpose and of His salvation? If God has done the greatest thing for us, He is not going to fail to do that which is lesser.

Now watch verse 33: “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifies.” God is the one who justified; no one can lay a charge against us before God. You might lay a charge against us before man, but you are not going to lay a charge against us before God, because God is the one who justified. Now watch verse 34: “Who is he that condemneth?”

It does not do you any good to condemn. Why? It is Christ that died, yea, rather that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Do you see how the intercession of Jesus Christ is intimately connected with our salvation? Because we have been called, justified, and glorified, the heavenly session of our Lord denotes His power to save and protect us, and His intercession assures it. He is there. He is going to make sure that our glorification comes to pass because God has already given the greater—that is, His Son—to be our sacrifice and our substitute. Now God is going to finish the work. If God has done the greatest, shall He not do that which is least? Of course He will.

Conclusion: Encouragement to Bold Prayer

Our glorified Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ, is conscious of His claims. He is conscious of the efficacy of His life, death, resurrection, and intercession. Our Lord is confident in His prayers, and He says in verse 24, “Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am.” How could anyone think that the Father would not answer that prayer, in light of the fact that the Father sent the Son to accomplish salvation? That is why glorified is in the past tense. It is an accomplished fact in the will and purpose of God.

Faith finds joy and triumph not just in the sacrifice of Christ and not just in His resurrection, but in His intercession at the right hand

of God. When we understand that our prayer is connected to the intercession of Christ, how could we not be constant in prayer?

How could we not be continuous in prayer when we know that the Holy Spirit is an intercessor in us and Jesus Christ is an intercessor for us before the throne of God? How could we not come with holy boldness within the veil into the most holy place and have communion with God? If God has done the greatest, will he not do that which is least? If God has sent his Son to be our intercessor, and the Spirit to be our intercessor, he certainly encourages us to pray.

Does that mean he will not hear us? No, he will hear us. He has done that which is greater and will not fail to do that which is lesser. Therefore Hebrews 10:22 says, "Let us draw near with a true heart and full assurance of faith." When we pray, we can say, "Father, in faith, I know the Holy Spirit prays in me. I know the Son of God prays for me. I want your will. I want your word. Hear me, O Father." Through Jesus Christ in the Spirit, we have perfect communion with God the Father.

"Wherefore, he is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth, to make intercession for them." Jesus Christ's intercession is the foundation for our prayer life. Knowing he prays for us encourages us to pray to God the Father through God the Son in the Holy Spirit.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow before thee. We thank you for the intercessory work of the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank you for the intercessory work of the Holy Spirit. And I pray, Father, that you would indeed make us holy, make us godly, make us prayerful. May we praise thee for your infinite work in Jesus Christ. In whose name we ask and pray, amen.

CHAPTER 14

Are You Involved In A Scandal?

July 5, 2022

Introduction: The Biblical Meaning of Scandal

Turn, if you would, to Matthew chapter 13. We will begin by reading only one verse, verse 57. The title of the message is a question: Are you involved in a scandal? I will explain. Concerning Jesus Christ, the Bible says, “And they were offended in him. But Jesus said to them, A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house.”

Everyone knows about scandals. Soap operas, Hollywood movies, trashy magazines, and even newspapers thrive on scandals. The truth is, the juicier the scandal, the more magazines and more papers they sell.

When we think of scandals, we normally think of prominent men and women, especially, violating their marriage vows, defrauding, stealing, plotting, scheming, or even committing murder. Such thinking is basically supported by dictionary definitions of scandals.

One dictionary defines a scandal as a disgraceful or discreditable action or circumstance; an offense caused by a fault or misdeed; damaged reputation; or public disgrace. Of course, it also includes defamatory talk and malicious gossip.

According to modern-day dictionaries, to scandalize is basically to shock or horrify someone because something is immoral or improper. We are aware of all kinds of public scandals, not only from the Roman Catholic Church and the pedophilia involved there, but even in Hollywood.

In fact, there is a famous, or infamous, divorce going on now involving Amber Heard and Johnny Depp. The truth is, I know nothing about either one of them. I do not watch any of that stuff, but I know that every time you look at the news, it is there. We hear about these things all the time.

But when you come to the word scandal in the Bible, it is a totally different idea. It is possible to be scandalized by the Word of God. It is also possible to be scandalized by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Our text will demonstrate this. Our English word scandal comes from the Greek word skandalon.

Sometimes it is closely connected with a stumbling block, but it is usually translated as offense or offended, and it means literally to ensnare or to entrap an animal or an enemy. In reality, the skandalon was the trapstick that held the trap in place, and when, of course, that stick was moved or bumped into, then the trap fell, and the enemy and or the animal was ensnared. So anytime you see the word usually in the New Testament, offend or offended, it is from the Greek word skandalon. And sometimes, occasionally, it is translated as a stumbling block, but there is another word that is used mainly for stumbling blocks, but it's always closely associated with a stumbling block.

So if you'll hold Matthew chapter 13, look in your Bibles to the book of Romans chapter 14 and verse 13, and I'll show you a very close connection in Romans chapter 14 verse 13. Note if you would what the scripture says. Romans 14 and verse 13: "Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's

way." Now, the Greek word for stumbling block is the word proskomma, and it indicates a stumbling stone or stumbling block. It is an obstacle that is placed in someone's way so that if his foot strikes against it, then he's simply going to stumble or fall. Now when you look in Romans 14 in verse 13, he says, "Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall." And the word occasion to fall is the word skandalon. So you see the stumbling block and the scandal go together.

So he says, "Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or a scandal in his brother's way." So clearly then you have the stumbling block and the scandal closely associated. So here's a truth that I want to share with you today. And I want you to understand this because it is very clearly taught in the scripture that the word of God itself can scandalize. And the Lord Jesus Christ himself can scandalize as well. So let me show you, first of all, how the Scriptures of God, or the Word of God, can scandalize. So I want you to turn in your Bibles, if you would please, to Matthew chapter 15, since that's close to our text. Look in Matthew chapter 15, and notice, if you would please, verse 12.

The Word of God Can Scandalize

Matthew 15:12 says, “Then came his disciples, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying?” Literally, the Pharisees were scandalized after they heard this saying. They were scandalized by our Lord’s teaching.

He taught that their traditions violated the word of God and that, by their tradition and religion, they consistently transgressed the law of God. Matthew 15:1 begins: “Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying, Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread. But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?”

When they asked why the disciples did not wash their hands before eating bread, this had absolutely nothing to do with sanitation. It was a ritual, a ceremony handed down by the elders. In

verse 3, Jesus said, “But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; And honour not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition. Ye hypocrites!”

“Well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.” Our Lord clearly states that their traditions were worthless and their religion useless. They were hypocrites and did not worship God in truth. He spoke plainly and clearly against their traditions.

In verse 10, He continues: “And he called the multitude, and said unto them, Hear, and understand: Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.” You might eat a little dirt if you do not wash your hands, but that is not the main contamination. The main contamination is what comes forth out of the mouth; in other passages, He says it comes forth from the heart.

These Pharisees had everything upside down. The Lord Jesus was teaching this very clearly. Now, if you look back in verse 12, the disciples asked the Lord Jesus, “Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying?” They were scandalized by the Lord Jesus Christ and by His word. His answer to His disciples may surprise us. In verse 13 He said, “Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up. Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.”

Here is a truth our Lord is enunciating clearly: if someone is scandalized by the Word of God or by the Lord Jesus Christ, that person is not a plant of our heavenly Father. He has not planted them. They are blind, and if the blind lead the blind, they will both fall into the ditch. In other words, if you are scandalized by the Word

of God—if you reject the Word of God—you are headed for destruction; that is what it amounts to. Our Lord is showing us very clearly that all who reject the Word of God are scandalized by it; therefore, they are blind and headed for destruction.

Here is an interesting thing: truth does shock and horrify people who are consumed with error and heresy. Have you ever stopped to think about that? When you tell the absolute biblical truth to someone who has never heard the truth, someone raised in some type of superstition or tradition, and begin to reclaim the truth, all of a sudden it is like, “What? That can’t be right. I’ve never been taught that in my entire life. I’ve never heard that in my entire life.” They are in a very real state of shock. And so the truth does indeed shock them.

SCRIPTURE READING - 1 Peter 2:3-10 (KJV)

Jesus Christ Himself Can Scandalize

Matthew 13:57 says, "And they were offended in him." They were not just offended by the Word of God; now they are offended in Him. That is, they were scandalized by Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ.

In 1 Peter chapter 2, beginning with verse 3, the Scripture says, "If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious. To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed. But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: Which in time past were not

> a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy."
>
> In verse 4, he says, "...to whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men." The word disallowed occurs again in verse 7: "the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner." The Greek word here literally means disallowed, rejected, disapproved, and repudiated. So Jesus Christ was repudiated. He was disallowed. He's rejected by these individuals who would not acknowledge Him as the Messiah. But look in verse 8. We're talking about Jesus Christ.

