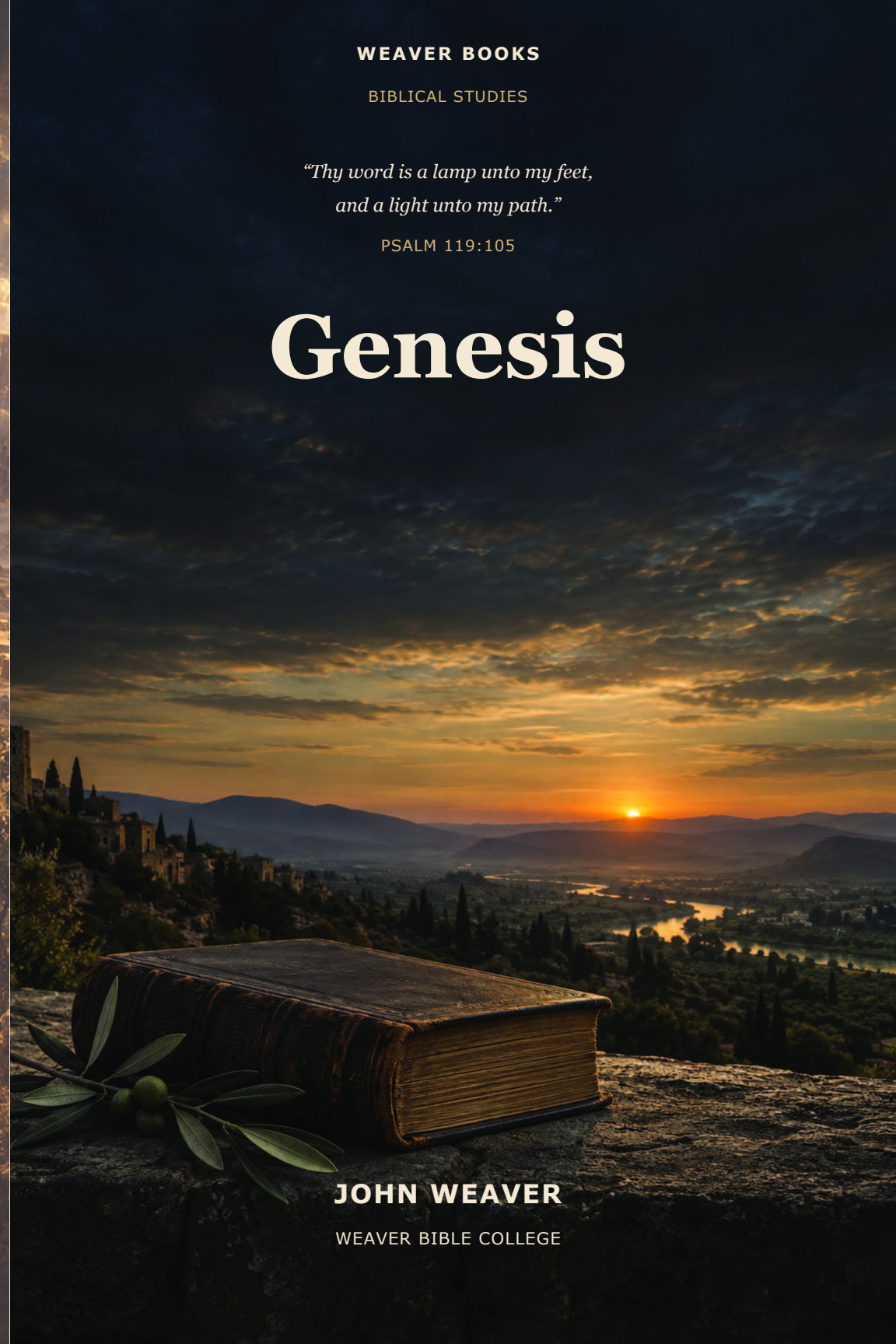
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"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet,
and a light unto my path."

PSALM 119:105

Genesis



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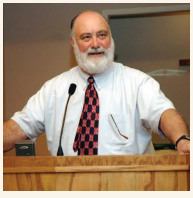
In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

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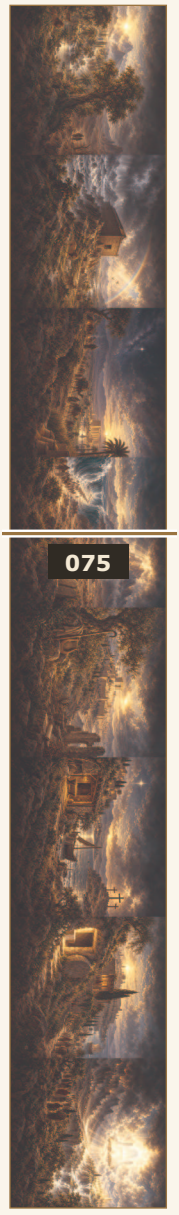
"If we understood one simple truth, we would never murmur, bellyache, or complain at whatever God sends us."

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CHAPTER 1

Waiting Upon the Lord

Introduction to Waiting Upon the Lord

This message is entitled Waiting Upon the Lord. Although you have heard the terms used and read verses where these terms are used, you have probably never heard an entire message on this subject. Look in Psalm 123, and let us read all four verses:

"Unto thee lift I mine eyes, O thou that dwellest in the heavens. Behold, as the eyes of the servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden look unto the hand of her mistress, so our eyes wait upon the Lord, our God, until that He have mercy upon us. Have mercy upon us, O Lord, have mercy upon us, for we are exceedingly filled with contempt. Our soul is exceedingly filled with the scorning of those that are at ease, and with the contempt of the proud."

Psalm 123 is a prayer, and involved in that prayer is waiting upon the Lord. It is a short Psalm and therefore a short prayer. Martin Luther the Reformer, commenting on Psalm 123, said this:

"This Psalm as you see is but short, and therefore, a very fit example to show the force of prayer, not to consist in many words,

but in fervency of spirit. For great and weighty matters may be comprised in a few words, if they proceed from the spirit and the unspeakable groanings of the heart, especially when our necessity is such as will not suffer any long prayer. Every prayer is long enough, if it be fervent and proceed from a heart that understandeth the necessity of the saints."

Luther is saying that it is not necessarily the length of the prayer that matters, but certainly it is the fervency of the prayer. David is exceedingly fervent in Psalm 123. He says, "Unto thee lift I mine eyes, O thou that dwellest in the heavens. Behold, as the eyes of the servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden look unto the hand of her mistress, so our eyes wait upon the Lord our God."

Waiting upon the Lord is a spiritual exercise that is commanded over and over in Scripture. Have you ever wondered what it is to wait upon the Lord? What does it mean? How do you do it? Have you ever waited upon the Lord?

The Psalm continues: "So our eyes wait upon the Lord, our God, until that He have mercy upon us. Have mercy upon us, O Lord, have mercy upon us, for we are exceedingly filled with contempt. Our soul is exceedingly filled with the scorning of those that are at ease, and with the contempt of the proud."

If you have not learned to wait upon the Lord, ask yourself why not. It could be because we have never studied the issue and are therefore ignorant as to how to wait upon the Lord. Everyone in this room probably knows that there are a multitude of promises in the Bible given to those who wait upon the Lord. Perhaps the most notable is found in Isaiah 40:31: “But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings as an eagle. They shall run and not be weary. They shall walk and not faint.”

I do not know about you, but I would certainly like to have my strength renewed. I would like to be able to run and not be weary, and walk and not faint. But notice what he said: “They that wait upon the Lord.” This promise of having your strength renewed is therefore based upon waiting upon the Lord.

There are many such promises in Scripture. Psalm 27:14 says, "Wait on the Lord. Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart, wait, I say, on the Lord." Notice once again that the promise is strength of heart. You think of men like William Wallace, who had the nickname Brave Heart. You think of other men, the martyrs, who had strong, strong hearts. "Wait on the Lord, be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart, wait, I say, on the Lord."

The Meaning of Waiting: Anticipation and Expectation

The Hebrew word for wait in these passages is kavah. It is translated in our Bibles as to wait for, to wait, to look for, to look for eagerly, to hope, and to look for expectantly. In other words, when the word wait is used in the Bible, it indicates anticipation, expectation, and eagerness. Psalm 37:9 gives an example: "For evildoers shall be cut off, but those that wait upon the Lord, they shall inherit the earth." The evildoers shall be cut off, but those who wait for the Lord shall inherit the earth. Verse 34 says, "Wait on the Lord and keep His way, and He shall exalt thee to inherit the land. When the wicked are cut off, thou shalt see it."

Psalm 37 is talking about the victory that is ultimately going to be given to the saints of God. What is going to happen to the wicked? They are going to be cut off. In other words, the world and everything in it will be delivered to the people of God. Can you eagerly anticipate that? I do not see why you should not. There is a song that many people sing, and its chorus goes something like this: "I want to see Israel marching. I want to hear that kingdom call. I want to climb up Zion's mountain. I want to see old Babylon fall." Certainly, that is exactly what this passage is talking about: the fall of the wicked. We are to eagerly anticipate that so that we may inherit the earth. Peter tells us in 2 Peter 3:13 that when this happens, there will be a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.

What is he saying? He is saying that we are going to receive that which has been promised us in the Scripture.

The promises are not what I want to deal with today concerning waiting upon the Lord. What I really want to deal with is the reality

of waiting upon the Lord. You and I should know how to perform this spiritual exercise in order that we may obtain the promises. What good are all the promises in the Bible if you do not have the means, or know the means, to obtain them, receive them, and apply them?

That is like someone giving a million bucks in your name and putting it in the bank somewhere, but never putting your signature on the bank card. It is there, but it does you no good, because you cannot receive it or apply it. The important questions you have to ask yourself are these: First, what is waiting upon the Lord? Secondly, how do we do it?

The Illustration from Psalm 123: Servants and Masters

A perfect illustration is given to us to answer those questions in Psalm 123:2. David said, “Behold, as the eyes of the servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden look unto the hand of her mistress, so our eyes wait upon the Lord our God, until that He have mercy upon us.” How do servants look to the hand of their masters? How does a maiden look to her mistress?

The Hebrew word for servant here is ebed, which literally means a servant, a manservant, a bondservant, or a slave. The Hebrew word for master is the normal word indicating a lord, a master, a superintendent, or a king. The maiden in this verse would be a female slave, and the mistress would be her lady, her queen, or her mistress.

David is telling us that a relationship existed between a master and his servant, and between a maiden and her mistress, that reflects what it literally means to wait upon the Lord. Unless we grasp, in some degree, this relationship, we will not know what it means to wait upon the Lord. He says, "as the servants look to the hand of their masters, and as a maiden looks to her mistress." What we do not comprehend in this day and age is the close bond and the love that actually existed between most masters and servants, and between ladies and their maidens.

Genesis chapter 15 illustrates this relationship. Abraham was a man of exceedingly great wealth. He had lots of cattle, silver, and gold, but he had no children. After these things, the word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision, saying, "Fear not, Abram, I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." God speaks to Abraham, and Abraham answers: "Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward or the servant or the slave of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?"

Abraham had plenty of servants or slaves. He had 318 trained fighting men in his own house. Eliezer happened to be the chief steward, or chief slave, so to speak. Abram said, "Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus? And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed, and lo, one born in mine house is mine heir." Then the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, "This shall not be thine heir, but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir."

The Scripture is saying that here is a man who has a great deal of wealth, but no children. Abram is saying, "Lord, if I don't get a child, my chief servant, Eliezer of Damascus, he's going to get everything." God said, "No, he's not going to inherit everything. I'm going to give you a son. I'm going to give you a child." And certainly God did.

But in those days and times, it was the servants who would inherit where there were no children. Proverbs 17:2 says, "A wise servant shall have rule over a son that causeth shame, and shall have part of the inheritance among the brethren." A wise servant would be treated as a family member and would have part of the family inheritance. Proverbs 29:21 declares, "He that delicately bringeth up a servant from a child shall at length have him become his son." Here is a slave, perhaps a little boy born in the house, brought up as a slave; but sooner or later, he will be treated as a son. In other words, he will have part of the inheritance.

If we do not understand the relationship that existed between masters and servants, and maidens and their mistress, we cannot understand what it means to wait upon the Lord. Notice that the eyes are mentioned. In those days, all it took for a master to communicate with his servant was the motion of a hand or the look

in the eyes. The servant was so in tune with the master that he understood.

That is why, in Psalm 123:1, David says, "Unto thee lift I up mine eyes, O thou that dwellest in the heavens." What is David doing? David is taking the place and position of a servant. He says, "I'm lifting up mine eyes, I'm looking to you," so that he may know what the Lord would have him to do.

John Trapp, one of the old Puritans who was alive in the 1600s, said this concerning verse 1: "Praying by glances of the eye rather than by words, mine afflictions have swollen my heart too big for my mouth." In other words, "I can't speak, and so it's just the eyes glancing to the Lord in prayer."

The servant always looks to his master. He uses his eyes to discern the master's every command. How does a servant wait upon his master? There are five ways, and these are what David is teaching us in verse 2: "Behold, as the eyes of a servant look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden look unto the hand of her mistress, so our eyes wait upon the Lord our God until that He have mercy upon us."

How do masters and servants relate to each other? How do servants wait upon their masters? First, they wait dependently. Servants are entirely and completely dependent upon their masters. The master supplied them with their food and clothing and every essential. The master assigned their duties and gave them their orders. A servant is not to act independently; he is to act dependently.

Waiting Dependently

A servant waits, and he waits upon his master. This waiting not only speaks of service; it also means that he is to do absolutely nothing without the direction and permission of the master. It is the master who supplies everything for the servant, which means that the servant is dependent upon the master. The Bible says in Proverbs 27:27, "And thou shalt have goats' milk enough for thy food, for the food of thy household, and for the maintenance of thy maidens." In

other words, it was the master who was responsible to supply food and clothing to all the servants.

You remember that wise woman in Proverbs 31, the woman who was worth far more than rubies? Listen to what the Bible says in Proverbs 31:15: "She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens." In other words, it is the woman who is supplying the meat for the household. She is making the preparations, dividing it out, and apportioning it, not only for her household, but also for her maidens.

Just like a servant is dependent upon his master, likewise, we are to be entirely and completely dependent upon the Lord. It is our Lord who supplies our every need. It is our Lord who gives us His commands and directions for our lives. It is our Lord who assigns us our duties, our missions, and everything that He desires for us to accomplish.

Psalm 145:15 says, "The eyes of all wait upon Thee, and Thou givest them their meat in due season." Verse 16 adds, "Thou openest Thine hand and satisfiest the desire of every living thing." Note again that the eyes of all wait upon the Lord, and He gives them their meat in due season. Is it not amazing when we stop and think how the Lord provides for every one of us?

But not just for us—for all the animals. With all of your wealth, all of your acquisition, everything that you have, undertake one task: feed all the birds in the world for one week. What if we limited it to the crows? “The eyes of all wait upon Thee.”

Somebody says, “Well, I’m not dependent upon the Lord. I work.” If you don’t think you’re dependent upon the Lord, try breathing without breathing His air. Try living without drinking His water. Try eating without using His soil to cultivate anything in. The truth of the matter is this: we must come to the position of recognizing our complete and entire dependence upon the Lord. Everything that we have, He gave us, whether we like it or not. You say, “But I work.” Yes, but He gave you life, health, strength, and mental ability. He gave you everything. You need to acknowledge that you are totally dependent upon Him.

The Bible in Lamentations 3 and verse 25 declares, “The Lord is good unto them that wait upon Him, to the soul that seeketh Him.” John Gill, that great Baptist preacher, said this: “Saints are servants, not of sin, nor of Satan, nor of men, but of the Lord, and not on the foot of creation only, but also on redemption, and are made so by the grace of God, and they are willing to work and are desirous to know what they should do. They inquire of God, they wait upon Him, in His word and ordinances for direction, and being informed with all their might, and follow the Lamb whithersoever He goes or directs them. And they look on Him for strength to assist them therein. Being conscious of their own weakness, they apply unto Him and wait upon Him for strength, and do all that they do in His name and strength. They look on Him for protection from all their enemies, which are many and mighty, and are stronger than they, and for food, both temporal and spiritual, and for all the necessaries and comforts, both of a corporeal and spiritual life, and likewise for the recompensive reward, the reward of the inheritance, which is of grace and not of debt.”

Every one of us must learn to wait dependently. If God does not provide for us, we are not provided for. I do not care whether that is physically or spiritually; it is still the truth. Even in preaching, what does the Bible say? “It’s not him that planteth, nor him that watereth, but it’s God who giveth the increase.” How do we wait upon the Lord? First of all, we wait dependently, just like a servant is dependent upon his master. Secondly, we wait expectantly.

Waiting Expectantly

The Bible says in Psalm 123:2, “Behold, as the eyes of the servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden look unto the hand of her mistress, so our eyes wait upon the Lord our God, until that He have mercy upon us.” When we wait, we must not only wait dependently; we must wait expectantly. That is, we must actually expect to receive our petitions, our desires, our needs, and our orders. Why in the world would you wait for someone if you did not expect them to deliver or to arrive?

I could stand out on this corner and, if someone asked why I was standing there, say, “I expect President Bush to drive by.” How long

do you think I would stand on that corner? The truth is, I do not really expect him to drive by. Since I do not expect him to drive by, I am not going to stand out there and look for him. I would not stand out there and look for the king of England. You might say, "They don't have a king in England; they have a queen." I would not wait for the queen either. She is not driving by. Why would you wait expectantly for someone if you know they are not going to show?

Look in your Bible at Hebrews chapter 10, while holding Psalm 123. Our Lord waited with full expectation, and in one sense of the word, He is still waiting. Hebrews 10:12 says, "But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God; from henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. For by one offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified." When our Lord offered Himself a sacrifice once and for all, He sat down at the right hand of God, henceforth expecting till His enemies have been made His footstool.

Let me ask you a question. Do you think that our Lord is going to expect and wait in vain? Or do you really believe that all of His enemies are going to be subdued and placed under His feet? I have news for you: they shall be subdued and placed under His feet. He will not wait in vain. Likewise, what does the Scripture teach concerning us?