And what is He to some of these people? He is a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence. That is, He is a scandal even to them which stumble at the Word. So it is possible, then, to be scandalized not only by the Word of God, but by the Lord Jesus Christ. What I have been telling you so far is this, and I think you can see that: the unsaved, the unregenerate, who reject the Lord Jesus Christ and refuse His Word, are scandalized by His Word and by Himself.

But let me make another statement. This may shock you. It is possible for Christians to be scandalized by the Word of God. It is possible for real, genuine believers to be scandalized by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christians Can Be Scandalized

In Matthew 11:6, look at what our Lord says: “And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.” Literally, blessed is he whosoever shall not be scandalized in me. So we are talking about individuals being scandalized by the Lord Jesus Christ. This is not merely a matter of unbelievers rejecting Him; the statement addresses anyone who may be offended in Him.

Matthew 26:31 makes it exceedingly clear that Christians can be scandalized, not only by the Word of God, but by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. In this passage, our Lord is speaking to His disciples: “Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad.” All of you shall be scandalized because of me this night.

"But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee. Peter answered and said unto him, Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended. Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples." Note this phrase.

Our Lord not only warns His disciples that they are going to be scandalized; He even quotes Scripture. In verse 31, when He said, "...for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad," He was quoting Zechariah chapter 13 and verse 7. Peter and the rest of the disciples were absolutely adamant that they would never be scandalized. They would never, ever be offended. Peter said, "I will die with thee first." Then the Bible says, "Likewise also said them all."

Now skip down to verse 55 and watch what happens: "In that same hour said Jesus to the multitudes, Are ye come out as against a thief with swords and staves for to take me? I sat daily with you teaching in the temple, and ye laid no hold on me. But all this was done, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples forsook him, and fled."

They were scandalized. Jesus Christ not only taught them and told them; He quoted the Scripture. Yet Peter and the rest of the disciples were saying, "I don't care what the scripture says, I'm not going to deny you. I don't care what you say. I'm not going to deny you. I'm not going to be scandalized. I'm not going to be offended." Jesus said, "Let me tell you something, Peter. Before that cock crows twice, you're going to deny me thrice."

Here were believers refusing to accept Scripture and refusing to accept the words of the Lord Jesus Christ. We see whose word actually came to pass. How then do we as Christians scandalize, become involved in scandals, or become scandalized? It is when you and I prefer our thoughts, our desires, our will, our way, and our words above the Word of God and above the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. We are involved in a scandal; we are being scandalized by the truth of God.

Illustration from Jeremiah 44

Let me give you a good illustration from Jeremiah chapter 44. This whole section is an absolutely wonderful section. Nebuchadnezzar had come and killed an awful lot of Judeans, taking a number into captivity. He then named a man as governor of the few weak and poor Judahites who were left. Ishmael came and murdered the governor. Then, of course, he took what was left of the king's household and some other people and left.

Some who remained came to Jeremiah and said, “Please inquire of God for us. We want God's will; we want to know His word. We are afraid of these Babylonians. We know now that our governor has been killed, and Nebuchadnezzar is going to come in and take revenge. Tell us what to do, and we will obey.” Jeremiah prayed, and God said, “I will tell them what to do. They need to stay in the land. If they stay in the land, I will protect them. They need not be afraid of Nebuchadnezzar; he will do absolutely nothing. Do not go down into Egypt. If they go down into Egypt, they are going to run into what they are fleeing from, because I am giving Egypt into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar.”

But when Jeremiah told them this, they said, “You are lying to us. Baruch has set you against us. We do not believe you. God did not say that.” They went into Egypt, and they even kidnapped Jeremiah and Baruch and took them down into Egypt as well.

But do you not see what God says? In Jeremiah 44, beginning with verse 28: “Yet a small number that escape the sword shall return out of the land of Egypt into the land of Judah, and all the remnant of Judah, that are gone into the land of Egypt to sojourn there, shall know whose words shall stand, mine, or theirs. And this shall be a sign unto you, saith the LORD, that I will punish you in this place, that ye may know that my words shall surely stand against you for evil.” God said, “You want a contest to find out whose words are going to stand? You want to find out who is going to be scandalized? You want to find out whether or not I can bring to pass exactly what I say?”

It is possible that when you and I do not believe the Word of God and do not bow to the Word of God, we are scandalized by it because

we are trusting in what we think, what we want, and what our desires are above what God says.

It is the will of our Lord Jesus for each of us that we not be scandalized, because He has warned us and foretold us. In John chapter 16, beginning with verse 1, He says, “These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended.” That is, that ye should not be scandalized.

Christ's Warning to Avoid Being Scandalized

“They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me. But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them. And these things I said not unto you at the beginning, because I was with you. But now I go my way to him that sent me; and none of you asketh me, Whither goest thou?”

Our Lord said, “I've spoken these things to you that you should not be offended.” What does He mean? Do not be scandalized. If they mistreated the Master, they are going to mistreat the disciple. If they rejected Me, they are going to reject you. If they ridiculed Me, they are going to ridicule you. If they persecuted Me, they are going to persecute you. If they killed Me, they are going to kill some of you. I am telling you this so that you will not be offended, so that you will not be scandalized. You have to understand that these things are coming down the pike.

Not everybody suffers to the degree that the original disciples did. Not everybody suffers to the degree that some of those Christians in Russia suffered. But it does tell us that we should not be offended, because these things are coming down the pike.

With these things in mind, turn back to Matthew chapter 13 and look at verse 54: “And when he was come into his own country, he taught them in their synagogue, insomuch that they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works?” He came into His own country; He was raised in Nazareth.

The Nazareth Rejection: Familiarity Breeds Contempt

He was born in Bethlehem. But after He came out of Egypt, He went back to Nazareth. That is where He was raised and brought up. Undoubtedly, there were family and friends in Nazareth. But the Bible says He taught them in their synagogues. When He taught, they were absolutely astounded, astonished, and amazed at what He said and did.

Look at verse 54 again: "Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works?" Let me give you a quick quote from Matthew Poole on this verse: "And said, Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works? that is, a power to do these mighty works. Mark saith, Whence hath this man these things? and what wisdom is this which is given unto him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands?"

Astonishment and admiration flow from ignorance and are no indications of any spiritual saving work upon men's hearts. We shall see that these Jews, notwithstanding their astonishment, were by and by scandalized and offended at Christ. They ask again, "Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works?"

Just stop and think about this. They knew Jesus Christ; He was raised there. They knew of His education—or, rather, His lack of education—because He had never been to an approved rabbinical school. He had never learned from any of the learned doctors, yet they were astounded, astonished, and amazed at what He taught and how He taught. Instead of glorifying the fact that a man who had never attended rabbinical school knew all the doctrine, had all the answers, and had power to do mighty works, they asked, "Where did he get this? How's he doing this?"

The teaching of Jesus Christ was totally different from the teaching of the scribes and Pharisees. Look at John chapter 7, verse 15: "And the Jews marvelled, saying, How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?" How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?

Where did He get this education? How does He understand this doctrine? Who taught Him theology? He did not go to one of our rabbinical schools. Our Lord answers that question when they want

to know how He knew and never studied under them: “Jesus answered them, and said, My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me. If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself. He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory: but he that seeketh his glory that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him.”

Our Lord says, “My doctrine is not Mine. My doctrine is from the Father who sent Me.” Now, having understood that our Lord received His doctrine and revelation from His Father, notice what set Jesus Christ apart from the scribes and Pharisees: “For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.” He taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes.

Mark records the same principle in another way: “And they were all amazed, insomuch that they questioned among themselves, saying, What thing is this? what new doctrine is this? for with authority commandeth he even the unclean spirits, and they do obey him.” Our Lord taught with absolute authority.

Have you ever realized this simple truth? Most people really and truly do not want authoritative truth or authoritative teaching. They do not want someone coming along saying, “You’re wrong.” They do not want someone saying, “Your traditions are unbiblical. The way you were raised is untruthful. What you think and what you believe and what your opinions are, are wicked and wrong.” Most people would rather be left in their own lives, opinions, and traditions than have truth. When you begin to state truth authoritatively, the response you normally receive is, “But who do you think you are, telling me what to do? Telling me what to believe? Telling me what to think?”

"Who in the world are you?" So this is what they are saying about Jesus Christ. He taught them as one having authority. Where did He get this knowledge? How did He learn this? Where did He get this power?

The sovereign God of heaven and earth, who is our Creator, our Sustainer, our Provider, our Lord, and our King, has the absolute right to tell us what to do, when to do it, where to do it, and how to do it. We are the creatures; He is the Creator. We are the servants;

He is the Lord. We are the children; He is the Father. He has every right to speak to us authoritatively. We may not like it, but He has every right to do so.

Most of us have heard the word Torah. In the broadest sense, Torah refers to the substance of divine revelation. In the strictest sense, it refers to the first five books of the Bible, containing the law of God as written by Moses. What many people do not know is that Torah actually means instruction, authoritative instruction. Perhaps that is why most people do not like the law of God or the Word of God: it is absolutely authoritative. The Bible is our sole authority for faith and practice because it is the Word of God.

In Matthew 13, verse 54, we read: “And when he was come into his own country, he taught them in their synagogue, insomuch that they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things?”

They stumbled over the truth of God. They were offended, scandalized by the Lord Jesus Christ, because they thought He was not and could not be the Messiah. He was their hometown boy. They knew Him; they had seen Him since He was a child. Besides, He was the carpenter’s son. A carpenter did not know these things. His brothers and sisters were there. Who did He think He was? Where had He gotten all of this?

Here was the problem: these people thought they knew the Scriptures, but they did not know the Scriptures. In John chapter 5, beginning with verse 39, our Lord said, “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.” In other words, they thought they were right, but the Scriptures testified of Him. If you do not see Christ in the Scriptures, you are not reading them correctly. Then He said, “And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.” They were stumbling over the Scriptures; they were being scandalized by the Scripture.

Do you realize that the authority with which our Lord taught, His knowledge of doctrine, His correction of the scribes’ and Pharisees’

misinterpretations and misapplications, and all the miracles He performed should have proven that there was something absolutely different about Him? They may not have observed it physically. Let me make a statement.

There was nothing extraordinary about the physical appearance of Jesus Christ. He looked like an ordinary, everyday Israelite. Isaiah 53 says, "Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed? For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him." In other words, there was nothing special about His outward appearance. "He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not."

Back in Matthew 13, these people were judging by appearance. He was their hometown boy. They had known Him all His life. They knew His father, mother, brothers, and sisters. They knew He had not been away to college. So where had He obtained all this information? Where had He learned this truth? Where had He received the power to do these works? The Bible says in John chapter 7, "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment." Consequently, they were judging by appearance.

Look at verse 57. Here is the inevitable result: "And they were offended in him." They were scandalized in Him. "But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house." His humility, His lack of an education as far as they were concerned, and their familiarity with His family made them refuse the truth He taught. They were offended at Him. These things made them stumble.

The Result of Being Scandalized: Unbelief

They concluded that He could not possibly be the Messiah because they knew Him. Yet one would have thought just the opposite. If they did not know where He had obtained all this information or the power to perform these miracles, there was something special about

Him. It should have led them to conclude that He was indeed the Messiah, the Son of God.

"And they were offended in him. But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house." He was in his own country and in his own house. His brothers did not even believe on him initially. Thankfully, they were converted later, but initially they did not believe him, because they encouraged him to go up to the feast. Our Lord said, "I go not up yet," and the Bible said that they did not yet believe in him. Nevertheless, he said, "A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house."

After fifty-seven years of preaching, the two hardest lessons I have learned are these. Number one, you cannot help everybody. It is impossible. Some people are not going to listen. Some do not want to listen; they do not want to be helped. You may want to help everybody, but it is impossible.

The second lesson is even harder: sometimes those you can help are your own family and your own friends. It is very difficult when you know the truth and have the answers, but they do not want the truth or the answers. This is why he says, "A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house." Familiarity does indeed breed contempt, but familiarity does not cancel out truth. It does not cancel the fact that God can use the weakest of men and the least of men. Familiarity does not stop God from using anyone at any time.

Here is the result of being scandalized: "And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief." Our Lord could have healed many sick people, cleansed many lepers, shared much doctrine, and done wonderful things. But they did not believe. A rejection of truth is unbelief. A denial of truth is unbelief. A refusal to hear truth is unbelief. If you refuse to hear, heed, or obey the truth, you are being scandalized by the Word of God. You are involved in a scandal. If you refuse to bow to the Lord Jesus Christ, you are being scandalized in Christ. Because you are offended in him, you do not believe him.

Applications and Warnings for Believers

Consider, for a moment, the people here in Nazareth. Their consciences were not exercised; their curiosity was aroused. They were astonished and amazed: Where did He get this knowledge? Where did He get this power? We would like to know. We know who He is. We know His family. What could be special about a carpenter's son? Curiosity will often lead you astray. The old adage says, “Curiosity killed the cat.” It has killed more than cats.

But they were not occupied with the claims of God; they were occupied with the schools of men. “Wow. He didn't go to the school of Hillel. He didn't go to the school of Shammai. What rabbi taught Him?” Most people are willing to pay attention to anything and everything but truth. We will spend our time, and waste our time, on trivial matters, but we will not spend time seeking, praying, and searching for truth.

So it is possible that those who reject the Word of God and reject the Lord Jesus Christ are involved in scandals. They are being scandalized by the Word of God and by the Lord Jesus Christ. Here is the second application: it is not only the unsaved who can be scandalized by the Word of God and by the Lord Jesus Christ, but Christians as well.

Turn, please, to John chapter 6. When we resort to our own will, our own knowledge, our own opinions, and our own desires, we are being scandalized. The Bible tells us that we are to trust in the Lord with all our heart, lean not to our own understanding, and in all our ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct our paths. Yet it is possible for Christians to be scandalized by the Word of God and by Jesus Christ Himself.

In John chapter 6, Jesus Christ has been teaching that He is the bread of life: “He that eateth me, even he shall live by me.” That is not teaching cannibalism or transubstantiation. It is teaching that, if we are real, genuine Christians, we are nourished and sustained by the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. When He teaches that He is the bread of life, look, please, at verse 60: “Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it?”

When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples murmured at it, he said unto them, “Doth this offend you?” Does this scandalize you? Are you involved in a scandal just because you do not believe what Christ told you or do not understand what He said? Are you going to reject Him or His Word based upon your own thinking and finite understanding?

“From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.” They were scandalized and offended. It was the Word of God and the Lord Jesus Christ that scandalized them. Then Jesus said unto the twelve, “Will ye also go away?” Simon Peter answered, “Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.” At least these were not scandalized.

Conclusion: Bow to Truth to Avoid Scandal

It is possible for a Christian to be involved in a scandal, and I am not talking about adultery, fornication, theft, or fraud. Christians may fail to bow to the Word of God, believe the Word of God, and act upon the Word of God. When they fail to do that, they are scandalized; they are involved in a scandal. We shall see whose word shall stand, God's or theirs. We may not understand the truth, but we must bow to the truth. We must always bow to the Lord Jesus Christ so that we will never be involved in a scandal with Him or with His Word.

Do not be offended at what He has said and what He commands.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee this night. We thank You for Your Word and for Your truth. The truth is, we have been scandalized and offended so many times because we did not believe, did not bow, did not hear, and did not heed. We ask for Thy divine forgiveness. Give us hearing ears, seeing eyes, and believing hearts, that we would not be involved in a scandal. Give us the grace always to bow to Thee and Thy truth. Thou art our authority. Thy Word is truth. Give us, we pray, Your grace. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask it. Amen.

CHAPTER 15

The Inestimable Value of Jesus Christ

January 3, 2024

Introduction: The Unspeakable Gift

2 Corinthians 9:15 is a simple verse, though it is probably a little more complicated than we think at the very beginning. The Apostle Paul writes, “Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift.”

While we have often thought about the Lord Jesus Christ in relation to His person and His work, we have probably not really contemplated what we might call the extreme value and worth of what our Lord has accomplished. Like everything else, we tend to take Him for granted. We take His grace for granted. We take His mercy for granted. We take His life for granted. But the Apostle Paul simply says, “Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift.”

Three Greek Words for 'Unspeakable'

The word “unspeakable” occurs three times in the New Testament, and each time it comes from a different Greek word. In 2

Corinthians 12:4, the Apostle Paul speaks of himself, saying that he was caught up into paradise and heard unspeakable words, which is not lawful for a man to utter.

The word “unspeakable” in this passage is arrētos, and it really refers to that which is unsaid, unspoken, or unspeakable on account of its sacredness. It concerns words heard in paradise that a man was not permitted to utter.

In 1 Peter 1:8, the subject is the joy that Christians possess in Jesus Christ: “Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.” Here the word “unspeakable” is aneklalētos. It refers not merely to that which is unspeakable, but, in one sense, to that which is almost inexpressible. It refers to the joy that Christians have. We may tell others about the joy that we possess in Jesus Christ, yet at the same time we cannot really express its height or degree. It is joy unspeakable in that sense of the word.

Then if you look back to 2 Corinthians 9 and verse 15, once again, the Word of God says, "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift." This Greek word happens to be the word anekdiēgētos and refers to that which is not capable of being spoken of, that which is unutterable, that which is inexplicable, and therefore that which is indescribable. In other words, what he is saying in verse 15 is that there are no words that can properly express the greatness of God in giving His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, it's higher than our mind can conceive. It's higher than language can express. And so, this word is actually a derivation of another Greek word, which means, again, incapable of being narrated fully, completely, or wholly. So, there are many scholars that have tried to express this word by using other words like "wonder beyond description" or "unsearchable." All of these are just to describe the one word here, "unspeakable."

So what we have to understand is this. Think about this. He says, "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift." That means this: that all of God's preachers that have lived in the time past, that are living now in the present, and shall be living in the future, all of them lumped together, could not express or fully declare the value and the

worth of Jesus Christ. It is an unspeakable gift. Not fully able of being narrated.