Hebrews 11:6 says, "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he that cometh to God must first believe that He is, and secondly, that He is a rewarder of those that diligently seek Him." When we wait, we are not only waiting dependently; we are waiting expectantly. David said in Psalm 62:5, "My soul, wait thou only upon God, for my expectation is from Him." Why is David waiting upon God? He expects Him to answer, supply his needs, deliver him, and bless him. In Psalm 130:5, David states, "I wait for the Lord. My soul doth wait, and in His word do I hope."

"In His word do I hope." It is the word of God that gives us hope. What do we have in the Bible? We have His covenant, His promises, His warnings, His directives, and His blessings. Why would I wait upon the Lord expectantly? Because I know in His book, in His Bible, and in His covenant what He has promised, and I expect Him to answer.

It is amazing when you comprehend that, in one sense of the word, everyone and everything waits upon the Lord, even animals. Psalm 104:27 says, “These wait all upon Thee that Thou mayest give them their meat in due season.”

Psalm 104 shows the context: “O Lord, how manifold are Thy works, in wisdom Thou hast made them all! The earth is full of Thy riches. So is this great and wide sea, wherein are things creeping innumerable, both small and great beasts. There go the ships, there is that Leviathan whom Thou hast made to play therein. These wait all upon Thee, that Thou mayest give them their meat in due season.” So even the animals wait upon God, that He may give them their food in due season. Psalm 145:15 likewise says, “The eyes of all wait upon Thee. Thou givest them their meat in due season.” Those who truly, genuinely wait upon the Lord must wait not only dependently, but expectantly.

That expectation shall not be disappointed. Psalm 25:3 says, “Yea, let none that wait upon Thee be ashamed. Let them be ashamed which transgress without cause.” Notice the contrast. If I am waiting dependently upon the Lord, if I am waiting expectantly upon the Lord, what is the Scripture saying? “Let not them that wait upon the Lord be ashamed.” There is nothing to be embarrassed about and nothing to be ashamed of in waiting upon Him. We do not sit saying, “Well, I waited, but nothing happened. He never came. He never showed. He never gave me wisdom. He never answered my petition.” No, we will not be ashamed for waiting upon the Lord. Those who will be ashamed are those who transgress without cause—those who sin and violate His law.

Psalm 69:6 declares the same truth: “Let not them that wait on Thee, O Lord God of hosts, be ashamed for my sake. Let not those that seek Thee be confounded for my sake, O God of Israel.” Once again, we will not be ashamed or confounded because we wait upon the Lord.

We will not be disappointed. No one has ever biblically waited upon the Lord in vain. No one has ever biblically waited upon the Lord and had to be ashamed because He never answered. Our expectations shall be rewarded by the grace and mercy of God.

On the other hand, that is not so with the wicked. Let me just quote Proverbs 10 and verse 28. There the Bible says, “The hope of the righteous shall be gladness, but the expectation of the wicked shall perish.” Wow. The expectation of the wicked shall perish, but the hope of the righteous shall be gladness. So we shall not wait in vain. How do we wait on the Lord? We must wait dependently, we must wait expectantly, and thirdly, we must wait lovingly.

Waiting Lovingly

Hold Psalm 123, but turn in your Bibles to the New Testament, Luke chapter 7. I want you to see this because we do not understand the relationship that often existed between a master and his servant, or between a maiden and her mistress. The Scriptures showed us how a servant most often would even receive an inheritance among the children. Notice Luke chapter 7, verse 1: “Now when he had ended all his sayings in the audience of the people, he entered into Capernaum. And a certain centurion’s servant,” and translate that as slave, “a certain centurion’s servant or slave who was dear unto him was sick and ready to die.”

“And when he heard of Jesus, he sent unto him the elders of the Jews, beseeching him that he would come and heal his slave.” Notice that a certain centurion’s servant or slave was sick and ready to die. But this slave was dear unto this centurion, dear unto the master. The centurion loved his servant. In other words, there was a bond that existed between the servant and the master.

I can assure you that there were ungodly masters in times past. But just because there were ungodly masters does not mean that every master was ungodly. There have been ungodly husbands, but that does not mean that every husband is ungodly. There have been ungodly wives, but that does not mean that every wife is ungodly. Here was a servant who was dearly loved by his master.

Even Hebrew slaves could become permanent slaves. Everyone knows that if a Hebrew became a slave to another Hebrew, he would serve him for six years, and in the seventh year he must go out free. But even in Hebrew servitude, there was a procedure for a Hebrew to become a permanent slave. Why would anyone want to become a permanent slave?

The answer is because he loved his master. Exodus 21 says, “Now these are the judgments which thou shalt set before them. If thou buy an Hebrew servant, six years he shall serve. And in the seventh, he shall go out free for nothing. Now watch carefully. If he came in by himself, he shall go out by himself. If he were married, then his wife shall go out with him. If his master hath given him a wife, and she hath borne him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be her master's, and he shall go out by himself. And if the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife and my children, I will not go out free. Then his master shall bring him unto the judges, he shall also bring him to the door and to the doorpost, and his master shall bore his ear through with an awl, and he shall serve him forever.”

Boring the ear through, or having your ear pierced, was a sign that you were a slave. You will read the same thing in Deuteronomy 15, verses 12 through 17.

What did the servant say? “I love my master, I love my family, I will not go out free.” The master then brings him to the judges, they take him to the doorpost, and they bore a hole in his ear, which means he is now a permanent slave.

This is applied to Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ was the sent One of the Father and came to do the Father's will. He said over and over, “I came not to do mine own will, but the will of Him that sent me.” In Psalm 40, beginning with verse 6, Scripture says, “Sacrifice and offering Thou didst not desire, but mine ears hast Thou opened, or digged. Burnt offering and sin offering hast Thou not required.” This passage is applied to our Lord in the New Testament, and Isaiah 50 also shows how this is applied to Jesus Christ.

"Then said I, Lo, I come in the volume of the book it is written of me. I delight to do Thy will, O my God, yea, Thy law is within my heart." In the book of Hebrews, this passage is applied directly to Jesus Christ. Note what He says in verse 6: "Mine ears hast Thou opened." Look in your Bibles to Isaiah 50 and verse 5: "The Lord God hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back." Then He goes on to say, "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off my hair. I hid not my face from shame or spitting."

What does He mean when He says, "The Lord God, my God, hath opened mine ear"? It is not that He merely opened His ears so that He could hear. No. He bore a hole in it, in the sense that Jesus Christ was the permanent servant of the Father. Over and over, as I pointed out earlier, He said, "I come to do Thy will." That is what He said in Hebrews 10, verses 5 through 8, where Psalm 40 is cited: "Lo, it is written of me in the volume of the book, I come to do Thy will, O God." So the Son was saying, "I love the Father, and I am going to serve Him."

He was the sent One. Do you realize that in the New Testament the Apostle Paul delighted to refer to himself as the servant of Jesus Christ? The interesting thing is that the Greek word for servant is doulos, which literally means slave. Paul says, "I am the slave of Jesus Christ." He was admitting that he was the slave of Christ. Clearly, the Bible teaches that every believer is indeed the slave of Christ. In 1 Corinthians 6:19–20, the apostle Paul writes, "What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, which is given you, which is in you, which ye have of God? Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price. Therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's."

You have been bought with a price. You are not your own; you belong to someone else. You belong to Christ. In 1 Corinthians 7:23 we read, "Ye are bought with a price, be not ye the servants of men." Why in the world should we be the servants or slaves of men when we are the slaves of Jesus Christ?

Our servitude is based upon love: “We love Him because He first loved us.” We serve Him because of His great love and mercy manifested in our hearts and lives. It is easy to wait upon someone that you love. David said in Psalm 25 and verse 21, “Let integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I wait upon Thee.” In the same psalm, in verse 5, he said, “Lead me in Thy truth and teach me, for Thou art the God of my salvation. On Thee do I wait all the day.” David said, “I can wait upon You because I love You.”

Have you ever wondered why God makes us wait? There are a multitude of answers to that question, but I want you to see one directly from the Bible. Isaiah 30, verse 18, says, “And therefore will the Lord wait.” In other words, the Lord is waiting because we are

waiting. “Therefore will the Lord wait that He may be gracious unto you. And therefore will He be exalted that He may have mercy upon you. For the Lord is a God of judgment. Blessed are all they that wait upon Him.”

He makes us wait, and He waits—why? That He may be merciful unto us. I believe I prefer to wait and have mercy than not to be waited on and have judgment. The Lord is going to be gracious and kind to us. So how do we wait? We wait dependently, expectantly, lovingly, and patiently. We love Him because He first loved us.

Waiting Patiently

David said in Psalm 123, “as the eyes of the servant look unto the hand of the master, and as the eyes of the maiden look unto the eyes of her mistress.” Suppose that you were my servants and I was an extremely wealthy man. Your assignment was to stand still and wait upon my direction. I would supply everything for you; you would have no needs. You would not have to work for your food or buy clothes, because I would supply them. All you would have to do is stand and wait for me to say, “Do this” or “Do that.” If I said nothing, you would simply wait.

Do servants hurry their masters? Do maidens demand things of their mistress? The answer is no. Servants wait, and they wait patiently. Their entire life is given to waiting. I'm going to tell you what one of our biggest sins really is. It's one of my sins, and I'll guarantee it's one of your sins: the sin of impatience.

Each of us wants God to move, but we want Him to move in our time and in our way. What we forget is that we are limited by time, but He is not. We are temporal. He is eternal. One day is as a thousand years with the Lord. We have to learn to wait upon the Lord. You know what our Lord said in Luke 21 in verse 19? "In patience possess ye your souls." I'm quite afraid that most of us do not really and truly possess our souls in patience.

Scripture asserts that one reason we experience all the tests, trials, and tribulations we go through is to teach us patience. Romans 5 and verse 3 says, "And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also, knowing that tribulation worketh patience." In 2 Corinthians 6 and

verse 4, the Bible tells us that we are to prove ourselves as the ministers of God in much patience. Hebrews 10 and verse 36 says, "For ye have need of patience that after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise." Even after you've done His will, you have to wait until His time. So you have need of patience.

How does a servant wait upon his master? He waits patiently. In Hebrews 12 and verse 1, the Bible says, "Wherefore, seeing that we are encompassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us." In James 1 and verse 4, "But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be mature and complete, wanting nothing." And the Bible says in Revelation 14 and verse 12, "Here is the patience of the saints."

Waiting Obediently

“Here are they that keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus Christ.” This is the patience of the saints. In other words, we wait upon the Lord. We know that He is going to work and do things in His time and in His way. I have people say all the time, “Brother Weaver, do you think that we’ll see victory in our lifetime, or will it be in the lifetime of our children or our grandchildren?” All I can say is, I sure hope it is in my lifetime. But I do not know. I do know this: we have to wait upon the Lord.

And I have news for you: when the Lord moves, He will not be one day late. He will not be one second late. He will be right on time. But we have to learn to wait patiently.

Fifthly and finally, this is how we wait upon the Lord: we must wait obediently. It is true that we must wait dependently, expectantly, lovingly, and patiently, but it is equally true that we must wait obediently.

Waiting does not imply idleness. Waiting does not mean that we sit around doing absolutely nothing. Waiting does not imply inactivity. In Acts 1:4, our Lord told His disciples, “And being assembled together with them, commanded them they should not depart out of Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which saith He, ye have heard of me.” They were waiting, but their

waiting was obedient, since that is what God commanded them to do.

Secondly, if you read the context, they did not sit idly by. They were not only praying, but they also gave themselves to carrying out the business at hand, appointing a replacement for Judas Iscariot. They were waiting; they did not leave the city, but they were not sitting there idle. It is inconceivable that someone would be waiting for an answer or a blessing from God while at the same time acting disobediently toward Him. Whatever God called us to do, whatever business He has appointed us, whatever vocation we have, as Christ, we must be about our Father's ministry.

Most of us are parents, and many of us are grandparents. Which are you going to bless more quickly, an obedient child or a disobedient child? I know the answer to that. You are going to bless an obedient child. I have told my children and grandchildren, "If you do right, I will help you till I'm blue in the face."

I will die helping you. But if you are going to do wickedly and wrongly and think I am going to help you, you are mistaken. I am not going to subsidize sin and rebellion. Our Father is not going to subsidize sin and rebellion. So if we wait upon Him, we must learn to wait obediently. If we want to please our Heavenly Father, we must serve Him in the area that He has appointed us and do whatever we can do. The Bible says in Romans 12 and verse 7, "Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering, he that teacheth on teaching." When the word wait is used, we are to be diligent in doing whatever God has called us to do.

It does not matter if you are a minister, a businessman, a doctor, or whatever you are. If you are waiting upon Him, you have to give diligence, work, effort, and activity in being obedient. We may be waiting upon the Lord for wisdom, discernment, or direction, perhaps concerning a very complicated or complex problem. But whatever it is, we have to be obedient while we wait.

James 4 and verse 17 says, "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin." If you know what you are supposed to do and do not do it, to you it is sin. We may not know everything about what we are supposed to do, but many of us know

many things that we are supposed to be doing. If we do not obey in the areas we do know, to us it is sin.

David said, “As a servant looketh unto his master, and as the eyes of a maiden to her mistress, so our eyes wait upon Thee.” Our eyes should be fixed upon the Lord in the sense that we are waiting upon Him. As we wait, we are being obedient in every area of our lives.

Matthew Henry said the eyes of a servant must look to his master’s directing hand, expecting him to appoint his work, show him how he must do it: “Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?”

Second, we must look to his supplying hand. Servants look to their master or mistress for their portion of meat in due season. To God we must look for our daily bread and for grace sufficient from Him, receiving it thankfully.

Third, we must look to his assisting hand. If the servant cannot do his work himself, where must he look for help but to his master? In the strength of the Lord, we must go forth and go on.

Fourth, we must look to his protecting hand. If the servant meets with opposition, is questioned for what he does, or is wronged and injured, who should bear him out and right him but his master who set him to the work? When persecuted, the people of God may appeal to their Master: “We are Thine, O Lord, save us.”

Fifth, we must look to His correcting hand. If a servant has provoked his master to beat him, he does not call for help against his master, but looks at the hand that strikes him until it says, “It is enough, I will not contend forever.” We must look to our Lord in all of these things.

Applications and Conclusion

What is waiting upon the Lord? How do we do it? We must learn to wait dependently, expectantly, lovingly, and obediently. We cannot expect the blessings of the Lord if we are disobedient unto Him. Biblical waiting upon the Lord is not useless, idle inactivity. No one waits upon the Lord but those who love Him and trust Him. Those who wait upon the Lord understand the relationship between a servant and his master, because we learn to look to Him.

We must learn to lift up our eyes unto the Lord. We must learn to watch as well as wait. Every blessing that God has promised is, in reality, for those who wait upon Him, those who love Him and trust Him. In Isaiah 40, verse 31: “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.”

Many of you have seen eagles soar. Eagles fly higher than probably any other bird, and it is amazing how effortlessly they soar in those airstreams. You remember how Elijah ran and outran a chariot? He surely did with the hand of the Lord upon him. If we truly want the blessings of God in our lives, we need to learn to wait upon the Lord. He is the Master; He is King of Kings and God of Gods and Lord of Lords.

We should bow before Him and say, “Here I am. Teach me. Build me up in the most holy faith. Make me obedient. Make me holy. Make me godly.”

Father, we are so thankful today for Jesus Christ and for Thy so great salvation. We are thankful, Lord, that we can, by Your grace and by Your mercy, wait upon You, and we never, ever wait in vain. Thou art the one true and the living God. Give us grace, give us repentance, give us faith that we may serve Thee. In the name of Jesus Christ we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 2

There They Preached the Gospel

Introduction: The Simple Statement That Jumped Out

I have an interesting practice, and I hope you have the same practice: I read the Scriptures every day and try to study every day. I also simply read through my Bible time after time. Usually, when I am reading for my own personal benefit, subjects pop out that I end up preaching on. After I read and begin to think, I begin to study, and usually a message comes out of it.

The same thing happened as I was reading through the book of Acts recently. In Acts chapter 14, verse 7, the Bible says, “And there they preached the gospel.” And there they preached the gospel. As I read through Acts, that statement simply jumped out at me.

This statement is so simple, plain, and direct that it must be easily understood. And yet the Scripture says, “And there they preached the gospel.” I can assure you that most professing Christians think they really understand what it means to preach the gospel. Yet the truth should be very evident: after visiting most churches and

listening to most television and radio preachers, most folks really have no idea what the gospel truly is.

What Is the Gospel? Correcting Misconceptions

I want to ask you this question: What is the gospel? Do not answer out loud, but think about that for a moment. Holding Acts 14, I want you to look in 1 Corinthians chapter 15. We usually come to this passage when we talk about the gospel. Let us begin reading with verse 1. Paul writes:

"Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also you have received, and wherein you stand; by which also you are saved, if you keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless you have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received. How that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures."

The important thing, especially in verses 3 and 4, is that I have heard preachers say—and probably you have as well—that 1 Corinthians 15:3–4 is the gospel in a nutshell. By that, they mean it is the smallest bit of information that one could possibly obtain and yet still call it the gospel.

But are they correct in that assumption? I confess and acknowledge that Jesus Christ did indeed die according to the Scriptures, and that He was indeed raised from the dead bodily according to the Scriptures. But here is my question: Was not Christ also born according to the Scriptures? And did not Jesus Christ live according to the Scriptures?

Are not His birth and His life equally the gospel, as well as His death and resurrection? The answer is yes.

Notice 1 Corinthians 15:1: "Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached unto you." Paul is saying that he preached the gospel to them. Then, in verse 2, he says, "by which also you're saved if you keep in memory what I preached unto you." Again, he speaks of having preached to them. In verse 3 he says, "For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received."

The interesting thing is that in verses 3 and 4 Paul emphasizes mainly the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. So is that all Paul preached? If not, why does he emphasize in this passage only the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ?

The reason appears in 1 Corinthians 15:12: "Now if Christ be preached that He rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?" There were people in the Corinthian church who were denying the bodily resurrection of the dead. Therefore Paul singled out this aspect of Christ's work.

He continues: "But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen? And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised? And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; you are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished."

In other words, Paul is correcting bad theology in the Corinthian church. What they were denying was the bodily resurrection of Christ. In fact, the rest of 1 Corinthians 15 goes on to prove the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 15:3–4, Paul emphasizes the part of the gospel that some in the Corinthian church were denying: "I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received: how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures."