And moreover, the truth of the matter is not only can preachers not do that, but angels cannot do that. Angels, although they may be holy and although they may be in the presence of our Lord, yet they are incapable once again of understanding this, and the reason being simply because they have never ever been redeemed. So if you look back in your Bibles to 1 Peter chapter 1 and let's begin reading there with verse 10. 1 Peter chapter 1 and verse 10, you're going to see that even the Old Testament prophets did not understand everything that they prophesied about Jesus Christ. So in 1 Peter 1 and verse 10, the Word of God says, "Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you."

“Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.” Obviously, then, the Old Testament prophets did not understand everything that they wrote or preached. Angels, of course, cannot even attempt to understand this because, number one, they have never ever been redeemed.

The Gift of a Sovereign

When Scripture says, “Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift,” in 2 Corinthians chapter 9 and verse 15, the Greek word for “gift” is dōrea. It rightly means a gift, but it also denotes a gift that is given in gratuity, in grace, and in favor. In other words, it is the gift of a sovereign. It is a gift that has been given in grace, favor, and mercy.

You have to understand that no one deserved the Lord Jesus Christ. No one deserved His grace, mercy, or favor, and no one deserved to be saved. No one could earn or merit salvation, period. The truth of the matter is this: each one of us only deserved justice. When justice would have been applied, we would have been

condemned and faced damnation as well. And yet the Bible tells us that God gave us this unspeakable gift in Himself.

God's Love as the Source

First John 4:10 says, “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” Now, when you stop and think about this, God did not send His Son because we loved Him. He did not send His Son because we needed Him. No, He sent His Son because He loved us, and He sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

The word “propitiation” is very interesting. It is the word hilasmos in the Greek, and it literally refers to the fact that Jesus Christ appeased, placated, and satisfied the justice and the wrath of God, but at the same time He also appeased, placated, and satisfied the holiness and the righteousness of God as well. So the Bible says, “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”

Now hold on to that thought, but skip down to verse 19. This is a verse that we quote often: “We love him, because he first loved us.” So many times we do not even think about the implications of these verses; we simply quote them. But first of all, note that if God had not first loved us, we would never have loved Him. When you say, “I love God the Father,” or, “I love the Lord Jesus Christ,” in reality our love for Him is merely a reflection of His own love for us.

You have to understand that if He had not first loved us, we would have been lost. We would never have experienced salvation. We would never have sought Him. We would never have believed Him. We would never have desired Him. So here is the second implication: when He said, “We love him, because he first loved us,” we must grasp and understand, in one sense of the word, the privilege and the grace that is given to us to enable us to love Him.

Even to desire Him. Have you ever considered the fact that if the Father had not sent the Son to be the propitiation for our sins, we would have never—and I am going to emphasize that—never, ever loved Him? We would have never desired Him. We may not even today, as Christians, love Him as we should love Him. We may not

love Him the way we ought to love Him. But an amazing thing is that we still, by His grace, have a desire to love Him. We would not even have that desire had it not been that He first loved us. I have often thanked the Lord simply for the desire to love Him, for the desire to be more holy or to be more godly.

He loved us first, and therefore we can only love Him. When you consider the love of God, you have to understand that God is to be loved in the way that He demands—and I would also add, in the way that He deserves—to be loved.

In Matthew 22, beginning with verse 35, one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, tempting Him, and saying, "Master, which is the great commandment in the law?" Notice that our Lord does not quote any of the Ten. Jesus said unto him, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind." This is actually the Shema Israel from Deuteronomy chapter 6. He said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Then He said in verse 40, "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

Stop and think about this: "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." You must consider the fact that God first loved us, then enabled us to love Him. If we did not love Him, we would not be interested in His law, His gospel, or anything. In other words, on these two commandments hang the law and the prophets.

SCRIPTURE READING - Ephesians 1:3-8 (KJV)

All Blessings Through Christ

Paul, in 2 Corinthians 9:15, thanked God for this unspeakable gift that He has given us in Jesus Christ. Do you realize that any, each, every, and all blessings come to us through the Lord Jesus Christ?

The Word of God says:

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ. According as he hath chosen us in him before the

foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: that in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him."

Look back at verse 3: He has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ. That included our election. That included the fact that we have been made holy with Him. That included the fact that He predestinated us to the adoption of sons. That includes the fact that He has made us accepted in the Beloved. It includes every blessing that is conceivable.

In light of that, look back in your Bibles to Romans 8:32. I want to tie this together.

The Security of the Believer

Romans 8:32 says, “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?” He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? In other words, if God has given us His best, His only begotten Son, He is saying, “How much more with him will he give us also that which is lesser?” So He is going to give us any and everything through the Lord Jesus Christ. This is only some of the things that God has given us: “Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again,”

“Who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.” Now watch this question: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or

persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

If you go back and look at verse 33, when he asks, "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth." Then look at this one: "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." Do you realize there is no condemnation, there is no charge of condemnation that can stand against a child of God?

It does not matter who the enemy is that tries to condemn us. It does not matter if it is Satan himself. None of those charges will stand, not only because we have been justified by the grace of God, not only because Jesus Christ has died, not only because He has forgiven us our sins, but because He also ever liveth to make intercession for us. So no charge of condemnation can go against us.

He has purchased us. Nothing can separate us from Him. We are vitally united unto Him. He is the head and we are the body. There is absolutely nothing that can separate us from the love of God. "I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, anything that you can imagine, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." In other words, in the redemption that Jesus Christ provides, there are no what-ifs.

Somebody comes up with, "What if? What if? What if this happens? What if that happens?" There are no what-ifs. Everything is certain, everything is settled, everything is sure, and we have divine assurance on that fact.

The Uniqueness of Christ's Person

Why is all this true? The answer is because of the person and work of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the eternal Son of God. Everyone can quote John 3:16: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” The Greek word for “only begotten” is monogenēs, literally meaning one-of-a-kind, unique. There is no one else like the Lord Jesus Christ because He is the only begotten Son of God.

He is perfect man, and He is perfect God. Thus the Bible says in 1 Timothy chapter 3 and verse 16, “And without controversy—no controversy over this—without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.” Without controversy, homologoumenōs is the Greek word. That means with the consent of all, or confessedly; no one would object to this fact. Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh.

This is why Jesus Christ is one of a kind. This is why Jesus Christ is unique. In John 1, verses 1 through 3, we read: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.”

Then verse 14 says, “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.” Jesus Christ is not simply the perfect man; Jesus Christ is God in the flesh. When you understand the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, you will grasp the value and worth of His person and His work.

In the Old Testament, there were all kinds of sacrifices. There were bulls and lambs and goats sacrificed, but the blood of animals could never, ever take away sin. The blood of man could never take away sin. The reason the Lord Jesus Christ could take away sin was not simply because He is God in the flesh, but also because He was appointed to be the mediator and to be the propitiator of our sins. In other words, God the Father ordained Him.

The Eternal Covenant and Redemption

Hebrews 13:20–21 says, “Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our 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 wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

Now note that this speaks of “the blood of the everlasting covenant.” All of those animals that were sacrificed in the Old Testament could never take away sin. They simply were covering until the true Lamb of God came, the Lord Jesus Christ. The reason He came was because of this eternal covenant between God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. In this covenant God gave to Jesus Christ a people. Jesus Christ undertook to be their shepherd and their propitiator, and the Holy Spirit agreed to convict and convert—and that He did.

This is why the Lord Jesus Christ is able to take away sin: He is God in the flesh, He was ordained by the Father, and He came as the mediator and propitiator of His people through the blood of the everlasting covenant. First Peter 1:18–20 says, “Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as

of a lamb without blemish and without spot: who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you." In other words, God the Father ordained salvation. That's what you read about in Ephesians chapter 1. He, God, hath made us accepted in the Beloved. In other words, God the Father purposed and planned salvation. God the Son purchased salvation. And God the Holy Spirit applies salvation. But all of this comes from the purpose of God. And so very clearly, Jesus Christ is the one who brought us this great salvation. That's why the Apostle Paul is saying, "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift."

The Magnitude of Forgiveness

Now, let me tell you what motivated me to bring this message today. Because this past week I was traveling and I was listening to a Christian radio station and someone—I don't even know who, don't remember—someone said this on the air talking about Jesus Christ: "He forgave me all my sins." And when he said that, here is what I said in my mind: "He also forgave me for my sins. And He had a lot of forgiving to do." And then the thought hit me of what I just said. And then the next thing that came to my mind was an old hymn. I don't know if you've ever heard it or not.

It's beautiful. "He the Pearly Gates Will Open." I wish I could sing; I would sing it if I could, but let me read some of the stanzas. Listen to this first one: "Love divine, so great and wondrous, deep and mighty, pure, sublime! Coming from the heart of Jesus, just the same through tests of time. He the pearly gates will open, so that I may enter in; for He purchased my salvation and forgave me all my sin." Here's the third one—I'm going to skip the second one: "Love divine, so great and wondrous, all my sins He then forgave; I will sing His praise forever, for His blood, His power to save. He the pearly gates will open, so that I may enter in; for He purchased my salvation and forgave me all my sins." Here's the last stanza.

"In life's eventide, at twilight, at His door I'll knock and wait; by the precious love of Jesus, I shall enter heaven's gate. He the pearly gates will open, so that I may enter in; for He purchased my salvation and forgave me all my sin." Every one of those stanzas ends, "purchased my redemption and forgave me all my sin."

When I heard the man say, "He forgave me all my sins," my life flashed before my eyes—not all of my life, but primarily my sinful life. He not only forgave me all my sins, but He had an awful lot of forgiving to do.

I confess very easily and quickly that I am a sinner. I have no problem with that, because the Word of God declares it. But it is absolutely impossible for me to remember every one of my sins. Moreover, it is impossible for you to remember each and every one of yours. We can remember enough of our sins before conversion to

know that we were sinful. We were fleshly and worldly, after the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

We can also remember enough of our sins to know that, even after we were saved, we were not perfect. We still sinned—not as we did before salvation, but we were still sinners. None of us has loved the Lord Jesus Christ as we should have loved Him, prayed as we should have prayed, studied the Word of God as we should have studied it, or worshipped and praised God as we should have worshipped and praised Him. Even after we were saved, there were things we should not have done that we did, and things we ought to have done that we did not do. There are sins of commission, but there are sins of omission as well.

My life flashed in front of my eyes—that is, my sinful life—and I said, "He forgave me also. He also had an awful lot of forgiving to do." So let me ask you this question, and I want you to think about this: How many sins had you committed before Jesus Christ died? In the strictest sense of the word, the answer is none, because you weren't even born. Which means this: Jesus Christ not only died for all past sins and present sins, but future sins as well.

Think about this. We just read about that eternal covenant in Hebrews 13, verses 20 and 21, where God gave us to Jesus Christ—that's what He prayed about in John 17—and Jesus Christ, knowing every sin that we would ever commit, loved us anyhow and became our propitiation. He gave Himself for us, knowing our wickedness and our depravity.

We're talking about the worth and the value of the person and work of Jesus Christ. If Jesus Christ died and forgave me of all my sins—past, present, and future—just my sins are a lot. But that is true of every believer. Think of the believers who have lived in time past, those who are presently living today, and those whom God will save in the future. Jesus Christ died for each and every one of their sins in order that they may be forgiven. Can you imagine? It is impossible for me to tally all of my sins, and impossible for you to tally all of yours. But to tally all the sins of every individual believer who has ever lived, now lives, and shall live would be an impossible task. Wow.

The Sufferings of Christ

The greatness and the magnificence of His forgiveness is astounding. Now here is something else to think about. When we are talking about our sins, most of the time you and I are very flippant. I have actually heard people brag about their sins. To be absolutely honest, I am ashamed of my sins. I wish I had never done them, but I did. The truth of the matter is that many times we are flippant and do not really understand the impact of our sin.

I want to show you a passage that I have got to emphasize. We understand most of this, but look at what the prophet says in Isaiah 53, beginning with verse 1: "Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? For he—that is, Lord Jesus—shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not."

I am going to preach on this passage one day again; I have done it in time past. But the Bible says that we esteemed him not—that is, we did not even give him a second thought. We did not think he was worthy of a second thought. Look in verse 4: "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. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth."

He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken. And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.

Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.

When you stop and think about this, the brutality that Christ went through—it was not just the rejection, the mocking and ridicule, or the cat-o'-nine-tails that He was beaten with. It was not just the crown of thorns driven on His head with a reed. He was crucified, and all of this was agony. None of us probably can even conceive of the human pain that our Lord suffered. But that human pain was nothing compared to His spiritual sufferings. Jesus Christ was and is the sinless Son of God. He was like as we are, tempted in all points, the Bible says, yet without sin. He was personally sinless. He had done nothing to deserve death or our condemnation. But God the Father made Him legally guilty.

He was personally innocent, but He was made legally guilty. Second Corinthians chapter 5, verse 21, says: "For he—that is, God the Father—hath made him—God the Son—to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." Can you conceive of this in your mind, that the sinless, holy soul of Jesus, our Lord's person, was legally made a sinner, and all of our sins were imputed to Him, placed upon Him, given to Him to suffer in our stead?

I would imagine the spiritual sufferings of our Lord were far more potent than His physical sufferings. I want to show you. To me, this is almost inexplicable. Hebrews 12, beginning with verse 2, says: “Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.”

Now go back to verse 2. Look at this: “Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame.” What was the joy that was set before Jesus Christ? The joy that was set before Jesus Christ was, number one, His absolute and complete obedience to His Father, and number two, He was redeeming His people. And it’s

counted as a joy. Notice what He did: the Bible says He endured the cross, despising the shame. Of all the agony that He suffered, it was because of sin. And here is the clincher: all that our Lord suffered and endured was not just because of sin, but because of your sin and my sin. Yet He forgave each of us fully and freely.

Redemption of Creation

In other words, it was His great person that led to His forgiveness. Here is the second thing you've got to consider. To show you the greatness, the value, and the worth of the work of Jesus Christ, He not only redeemed and forgave us, and not only cleansed us; He also redeemed creation.

You remember in Genesis chapter 3, when Adam sinned? What did God do? God cursed the ground because of the sin. So this earth has been under a curse. In fact, God told Adam, "Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread." Now look in your Bibles to Romans chapter 8. I want you to see the greatness of the work of Jesus Christ. Beginning at verse 19: "For the earnest expectation of the creature"—that would be creation—"for the earnest expectation of the creation waiteth

This earth is waiting breathlessly until the sons of God are fully manifested. Why? Watch verse 20: "For the creature"—or the creation—"was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope. Because"—here it is—"the creature"—or the creation—"itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God." "For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now." In other words, God's earth, God's creation, is groaning and waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God, because when we are set at liberty, when we are glorified, He shall be glorified in us and we in Him, and the whole creation will be released from this curse.

So the person and work of Jesus Christ is worth everything imaginable. It is inexplicable because it is His unspeakable gift. Now I want to make some applications, and I want you to listen carefully. The first one is this: we need to value the work of Jesus Christ as it is revealed in His Word.

Now you are in the book of Romans. I want you to turn to Romans chapter 4. But as you are turning there, I am going to quote from Psalm 32 and verse 2: "Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile." So the Apostle Paul uses this Old Testament quote in Romans chapter 4, beginning there with verse 6: "Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin."

Applications: Value, Forgive, Give

Everyone understands the word "impute," or at least you should. When I was a boy—you did not know such a thing as credit cards—I would go into a store, and if I saw something that I wanted and did not have any money, I would pick up that item, go to the store clerk, and say, "I impute this to my father." No, I did not say "impute" to my father. You know what I said? "Charge it." That is what the word "impute" means; it means to charge. "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." Do you realize

Forgiving as We Have Been Forgiven

The greatness and value of the work of Jesus Christ is seen in this: even though we sin, our sins are not imputed to us. Why? Because they have been imputed to Jesus Christ. They were charged to His account. We understand how blessed we are through the person and work of Jesus Christ.

If we have been so richly, freely, and fully forgiven, we must also learn to forgive others as Jesus Christ forgave us. I have heard people say, "Well, I'll forgive him, but I'm not forgetting." If that is your attitude, you are not forgiving. When God forgave us our sins, He forgot them. That does not mean He eradicated them from His mind, because He is omniscient; He knows everything. But it does mean that He does not hold them against us any longer. He does not bring them up.

Here is a good illustration. Alice and I get into a little row, let us say, and she says something she ought not to say. Then she says,

“I’m just sorry. Please forgive me.” I say, “Okay, you’re forgiven. No problem.” The next day she says something again in light of that, and I say, “I knew you never really repented, because here you are doing it again.” Well, it was not just her; it was me. I said I forgave her. If I forgave her, I ought not to bring it up again or hold it against her.

When God forgives us, He does not hold our sins against us. So when we forgive biblically, we do forget. We do not have the power to eradicate it from our minds, but we do have the power not to mention it again—to bite our tongue and hold it.

SCRIPTURE READING - Matthew 18:21-35 (KJV)

"Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven"—490, which means basically unlimited. "Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. So when his fellowservants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him."

"So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses." In other words, if we have been the recipients of His great mercy, grace, love, and forgiveness—and consider how many sins He has forgiven in each of us—can we not also learn to forgive one another? That is exactly what He is saying.

The Apostle then says, "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift." There is no way anyone can exhaust the significance of the gift of Jesus Christ. In 2 Corinthians 9:15, Paul ends his appeal for an offering for the poor saints of Jerusalem with thanksgiving to God for His unspeakable gift.

How does that apply to us? If God has been so generous and gracious with each of us, can we not be generous and gracious with suffering saints who are poor as well? Your view of the person and work of Jesus Christ will be reflected in your giving and in your helping of others. If you realize what God has given you in Jesus Christ, it will make you generous, gracious, loving, kind, and forgiving.

Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift. Think and meditate upon the value and worth of the person and work of Jesus Christ—the greatest work ever done by the greatest person who ever lived. It is salvation alone.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee this day. We thank You for Your love and grace. Above all, we thank Thee for Jesus Christ. Lord, we cannot express the value and worth of Jesus Christ; it is far beyond human words, human utterance, and human ability. But we know that He is Your Son, and He is our salvation. Help us to love Thee, honor Thee, submit to Thee, obey Thee, worship Thee, and give Thee all honor, glory, and praise. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord, we ask these things. Amen.