If you say that 1 Corinthians 15:3–4 is the gospel in a nutshell, the error is suggesting that the gospel is simply facts about Christ. Is it a fact that Jesus Christ died? Yes. Is it a fact that He was buried? Yes. Is it a fact that He was raised from the dead? Yes. But the gospel is not facts about Christ.

The gospel is Christ. Everything about Jesus Christ is the gospel, for He is the gospel. The word gospel, which I will point out before I close, literally means good tidings or glad tidings of salvation through Jesus Christ. Everything about Christ is the gospel because Christ is the gospel.

When you read the word gospel in the New Testament, it never simply means a book or facts about Christ. It is the truth concerning Christ. We refer to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John as the four Gospels, not because they are merely books, but because they are histories about the person and work of Jesus Christ. The gospel, then, is not simply facts or books. Jesus Christ is the gospel.

He is the subject of it. He is the object of it. He is the life of it. Christ preached the gospel, the apostles preached the gospel, and the evangelists preached the gospel. Usually, when we use the word gospel, we use it in a collective sense, indicating the doctrines that revolve around Christ. Preaching the gospel includes not only proclaiming the good news that Jesus Christ is salvation and that Jesus Christ alone is salvation, but also declaring all the promises, all the precepts, and even the threatenings found in the Word of God.

The Gospel Is the Entirety of God's Word

When you talk about the gospel, it is interesting to look through the New Testament and find the terms that refer to the gospel. Let me give these to you very quickly. First of all, it is called the gospel of God in Romans 1:1, the gospel of the grace of God in Acts 20:24, the gospel of the kingdom in Matthew 4:23, the gospel of Christ in Romans 1:16, the gospel of peace in Ephesians 6:15, the glorious gospel in 2 Corinthians 4:4, the everlasting gospel in Revelation 14:6, and the gospel of our salvation in Ephesians 1:13. Now we are talking about preaching the gospel.

The word preach is from the Greek word kerusso, which literally means “I herald.” So preaching the gospel is basically heralding the message of Jesus Christ—the whole message of Jesus Christ. It is important that you remember that I have just said that Jesus Christ is the gospel.

In 2 Timothy chapter 4 and verse 2, notice what the Apostle Paul tells Timothy. In fact, let us read verse 1 so you can see it in the context: “I charge thee therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word.”

“Be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.” Notice something about preaching, or heralding, the word. He says, “Preach the word,” herald the word, and preaching or heralding the word includes reproof, rebuke, and exhortation. In other words, when you herald the gospel, sometimes you are proclaiming, sometimes rebuking, sometimes reproving, and sometimes exhorting. Since the Apostle Paul, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, commands us to preach the word, we have to ask this question: Is the entirety of the Word of God the gospel?

And the answer is yes. Is not the whole Word of God good news? Is not the entirety of God's Word glad tidings to those who hear, heed, and obey the Word of God? When you consider the Old Testament, you have to ask yourself: Does not the Old Testament speak and teach about Jesus Christ? Does it not speak about reconciliation, salvation, deliverance, justification, and sanctification? Does it not teach repentance and judgment? Does it not also teach condemnation upon those who refuse to bow to God's salvation? And the answer is yes.

If we are commanded to preach the entirety of the Word of God, and if we understand that the entirety of the Word of God is indeed the gospel, why is it that most preachers limit their preaching and teaching simply to the New Testament? If you confess that the entirety of the Bible is indeed the Word of God, why then do we not preach the Word of God in its entirety?

Blood Guiltiness and the Whole Counsel of God

Have you ever heard of blood guiltiness? If you have never heard of it, you should have. And if you have heard of it, you should have wondered concerning it. Let me show you what I am about to declare.

When I started preaching forty-something years ago, and as a young Christian, I was told that I was responsible to witness to every person that I saw. If I did not witness to them, their blood was going to be on my hands. Think for a moment. What greater way is there to control and manipulate a people except through guilt? If I can make you feel guilty, I can control you.

Rushdoony wrote a very important book years ago, The Politics of Guilt and Pity. Why is there so much guilt being forced upon the American people? To control us. To manipulate us. If we can be made to feel guilty about slavery, something that happened two hundred years ago or that still is happening today.

We can be controlled. If we can be made to feel guilty that somewhere somebody does not have enough food to eat and somewhere some child is being abused—and I am certainly not for child abuse—we may be manipulated. I am not responsible for what someone else does; I am responsible for what I do.

Arminian theology seeks to control and manipulate Christians by making them feel guilty. It proclaims, basically, that it is our responsibility to witness to every person we see. We must follow their bidding, their program, and their interpretation of Scripture; and if we do not follow it, then we are guilty. Such theology is not only unbiblical, but certainly impractical.

If I am responsible to witness to every person I see, or else their blood is on my hands, here is my question: How can I work? How can I play? How can I have a family? How can I do anything else?

For instance, suppose Alice asked me to go downtown to buy some milk and bread that she needs for supper. She says, “You bring me back the milk and bread and then we’ll have supper.” But I am convinced that I have to witness to everyone I see. I stop at the store, see a man walking in, and say, “Whoa, sir, let me tell you about Jesus Christ.”

Before he can walk away, someone says, “Wait right here just a moment. I want to tell you about Jesus Christ. And you, sir, stand right there, because I want to talk to you too.” Would I ever get into the store? If I got into the store, there would be more people. Once I began witnessing to them, would I ever get out of the store? More would keep coming in. Would I ever get home in time for supper? Would I ever have supper? Would I ever return home? When would it stop? You follow me?

Now there is such a thing as blood guiltiness. I am going to show it to you from the Bible. Look, please, in Acts chapter 20, beginning at verse 17. The apostle Paul sent from Miletus to Ephesus and called

the elders of the church. “And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church.”

“And when they were come to him, he said unto them, ‘You know from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews: how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you and taught you publicly and from house to house.’”

Look again at verse 20: “How I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you and have taught you publicly and from house to house.” Do you remember 2 Timothy 3:16? “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.”

What did he say? “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable.” If all Scripture is profitable, and Paul kept back nothing that was profitable, what did Paul do? He preached all of it. He preached the entirety of the Word of God. Then he says in verse 21, “Testifying both to the Jews and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Paul said, “And now behold, I go bound in the Spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide in me. But none of those things move me, neither count I my life dear to myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify of the gospel of the grace of God.”

He continued, “And now behold, I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more. Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men.” Paul, did you witness to every man that you saw? No, he did not. How, then, could he say that he was pure from the blood of all men?

He explained: “For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.” What brings blood guiltiness upon a preacher, or

upon anyone? Failure to preach and teach the whole counsel of God. How did Paul escape blood guiltiness? Not by witnessing to everyone he saw, but by declaring, preaching, and teaching the entirety of God's Word.

What will happen when you start preaching the entirety of God's Word? You may be run off. Many people do not want truth. I was once asked to go to Florida and was offered a huge ministry. The auditorium alone was worth millions; they also had a gym and a Christian school, but were about ten million dollars in debt. They asked me to become their pastor.

I told them, "You don't really want me." They insisted that they did, but I answered, "No, you just think you want me. Because when I start preaching, within the first six months I'm going to thin the congregation down by at least 50 percent. Since you won't have the money coming in to pay your sinking fund, you'll have to get rid of me. It would be best if you called somebody else. You really don't want me." Why? So many people do not want the truth. You might get run off, persecuted, hated, and despised. But truth is truth.

We are responsible to preach and teach the totality of God's Word. That is one reason I like you folks. I love you folks. You know why? Because I can open the Bible and just preach. I do not have to say, "Wow, I wonder if Ron is going to like this one." Truth is, I do not really care whether he likes it or not. And the truth of the matter is, I believe I know him well enough: if it is from the Word of God, he is going to like it. Anybody who loves the Scripture is going to love the truth. But you see, the gospel is not just facts about Christ. The gospel is Jesus Christ.

Preaching Christ Means Preaching the Whole Bible

I want you to turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 2, because here is another passage that so many quote. I have heard preachers use this verse very piously. In 1 Corinthians 2:2, the Apostle Paul says, "For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and Him crucified."

I do not worry about all these people and their sins, and I do not worry about what is happening in the world, and I do not worry

about the corruption in politics, and I do not worry about— I just preach the gospel. I just preach Christ and Him crucified. That sounds good, does it not? Well, let us look at the context. In 1 Corinthians 2:1-2, he says, "And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified."

He continues: "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."

Now what in the world is Paul saying when he says, "For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified"? Here is what he is saying: I am not depending upon my oratory. I am not depending upon my sermon outlines. I am not depending upon my illustrations. I am not depending upon gags and gimmicks and programs. I am not depending upon emotionalism. I am not depending upon tricks and gimmicks. No, no, no. The only thing I am depending upon is Christ and His power in my preaching.

In the conversion of sinners, when people are genuinely convicted and converted, they are genuine Christians. Do you know why so many churches put so much emphasis upon their soul-winning programs? Because they have to keep bringing people in to replace those who are leaving. One year, I preached in a church down in Florida that had about 300 people in the congregation. The next year, I went back and preached to the same church. There were only three or four families that I recognized. Within a year, practically 90 percent of the church had changed.

There is something seriously wrong with evangelism when the converts do not stick. It seems to me that 1 John 2:19 says this: “They went out from us because they were not of us. For had they been of us, no doubt they would have continued with us.” The proof that a man is genuinely converted is that he continues in the faith and in the things of Christ. All Paul is saying in 1 Corinthians chapter 2 is, whatever converts I get, I want them to be God's converts.

It is like Billy Sunday, the Presbyterian evangelist. He died, I think, in the 30s. Billy Sunday was walking down the street one day and met a drunk man. The man said in his drunken stupor, “Mr. Sunday, Mr. Sunday, don't you know me?” Billy Sunday said, “I'm sorry, I don't know you.” The man replied, “You ought to; I'm one of your converts.” Billy said, “Blessed God, you must be, for you're certainly not one of God's.”

That is all Paul is saying. He wants anyone who is convicted and converted to have been convicted and converted by the power of Christ, by the power of His ministry. Paul certainly preached the gospel. But if we are going to preach Christ and Him crucified, is not Christ the Creator? Yes, He is. Creation is ascribed to God the Son. “All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made.”

If you are going to preach about Christ, you have to preach about creation and about the book of Genesis. Was not Christ the true seed of Abraham? Of course. Did not Christ come of the tribe of Judah? Of course. Is not Christ the central focus in the Old Testament as He is in the New Testament? The answer is yes. Therefore, if you are going to preach Christ, you must preach the entirety of the Word of God, because Christ is the central theme and focus in the Old Testament as well as the New Testament.

Preaching that Christ is the Creator, or that Christ is the true seed of Abraham, is just as much the gospel as preaching the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, because Jesus Christ is the gospel. If you are preaching Christ, you are preaching the gospel. If you are preaching the threatenings that Christ made toward those who will not receive Him, you are still preaching the gospel, because you are preaching Christ.

There They Preached the Gospel: The Example of Paul and Barnabas

Acts 14:7 says, “And there they preached the gospel.” What is significant about that statement? In order to understand it, we must read Acts 14, verses 1 through 6: “And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks

believed. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren. Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of His grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands. But the multitude of the city was divided: part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles. And when there was an assault made both of the Gentiles, and also of the Jews with their rulers, to use them despitefully, and to stone them. They were ware of it, and fled unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and unto the region that lieth round about: and there they preached the gospel."

As they were at Iconium, they were preaching, and great multitudes evidently were believing. It is easy to preach and easy to teach as long as you have smooth sailing, balmy breezes, and plenty of sunshine. At first, they had it. Then the unbelieving Jews raised a ruckus, tried to stone them, and sought to kill them. When they knew what was going to happen, they fled to Lystra and Derbe. When they arrived there, it is said, "And there they preached the gospel."

In Acts 13:49–52, we read: "And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region. But the Jews stirred up the devout and honourable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts. But they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came unto Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost." And it could be said, "And there they preached the gospel."

Do you see what is happening? It does not matter where they are driven; there they preach the gospel. In Acts 14:8–18, we read: "And there sat a certain man at Lystra, impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother's womb, who never had walked: the same heard Paul speak: who steadfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed, said with a loud voice, 'Stand upright on thy feet.' And he leaped and walked. And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, 'The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men.' And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker. Then the priest of Jupiter, which was before their

city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people. Which when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out, and saying, 'Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein: who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless He left not Himself without witness, in that He did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.'"

"And with these sayings scarce restrained they the people, that they had not done sacrifice unto them." You would think that Paul and Barnabas were going to have smooth sailing. They had healed this man, and everybody had tried to proclaim them as gods. The people were going to sacrifice to them and honor them. Surely Paul and Barnabas could sail on this honor for some time, getting good mileage out of it and being able to preach the Word of God to these people.

Well, look in verse 19: "And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead. Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe. And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch." Isn't that amazing? Some say that Paul was actually killed. I do not know whether he was or not, but they at least thought he was dead.

God sovereignly and powerfully raised him up. Skip down to verse 24: "And after they had passed throughout Pisidia, they came into Pamphylia. And when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down into Attalia." It did not matter where they were, what happened, or what the circumstances and situations were. Nothing deterred the Apostle Paul and the others from preaching the gospel.

Paul's Humanity and God's Encouragement

Was Paul superhuman? When you read about Paul, Peter, and all these other men God used, you tend to think they were super saints, super pious, or superhuman. Was Paul superhuman? No. None of them were. Each one was a sinner, nothing more than a mere man. It might surprise you to learn that even the mighty Apostle Paul was sometimes afraid. In 1 Corinthians 2:3, he said, “I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling.”

Look in Acts chapter 18. Paul goes on to Corinth, an exceedingly wicked city. You know Jacksonville has a seaport.

A lot of other cities have seaports, and usually when you have seaports, you have a bunch of wickedness because you have a bunch of sailors. You have heard the expressions “a drunken sailor” and “cuss like a sailor.” Corinth had three seaports. It was so pagan that it had all these pagan temples. One pagan temple had a thousand prostitutes in it for the free use of visitors to that temple. The Apostle Paul went to Corinth to preach.

In Bible times, if you wanted to cut a man down verbally, you called him a Corinthian. If you said someone was acting like a Corinthian, that was a slam, a put-down—like calling a white man white trash. It was a put-down because the Corinthians were so foul and wicked.

But look in Acts chapter 18, beginning at verse 9. Paul was in Corinth: “Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision.” Here is what God told him: “Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city.” Paul was fearful, and God comforted him: “Paul, don’t be afraid. I’m going to protect you. No one is going to harm you.” Verse 11 says, “And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.”

And there he preached the gospel. It did not matter where he was or what the circumstances were. Persecution, resentment, bitterness, hatred, ill will, fear, and suffering did not deter Paul or the other disciples from preaching and teaching the Word of God. Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 2:2, “But even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold

in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention." It did not matter that people hated them, persecuted them, or resented them; they were still bold in their God to preach the gospel. That is true, folks. Many refuse to hear the Word of God, and many reject it. What happened in the New Testament when people hated, rejected, and refused the Word of God?

Did Paul and the other apostles stand there and beg them, "Please listen, please listen"? No, no, no. They shook the dust off their feet and said, "The very dust be a witness against you." And they went somewhere else. In other words, rejection did not hinder them from preaching the word of God. You know what God often does? To get us to preach and teach, He sends persecution.

Persecution Scatters Preachers

Look back to Acts chapter 8. You will remember that in Acts chapter 7, Stephen, the first martyr, was stoned to death. Look in verse 1: "And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison. Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word." Isn't that interesting? Persecution drove them out of Jerusalem. And wherever they went, they went preaching.

Look in Acts chapter 11, beginning there at verse 19. Acts 11:19 says, "Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only." And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord. Notice, if you would, verse 19: "Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen." What got these folks scattered out preaching? Persecution.

The Great Commission: As You Are Going, Preach

The Great Commission says, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.” And, “lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”

Many pastors say that we have a divine command to go: “Go ye.” That is a command; “Go ye” is an imperative. Usually, however, those who say that have not really done very much studying, because “go” is not an imperative in the Greek. It is a participle. What does that mean? Verse 19 literally says, “As you are going.” Where is the imperative? Where is the command? It is the word “teach.” That is the imperative. As you are going, teach. As you are going, preach. In other words, wherever you are, that is where you are commanded to preach and to teach—as you are going somewhere.

Did God in His all-wise providence place you in a situation where there are some who are open to the gospel? If so, there preach. Did God in His all-wise providence place you in a situation where there are ignorant, apathetic, stubborn, and rebellious people? If so, there preach. It does not matter where you are. You may say, “Now wait a minute, Brother Weaver. I would really like to be in a position where people really want the Word of God and really respond.” Wouldn’t everyone?

But God does not always put us in those positions. Noah did not have any converts. What about Jeremiah? Nobody listened to him either. How about Isaiah? Very few. I am simply pointing out the fact that wherever God sent His people, there they preached.

Now consider these Roman believers. Paul is writing to Roman Christians: “Among whom are ye also the called of Jesus Christ: to all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Has it ever entered your mind to ask the question, how did Paul get to preach to these Romans and why was Paul writing to them? In Philippians 4:22 he writes, “All the saints salute you, chiefly they that are of Caesar’s household.”

Prison and Palace: Preaching in All Circumstances

Were there people in Caesar's palace who were believers? Of course. How did people in Caesar's palace and in Rome become believers? Look in Philippians chapter 1, beginning at verse 12. Some of you know that the Apostle Paul had several vacations from his preaching tours. I would say federal, but they were not federal. They were Roman. The Apostle Paul was thrown into prison numerous times.

Here he is in prison, and he says, "But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel; so that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places; and many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear."

Notice, Paul was in prison, and it was in the palace prison that he preached. It was in the palace prison that they of Caesar's household were converted. It was in the palace prison that he was able to reach even some who were outside the prison. Remember Acts chapter 16. Paul and Silas had cast a demon out of a girl, and the men who owned her complained. The magistrates threw them into prison after beating them.

At midnight, Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises unto God, and the prisoners heard them. God sent the earthquake and loosed all the prisoners. When the jailer came in, about to kill himself, Paul said, "Do thyself no harm, we're all here." What did Paul do when he went to prison? He preached, he prayed, and he praised.

Look in Acts 24. Paul was wrongly condemned, wrongly convicted, and wrongly accused. The Jews accused him of being in the temple with a Macedonian, which, of course, he was not, but that did not bother them. Paul was sent down to face Festus and then Felix. After Paul had been wrongly accused, Acts 24:27 says, "But after two years Porcius Festus came into Felix' room: and Felix, willing to shew the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound." Felix was the one who trembled at the preaching of Paul.