CHAPTER 16

The Worst Judgement

January 3, 2024

Introduction: The Worst Judgment

The title of the message is “The Worst Judgment.” Notice Deuteronomy 28, beginning with verse 28 and ending with verse 32: “The Lord shall smite thee with madness, and blindness, and astonishment of heart. Thou shalt grope at noonday, as the blind gropeth in darkness, and thou shalt not prosper in thy ways: and thou shalt be only oppressed and spoiled evermore, and no man shall save thee. And thou shalt betroth a wife, and another man shall lie with her. Thou shalt build a house, and thou shalt not dwell therein. Thou shalt plant a vineyard, and shalt not gather the grapes thereof. Thine ox shall be slain before thine eyes, and thou shalt not eat thereof. Thine ass shall be violently taken away from before thy face, and shall not be restored to thee. Thy sheep shall be given unto thine enemies, and thou shalt have none to rescue them.

God's Armory of Judgments

"Thy sons and thy daughters shall be given unto another people, and thine eyes shall look, and fail with longing for them all the day long: and there shall be no might in thine hand."

There are indeed many judgments, and many different kinds of judgments. If you take the time to read Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26, you will find that God uses many different kinds of judgment in His divine retribution for disobedience, sin, and rebellion. God chooses His weapons of judgment from His armory. It may surprise you to learn that God does have an armory. Jeremiah 50:25 says, "The Lord hath opened his armory, and hath brought forth the weapons of his indignation. For this is the work of the Lord God of hosts in the land of the Chaldeans." Note again: "He hath opened his armory, and brought forth the weapons of his indignation."

The Hebrew word for "armory" is otsar, and it refers to a treasure, a storehouse, a cellar, or an armory. Israel provoked God many times in history, and God judged them many times in different ways. He chose out of His armory the weapons that He needed to chastise and to discipline the people.

SCRIPTURE READING - Deuteronomy 32:15-30 (KJV)

> 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.

Examples of God's Judgments in Deuteronomy 32

> They provoked him to jealousy with strange gods, with abominations provoked they him to anger. They sacrificed unto devils, not to God; to gods whom they knew not, to new gods that came newly up, whom your fathers feared not. Of the Rock that begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee. And when the Lord saw it, he abhorred them, because of the provoking of his sons, and of his daughters. I will hide my face from them, I will see what their end shall be: for they are a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith. They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not

> God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities, their idols.
>
> And I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation. For a fire is kindled in mine anger, and shall burn unto the lowest hell, and shall consume the earth with her increase, and set on fire the foundations of the mountains. I will heap mischiefs upon them; I will spend mine arrows upon them. They shall be burnt with hunger, and devoured with burning heat, and with bitter destruction.
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> I will also send the teeth of beasts upon them, with the poison of serpents of the dust. The sword without, and terror within, shall destroy both the young man and the virgin, the suckling also with the man of gray hairs. I said, I would scatter them into corners, I would make the remembrance of them to cease from among men: were it not that I feared the wrath of the enemy, lest their adversaries should behave themselves strangely, and lest they should say, Our hand is high, and the Lord hath not done all this.
>
> For they are a nation void of counsel, neither is there any understanding in them. O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end! 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.

"For their vine is of the vine of Sodom, and of the fields of Gomorrah: their grapes are grapes of gall, their clusters are bitter." In this passage, God delineates many of the sins of the people against Him. At the same time, He also delineates many of His judgments against those people and against their sins. They provoked Him; they shall be provoked. They will be consumed with fire and sword and hunger, and He said it would be the sword without and terror within. Since this is Deuteronomy 32, and He is going to continue, note what He says in verse 34: "Is not this laid up in store with me, and sealed up among my treasures?"

"To me belongeth vengeance, and recompence; their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste." After God speaks of all these judgments, He asks in verse 34, "Is not this laid up in store with me, and sealed up among my treasures?" The interesting thing is that the word "treasures" in verse 34 is exactly the same Hebrew word as "armory" in Jeremiah 50:25. Just as men value their arms and weaponry and consider them their treasure, God also values His weaponry, His armory, and considers it His treasure as well.

God does have specific judgments that He favors. In Ezekiel 14:21, we see the four main judgments of God: "For thus saith the Lord God; How much more when I send my four sore judgments upon Jerusalem, the sword, and the famine, and the noisome beast, and the pestilence, to cut off from it man and beast?"

God's Four Sore Judgments and His Favorites

I have an armory. It may not be a vast one, but I do have one, and I have calibers that I favor above others, and weapons that I favor above other weapons. Likewise, God says, "I have my armory. I have my favorite weapons. I have my favorite judgments, and those are the ones that I'm going to use."

As you read through Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26, you discover a curse upon all those who disobey and rebel against God. Deuteronomy 28 shows what I consider today the worst judgment.

You may disagree with this assessment, but when I get through, I think you will see its importance. Look in Deuteronomy 28, beginning with verse 21:

"The Lord shall make the pestilence cleave unto thee, until he have consumed thee from off the land, whither thou goest to possess it. The Lord shall smite thee with a consumption, and with a fever, and with an inflammation, and with an extreme burning, and with the sword, and with blasting, and with mildew; and they shall pursue thee until thou perish. And thy heaven that is over thy head shall be brass, and the earth that is under thee shall be iron. The Lord shall make the rain of thy land powder and dust: from heaven shall it

come down upon thee, until thou be destroyed. The Lord shall cause thee to be smitten before thine enemies.

"Thou shalt go out one way against them, and flee seven ways before them: and shalt be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth. And thy carcase shall be meat unto all fowls of the air, and unto the beasts of the earth, and no man shall fray them away. The Lord will smite thee with the botch of Egypt, and with the emerods, and with the scab, and with the itch, whereof thou canst not be healed. The Lord shall smite thee with madness, and blindness, and astonishment of heart."

These are just some of God's judgments. In this short passage, He mentions pestilence, consumption, fever, inflammation, the sword, blasting, mildew, drought, destruction, captivity, and the botch of Egypt, which would be blains and boils like Job experienced, and they experienced as well. He then mentions hemorrhoids, tumors, and piles; the scab and the itch, none of which are going to be healed. He says He is going to make you grope like a blind man in the middle of the day.

Matthew Henry, commenting on this, said: "Many particular judgments are here enumerated, which would be the fruits of the curse and with which God would punish the people for their apostasy and disobedience. These judgments threatened are of different kinds, for God has many arrows in His quiver, yes, and four sore judgments, and many more."

They are represented as very terrible, and the descriptions of them are exceedingly lively and affecting, that men, knowing these terrors of the Lord, might, if possible, be persuaded. The threatenings of the same judgment are several times repeated, that they might make the more deep and lasting impressions, and to intimate, if men persisted in their disobedience, the judgment which they thought was over, and of which they said, “Surely the bitterness of it is past,” will not be over. In other words, it’s going to continue.

Although there are numerous judgments mentioned here, God still uses these judgments even today. In Amos chapter 4, beginning with verse 6, we can identify some of these judgments. 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." So there is the judgment of famine, which is obviously used often.

"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." So there is drought.

"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." So there are all kinds of pestilence from insects and diseases upon our food.

"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 unto your nostrils: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord." So there is war and destruction.

"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."

These are supernatural judgments. Then, in verse 12, He says, "Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel." In other words, God said, "I sent all of these judgments to get your attention, and you never paid any attention. Because you would not return unto me, because you would not repent, therefore," He said, "prepare to meet thy God, O Israel." We have been warned over and over in the Bible. Hebrews 10:31 says, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." Certainly, that is true.

Do you realize that God knows exactly what kind of judgment to bring? Not only is God infinitely wise; He is omniscient. He knows exactly what it will take to bring a people to their knees, to bring us to ourselves and to our senses. God chooses the weapon that will do

the most good and bring Him the most glory. God has many weapons; however, there is one weapon that you and I overlook. It is very discernible and recognizable, but because it is with us all our lives, we tend to overlook it.

The Judgment of Powerlessness in Deuteronomy 28:31-32

I want to show it to you. Skip down to verse 31. This is still part of God's curse upon disobedience: “Thine ox shall be slain before thine eyes, and thou shalt not eat thereof. Thine ass shall be violently taken away from before thy face, and shall not be restored to thee. Thy sheep shall be given unto thine enemies, and thou shalt have none to rescue them. And thy sons and thy daughters shall be given unto another people, and thine eyes shall look, and fail with longing for them all the day long: and there shall be no might in thine hand.”

This judgment is a judgment of powerlessness and helplessness. Have you ever considered what it would be like to be entirely and completely helpless and powerless before your enemies, or before what we would call circumstances? No one desires to have his property stolen or taken away, especially by force and violence.

It is strange, but true, that men and families often count their animals as their own family. You remember Nathan's story to David about the man who had one little lamb that slept in his bosom. I have favorite animals, and I would not want anyone to mercilessly slaughter them while I was unable to stop them or do anything about it.