For two years now, Paul is held in prison. When Festus came in, Paul preached to him, as well as to Agrippa and his wife. It was Agrippa who cried out, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a

Christian." All this time he is in prison. After he is sent to Rome, Acts 28:30–31 tells us, "And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him."

The point is this: persecution could not stop him. Prison could not silence him. Prosperity did not deter him. Privations only made him stronger. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 12:10, "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong." Do you realize the only thing that could silence the Apostle Paul was death? The only thing that could silence most of these people was death.

It did not matter where they were, or the situation and circumstances; there they preached the gospel. The Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 11:1, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ." Follow me as I follow Christ. If we follow the Apostle Paul, we are going to be doing an awful lot of preaching wherever we are.

Applications: Faithfulness Where God Places You

Now let me make some applications and try to tie everything together. The first one is this. Do you remember the story of Esther? There is a whole book about her. You remember how she became queen, and Mordecai told her that God had brought her to the kingdom for such a time as this. Have you ever stopped to think that God, in His all-wise providence, has placed you exactly where you are for such a time as this?

It does not matter if you are at home, traveling, in prison, or in the hospital. There, preach the gospel. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 7:21–22, "Art thou called being a servant? care not for it: but if thou mayest be made free, use it rather. For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant."

The word servant is the Greek word doulos, which literally means slave or bond slave, one in servile condition. Are you called being a slave? If you can be free, use it rather; but if you cannot be free, that

does not matter. You preach the gospel being a slave. If you are a free man and belong to Christ, you are still a slave. You preach the gospel. It really does not matter whether we are bond or free, in prison or out of prison. There, preach the gospel, live for Him, and honor Him.

Here is a second application. Turn, please, to 2 Corinthians chapter 2, and look at the Scripture. Listen carefully, because I am going to make an application that some of you may not understand, though I hope that you shall. Do not become excited if you do not see fruit immediately in your witnessing, preaching, or teaching. You may say, “Brother, I am not a pastor.” That does not matter. “I have never been to college.” That does not matter. “I have never been to Bible school.” That does not matter.

If you've been saved by the grace of God, you know the truth and you can share the truth. But don't become excited if folks reject the truth and hate it. When God first saved me, I thought, This thing is so wonderful. I can't wait to tell everyone, especially members of my family. All of a sudden, some of those members of my family did not want to associate with me anymore. “Well, you've gone off on the deep end. You're a nut. All you want to talk about is Christ and read the Bible.”

God does not give everyone a ministry of reconciliation. He didn't give that to Noah. He didn't give it to Jeremiah. He didn't give it to Isaiah. He didn't give it to a lot of people. To some people, He gives a ministry of condemnation. In 2 Corinthians 2:14, Paul says, “Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of His knowledge by us in every place.” Then he says, “For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: to the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?”

In the Old Testament, they had offerings that were sweet savour offerings. It is like walking by while your neighbor is grilling a steak outside. That is a sweet savour; you like it. Or barbecue and chicken—you like it. God says that when His Son is preached, and people repent and believe, it is a sweet smell: “I love it. My Son is preached.” But when His Son is preached, and men hate Him, reject

Him, and deny Him, God says it is still a sweet smell: “My Son is preached.” To the one, we are the savour of life unto life, and to the other, the savour of death unto death. But if Christ is preached, whether men repent or do not repent is immaterial. We honor God by preaching Jesus Christ.

We get our English words evangelize and evangelist from the Greek word euangelion, which is the word for gospel. To evangelize is to preach the gospel. Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:5 to do the work of an evangelist. But you do not have to be a pastor or a preacher to carry the Word of God. If you are a Christian, you are obligated to carry the Word of God as you travel, as God opens doors for you, and as God gives you people to speak to.

I have tried to speak to some people, and they did not want to talk to me. Others, I did not particularly want to talk to, but they wanted to talk to me, and they wanted me to tell them about the gospel. I remember one man to whom I tried to witness and share the Word of God. Whenever he saw me coming, he would turn around and go the other way. If he saw me on the sidewalk in time, he would cross the street so he would not have to speak to me. I always spoke to him, though. You know what God did? God, in His grace and mercy, saved that fellow. After God saved him, I could not drive him away. On numerous occasions at midnight I would say, “Gary, would you please get up and go home? I have got to get some rest. I have got to get some sleep.” He wanted the truth. He wanted everything. You do not have to be a pastor to share the Word of God.

We are living in dangerous, troublesome times, much like the New Testament era. I do not know what is coming down the pike after this year. I surely do not. But I know this: I do not care whether you are talking about corrupt government, corrupt politicians, persecutions, privations, depression, or economics. Jesus Christ is our answer in the totality of His Word. We are obligated to declare that truth whether people hear it or not, and whether they believe it or not.

If we will be faithful, God will honor the preaching and teaching of His Word. I hope you read about the leaven. Leaven works silently and secretly. You cannot see it.

But all of a sudden the whole loaf is leavened. That is the power of God. We cannot see everything that is going on in this land. We do not know. We tend to think that it is "us four and no more," that woe is us—we are all alone. If we just had . . . I have news for you, folks: there are more believers, and more people who think the way we think, than you can ever imagine.

I find them all over this country. We need to make up our minds that we are going to be faithful wherever God places us. There, preach the gospel.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank You and praise You, Lord, for all of Your goodness, kindness, love, and mercy. We are thankful, Father, for every opportunity that You give us, for every open door. Help us, Lord, to be faithful in preaching the gospel and talking about the entirety of the Word of God, for the entirety of the Word of God is focused upon Jesus Christ. Thank You, Lord, for each one here today. We ask Your blessing upon them. And, Father, we pray that You would help us deliver us in Christ's name, amen.

CHAPTER 3

What do You Want Said at Your Funeral

Introduction: The Biblical Concept of Lamentation

Acts chapter 8. We've got one verse to read. And I want you to listen carefully to the title of the message. And I think you're going to see, as I preach this message, why I am doing so. Notice Acts chapter 8 verse 2. And we're talking about Stephen. Look what the Bible says. Acts 8 verse 2: "And devout men carried Stephen to his burial and made great lamentation over him." Very simple. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial and made great lamentation over him. The title of the message today is, "What do you want said at your funeral?" It may surprise you to find out that the word "funeral" does not occur in Scripture. However, the word "lamentation" occurs often. The word "lamentation" refers to a dirge, a mourning, or an elegy. In one sense of the word, it is equivalent to our word "eulogy." The very first time the word occurs in Scripture is found in Genesis 50 and verse 10. Don't turn there. But that's where there was great mourning given over the death of Jacob.

The second time the word occurs in Scripture is found in 2 Samuel chapter 1 and verse 10. And it's there we read, "And David lamented with this lamentation over Saul and Jonathan his son." And if you read the rest of those verses, you would find the eulogy that David gave basically over Saul and Jonathan, in other words, the good things that he said concerning them. So literally then, what David was doing when he lamented with a lamentation was that he was giving a eulogy. When we read through Scripture, we will find that the word "lamentation" not only is a word that is used over the deaths of men, but it is also used over the death of cities as well.

Impetus for the Message: Misleading Funerals

Now let me tell you the impetus for this message. In fact, the thought hit my mind many months ago. I attended the funerals of two men that I had known for many years. I was not a preacher. I was not a participant. I was just there sitting in the congregation. Both of the men of whose funerals I attended were preached right into heaven and were extolled as saints. Yet neither of these men made a profession of faith except on their deathbed. I listened to the preachers who preached the funerals and they extolled their work ethic, their family life, their compassion for others.

Now some of what they said, in all probability, was true. And I certainly hope that a great deal of it was true. But as a whole, most of it was untrue. I know. Because I knew each of these men for many, many years. The old saying is that when a man dies, all his friends go lying about him. Well, you know, the truth of the matter is this.

When someone dies, usually his sins are overlooked, his bad virtues are forgotten, his mistakes are hidden, and every bad thing that he has ever done in his entire life is somehow excused. It is true, in one sense of the word, that our modern-day funerals are for the living. Whatever the deceased has done or has not done is basically over for him, and it is impossible to change those facts. Moreover, it does not matter how we either extol the one who has died or condemn the one who has died. The truth of the matter is, once he is dead, the judgment is in the hands of the Judge of all the earth.

The Bible teaches very clearly in 2 Corinthians 10:18. “For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord

commendeth." There is no one who can commend himself to God. Likewise, there is no man who can commend another man to God. For it is not he who commends that is commended, but whom the Lord commends. In other words, real, genuine commendation comes from God.

The opposite is also true. Whom men condemn is not necessarily condemned. Only the one whom God condemns is condemned. I have known preachers who have condemned people who disagreed with them. What does their condemnation mean? Absolutely nothing, because the one whom they condemned may not necessarily have been condemned by God.

The point is this: once someone has died, it does not matter whether we tell the truth or whether we lie; in one sense of the word, nothing changes the facts of their lives. Men can lie over other men in their deaths, but that does not change reality. Men can tell the truth, but that still does not change reality either.

The Purpose and Comfort of Funerals

Funerals are important for a number of reasons. They are indeed an opportunity to preach the gospel to those who may not hear it otherwise. People will often attend the funeral of a friend when they will never ever darken the doorway of a church. Thus, there is an opportunity to preach the gospel to those who normally would not hear. Secondly, funerals are indeed an opportunity to share the Word of God with family members. If there is any comfort, consolation, or encouragement for the family, it must be through the Word of God.

The Apostle Paul wrote, "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort, who comforted us in our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God."

God is called the God of all comfort. He comforts us in our tribulation that we might be able to comfort others who happen to be going through perhaps the same thing.

The Bible clearly teaches the sources of comfort for the child of God. First, based upon 2 Corinthians 1, we must derive comfort from the sovereign God of heaven and earth, for He is indeed the God of all comfort.

Secondly, we must derive comfort from the Son of God. The Bible teaches very clearly in the book of Hebrews that He suffered in every area such as we are and such as we have suffered, with the exception of sin. In other words, He never sinned. He is indeed a great high priest, and He is able to sympathize with us because of that.

Thirdly, we must have our comfort from the Spirit of God. It is the Holy Spirit of God who is the divine comforter. In fact, the Greek word for comforter is parakletos. Para is a preposition which means alongside of, and kletos is called. Thus, the paraclete is the one who is called alongside of to help.

We derive our comfort not only from the sovereign God, the Son of God, and the Spirit of God, but also from the Scriptures of God. Romans 15 tells us very clearly that those Scriptures are designed to give us comfort and encouragement. Lastly, we are to derive comfort from the saints of God. In James chapter 5, you will find that all of the saints have gone through everything that we are going through. Whatever happens to us has happened to others before us, and we can be encouraged by the saints.

SCRIPTURE READING - Luke 23:32-40 (KJV)

> Now, I want you to understand that this is the true comfort. It's the permanent comfort. It's the eternal comfort. The only thing that man can offer as an alternative is temporary, and unhappily so many then try to get their comfort from pills, from a bottle, from drugs, from fleshly lusts. No, those things do not genuinely comfort. They may distract you momentarily, but there is no real comfort in those things. The only comfort is based upon these things that I've just given you.
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> After listening to each one of these sermons that I attended, I was greatly disturbed. In fact, in my mind, there were indeed questions concerning the supposed conversions of these men. And let me just say, I genuinely hope and I genuinely pray that they were indeed converted. But to extol these individuals as

saints, as if they had been living a godly life for a multitude of years, is a little beyond belief.

The Only Deathbed Conversion in Scripture

So let me ask the question: Is it possible for a man to be saved on his deathbed? And the answer is absolutely yes, it is possible. My next question is this: Is it probable? Well, I want to give you an answer both from scripture and from history. This is the only deathbed conversion in the Bible. Notice Luke 23, beginning with verse 32:

"And there were also two other malefactors led with him to be put to death. And when they were come to the place which is called Calvary, there they crucified him and the malefactors, one on the right hand and the other on the left.

"Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment and cast lots. And the people stood beholding him, the rulers also with him, deriding him, saying, He saved others; let him save himself, if he be the Christ, the chosen of God. And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him and offering vinegar, and saying, If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself. And a superscription also was written over him in letters of Greek and Latin and Hebrew, This is the king of the Jews. And one of the malefactors, which were hanged with him, railed on him, saying, If thou be the Christ, save thyself and us. But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing that thou art in the same condemnation, and we indeed justly?"

"For we received the due reward of our deeds, but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise." This is the only deathbed conversion mentioned in the Bible. I believe the answer is this: God gave us one deathbed conversion so that none would presume, but only one, so that none may despair. This is the only one in the Bible.

Faith and Repentance Are Gifts from God

The old saying is that many who plan on repenting at twelve o'clock die at eleven-thirty. It is the height of arrogance and presumption to think that one can repent and believe whenever he pleases and whenever he chooses. When anyone thinks he can repent or believe whenever he pleases, that is merely humanistic thinking and demonstrates a lack of biblical understanding.

The Apostle Paul wrote, "But the natural man, that is the unsaved man, man by nature, but the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." The natural man, the unsaved man, does not receive the things of the Spirit of God. What does he count the preaching and teaching of the Word of God? Foolishness. But note this next part: "neither can he know them." That is a term of ability. He does not have the ability to know them because they are spiritually discerned. Man by nature, in and of himself, does not have the ability to discern the things of God.

For someone, then, to presume, "I'll get saved on my deathbed," is a very arrogant and unbiblical presumption. Let me state this categorically: Faith does not reside in man by nature. Faith is not innate in man. Faith is not inherent in man.

I know that you have heard preachers say this, because I have heard preachers say it: “All men have faith; all they have to do is exercise it.” Have you ever heard that? I have. I have heard it all my life.

In fact, I have heard it explained this way: “All men have faith. I mean, there is a chair behind you. You exercise faith when you sit in that chair. You believe that chair is going to hold you up; and when you sit down, that is an act of faith.”

The only problem is that there is a vast difference between a physical act and a spiritual act.

Turn to 2 Thessalonians chapter 3, verse 2. I want you to see what the apostle Paul wrote. Turn to 2 Thessalonians 3. It is 2 Thessalonians, not 1 Thessalonians. In fact, we will read verse 1.

He says, “Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified even as it is with you, and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men.” Note now: “For all men have not faith.” Isn’t that amazing? Faith is not inherent in man. Faith does not reside in man by nature. Faith is not innate in man.

Everybody in this room 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.” Where does faith come from? It is God’s gift. It does not reside in man by nature. Therefore, if faith is not inherent or innate in man, and if faith is God’s gift, how could one presume upon God, thinking that God is going to give him His gift right before he dies?

“But Brother Weaver, I have the answer. In order to get faith, all one has to do is repent.” That sounds good. The only problem is that it is impossible to repent whenever you want to. Repentance is not inherent in man by nature either. It is not innate in man. Repentance, like faith, is the gift of God.

Let me demonstrate this before showing you from Scripture. Our Lord said that all things are possible to him that believeth, and He said, whatever you ask, believe, and you shall receive it. Have you ever tried to work up faith or make yourself believe? Men do that all the time. You cannot make yourself believe, because faith is a gift of God. If God does not enable you to believe, you are not going to believe. It is that simple. Likewise, you cannot work up repentance or make yourself repent, because repentance is the gift of God.

Look first at Acts 5:30–31. Peter is preaching, and he says, “The God of our fathers raised up 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.” Notice that one word: “give.” Where does repentance come from? It comes from God. It is His gift for Him to give.

In Acts 11, Peter gives the report of the Gentiles and how they have believed. In verse 17 he says, “For as much as God gave them the like gift as He did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?” Now watch carefully:

“When they heard these things, they held their peace and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted or given repentance unto life.” Where does repentance come from? It comes from God. It is His gift.

Now look at 2 Timothy 2, beginning with verse 24. This is a very interesting passage, and again, it is a very plain passage. The apostle Paul writes, “And the servant of the Lord, he's talking about the preacher here, and the servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient.” Why should we be patient with our preaching and teaching? Here is why: “In meekness, instructing those that oppose themselves, now watch, if God, per adventure, will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth, and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.” The preacher must patiently instruct those who oppose themselves, because repentance is something God gives. God grants repentance unto life, and through it people acknowledge the truth and recover themselves out of the devil’s snare.

When are men recovered out of the snare of the devil? According to verse 25, it is when they repent and acknowledge the truth. When do men repent and acknowledge the truth? Again, according to verse 25, it is when God gives them repentance. Therefore, for someone to presume upon God is the height of arrogance.

Is it possible for God to save someone on his deathbed? The answer is yes. There is no limitation as to what God can do. God may give repentance and faith whenever He pleases and to whomever He pleases. Isaiah 55:7 says, “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord and he will have mercy upon him, for our God, for he will abundantly pardon.”

But the problem with quoting verse 7 by itself is that verse 6 precedes it: “Seek ye the Lord while He may be found. Call ye upon Him when He is near.” What does verse 6 teach? That there is a time when God cannot be found and a time when God is not near. Scripture therefore plainly teaches that it is an act of presumption to think that one can simply call upon God and find God whenever he pleases.

How do you know that when it comes your time to die, you will be able to think, control your pain, control your emotions, and control your thoughts in such a way as to understand the Word of God and salvation? To presume that will happen a few minutes before you die is the height of presumption.

Historical Example: Stonewall Jackson

Let me give you a historical example. Everyone is aware of Stonewall Jackson. Dr. Hunter McGuire was one of the doctors who attended Jackson when he was wounded, and he wrote an account of his dealings with Stonewall Jackson. Remember that when Stonewall was wounded, he was being carried from the field on a litter. I think, if I remember correctly, there were probably six men carrying it. One of them was Captain Smith. As he rushed Stonewall off the field, Captain Smith's foot became entangled in a vine, and he tripped and fell. The litter then fell to the ground, and Stonewall fell on that already wounded arm. Captain Smith sprang to his side, raised his head, put his head in his arm, and cried, "Oh general, are you seriously hurt?" Stonewall answered—this is McGuire's account—"No, don't trouble yourself, my friend, about me."

After winning the battle, Stonewall Jackson attended to the wounded. He was placed on the litter again and carried a few hundred yards, where Dr. McGuire met him with the amulets. Dr. McGuire said, "I knelt down by him and said, 'I hope you're not badly hurt, General.' He replied very calmly but feebly, 'I'm badly injured, Doctor. I fear I'm dying.' And after he paused, he said, 'I'm glad you've come.' I think the wound in my shoulder is still bleeding."

Dr. McGuire and some others amputated Jackson's arm. While he was recovering, Chaplain Beverly Tucker Lacy came to see him. After a little while, Stonewall said that when he fell from the litter and struck his shoulder on the ground, he thought he was going to die on the field. He said, "I thought that I was going to die on the field and gave myself up into the hands of my heavenly Father without a fear." Stonewall declared that he was in possession of perfect peace.

While expecting immediate death, he said, "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 as 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 the 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." Stonewall added, "I felt that if I neglected the salvation of my soul before it would have been too late then. I want an experience."

Here was a man who believed he was going to die when he fell from that litter. Though he was in excruciating pain and suffering, and his thoughts were rambling, he said that had he not previously settled everything by the grace of God, he did not think any man would be able to control his mind and thoughts so as to understand the Word of God. Men often presume upon the grace of God, and at times they presume too much.

It is indeed a presumption to think that one may live a life of sin, rebellion, and disobedience, and then in the last few minutes of his life turn savingly to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is also a presumption to think that, in the minutes prior to your death, you will have the mental, physical, and spiritual ability to understand the gospel, repent, and believe. Moreover, such an attitude belittles the greatness, glory, and majesty of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ does not deserve the last few minutes of your life. He deserves the entirety of your life. He is the King of kings, Lord of lords, and God of gods.

Each of us must die. There can be no argument concerning that. Hebrews 9:27 says, "It's appointed unto man once to die, and after that the judgment." So here is my question: What do you want said at your funeral? You will have one whether you like it or not. Someone will say something over your body. The question is, what will they say, and will it be true?

I told Alice, after coming back from these two services, "I don't want there to be any question or any doubt as to my salvation or as to whom I've entrusted my soul." Like the Apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 1:12, I can say, "I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He's able to keep that which I've committed unto Him against that day." I know who Jesus Christ is, and I don't want anybody sitting

around saying, "I wonder if he was really saved. I wonder if he really trusted Christ." I want to take you through the Bible and show you what was said concerning the deaths of several men—their eulogies. As I show you some of these, you may say, "Man, I don't want that said at mine."

Biblical Eulogies: Abner, Jehoiakim, and Elisha

Turn to 2 Samuel chapter 3, verse 31.

David is going to speak and lament over the death of Abner. 2 Samuel 3:31 says, "David said to Joab and all the people that were with him, 'Rend your clothes, and gird you with sackcloth, and mourn before Abner.' And king David himself followed the bier. And they buried Abner in Hebron. And the king lifted up his voice, and wept at the grave of Abner; and all the people wept. And the king lamented over Abner, and said, 'Died Abner as a fool dieth? Thy hands were not bound, nor thy feet put in fetters. As a man falleth before wicked men, so fellest thou.' And all the people wept again over him."

Now, what a thing to say at a man's funeral: "Died Abner as a fool dieth? Thy hands were not bound, nor thy feet put in fetters. As a man falleth before wicked men, so fellest thou."

To understand David's eulogy, you have to go back to 2 Samuel 2:17. There was a battle between the followers of Joab and the followers of Abner. Abner was the captain of Ish-bosheth's army of Israel, and Joab was David's captain over Judah. "And there was a very sore battle that day; and Abner was beaten, and the men of Israel before the servants of David. And there were three sons of Zeruiah there, Joab, and Abishai, and Asahel. And Asahel was as light of foot as a wild roe. And Asahel pursued after Abner, and in going he turned not to the right hand nor to the left from following Abner. Then Abner looked behind him, and said, 'Art thou Asahel?'"

"And he answered, 'I am.' And Abner said to him, 'Turn thee aside to thy right hand or to thy left, and lay thee hold on one of the young men, and take thee his armour.' But Asahel would not turn aside from following him. And Abner said again to Asahel, 'Turn thee aside from following me. Wherefore should I smite thee to the ground?

How then should I hold up my face to Joab thy brother?' Howbeit he refused to turn aside. Wherefore Abner, with the hinder end of the spear, smote him under the fifth rib, and the spear came out behind him, and he fell down there, and died in the same place. And it came to pass, that as many as came to the place where Asahel fell down and died stood still."

And Joab and Abishai pursued after Abner. And the sun went down when they were come to the hill Ammah, that lieth before Giah by the way of the wilderness of Gibeon. And the children of Benjamin gathered themselves together after Abner, and became one troop and stood on the top of the hill. And Abner called to Joab and said, “Shall the sword devour forever? Knowest thou not that it will have bitterness in the latter? And how long shall it be then, ere thou bid the people return from following their brethren?” And Joab said, “As God liveth unless thou had spoken. Surely then in the morning the people had gone up, every man from following his brother.” So Joab blew a trumpet, and all the people stood still and pursued after Israel no more. Neither fought they any more.

Abner had killed Asahel, the brother of Joab and Abishai. He had pleaded with Asahel to turn aside: “Stop following me. Don't make me kill you. You want someone's armor? You take a younger soldier. You get one that's inexperienced. Don't mess with me.” He looked back and saw that Asahel was still following. He said, “Look, how can I hold my face up to Joab, your brother, if I have to kill you? Please turn aside.” Asahel kept coming. Abner, being a more experienced soldier, slowed down, let him catch up, took the spear, and pushed backwards. He smote Asahel and killed him right where he lay.

Both Joab and Abner had agreed to this battle. Abner the son of Ner and the servants of Ish-bosheth, the son of Saul went out from Mahanaim to Gibeon, and Joab the son of Zeruiah and the servants of David went out and met together at the pool of Gibeon. They sat down, the one on the one side of the pool and the other on the other side of the pool, and Abner said to Joab, “Let the young men now rise and play before us.” Joab said, “Let them arise.” So both of them agreed to this military exercise. Then there arose and went over by number twelve of Benjamin, which pertained to Ish-bosheth, the son of Saul, and twelve of the servants of David. And they caught every

one his fellow by the head, and thrust his sword in his fellow's side. So they fell down together, wherefore the place was called Helkath Hazzurim, which is in Gibeon.

The battle broke out, and Asahel was killed. Abner had pleaded with Asahel to turn aside, but he ended up killing him. Joab and Abishai then had it in for Abner. Abner was with Ish-bosheth, while Joab was with David. When the battle was over, Abner became upset with Ish-bosheth and told him that he would turn the kingdom over to David. Abner then came to David and entered into a covenant with him to make David king over all Israel.

In 2 Samuel chapter 3, verse 22, we read: "And behold, the servants of David and Joab came from pursuing a troop and brought in a great spoil with them. But Abner was not with David in Hebron, for he had sent him away and he was gone away in peace."

The compact, the covenant, had been made. David had sent Abner away. "When Joab and all the hosts that were with him were come, then they told Joab, saying, 'Abner the son of Ner came to the king, and he sent him away, and he is gone in peace.' Then Joab came to the king and said, 'What hast thou done? Behold, Abner came unto thee. Why is it that thou hast sent him away, and he is quite gone? Thou knowest Abner the son of Ner, that he came to deceive thee, and to know thy going out and thy coming in, and to know all that thou doest.'"

When Joab had come out from David, he sent messengers after Abner, who brought him again from the well of Sirah. But David knew it not. David had no part in this. "And when Abner was returned to Hebron, Joab took him aside in the gate to speak with him quietly and smote him there under the fifth rib that he died for the blood of Asahel, his brother."

Afterward, when David heard of it, he said, "I and my kingdom are guiltless before the Lord forever from the blood of Abner, the son of Ner." Verse 30 says, "So Joab and Abishai his brother slew Abner, because he had slain their brother Asahel at Gibeon in the battle." David was lamenting over Abner, and he said, "Died Abner as a fool dieth?" Then he said, "Thy hands were not bound, nor thy feet put into fetters."

"As a man falleth before wicked men, so fellest thou." Why is David giving this eulogy? Because Abner knew that Joab and Abishai were his enemies. When Joab sent for him and brought him back, he took him aside and said, "I want to talk to you privately in a very low tone." He and Abishai got Abner to the side and then murdered him. "Died Abner as a fool?" What's wrong with you, Abner? Didn't you know those men intended to kill you? Why would you go with your enemies to a private place where no one could see you or help you? Were your hands bound? Why didn't you use your sword?

Your feet weren't in fetters. If you weren't going to defend yourself, why didn't you run? Why didn't you get out of there? You understand why David is eulogizing Abner like this? Then he said, "You just fell before wicked men. Wicked men murdered you." I think there's a lesson to be learned in this, and that lesson is very simple: Do not trust the wicked, and do not allow yourself to be put in an indefensible position. "Died Abner as a fool. Thy hands were not bound, nor thy feet put in fetters."

Let me show you the second funeral, or lack thereof. Look in Jeremiah 22 and verse 19. This concerns King Jehoiakim. God says, "He shall be buried with the burial of an ass, and drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem." Why would he be buried with the burial of an ass? How do you bury an ass? You don't. You draw him out.

“Leave him somewhere and let the buzzards eat him, let his body rot.” Why would God say that? Let us begin reading in verse 13, Jeremiah 22. God says, “Woe unto him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness, and his chambers by wrong, that useth his neighbor's service without wages, and giveth them not for his work. That saith, ‘I will build me a wide house and large chambers,’ and cutting them out windows, and it is sealed with cedar, and painted with vermilion. Shalt thou reign, because thou closest thyself in cedar? Did not thy father eat and drink, and do judgment and justice, and then it was well with him? He judged the cause of the poor and the needy, then it was well with him. Was not this to know me, saith the Lord? But thine eyes and thine heart are not but for thy covetousness, and for to shed innocent blood, and for oppression, and for violence, to do it.”

"Therefore, thus saith the Lord concerning Jehoiakim, the son of Josiah, king of Judah, 'Thou shalt not lament for him, saying, Ah, my brother, or Ah, sister. They shall not lament for him, saying, Ah, Lord, or Ah, his glory. He shall be buried with a burial of an ass, and drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem.'"

To understand why God said this, you would have to understand the wickedness of Jehoiakim. The Bible tells you in 2 Chronicles 36 and verse 5, "Jehoiakim was 25 years old when he began to reign. And he reigned 11 years in Jerusalem and he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord." Then, in 2 Chronicles 36 and verse 8, "Now the rest of the acts of Jehoiakim and his abominations which he did." Again, in 2 Kings 24 verse 19, "And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord."

Look, since you are in Jeremiah, turn to Jeremiah 26, and look, if you would please, at verse 23. Here is a wicked, wicked man. Here is a prophet by the name of Uriah. Uriah prophesied against Jehoiakim, and Jehoiakim threatened him. Uriah fled to Egypt. Notice what happens: "And they fetched forth Uriah out of Egypt, and brought him unto Jehoiakim the king, who slew him with a sword, and cast his dead body in the graves of the common people." Here the king is killing a prophet of God. Look in chapter 36 of Jeremiah and verse 28. Jeremiah had written a scripture. He had written a roll.

Baruch was reading it, and it was taken from him and brought to King Jehoiakim. Notice Jeremiah 36:28: "Take yet another roll, and write in it all the former words that were in the first roll, which Jehoiakim the king of Judah hath burned." He was burning Scripture. Notice also what God says concerning Jehoiakim in Jeremiah 36:30: Let him rot. Let him die.

The question that must be asked is simple: If you had a funeral for such a wicked man, what could you say? How could any words of comfort be given to his family? His life was an open book. Everyone knew of his wickedness.

I have preached for forty-five years. I have never kept account of how many funerals or weddings I have performed, but I have had to preach the funerals of some unsaved men and women. It is a very

difficult thing to do. What I have found absolutely stunning is that, usually, when an unsaved man or woman dies, the family always wants Psalm 23 read at the funeral. How can Psalm 23 comfort someone if he is not a sheep? If you are not a sheep, He is not your shepherd. It is that simple.

It is too late for one who dies without Christ. All you can do is preach the gospel to those who attend. If you want your family to be comforted in your death, you need to live in such a way as to give them comfort. If you want them to have consolation, you need to trust Christ and live for Him now.

Thirdly, look in your Bibles to 2 Kings chapter 13. Here, Elisha is dying—the prophet, the man of God. The Bible says, "Now Elisha was fallen sick of his sickness, whereof he died."

Joash the king of Israel came down to him and wept over his face and said, "O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof." Elisha was not dead at this point, but he was dying. Note this lamentation that the king gives. He says, "O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof." Interestingly enough, this is exactly the same thing that Elisha said when Elijah was taken into heaven in a chariot of fire and a whirlwind. In 2 Kings 2 and verse 12, the Bible says, "Elisha saw it, and he cried, My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof." What did Elisha mean when he said that concerning Elijah? And what did King Joash mean when he said that concerning Elisha? If Elisha was the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof, what he was saying is this: The true protection of the nation is not only in the hands of God, but in the men who represent Him as they preach and teach the truth of God.

That is quite a compliment for Elisha. The king was recognizing that God is the sovereign protector and that God protects through His Word. Our protection lies not in our armies, our weaponry, or our military tactics, but in the sovereign God of heaven and earth. I am going to be preaching a sermon in the next few weeks based on Psalm 127 verse 1, where the Bible says, "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it. Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain." The Bible says that God

delighteth not in the strength of horses, nor does He take pleasure in the legs of men.

In other words, it's not our abilities. Proverbs 21 in verse 31 says, "The horse is prepared for the day of battle, but safety is of the Lord." Even David himself in Psalm 140 verse 7 said, "Thou hast covered my head in the day of battle." Our protection is of God. Elisha was eulogized as being a man of God, the true representative of the Lord God.

Elisha's Bones and the Christian's Hope

I want you to look in 2 Kings 13, verses 20 and 21. I really would not mind having this type of funeral. Here we go. 2 Kings 13, notice verse 20: "And Elisha died, and they buried him. And the bands of the Moabites invaded the land at the coming of the year." Elisha was dead and buried. "And it came to pass, as they were burying a man, that behold, they spied a band of men," that is, Moabites, men who were coming to kill and to steal. "They spied a band of men, and they cast the man," that is, the dead man, "into the sepulcher of Elisha, and when the man was let down and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived and stood up on his feet."

Can you believe the dead man was in a state of shock? I mean, I was dead, and all of a sudden I'm alive. I would love to have seen the expression on the men's faces who threw him on Elisha's bones. They thought they were burying him. No time for a eulogy. Yet life was given him instantly.

We smile and laugh at that. When you think of the situation, it has to be funny and comical. Yet it leads us to a very important point: death is not the end for a Christian. It's the beginning. When we drop our earthly shell, our lives are just beginning. Our Lord said in John 5 in verse 24, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life." Once we are saved, once we have believed, we have already passed from death unto life. Our Lord said it like this in John 10 verses 27 and 30.

"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. And I have given them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand. My Father who gave them Me is greater than all, and no man is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand. I and My Father are one." You're talking about security. I probably told you this, but I thought about it, and I'm going to tell you again. I was driving home late one night, about one o'clock in the morning, with the radio on, trying to stay awake. I was coming through Atlanta, and there was a black preacher on the radio.

He was preaching from this text in John chapter 10. He read this verse and said, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them. They follow me, and I give them eternal life. They shall never perish. Neither shall any man pluck that out of my hand. My Father which gave them me is greater than all. No man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand."

The old black preacher said, "Now let me get this straight. Now once we be saved, we in the hand of the sovereign God of heaven and earth. The Father, He won't pluck you out of His hand. And God the Son, He won't pluck you out of His hand. And God the Spirit, He won't pluck you out of His hand. And come to think of it, them's the only three that can do any plucking anyhow."

And that's a fact. We have passed from death unto life. In 2 Corinthians chapter 5, beginning in verse 1, the Apostle says, "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved," that's our physical body, "we have a building of God and house not made with hands eternal in heaven." So we will have a heavenly eternal body.

"For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven." In other words, we really desire that eternal body. "If so, that being clothed, we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle," that is, earthly bodies, "do groan, being burdened. Not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon that mortality might be swallowed up of life."

“Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who hath also given unto us the earnest of the Spirit. Therefore we are

always confident, knowing that while we are at home in this body, we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith and not by sight. We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord."

Death is not the end for the child of God; it is the beginning, the inheritance of our eternal body, and entrance into the presence of the Lord. Those in Jesus Christ never die. Our Lord said to Martha in John 11: "Jesus said to her, 'Thy brother shall rise again.' Martha said unto Him, 'I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.' Jesus said unto her, 'I am the resurrection and the life.' He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die."

We have passed from death unto life, and physical death for the child of God is nothing more than the doorway into glory. That is all.

Personal Application: What I Want Said at My Funeral

What do you want said at your funeral? Will it be the truth? How can you be eulogized and lamented over as a godly Christian if you are not one? How can anyone seriously believe a pastor if you have not lived in such a way as to remove all doubts concerning your salvation? I have doubts concerning someone who says he is a Christian yet never lives a Christian life, someone whose life never produces fruit and who never grows in grace.

Do not make it difficult for the preacher to preach your funeral or for your family to remember you. If you are a child of God, live it and demonstrate it. Those of us who are Christians may rejoice that Christ has removed the sting of death for us. Death for the child of God is no more than sleep.

Stop and think about that. The Apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15, "O death, where is thy sting?" It is gone. "O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is law. But thanks be to God, who giveth us a victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." The sting has been taken out of death. Therefore, we are told in 1 Thessalonians 4:14, "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even those also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with

Him." I have no problems lying down and going to sleep. For the child of God, death is no more than going to sleep and waking up in glory.

Since I have asked the question, what do you want said at your funeral? Let me tell you what I want said at mine. I want every word spoken to be absolutely true. I want it known far and wide that my complete faith and trust were and are in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. I want it proclaimed that He is a wonderful, marvelous, glorious, gracious Lord and Savior. I want Him magnified, glorified, and praised.

I want it to be said inaccurately so, that I believed the entirety of the Word of God, and that I prayed and lived in such a way that my life was continually brought into conformity to His Word. I want it known that I was an obedient child of God, that I loved the saints of God, whoever and wherever they are, and that I wanted to minister to them by the grace of God. I want it known that I loved my wife.