Look again at verse 31: “Thine ox shall be slain before thine eyes, and thou shalt not eat thereof.” In other words, it is stolen and taken away. “Thine ass shall be violently taken away from before thy face, and shall not be restored to thee.” You are not going to get anything out of it. “Thy sheep shall be given unto thine enemies.” Now look at this: “And thou shalt have none to rescue them.” In other words, you are helpless. You are powerless. You have no strength. You have no might.

There's nothing you can do to stop it. There's nothing you can do to recover your property. It's gone. That's not the worst part. The

worst part is not having your property stolen, your animals stolen, and being helpless. If you look in verse 32, "Thy sons and thy daughters shall be given unto another people, and thine eyes shall look, and fail with longing for them all the day long: and there shall be no might in thine hand." Wow, you're helpless. You're powerless. Your children are kidnapped, killed, sold into slavery, or given to other countries and peoples. You can't stop it.

It could be your wife. It could be your husband. We're talking about children, including grown children. I just read recently this week of some men who broke into a family's home where there were no weapons. The intruders incapacitated the husband, shot him, killed him—didn't kill him, but stabbed him, did something where he could not function—and then proceeded to rape his wife and daughters before his eyes.

To not be able to help and not be able to stop wickedness and sin is a terrible judgment. I can assure you, when you understand that you're completely, totally helpless and powerless, without strength and without might, it is dreadful.

Human Powerlessness Rooted in the Fall

This is an aspect of God's judgment that we should be able to recognize. The Bible teaches in 1 Corinthians chapter 15 that Adam was our federal head and representative. Since he was our federal head and representative, what he did, we did. When he sinned, we sinned; when he fell, we fell. When God created Adam, He created him with original holiness, righteousness, and knowledge, and the ability to please God, because he walked with God in the garden in the cool of the day. But when Adam rebelled against God, he not only lost his holiness and righteousness and became totally depraved; he also lost his ability to please God.

That's why the Bible says in Romans 5 and verse 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." That little phrase, "for that all have sinned," is an aorist passive in the Greek, which means it happened once and for all and it's over and done with. When did all men sin once and for all? The answer is in Adam. Here we are talking about the judgment of God, and He says, "There

shall be no might in thy hand." That means we've lost our power. We've lost everything.

I want you to picture this with me. Here is a loving and faithful husband wrestling with the reality of an unfaithful wife. He loves her, wants her, desires her, pleads with her, begs her, and beseeches her, yet she continues in her rebellion. She will absolutely not listen. She will absolutely not repent. She will absolutely not come to her senses. What can that husband do? The answer is, nothing. You may say, "Well, he can pray." I understand that. But the point is that he is powerless to change his wife. He has no might.

Parental and Marital Helplessness

Reverse the situation. Here is a loving wife and an unfaithful husband. What can she do? Nothing. One of the hardest things we have to learn is that you cannot live for other people, and you cannot make other people do that which is right. It is absolutely, totally impossible. These are not imaginary scenarios; I am not making them up.

After fifty-nine years of preaching, I have seen this happen so many times, over and over. I have seen couples married fifty years, and one of them starts straying. It is unbelievable. Consider children as well: little children, teenagers, young adults, and grown adults. My mother died at age ninety. Even when I was fifty years old, I was still her baby. That's what you tell people: "This is my baby." Think about all our children and how often they break their parents' hearts. They simply will not do what is right. They will not behave. They will not believe. They will not repent.

I love children. I really do. But I have seen so many young couples with young children who are happy because their children are obedient and well trained. They like to show how obedient their children are. I always smile, and sometimes I say it aloud and sometimes secretly, “Wait until they are sixteen or eighteen. There may be a difference.”

One of the hardest things you will ever learn as a parent is that you cannot make your child do what is right. You cannot live for that child. You can teach, love, and guide that child, but you cannot live

for him. You cannot keep him from making mistakes or from doing the same stupid things you did. You are trying to head him away from you, but you simply cannot stop him. You are absolutely, totally powerless.

Now, you may say, "Wait a minute, Brother Weaver. I know what the Bible says in Proverbs chapter 22 and verse 6: 'Train up a child in the way that he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.'" The interesting part of that verse is the word "old." "Train up a child when he is young, and when he is old, he will not depart from it." The word "old" in Hebrew is zaqen. It is translated in our Bibles as "old" and as "aged." It means to become old, to grow old, and to show age. It is the root word of the biblical word "elder," zaqen, which means "a bearded one."

I believe Proverbs 22:6 is a general principle. I am not denying the truth of the Bible; I believe the Bible. But the verse does not say that he will never depart from it. It says that when he is old, he will not depart from it.

Consider another general principle in Proverbs 18:22: "Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the Lord." I know some men who found a wife but did not find a good thing, and some women who found a husband but did not find a good thing. This means that, with the blessing and grace of God, whoever finds a good, godly wife finds a good thing and obtains favour of the Lord.

Here is another general principle: Proverbs chapter 23, verses 13 and 14, says, "Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell." Does that mean every child who has ever been beaten is going to heaven? No. If that is what it meant, one of the best means of evangelism would be to grab a rod and beat every child you could find. What it means is that, with the blessings and grace of God upon that individual's life, the correction would work. Without that, it is not going to work. It is just that simple.

There have been plenty of people in the Bible who were taught and departed. Solomon was taught, and Solomon departed from the

Lord. Demas certainly departed from the Lord. I think these proverbs, many of them, can be understood more easily as general principles. The point I am trying to make is this: we have no power, no might, in ourselves. We cannot make our spouses or our children do what is right. Alice and I have been married soon to be sixty-one years, if the Lord lets us live, but I cannot make her do what is right. If she wanted to leave tomorrow, I could not stop her. Well, I could—I can shoot better than she could. There is nothing I could do. And if I wanted to do something wrong, if I wanted to run out on her, she could not stop me. This is a devastating judgment: we simply cannot make each other do what is right.

We cannot make our children do what is right. We must understand the grief, heartache, and sadness of parents when they see their children go astray. The only two things we can do are, first, pray for them, and second, live a life of godliness and holiness, giving them an example so that they may see where they have erred and sinned against God. That is about it, other than confronting them and talking to them. Sometimes confronting them does nothing; sometimes it even makes things worse.

It is like Esau. When he saw that the women of Canaan pleased not his father and mother, he went out and married two more, just for spite. I want you to look at Psalm 49 to show this simple truth. There's no way in the world that we can redeem our own. We cannot bring them back. We cannot save them. In Psalm 49 verse 7, the Word of God says, "None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him." There's no way I could save my wife. There's no way I could save my children. It's not in my power. It's not in my might. I don't have that ability. John Gill wrote on this passage, "Train up a child in the way that he should go." He said: "And when he is old, he will not depart from it, that is, not easily, nor ordinarily."

There are exceptions to this observation, but generally—so he is talking about a general principle—where there is a good education, the impressions of it do not easily wear off, nor do men ordinarily forsake a good way that they have been brought up in. However, when they come to years of maturity and understanding, their hearts are seasoned with the grace of God. They are then enabled to put

into practice what before they had only in theory, continuing in the paths of truth and holiness.

Generally speaking, that is a general principle, but there are exceptions to it. In other words, you must always count in the grace and mercy of God. So, parents, teach your children all you can, and teach them rightly, but you must do more than teach them. You must pray every day that God will make it effectual in their hearts and minds. Discipline them, yes, but pray that God will make it effectual in their lives. These are principles based upon the blessings, grace, and mercy of God. You have to understand that men are sinners.

Isaac Case was a pastor. Dr. A. R. Crane wrote concerning this godly man: "Isaac Case began his ministry in Readfield, Maine, and until his death at age 91 on November 3, 1852, his life was spent in the preaching of the gospel. The Revolutionary War being over, the message of Christ expanded along the towns and settlements, so his work was the planting of many Baptist churches in those areas. He established the First Baptist Church of Thomaston and Readfield."

"They only counted converts who were actually baptized in those days, and he baptized scores wherever he went. In 1904, Dr. A. R. Crane presented a paper at the Maine Baptist Missionary Convention entitled, 'The Baptist Ministers in Maine from 1804 to 1904,' and listed Isaac Case as one of the most important. He said that he had heard Case preach in his old age and considered him to have as much power with God as any man he had ever heard. But he could not understand how Isaac Case's grown son never attended church services. Asking Case's son one day why he did not attend church, since his father was such a great preacher, the son replied, 'Grace is not hereditary, depravity is.'"

And that, my dear friend, is truth, because mankind does not have the power or the might to make anything right or do right. I want to tell you, I am not a mechanic. I do not even want to be around machinery. You could spit in my face and I could hold my temper. I could. But you fix it where I cannot get to a nut that I know needs to be gotten to, or when I get to it, it will not turn like it is supposed to turn. That is when I holler, “Steve! Steve!”

It blows my mind how my lawnmower can be working absolutely perfectly, with no problem whatsoever, and I turn it off and go get some water, come back, and it will not even start. I am simply pointing out that we have no power over anything. We have no strength over anything. We have no might. Look back in your Bibles to Deuteronomy chapter 28 and look at verse 20. Look at what God says: “The Lord shall send upon thee cursing, vexation, and rebuke, in all that thou settest thine hand unto for to do, until thou be destroyed, and until thou perish quickly; because of the wickedness of thy doings, whereby thou hast forsaken me.”