They love my children, my grandchildren. Some of them are here today. I always tell them that I love them. Before I hang up the phone, I tell them, "I love you. Bye." I want it known that I love my wife, my family, and my friends. I want it known that I acted biblically toward my enemies and those who hated me. I want it known that I believed in a biblical work ethic, and that anything good, righteous, or holy in my life was there only because of the grace of God. I have no good thing within myself. Simply stated, what I want known at my funeral is this: Jesus Christ was and is everything, and I am nothing but a poor sinner whom He saved by His wonderful, glorious grace.

I want Christ magnified and glorified. I want to live in such a way that He will be when I die, and that whatever is said concerning my faith and obedience will be true and accurate. Whatever is true and accurate will be there only because of His grace and mercy.

Someone will say something over you. What will they say? And will it be true?

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we ask for Your grace and mercy. We pray, Lord, that You would teach us and help us live our lives in such a way that there would be no doubt concerning our

salvation, or concerning in whom our trust and faith are. Help us, Lord, to live faithful, obedient, and godly lives, that we may glorify Thee in life and in death. In Jesus Christ's name we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 4

Reasons for Judgment

"Behold, the Lord maketh the earth empty, and maketh it waste, and turneth it upside down, and scattereth abroad the inhabitants thereof. And it shall be as with the people, so with the priest, as with the servant, so with his master, as with the maid, so with her mistress. As with the buyer, so with the seller. As with the lender, so with the borrower. As with the taker of usury, so with the giver of usury to him. The land shall be utterly emptied and utterly spoiled, for the Lord hath spoken this word. The earth mourneth and fadeth away, the world languisheth and fadeth away. The haughty people of the earth do languish. The earth also was defiled under the inhabitants thereof, because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore, hath the curse devoured the earth, and they that dwell therein are desolate. Therefore, the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men left."

Introduction: God's Witness and Judgment

There is a principle in Scripture: God never leaves Himself without witness. God witnesses to us both positively and negatively. Acts 14:17 says, "Nevertheless, he left not himself without witness, in that

he did good, and gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness."

The fact that we have fruitful seasons and seasonal rains, and are enabled to enjoy the fruits of our labors, witnesses to God's gracious, kind, and providential blessings in our lives. The Bible teaches that God causes the sun to shine upon the just and the unjust alike. Positively speaking, all we have to do is look around us to see the witness of God. Psalm 19:1-5 says, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge."

“There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun, which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a strong man to run the race.” So Psalm 19 tells us that if we look around at God's creation, we can understand that there is indeed God and that creation is a positive witness to us.

But God not only witnesses to us positively; He also witnesses to us negatively. Romans 1, beginning with verse 18, says, “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness, because that which may be known of God is manifest in them, for God hath showed it to them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.”

Notice that the Bible explicitly says, “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against them.” Here is God's wrath; here is God's judgment. This is a negative witness concerning God. It is important to note that there are always reasons behind God's judgments. The Bible tells us in Lamentations 3:33 that God “doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men.” In other words, God is not some mean old man upstairs, sitting somewhere just waiting to hurt someone. No. The Bible says that God doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men. There is a specific reason why God sends His judgment.

We can also say that there are general reasons for God's judgment and there are specific reasons. There are specific sins that warrant specific judgment. Judgment is always an act of God. It may surprise you to understand that judgment in the Bible is referred to as God's special treasure. Deuteronomy 32:34 asks, “Is not this laid up in store with me and sealed up among my treasures?” What is it that is laid up in store with God? What is it that is sealed up among His treasures? Verse 35 answers, “To me belongeth vengeance and recompense.”

"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." God says that judgment is indeed His special treasure, and when He sends it, it will come in haste. If we return to Isaiah 24:1, we know that judgment is the work of God because the Bible says explicitly: "Behold, the Lord maketh the earth empty, and maketh it waste, and turneth it upside down, and scattereth abroad the inhabitants thereof."

The Certainty and Scope of Judgment (Isaiah 24:1-4)

Matthew Henry comments that the earth is stripped of all its ornaments and looks as if it were taken off its basis. It is made empty and waste, as though reduced to its first chaos: "Tohu and Bohu, nothing but confusion and emptiness again, without form and void."

It is God who brings these calamities upon the earth. The Lord made the earth fruitful and beautiful for the service and comfort of man, and now makes it empty and waste, for its Creator is and will be its Judge. He has an incontestable right to pass sentence upon it and an irresistible power to execute that sentence. The Lord has spoken this word, and He will do the work. It is His curse that has devoured the earth.

This includes the general curse which sin brought upon the ground for man's sake, and all the particular curses which families and countries bring upon themselves by their enormous wickedness. See the power of God's curse: it makes all empty and lays all waste. Those whom He curses are cursed indeed.

There are general curses and special curses. God not only made the earth; He is also fully capable of destroying it and, if He so chooses, remaking it according as He desires.

If you look in verse 1 again, "Behold the Lord maketh the earth empty." The word earth here has been variously interpreted. Some scholars say that it simply refers to what we would call the land of Palestine or Canaan, and therefore they say this judgment is restricted to that area. Others interpret earth as having a much broader significance, referring to the entire world.

We know that the land of Canaan has indeed been the recipient of God's judgment many times. If you restrict the word earth in verse 1 to the land of Canaan or Palestine, you must remember this simple truth: God is immutable. God does not change. In Malachi 3:6 He says, "I the Lord change not." If the word earth is limited to Canaan, then we must admit that any nation that sins as that land did, God has the absolute right to judge in the same way.

Why? Because God is immutable. God does not change. His justice is exactly the same. Either way you interpret the word earth, you come out with the same application: God is still able and righteous in His judgment of any nation, any portion, and any part of the earth, as well as the entire earth itself.

If you look in verse 2, you find the general reason for such judgment and devastation: "and it shall be as with the people, so with the priest, as with the servant, so with his master, as with the maid, so with her mistress, as with the buyer, so with the seller, as with the lender, so with the borrower, as with the taker of usury, so with the giver of usury to him."

Verse 2 includes persons of all ranks, kinds, and conditions. God is saying that it does not really matter who you are, where you are, or what you do; you will still be the recipient of these judgments. In one sense, common calamities happen to all without respect. An earthquake will destroy the house of a rich man just as easily as the house of a poor man. It will destroy the intellectual and the ignorant. Diseases affect all of us. You do not have to be poor to get certain diseases, nor rich to receive certain germs.

The whole land was corrupt, all the people from the least to the greatest were perverted, and therefore God's judgment was going to fall upon all of them. Every class, every kind, and everyone was going to lose it all. In some judgments, the poor are usually the first affected, especially when famine is around. Usually, however, it is the rich who are kidnapped and held for ransom. You do not usually kidnap a poor man. There are certain judgments that affect certain classes at certain times, but that judgment eventually affects everyone. God is saying that He is going to judge the earth, and He is telling us why: everyone is corrupt.

Look in verses 3 and 4 and ask yourself this question: How serious will God's judgments be? The Bible says, "the land," whether you are talking about the earth as a whole or the land of Canaan, "the land shall be utterly emptied and utterly spoiled, for the Lord hath spoken this word, the earth mourneth and fadeth away, the world languisheth and fadeth away, the haughty people of the earth do languish." In verses 3 and 4, God is confirming what He has already said in verse 1.

When this judgment comes, it will not be an accident or the work of Mother Nature. It will be the work of God. God expressly states that He is going to empty the land, empty the earth; He has purposed it, He is determined to do it, and it shall be done. God will rid the land of all its inhabitants, and its riches will be stolen, looted, and taken.

Remember that when God called Isaiah to preach, He told him this was going to happen. In Isaiah 6:8, Isaiah said, "Also I heard the voice of the LORD saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I, send me." Isaiah volunteered to go. Then God said, "Go and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not, and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes, lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed."

Then Isaiah asked, "Lord, how long?" That is, how long shall I go? How long shall I preach?

Special Sins, Special Judgments

He, the Lord, answered, "until the cities be wasted without inhabited and the houses without man and the land be utterly desolate and the Lord have removed men far away and there be a great forsaking in the midst of the land." God is saying that it is all going to be taken away.

General vs. Specific Curses

There are indeed general curses and general judgments, but there are also special and specific curses and special and specific judgments. Special sins deserve special judgments. Look at Isaiah 24:5. God says why He is judging the earth: "also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant." Then He says, "therefore hath the curse devoured the earth." It is important to note that these three sins have caused the earth to be defiled. The word defiled is also translated as polluted, profaned, and corrupted. The earth is polluted, profaned, or corrupted because its inhabitants have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, and broken the everlasting covenant.

Now we know according to the Scripture that, generally speaking, the earth was placed under a curse because of what you and I would say is general sin—that is, a sin of rebellion against God. In fact, if you look in your Bibles to Genesis chapter 3, notice this general curse, beginning there with verse 17: “And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife and hast eaten of the tree which I commanded thee saying thou shalt not eat of it, cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also, and thistles shall it bring forth of thee, and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return to the ground, for out of it wast thou taken, for dust thou art, and in dust thou shalt return.” Here is a general curse placed upon the earth because of man's sin.

If you turn over to the New Testament, to Romans chapter 8, once again you will see how this plays out. Let us begin reading in verse 19. The Apostle Paul writes, “For the earnest expectation of the creature.” When you see the word creature in this context, it is the

word creation, so you may read it like that: “For the earnest expectation of the creation,” that is, the world, “waited for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creation was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who had subjected the same in hope.”

“Because the creature or the creation itself,” that is, the world, “also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know”—here is the same word—“that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.” Very obviously, when man sinned, the whole earth was placed under a curse, or under a judgment of God. This is what you and I would call a general curse, because it was a general sin in that sense of the word.

However, there are specific sins that merit and deserve specific judgments. God has specifically said that these are the sins that pollute the land to such an extent that it causes the land to vomit out its inhabitants thereof. Consider what God said about the pagans, heathen, and wicked individuals who lived in the land of Canaan. When God brought the children of Israel out of Egypt, He put a sword in their hand and said, “You go into the land of Canaan and you kill all of these wicked inhabitants.” In Leviticus 18:24, God tells His people, “Defile not ye yourselves in any of these things.”

“For in all these the nations are defiled which I cast out before you. And the land is defiled; therefore I do visit the iniquity thereof upon it, and the land itself vomited out her inhabitants.” In other words, the pagans, in all of their wickedness and perversity, defiled, polluted, and corrupted the land to such an extent that even the earth was sick of them and wanted to vomit them out as well. It is interesting to find in the Bible the sins which God specifically says defile a land. These sins pollute the land.

For instance, Jeremiah 3:2 gives another illustration of the land being defiled. This sin is spiritual whoredom, or idolatry. God says, “Lift up thine eyes unto the high places, and see where thou hast not been lain with. In the ways hast thou sat for them as the Arabian in the wilderness, and thou hast polluted thy land with thy whoredoms and with thy wickedness.” So idolatry pollutes the land. Very clearly, God says that. It corrupts the land. It defiles the land.

Let me ask you: Do you think God is pleased with the mosques and the Hindu temples that dot our landscape in this country? No. The Bible says they defile and pollute the land, because they do not represent the worship of the one true and living God who has revealed Himself through Jesus Christ. Numbers 35 gives another specific sin that pollutes and defiles the land; there, beginning in verse 30, we read:

Is our country defiled? Is our country polluted and corrupted the way the land of Canaan was? Numbers 35 says, "Whoso killeth any person, the murderer shall be put to death by the mouth of witnesses. But one witness shall not testify against any person to cause him to die. Moreover, you shall take no satisfaction for the life of a murderer who is guilty of death, but he shall surely be put to death. And you shall take no satisfaction for him that is fled to the city of his refuge, that he should come again to dwell in the land until the death of the priests. So shall you not pollute the land wherein you are."

"For blood it defileth the land, and the land cannot be cleansed of the blood that is shed therein, but by the blood of him that shed it. Defile not therefore the land which you shall inhabit wherein I dwell. For I, the Lord, dwell among the children of Israel."

What is another specific thing that defiles and pollutes the land? Failing to put a murderer to death. Think for a moment of all the murderers who have been set free from the prison system only to murder again. God says that a murderer is not to have life in prison, which means usually he can be out seven years. He is to be executed. God says it defiles the land. Failing to execute a murderer pollutes, defiles, and corrupts the land.

Everything that God says under the old covenant that pollutes and defiles the land is the same thing that pollutes and defiles the land under the new covenant. There are specific sins that pollute, corrupt, and defile the earth wherever you live. Those sins are still the same. Pollution in this country is not from not going green; it is from going black. It is from sin, rebellion, and wickedness.

Isaiah 24:5 says, "the earth also was defiled under the inhabitants thereof, because," here is why the earth is defiled, "because they have

transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant." My message today is to show you the three specific sins that God says pollute and defile the land in such a way as to merit specific judgment.

First, Scripture says they transgressed the laws. The Hebrew word for laws is the word Torah, which has reference to the law of God. Torah literally means authoritative instruction or authoritative direction. When the Bible says that God has given us His law, it means that God has revealed to us that which He would have us to do and how He would have us to act. He tells us what we may do. He tells us what we may not do.

First Specific Sin: Transgressing the Laws

The great advantage that Israel had over all the other nations was this: God had given them His law. He did not give it to the Assyrians, or the Egyptians, or the Hittites, or the Jebusites, or the Hivites. No. He only gave it to Israel.

That is why Romans 3:1–2 asks, "What advantage then had the Jew or the Judahite, the person who lived in Judah, or what profit is there of circumcision, much in every way, but chiefly because that unto them were committed the oracles of God." They had the Word of God. They knew what God required.

In Romans 9:4–5, the Apostle Paul said it like this: "...who are Israelites, to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises, whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all God blessed forever." So God had given Israel His law. There was no question about what Israel should or should not do. God spelled it out.

Let me put it to us very pointedly: there is no question as to what we should or should not do. God has spelled it out. Deuteronomy 4 shows how God praised His law and showed the great advantage Israel had. Notice Deuteronomy 4, beginning with verse 6; in fact, let us read verse 5.

God says, "Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the Lord my God commanded me," Moses is writing, "that

you should do so in the land whither you go in to possess it. Keep, therefore, and do them. For this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon Him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous, as all this law which I set before you this day."

It is God's law, God's word, that is our wisdom and understanding. It is God's law and God's word that sets us apart from all the other nations. How many would prefer to live in China, Africa, or Russia? Do you realize that, as corrupt and perverse as we are in America, there is at least still a smattering of God's law in this land? There is still a smattering of understanding. God says, "This is your wisdom and your understanding."

Now what did Israel do? God had given them His law and said, "This is how I would have you to live. This is what I want you to do, and this is what I do not want you to do." Yet they violated that law over and over, and they did so in many different ways. The land literally reeked with immorality, idolatry, tyranny, and degradation. Some rulers seduced the people into so much sin that their sin abounded over and above that which the pagans committed. For instance, in 2 Chronicles 33:9, the Bible says, "So Manasseh," that is, King Manasseh, "made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to err and to do worse than the heathen whom the Lord had destroyed before the children of Israel."

That had to be pretty bad: to have had the law of God and then turn and do worse than the heathen whom God kicked out. Psalm 106 concisely and succinctly gives many of the sins of the children of Israel and shows how they defiled the land and violated the law of God. Look in Psalm 106, beginning in verse 36.

Psalm 106:36–39 says, "And they served their idols, which were a snare unto them, Yea, they sacrificed their sons and their daughters unto devils, and shed innocent blood, even the blood of their sons and their daughters, whom they sacrificed unto the idols of Canaan,

and the land was polluted with blood. Thus were they defiled with their own works, and went a-whoring after their own inventions."

After God had given them His law and said, "You are to worship Me, and only Me," they turned their backs upon God and did everything that God said not to do. Please understand that violating God's law is a cause for severe judgment.

Think about the immorality in our land, the idolatry in our land, the corruption, the perversion, and the wickedness. Think of Washington, D.C.; think of Atlanta, Georgia; think of any state capital.

Look at what God says in Jeremiah chapter 5, beginning with verse 7: "How shall I pardon thee for this? Thy children have forsaken me, and sworn by them that are no gods. When I had fed them to the full, then they committed adultery, and assembled themselves by troops in the harlot's houses. They were as fed horses in the morning, every one neighed after his neighbor's wife."

"Shall I not visit for these things, saith the Lord, and shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?" Most today, even in this enlightened land that we live in, think it is a small sin and of little consequence to sin against God and to violate His law. That's why adultery is rampant, whoremongering and fornication are prevalent, and thievery, stealing, and murder happen every day. They think it is a light thing to sin against God. They never understand that it is an affront to the sovereign God of heaven and earth to thumb their noses at God, act as if God had not spoken, and act as if God did not even live.

They have absolutely no regard for God's person or God's Word. Sin is an assault upon God's majesty and an affront to His holiness. And God said, "I will judge for these things." What did He say? They've transgressed My laws. They've broken My Torah. I told them what to do; they would not listen.

God says, "because they have committed villainy in Israel, and have committed adultery with their neighbor's wives, and have spoken lying words in my name, which I have not commanded them, even I, knowing them, witness, saith the Lord." Because they committed villainy in Israel. In other words, you're vile. You're a

villain. You're wicked. Why did God destroy the land? Because they transgressed His laws. That's the first reason. That in itself is reason enough to destroy America. We violated His laws.

Second Specific Sin: Changing the Ordinance

But let's go on. Isaiah 24 and verse 5 says this: "The earth is defiled under the inhabitants thereof because they have transgressed the laws," and here is the second sin specifically, "changed the ordinance." The Hebrew word for ordinance is also translated as statute, ordinance, decree, or law. The word relates to the civil enactments prescribed by God and basically everything that would relate to a holy, godly, obedient, and just life and just society. So the word actually relates to justice and righteousness.

Again, let me give you just one simple paragraph from Matthew Henry. He says, "They have changed the ordinances of revealed religion. Those of them that have had the benefit of that, they have neglected the ordinance, so some read it. They have made no conscience of observing them. They have passed over the laws in commission of sin and have passed by the ordinance in omission of duty."

It is true that anyone may violate an ordinance by transgressing and rebelling against it. Anyone may fail to keep an ordinance by omitting it, forgetting it, or failing to do it. But that is not what the Scripture says. In verse 5, it says, “they transgressed the laws and changed the ordinance.” Who has the ability to change the ordinance, laws, and statutes? The answer is government—governmental power.

You must remember that government basically is force. If you have the power, you may force people to do things they normally would not do. A few years back, I preached two messages entitled “Civil Rulers and Idolatry.” I took you through Scripture and showed you that every idolatry began with civil government. It always began with a king: Solomon, Jeroboam, Ahab, or Omri. It all began with a king.

Civil government is the one that changes the ordinance. Corrupt, perverted, humanistic civil government wants to play God, and an

unbiblical civil government always replaces God's law with man's law.

Go back in your Bibles to 1 Samuel chapter 8. Israel wanted a king so that they might be like other nations, and they asked Samuel to make them a king. Beginning with verse 6, we read: "But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, Give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto the Lord. And the Lord said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee." God then says, "For they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them."

"According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt, even in this day wherewith they have forsaken me and served other gods, so do they also unto thee. Now therefore, hearken unto their voice, howbeit yet protest solemnly unto them, and show them the manner of the king that shall reign over them."

Now God says, "You want a man instead of me? Fine. Here's the kind of man that you're going to get." Samuel told all the people all the words of the Lord unto the people that asked him a king: "This will be the manner of the king that shall reign over you. He will take your sons and appoint them for himself, for his chariots, and to be his horsemen, and some shall run before him. And he will appoint him captains over thousands, captains over fifties, and will set them to ear his ground, and to reap his harvest, and to make his instruments of war, and the instruments of his chariots. And he will take your daughters to be confectionaries, and to be cooks, and to be bakers.

"And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your olive yards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants. And he will take the tenth of your seed in your vineyards and give to his officers and to his servants and he will take your men's servants and your maid's servants and your goodliest young men and your asses and put them to his work and he will take the tenth of your sheep and you shall be his servants."

What kind of ruler would change God's law? A man. That man is not going to be satisfied with what God has said. He wants it all. You

cannot understand 1 Samuel chapter 8 unless you understand it as a transition from one law structure to another. God says, “I have been your king.” What does a king do? He rules by his law. Fine. You change kings, you change laws. A king rules by his law. A king’s law is the extension of his person. When Israel changed from God to a man, they basically changed from God’s law to man’s law. Consequently, that is why God says they are going to be His servants, His slaves.

In our day and time, most of us would be happy if the civil government only took 10%. In 2 Kings chapter 17, this is plainly stated in Scripture. Remember, you cannot understand 1 Samuel 8 unless you see it as a transition from one law structure to another. A king rules by his law. If God is our king, He is ruling by His law in our lives. If man is our king, he is going to try and enforce his laws upon us. Now look what God says in 2 Kings chapter 17, beginning with verse 7.

"For so it was that the children of Israel had sinned against the LORD their God, who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt, from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and had feared other gods." The children of Israel sinned against God. How did they sin against God? The scripture tells us in verse 7: they feared other gods. How do we know they feared other gods? What was the evidence? Look in verse 8: "and had feared other gods, and walked in the statutes," that is, the laws of the heathen, "whom the Lord cast out before the children of Israel, and of the kings of Israel, which they made." They walked in the laws of the heathen and in the laws of the kings of Israel, which they had made. In other words, they traded God's law for man's law. They were no longer following God.

They were no longer fearing God. If you feared God, you would obey His law. They feared man and therefore walked in the laws of the heathen and in the laws of the kings of Israel. A king rules by his law. When the king came upon the throne, he said, "I'm God, you'll do what I say." In 2 Kings 17:18-19, it is stated plainly: "Therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel and removed them out of his sight. There was none left but the tribe of Judah only. And Judah kept not the commandments of the Lord their God, but walked in the statutes of Israel which they made."

What did Judah do? The same thing Israel did. They threw God's law away and walked in the laws of the kings of Israel. Judah changed the ordinance just like Israel changed the ordinance. She swapped God's law for man's law.

Once one changes laws, for all practical purposes, the former law is repealed and nullified. I know it is impossible to repeal and nullify God's law. But it can be repealed and nullified in the sense that you no longer pay attention to it, no longer heed it, and act as if it were no law. That's what sin and rebellion does. It looks at God and basically says, "I make my own law."

“You don't tell me what to do. I do what I want to do.” That is the spirit of those who reject God's authority. In Micah 6:16, God says, “For the statutes,” that is, the laws, “of Omri, are kept, and all the works of the house of Ahab. And you walk in their councils,” that is, in their laws, “that I should make thee a desolation, and the inhabitants thereof a hissing.” Omri, King Omri, was the father of Ahab. “Therefore you shall bear the reproach of My people.”

Now why is God saying that He judged Israel? Because they traded His law for man's law. Why did He judge Judah? They traded God's law for man's law. They listen to the law of man, not the law of God. Do you realize the sins of America are exactly the same sins as those of Israel of old? We've not only transgressed God's law, we've changed the ordinance! Wow! We fail to obey God's law. We fail to recognize God's sovereignty. We fail to recognize that God is King and that God has the absolute right to tell us how to live and how not to live.

Third Specific Sin: Breaking the Everlasting Covenant

Isaiah 24:5 gives a third reason that God sends specific judgment upon the land. Not only for transgressing the law, not only for changing the ordinance, but also for breaking the everlasting covenant. He said, “The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof; because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant.”

The word covenant here is berith in the Hebrew. It is a word used for those covenants by which the Lord, who adopted His people,

promised that He would be their God. Now how in the world do you break such a covenant? The answer is that they foolishly refused and rejected God, despised Him and His overtures of grace and love, and mocked His prophets and His messengers. Their attitudes and actions demonstrated conclusively that they did not want Him to be their God.

They chose idols for themselves. Jeremiah 44 records a striking illustration. God had sent Nebuchadnezzar against the land of Judah; he destroyed it, many were taken captive, and many died. Yet the people continued to disobey God. He told them not to go into Egypt, but they went there and disobeyed Him repeatedly. Thus the Lord said: "Therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Behold, I will set my face against you for evil, and to cut off all Judah. And I will take the remnant of Judah, and have set their faces to go into the land of Egypt, to sojourn there. And they shall all be consumed, and fall in the land of Egypt. And they shall even be consumed by the sword, and by the famine. And they shall die from the least even to the greatest, by the sword and by the famine, and they shall be in execration, and in astonishment, and in curse, and in reproach."

SCRIPTURE READING - Jeremiah 44:13-23 (KJV)

> For I will punish them that dwell in the land of Egypt, as I have punished Jerusalem by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence. So that none of the remnant of Judah which are gone in the land of Egypt to sojourn there shall escape or remain, that they should return to the land of Judah, to the which they have a desire to return. For none shall return, but such as shall escape.
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> Then all the men who knew that their wives had burned incense unto other gods, and all the women that stood by, a great multitude of all the people that dwelt in the land of Egypt, in Pathros, answered Jeremiah, saying, As for the word that thou hast spoken unto us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken unto thee. But we will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth, to burn incense unto the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink-offerings unto her, as

> we have done, we and our fathers, our kings, and our princes, in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem.
>
> For then had we plenty of vittles, and were very well, and saw no evil. But since we have left off to burn incense to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink-offerings unto her, we have wanted all things, and have been consumed by the sword and by famine. And when we burn incense to the queen of heaven, and pour out drink-offerings unto her, did we make her cakes to worship her and pour out drink-offerings unto her without our men? Then Jeremiah said unto all the people, to the men, to the women, and to all the people which had given him that answer, saying, The incense that you burn in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem, you and your fathers, your kings and your princes, and the people went in, did not the Lord remember them, and came it not in his mind, so that the Lord could no longer bear because of the evil of your doings and because the abominations which you committed? Therefore is your land a desolation and an astonishment and a curse without inhabitant, as at this day.
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> These people had sent to Jeremiah and said, Pray for us; we will obey whatever God says. Jeremiah came along and said, All right, here is what God says: Do not go into Egypt. Then they said, God did not say not to go into Egypt; we are going into Egypt. They went into Egypt and took Jeremiah. Then Jeremiah told them, The reason you are in Egypt is because you were idolaters, you were whoremongers, you were wicked, you were wrong.

The people said, “As long as we were in Judah, and we poured out our drink offerings and made cakes for the Queen of Heaven, we had it good. That is what we are going to do down here.” Jeremiah might well have said, “Dummies, do you not know that is why God drove you out of Judah to begin with? And now you are going to do the same thing here?” God sent Nebuchadnezzar down to Egypt and destroyed them again.

Here were a people who had a covenant with God, yet they deliberately and purposely turned their backs upon Him. Knowingly and willingly, they chose other gods. It is called the everlasting

covenant because it ought to have been perpetual and inviolable, enforced in every age. It was to be transmitted with uninterrupted succession from father to son, that it might never be effaced from the memory of man, but kept pure and entire. When God calls it this, He is representing to them their treachery, vileness, and wickedness in deliberately turning their backs upon Him.

It was a monstrous act of treason. Hebrews chapter 10, beginning with verse 28, says: “He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses.” The next verse says, “...of how much sorer or worse punishment, suppose you, shall he be thought worthy to trodden underfoot the Son of God, and have counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and have done despite unto the Spirit of grace.”

“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.”

There are many in this country who profess to be Christians. In fact, this country is usually referred to as a Christian nation. Yet most even professing Christians trample the Son of God under their feet. They ignore, ridicule, mock, and disregard the sinless Son of God. If God was angry with those who sinned in the land under types and shadows, how much more angry should He be with us? This is the argument: How much sorer or worse punishment should we be thought worthy of, who have trodden under our feet the fulfillment and reality—the Son of God Himself? If God destroyed them for sinning against types and shadows, how much worse should our judgment be for sinning against their fulfillment and reality? For these three reasons, God said, “I'll destroy the land.”

Applications for America

They have transgressed God's laws, changed the ordinance, and broken the everlasting covenant. As a people and a nation in America, we have done exactly the same. We have sinned in exactly the same way as those in Israel. You could say that we are indeed the children of our fathers.

In Zechariah 1:4, God cried out to the people: "Be ye not as your fathers, unto whom the former prophets cried, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Turn you now from your evil ways, and from your evil doings. But they did not hear, nor did they hearken unto the Lord their God." What did He say? Be ye not as your fathers. Do not be stubborn like they were. They refused to hear, and God tells us that we cannot be like them if we expect His blessing.

The second application is this: Since we have sinned knowingly and deliberately against revealed light, against the Son of God, is it any wonder that we are cursed, that the earth is defiled, and that we are experiencing the judgment of God? The question we must ask is not whether we are under God's judgment. We are. The question is, Why has God not already destroyed us completely? He would be just in doing so. We have sinned exactly as those people sinned.

There is a third application, which I do not have time to pursue fully. In one sense, there is indeed hope in judgment. God said, "I've given you the valley of Achor for a door of hope," and Achor refers to judgment.

Some of you will remember Senator Everett Dirksen. I do not remember much about him, but I do remember one thing he said: "When I feel the heat, then I see the light." He meant that he continued doing what he wanted until the people irritated, bothered, and bombarded him—until they put the heat on him. Dirksen probably did not realize that he was expressing a biblical principle: when I feel the heat, I see the light.

For we are told in Isaiah 26:9, “With my soul have I desired thee in the night, yea, with my spirit within me I will seek thee early. For when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.” In other words, when we feel the heat, we begin to see the light. When we feel the heat of God's wrath and judgment, we begin to understand that this is no accident.

This is not Mother Nature. This is the act of Father God, the Sovereign God of Heaven and Earth. Many who already bow and worship the one true and living God through Jesus Christ should be thankful that we have been drawn unto Him through His love, grace,

and mercy, and not through His judgment. I had much rather learn the easy way than the hard way. God can teach us either way.

I do not care what any president of the United States of America says, what Congress declares, or what a Supreme Court justice states. We, as God's people, can never give up the one true and living God as our God, nor can we ever give up His law. Isaiah 33:22 tells us, “For the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our King; He will save us.” God is God, no matter what the Supreme Court says, what legislation Congress passes, or how many executive orders the President issues. God is still God, and His law is still law. We have to come down to what the Apostle Peter said in Acts 5:29: “We ought to obey God rather than man.”

When there is a conflict, we must side with the sovereign God of heaven and earth. He is God, and His law is truth. Why did God judge Israel? They transgressed His law, changed His ordinance, and broke the everlasting covenant. These are reasons for specific, particular judgment.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee this day. We ask that You would help us, teach us, and build us up in the most holy faith. Give us grace that we may determine in our hearts that we will never forsake Thee, never bow to false gods, never give up Thy law, and always serve and worship only Thee, through Thy Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, in the power of Thy Spirit. In all things, may Thou be glorified in our lives. Give us grace and mercy, repentance and faith, and obedience. In the name of Jesus Christ we ask, amen and amen.

CHAPTER 5

Swearing Allegiance to the Sovereign State

Introduction: Defining Sovereignty

In John 19:6, we read: "When the chief priests therefore and officers saw him, they cried out saying, Crucify him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Take ye him and crucify him, for I find no fault in him."

"The Jews answered, We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God. When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he was the more afraid; and went again into the judgment hall, and said unto Jesus, Whence art thou? But Jesus gave him no answer. Then saith Pilate unto him, Speakest thou not to me? knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee? Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin. And from thenceforth Pilate sought to release him. But the Jews cried out, saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend: whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar. When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth and sat

him down in the judgment seat in a place that is called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha. And it was about the preparation of the Passover and about the sixth hour, and he said unto the Jews, Behold your king."

"But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate said unto them, Shall I crucify your king? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar. Then delivered he him therefore unto them to be crucified, and they took Jesus and led him away."

Sovereignty is a theological word and not a political word. When we talk about state sovereignty, we're actually talking about state independence. That simply means that each state is independent in the sense that it is capable of running itself and existing by itself without the aid of Washington, D.C. We must remember that it was the states that created the federal government and not the federal government that created the states. The states existed prior to the federal government and hopefully they will exist well beyond the federal government.

Sovereignty is a word that belongs in the realm of theology. Theology is the doctrine or the study of God. God alone is sovereign. The truth is, there can only be one sovereign, one ultimate, and one absolute. That one sovereign, one ultimate, and one absolute is not the state; it is not the federal government; it is not Washington, D.C.; it is God. There is no state or government that can exist without God. It is God who sets up rulers. It is God who takes down rulers.

The Bible says in Psalm 75, verses 6 and 7, "For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. But God is judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another." So it is God who puts rulers up, and it is God who takes rulers down.

Now, if God only is sovereign—and He is—how then can I title this message, "Swearing Allegiance to the Sovereign State"? The answer is very simple: wicked men deny God's sovereignty, and they deny God's sovereignty only that they may place sovereignty either in man or in a government. Let me make an observation that should be very clear. No one can exist without a sovereign. You must have a sovereign. If you deny that God is sovereign, then you are going to

locate sovereignty either in an individual, a man, or in a government. Therefore, when men deny God, they must place sovereignty somewhere else.

Men in their wickedness, rebellion, unbelief, and paganism will always attempt, when they deny God, to locate sovereignty in man or in the state. So the state is not sovereign. The federal government is not sovereign. Simply because men desire that a state be sovereign, want it to be sovereign, proclaim it to be sovereign, and act like the state is sovereign does not make it sovereign. Men may want to believe it, and men may want to act as though it is sovereign, but only God is sovereign.

Nimrod: Tyranny by Force

Now, let me show you how far back this rebellion goes. I want you to look in your Bibles, if you would. Hold John 19. After a while, you may think I have forgotten all about John 19, but I have not; we are going to come back there. I do want you to look in Genesis chapter 10. Let me show you the beginning of man's claim for sovereignty. We are going to read verses 8 through 11, and we are going to be reading about Nimrod. Notice Genesis chapter 10, verse 8: "And Cush begat Nimrod."

"He began to be a mighty one in the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the Lord: wherefore it is said, Even as Nimrod the mighty hunter before the Lord. And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar." The Bible says that Nimrod was a mighty hunter before the Lord. Actually, he was a mighty hunter against the Lord. Nimrod was the individual who pushed his own designs in brazen defiance of the Lord God. Nimrod did not hunt animals; he hunted men. He was so mighty, imperious, despotical, and tyrannical that, throughout the ages, whenever there is a totalitarian tyrant, he may be referred to as another Nimrod.

Nimrod's civil character as ruler and governor reveals his despotism. Nimrod was the first in the Bible to reduce men under what you and I would call a form of government. How did he reduce men under his form of government? Either through force and usurpation, or through persuasion and his deceitful and devious

manipulations. In other words, Nimrod wanted not just to be king, but to be sovereign.

Arthur Pink, commenting on Genesis chapter 10, verses 8 through 10, says, "And Cush begat Nimrod: he began to be a mighty one in the earth." The first thing that we note here is that Nimrod was a descendant of Ham, through Cush. In other words, he sprang from that branch of Noah's family on which rested the curse.

Next, we observe that it said he began to be mighty, which seems to suggest that he struggled for preeminence and by mere force of will obtained it. Finally, he began to be mighty in the earth. The intimation appears to be that of conquest or subjugation, as though he became a leader and ruler over men, as indeed he did. "He was a mighty hunter before the Lord: wherefore it is said, Even as Nimrod the mighty hunter before the Lord." In so brief a description, the repetition of the words "mighty hunter before the Lord" is significant. Three times in Genesis 10, and again in 1 Chronicles 1:10, the word "mighty" is applied to Nimrod.

The Hebrew word is "gibbor," translated in the Old Testament as "chief" and "chieftain." The verse in Chronicles agrees perfectly with these verses in Genesis: "And Cush begat Nimrod: he began to be mighty upon the earth." The Chaldean paraphrase says, "Cush begat Nimrod who began to prevail in wickedness for he slew innocent blood and rebelled against Jehovah." Observe, "a mighty hunter before the Lord." Comparing this expression with Genesis 6:11, "The earth also was corrupt before God," the impression is that this rebel pursued his impious and ambitious design in brazen and open defiance of the Almighty.

The word Nimrod actually means "we shall rebel." The eclectic Bible says, "Earthly power is first found with the family under the curse. It begins with Nimrod." Things develop more quickly on the evil side than on the good. Nimrod was a mighty rebel; his name means rebel, and his character before God was that of a hunter. This observation in these neglecting notes is very good: Jehovah took account of his character.