No, He said, “In all that thou settest thine hand unto.” Whatever you set your hand to, it is going to fall apart. It is going to fail. You do not have any power. You do not have any strength. You do not have any ability whatsoever. Now, if you want to argue with me and say, “Well, Brother Weaver, I do have strength. I do have might. I do have power,” then agree with me to demonstrate this in just one simple area, and I will believe you. I really will.

You know what that area is? Hold Deuteronomy 28, but turn in your Bibles to the book of Ecclesiastes chapter 8, right before the Song of Solomon, and look at verse 8. If you want to show me that you do have power and strength, I want to see it exercised in this one simple area. Here it is. Look what the Bible says: “There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death.”

"And there is no discharge in that war; neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it. There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death." If you can demonstrate that you have strength to stop death, I'll agree you have some power. I have news for you: you're not going to live one second longer than God has ordained for you. You can fight, fuss, cuss, and do whatever you want to do, but you're going to die because you do not have any power to retain your spirit or to stop from dying. You're going to die. So am I.

I'm simply trying to show you why we have no power. We are sinners. We are depraved. During the wilderness wanderings, God allowed the children of Israel to suffer hunger. Why? Deuteronomy 8:1 says, "All the commandments which I command thee this day

shall ye observe to do, that ye may live, and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the Lord sware unto your fathers. And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no." Then: "And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live."

The Purpose of Helplessness: Dependence on God

Did you hear what He said? "I suffered you to hunger for one reason: that I might feed you." He fed them with manna, which neither they nor their fathers knew, so that they would learn this principle: man does not live by physical bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. God suffered them to hunger that they might learn to depend upon Him, see His power and strength, and depend solely upon Him. He humbled them and caused them to hunger that He might feed them.

Now that I have shown you this truth—that we are powerless and helpless, and that there is not one thing we can do in the lives of our children or spouses to make them do what is right—that is the bad news, in one sense of the word. But I do have some good news for you.

God's Power as the Answer

First of all, I want you to turn to Psalm 62, verse 11. Here is a great truth. You need to underline this in your Bible and in your mind. The Word of God declares, “God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this; that power belongeth unto God.” Power belongs to God. It does not belong to man, but it belongs to God.

You remember what our Lord said in Matthew chapter 28 and verse 18? “And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.” All power in heaven and earth is given unto Jesus Christ. Remember what our Lord said in John chapter 15 and verse 5: “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"—what? "Without me ye can do"—how much? Nothing.

We already can do nothing. We are already powerless and helpless. But we know that all power is in God, and all power has been given to Jesus Christ. Without Him, we can do nothing. But with Him, we can do all things. What did the Apostle Paul say in Philippians 4 and verse 13? "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." I can do all things.

Now I want to show you something. Turn back in your Bibles to Exodus chapter 5. Moses and Aaron had gone in to Pharaoh and said, "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Let my people go, that they may serve me." Pharaoh responded, "I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go. Who is the Lord, that I should obey him?" Then the elders went in to ask Pharaoh to let them go, and what did he tell them? "Ye are idle, ye are idle."

"You make the same number of bricks, but you make them without straw. You gather your own straw, and if you don't make the same number of bricks, you're going to be beaten."

In Exodus chapter 5, verse 15, we read: "Then the officers of the children of Israel came and cried unto Pharaoh, saying, Wherefore dealest thou thus with thy servants? There is no straw given unto thy servants, and they say to us, Make brick: and, behold, thy servants are beaten; but the fault is in thine own people."

"But he said, Ye are idle, ye are idle: therefore ye say, Let us go and do sacrifice to the Lord. Go therefore now, and work; for there shall no straw be given you, yet shall ye deliver the tale of bricks." The officers of the children of Israel saw "that they were in evil case, after it was said, Ye shall not minish ought from your bricks of your daily task."

They met Moses and Aaron and said, "The Lord look upon you, and judge; because ye have made our savour to be abhorred in the eyes of Pharaoh, and in the eyes of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to slay us." Moses returned unto the Lord and said, "Lord, wherefore hast thou so evil entreated this people? why is it that thou hast sent me? For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in thy name, he

hath done evil to this people; neither hast thou delivered thy people at all."

Moses and Aaron are helpless. They went in and demanded, as God told them, that Pharaoh let Israel go, but he would not listen. The elders went in, and he would not listen to them either. Instead, he said, "You're idle. You're going to make the same number of bricks and you're going to do it without the straw. You'll get your own straw." When they came out, they looked at Moses and Aaron and said, "The Lord judge between you and us. All you said you were going to deliver us. All you've done is made it worse." Then Moses said, "Lord, why did you even send me?"

Now look in chapter 6 and verse 1: "Then the Lord said unto Moses, Now shalt thou see what I will do to Pharaoh: for with a strong hand shall he let them go, and with a strong hand shall he drive them out of his land." Since Moses, Aaron, and the elders of Israel realized they could not do it, God said, "Now you'll see what I can do."

"I can handle this situation." You know what our problem is? It is the same problem the Pharisees had. They denied the resurrection of Jesus Christ—the bodily resurrection, period. The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection; the Pharisees did, but the Sadducees did not. Our Lord said to them in Matthew chapter 22 and verse 29, "Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God." This is where we are today: we err because we do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. We depend upon our might, our strength, and our power, and we do not have any.

Application: Cry to God for Power

Here is my first application: If we do not realize and recognize our own helplessness and powerlessness, we will never cry to the Lord for His mercy, grace, strength, power, and ability. "Lord, I can't save my children, but You can. I can't save my wife, but You can. I can't save my husband, but You can." Try all you want and do everything you think you possibly can, but you will fail. I do not care who you are, where you are, or what you are doing. Unless God empowers you, you are going to fail.

Even the mighty apostles needed power. In Acts chapter 1 and verse 8, our Lord said, "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." You are not going to do it until you receive power. You do not have power in and of yourself. You cannot do it; you have to receive His power. Until we realize how truly helpless we are, we will never cry to God for power.

Return to Deuteronomy chapter 28 for a moment. This is, in one sense of the word, a very frightening verse, and yet a very praiseworthy verse. In verse 58, Moses says, “If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this law that are written in this book, that thou mayest fear this glorious and fearful name, the Lord thy God; then the Lord will make thy plagues wonderful, and the plagues of thy seed, even great plagues, and of long continuance, and sore sicknesses, and of long continuance.”

Notice the condition: if you do not fear this glorious and fearful name, the Lord thy God. How do you fear Him? By depending upon Him, by trusting Him, and by looking to Him.

Now consider two other passages and one final application. Some of you will be unable to claim this first passage until later, while some may do so now. Look at Isaiah chapter 40, a passage containing two promises upon which I genuinely rely and which I love. Verse 28 asks, “Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary?”

He does not grow old or give out. He cannot be weary; He is all-powerful. “There is no searching of his understanding.” Now notice verse 29: “He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.”

God says, “I’m the one who gives the power. I’m the one who gives the strength. I’m the one that gives the might.”

The psalmist said, "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." When I am old and grayheaded, forsake me not. Here is what I want you to learn: a judgment may be turned into a blessing. The worst judgment, one of the easiest proven, is that we have no power, no strength, and no might. But when you are saved by the grace of God, you can say with the Apostle Paul, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." He is our power, our strength, and our might. So the judgment is turned into a blessing to those who trust God.

Conclusion: Judgment Turned to Blessing

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank You for Your Word and for Your truth. We pray, Lord, that You would indeed help us to lean upon Thee, look to Thee, trust Thee, and believe in Thy power, Thy might, and Thy strength, while confessing, Lord, that we have none. Give us Your grace, Lord, that we may serve Thee acceptably with reverence and godly fear. In Thy name we pray. Amen.

The everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainted not, neither is weary. He does not grow old; He does not give out; He cannot be weary. He is all-powerful. There is no searching of His understanding. He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might He increaseth strength. Even the youth shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall. But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint. God said, "I'm the one who gives the power. I'm the one who gives the strength. I'm the one that gives the might."

The psalmist said in Psalm 71:18, “Now also when I am old and gray headed, O God, forsake me not, until I've showed by strength into this generation, and by power to everyone that is to come.” When I am old and gray headed, forsake me not. Here is what I want you to learn: a judgment may be turned into a blessing. The worst judgment, one of the easiest Proven, is that we have no power, no strength, and no might. But when you are saved by the grace of God,

you can say with the Apostle Paul, “I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me.” He is our power, our strength, and our might. So the judgment is turned into a blessing to those who trust God.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank You for Your Word and for Your truth. We pray, Lord, that You would indeed help us to lean upon Thee, look to Thee, trust Thee, and believe in Thy power, Thy might, and Thy strength, while confessing, Lord, that we have none. Give us Your grace, Lord, that we may serve Thee acceptably with reverence and godly fear. In Thy name we pray. Amen.

Source Notes

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Chapter 15: The Inestimable Value of Jesus Christ
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Chapter 16: The Worst Judgement
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