It was exactly the opposite of a shepherd. A hunter gratifies himself at the expense of his victim, but a shepherd expends himself

for the good of the subjects of his care. God's ideal king is a shepherd. David was taken from the sheepfold, where he learned to be king. Moses, too, was a shepherd, and he became king in Jeshurun. The Lord loves a shepherd. A shepherd gathers, protects, and feeds the flock—the opposite of a hunter. Nimrod was a rebel toward God and a hunter toward men; all this will come to a head in the last great Gentile power.

We see here the beginning and the character in which earthly imperial power appears on the scene of Scripture. Corruption and violence are the two principles in Babylon and Nineveh: Babylon is marked by corruption, and Nineveh by violence. Babylon was the scene of man's glory and the most corrupting influence imaginable. Assyria was the violent enemy of God's people. These things are deeply interesting and important. Great principles are set before us in a few simple words. Scripture can say so much in a word or two. These words contain the moral history of the world and of man's actings.

It does not really matter which commentator you consult. Every one of them will state this simple fact: Nimrod was the first who tried to reduce people under his power. He was a tyrant, a despot. You must understand that this was the first culmination of what happened back in Genesis 3:5. You remember when the serpent tempted Eve and said, “For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.” The Hebrew word for “knowing” has the force of “determining”: “Ye shall be as gods, determining good and evil.”

In other words, here was the serpent’s temptation: You do not need God to tell you right from wrong. You do not need God to give you His law. You become your own god. You make your own law. You determine right and wrong for yourselves. Nimrod then literally forced people into tyrannical subjugation in order that he might have his empire.

Israel: Trading God for a Man

Nimrod began his kingdom by force—force of arms, martial law, subjugation. We understand that. Now look in 1 Samuel chapter 8.

Years ago, I preached from this passage under the title “Trading God for a Man.” I am not going to re-preach that message, but I am going to use this passage again and show you some principles. This is all background for John chapter 19. Let us begin reading with verse 6:

“But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto the Lord. And the Lord said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them. According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, wherewith they have forsaken me, and served other gods, so do they also unto thee.”

SCRIPTURE READING - 1 Samuel 8:9-17 (KJV)

> Now therefore hearken unto their voice: howbeit yet protest solemnly unto them, and show them the manner of the king that shall reign over them. And Samuel told all the words of the Lord unto the people that asked of him a king. And he said, This will be the manner of the king that shall reign over you: He will take your sons, and appoint them for himself, for his chariots, and to be his horsemen; and some shall run before his chariots. And he will appoint him captains over thousands, and captains over fifties; and will set them to ear his ground, and to reap his harvest, and to make his instruments of war, and instruments of his chariots.
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> And he will take your daughters to be confectionaries, and to be cooks, and to be bakers. And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants. And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers, and to his servants. And he will take your menservants, and your maidservants, and your goodliest young men, and your asses, and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your sheep: and ye shall be his servants.

“And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen you; and the Lord will not hear you in that day. Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay; but we will have a king over us; that we also may be

like all the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles."

Israel wanted a king. They wanted a man as king. In essence, they were trading God for a man. In verse 7, God makes this exceedingly clear: "And the Lord said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee, for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them." Their choice and actions demonstrated that they did not want God to be their king. They did not want to be under God's law or rule. They wanted a man.

In 1 Samuel 12:12, Samuel emphasizes this point: "And when ye saw that Nahash the king of the children of Ammon came against you, ye said unto me, Nay; but a king shall reign over us: when the Lord your God was your king." God was the king of Israel. The people were saying, "No, we don't want God; we now want a man as king over us." Inherent in this demand for a man to rule over them was a rejection of the rule of God.

It is true that in the Old Testament God often ruled in and through men. He was ruling in and through Samuel. When there were wars, God raised up judges, and He ruled in and through those judges, who led the children of Israel in war; God gave them victory. But God was still king. He was ruling in and through these men.

When you come to 1 Samuel 8, you have a different ball game, a horse of a different color. They were not particularly wanting God to rule in and through their king. They were saying, "We don't want God. We want a man to be king over us. We want a man so that we can be like all of the other nations." And all the other nations were pagan and heathen. Number one, they wanted to be like all the other nations.

Number two, we want a king who will fight our battles for us. Verse 20 says, "that we also may be like all the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles." Not that we want him to lead us so that we may fight. No, we want him to do the fighting for us.

Here, then, is an abdication of personal responsibility: refusing to learn the martial arts, the art of war; refusing to defend yourself and

your country. We will simply hire someone to do it for us through the king. What we want is not personal responsibility, but security. We want this king so that we will be like everybody else and he will fight our battles for us. In other words, we want someone who will take care of us and protect us.

Benjamin Franklin wisely said, “Those who desire to give up freedom in order to gain security will not have, nor do they deserve, either one.” What was Israel willing to give up? Freedom. What was Israel wanting? Security. By giving up their freedom, they lost both their freedom and, eventually, their security as well.

One of my favorite quotes is from Samuel Adams, who, before the Philadelphia State House on August the 1st, 1776, said to the people: “If you love wealth better than liberty, the tranquility of servitude better than the animating contest of freedom, go home from us in peace. We ask not your counsels or arms. Crouch down and lick the hands that feed you. May your chains set lightly upon you and may posterity forget you are our countrymen.”

Chains always rest upon those who forsake personal responsibility, who want something for nothing, and who want government to provide for them. You have heard the old saying, “Come shackles, come shackles.” With everything the government gives comes the shackles. There is always a continuing loss of liberty and freedom. Do you realize what has happened in our country today? Most Americans are lost in the tranquility of their servitude. Either their chains do not clank loudly enough, or they have turned a deaf ear to the clanking of their chains. Again, Benjamin Franklin said this. Listen carefully.

Benjamin Franklin was right in one sense when he said, “A nation of well-informed men who have been taught to know and to prize the rights which God has given them cannot be enslaved. It is in the region of ignorance that tyranny begins.” However, he overlooked one thing. When a nation of well-informed men know their rights from God, deliberately turn their backs upon that truth, and refuse to acknowledge those rights, it is not their ignorance that enslaves them; it is their rebellion.

You know what happened in 1 Samuel chapter 8? It was not their ignorance, but their rebellion. God had given Israel His law and His Word. Samuel was a preacher and teacher of righteousness. In verse 9, God says, “Now therefore hearken unto their voice: howbeit yet protest solemnly unto them, and show them the manner of the king that shall reign over them.” God was saying, in effect, that they wanted this king, and He would let them have him, but Samuel must solemnly warn them. After Samuel showed them all the horrible aspects of an earthly king, verse 19 says, “Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay; but we will have a king over us.”

In other words, their attitude was, “We don’t care what God says. We don’t care what you say. We will have a king.” It was not their ignorance that enslaved them. It was their rebellion.

The Consequences of Rejecting God's Rule

Now look at 1 Samuel 8 and see the consequences any society faces for rejecting God as King. First, verses 11 and 12 reveal that there will be a standing army. Our founding fathers said that a standing army was the bane of liberty. Notice verse 11: “This will be the manner of the king that shall reign over you. He will take your sons, and appoint them for himself, for his chariots, and to be his horsemen; and some shall run before his chariots. And he will appoint him captains over thousands, and captains over fifties; and will set them to ear his ground, and to reap his harvest, and to make his instruments of war, and instruments of his chariots.” In other words, you are going to have a standing army.

In the Bible, David was actually the man who came up with the standing army. Saul had a little bit, but David made it much larger. Until that time, everything was the local militia; it was the people who fought. The king could not have a war if he did not have a standing army. If people did not agree with the war, they did not fight. But when the king gets a standing army, he orders them wherever he wants them to go, regardless of the will of the people. It does not matter. So, first of all, there is going to be a standing army.

Secondly, there is going to be state-enforced labor, work camps, or assigned duties. Verse 13 says, “And he will take your daughters to

be confectionaries, and to be cooks, and to be bakers." Verse 16 says, "And he will take your menservants, and your maidservants, and your goodliest young men, and your asses, and put them to his work." You would be absolutely flabbergasted to find out the percentage of American people who now work for the federal government. So there will be enforced labor and work camps. If martial law does get fully in our face, you will see even more of that.

Thirdly, there will be increased taxation. Look at verse 15: "And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers, and to his servants." Verse 17 says, "He will take the tenth of your sheep: and ye shall be his servants." The average American would be happy if the federal government only took a tenth. By the way, what does God demand? A tenth?

What is the king doing? Claiming to be God, or equal with God, because he is demanding the same thing that God demands. So there is going to be increased taxation. Fourthly, there is going to be a loss of liberty and freedom. In verse 17 and 18, he says, "He will take the tenth of your sheep: and ye shall be his servants." You shall be his servants. You are going to end up working for him.

Do you realize the average American now works through the month of July just to pay his taxes? So six to seven months out of the year, you're working for the king, for the government, for the empire. That's what he said: "You shall be his servants."

Fifthly, there will be totalitarianism. In verse 18, he said, "And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen you." In other words, you're going to get so sick and tired of this, you're going to cry out. Sixthly, there's going to be a price to be paid for your rebellion. He said in verse 18, "And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen you; and the Lord will not hear you in that day." In other words, you will reap what you sow. You wanted a man? God said, I'll give you a man. And when you get him, you'll wish you never had him. It's kind of like those people in the desert who said, "Give us meat to eat, we're tired of this manna."

God said, "Well, if you want—" They said, "We want quail. That's what we want." God says, "Fine, I'll give you quail." And while the

flesh was in their teeth, the Bible said He killed the fattest of them for their rebellion. They wanted quail. Once they got it, they would to God they did not have it. The same thing happened here.

John 19: The Jews' Trump Card

In Genesis 10, tyranny was brought on by Nimrod through force and usurpation and martial law. In 1 Samuel chapter 8, tyranny and totalitarianism was brought on through rebellion: “No, we're not going to listen to God. We want a man. We don't want God's law. We'll take man's law.” Every king rules by his law. So if you've got God as your king, His law is your rule. If you have man as your king, he's going to rule by his law, which is not necessarily going to be God's law.

In John 19, we find another way that you can slide into tyranny and despotism. This easier way of sliding into tyranny and despotism is so gradual and so easy that most do not realize what has happened until it has already happened.

Once it has happened, no one can believe the cause or reason for the tyranny. You have heard the old adage: You cannot see the forest for the trees. Things are right in front of you, and you never notice them. I was reading through John 19—I have preached on this passage a number of times—and it struck me: that is exactly what has happened in America, and we do not even realize it. In John 19, Pilate was determined to let Christ go.

The Bible tells us that Pilate knew the chief priests and Pharisees had delivered Christ for envy, and that Christ had done absolutely nothing wrong. Pilate pronounced Christ innocent three times. If we count the time when Pilate washed his hands and said, “I will have nothing to do with the blood of this just person,” it was four times. In John 18:38, Pilate said to them, “What is truth?”

“And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews and said to them, ‘I find no fault at all.’” In other words, there was no fault in Christ. John 19:4 says, “Pilate therefore went forth again, and saith unto them, Behold, I bring him forth to you, that ye may know that I find no fault in him.” Then in verse 6: “When the chief priests therefore and officers saw him, they cried out, saying, Crucify

him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Take ye him, and crucify him: for I find no fault in him."

Three times Pilate said Christ was innocent and just, with nothing in Him worthy of death. Then he washed his hands and said, "I'll have nothing to do with the blood of this just person." The chief priests, Pharisees, and Sadducees were becoming upset and violent because Pilate had openly proclaimed Christ innocent. It appeared that Christ would escape their hands.

They wanted Christ dead and out of the way, so they played their trump card. After Pilate had three times said He was innocent, "from thenceforth Pilate sought to release him." Pilate wanted Him to go free; he knew He was innocent. But the Jews wanted Him crucified. "But the Jews cried out, saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend: whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar."

They were testing Pilate's loyalty: Was he loyal to Caesar, or did he want to be the friend of Christ? They knew there was nothing that could produce more horror and terror in Pilate than to portray him as one who was against Caesar.

Let me show you how powerful that trump card was. Look at verse 12 again: "And from thenceforth Pilate sought to release him," right? But when they said, "If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend: whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar," watch verse 13: "When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha."

In other words, when it was laid down on the line, when Pilate found out he was going to be reported to Caesar as being contrary to Caesar because he let this man go who claimed to be a king, that settled it for Pilate. He was going to have Christ crucified. That was all it took to convince Pilate. Pilate understood something that the present-day Christian never ever seems to comprehend: he could not be a friend of Christ and a friend of Caesar at the same time.

If civil rulers ruled biblically and scripturally, governing themselves according to the law of God and the duties and boundaries He has laid down, it would be possible to be a friend of

Christ and of Caesar, because Caesar would then be ruling biblically and would himself be a friend of Christ. But when Caesar pits himself against Christ and against His law, it is impossible to be a friend of Christ and a friend of Caesar at the same time. Why? Because Caesar is claiming lordship. He is claiming Godhood. You cannot be a friend of Christ and a friend of Caesar when Caesar is contrary to God and contrary to His Word.

Here is what these people were saying to Pilate: “Whose friend are you going to be? Are you going to be Caesar’s friend and live? Or are you going to be Christ’s friend, let Christ go, and let Caesar kill you?” Pilate understood that he could not be the friend of Christ and the friend of Caesar at the same time. Here is something else that Pilate understood.

Look in verse 12 again. They said, “If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend.” Here it is: “Whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar.” Pilate understood that Caesar would not tolerate or allow criticism or dissent. All discontent, discussion, and disparaging remarks must be silenced, not only positively, but negatively as well.

If you are pro-Christ, Caesar understood that means you are anti-Caesar. If you merely say, “Well, I'm standing up for Christ and I'm standing up for what's right,” how is Caesar going to interpret that? You may be standing up for Christ and for what you think is right, but you are standing against me. I don't like your standing against me, speaking against me, or making remarks against me. That is why in the last 20 to 30 to 40 years there has been so much from our own federal government against Christ, against the Bible, and against Christianity, because Christianity, the Bible, and Christ condemn what Caesar is doing.

We Have No King but Caesar

When you speak what Christ says, then you are speaking against Caesar. Pilate understood that you cannot be the friend of Caesar and the friend of Christ at the same time. He also understood that if you were pro-Christ, you were anti-Caesar.

Now watch closely what follows. In verse 13, when Pilate heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth to the judgment. Verse 14 says, “And it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour: and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King! But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar.” We have no king but Caesar.

The hated Roman emperor who had ruled over them with an iron glove, this vicious, vindictive, mean, ungodly reprobate of a despot, they now claim as their only king. When Christ was crucified, Tiberius was Caesar. Caesar was a title. All of the Caesars, although they had different names, were called Caesars, just as all the kings in Egypt were called Pharaohs. There were Augustus Caesar, Julius Caesar, Tiberius Caesar, and Claudius Caesar, but they were all called Caesar. Tiberius was Caesar when Christ was crucified.

This man was so vile and wicked. Suetonius, the Roman historian, goes into depth regarding the madness of Tiberius. He said that Tiberius would have sex with people of all ages and sexes. He was very cruel to his subjects and would arbitrarily have people executed for crimes as harmless as speaking ill of Augustus Caesar, who preceded him. Suetonius also describes Tiberius's madness and reprobacy: he would force one of his subjects to drink large quantities of wine, then have their genitals tied so tightly that they could not urinate, and rejoice in watching them in agony. When Tiberius died of natural causes, Suetonius describes the sheer joy of the Romans at his death. They actually and literally danced in the streets; they were so happy to be rid of Tiberius.

It was as if they had awakened from a nightmare. Yet it was this man, so wicked and vile, of whom the Jews said, "We have no king but Caesar." We will take Tiberius over the Son of God. They acknowledged that they did not want, need, or desire any king but Caesar. Caesar was sufficient for them, and God took them at their word.

They preferred tyranny to Christ and the word of man to the word of God. How visibly stupid, ignorant, and rebellious can one be? First, they revolted from the spiritual kingdom of God; secondly, they preferred the tyranny of the Roman Empire, which they greatly

abhorred, to the just government God had promised them. When wicked men flee from Christ, they not only deprive themselves of eternal life; they heap misery after misery upon their own heads by their own choosing and doing.

This Roman Empire, which they professed to love and wanted only Caesar to reign over them around 33 A.D., sent the Roman Emperor Titus to Jerusalem by 70 A.D. He destroyed the city and killed over a million Jews.

The Jews rejected Christ and suffered under tyranny. We must ask: If they got what they deserved—and they did—why is the whole world in such a mess? Did we crucify Christ? Did we reject Him? Why can we not throw off Caesar's yoke? I know many of the answers, and I know that Christ died for our sins; I understand that.

Why We Are Under Caesar's Yoke

Why cannot we throw off Caesar's yoke? Every now and then, everybody gets tired of the corruption, incompetency, and taxation. The natives begin to revolt and speak out because Caesar has been pressing hard. Guess what he does? He says, "Oh, I'm so sorry." He lifts his thumb from one point and presses on another one equally hard.

"Well, we got relief over here. Thank God, we've got relief." But he is pressing over here equally hard as he pressed over there. It does not matter where he presses; we are still under his tyranny. Why in the world are we still under such a yoke?

Now watch verse 15 again: "But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate said to them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar." What were they saying? We do not want Christ. We do not recognize Him as King. We will not have this man to reign over us or to be our ruler.

Do you realize that when you reject Christ, you choose Caesar? When you refuse to bow to the sovereignty of Christ, you are swearing allegiance to the sovereign state. It is that simple.

Why are we in the same mess as the Jews? Because we have done the same thing. We have rejected the sovereignty of God, the

supremacy of Christ, His law, and His kingship. We have chosen our Caesar, and we have the same tyranny and the same loss of liberty.

You may be under the heel of a tyrant by force of arms, like Nimrod; by your own rebellion; or simply by refusing to submit to the sovereignty of Jesus Christ. It does not matter how you get under the heel of a tyrant; you are still under the heel of a tyrant. What has happened in this land is that we have turned from God, Christ, and His law. In doing so, we chose the sovereign state as our God and our King.

Our Lord said it very plainly in Matthew 12:30: "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad."

Choosing Between Christ and Caesar

Applications: Choose Christ or Caesar

We must make a choice. We will either serve the sovereign Christ or the sovereign state. We cannot serve both Christ and Caesar, for each claims sovereignty. In the first century, the question was, Who is Lord? Caesar was claiming lordship.

Everybody can quote Acts 4:12: "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." Peter was speaking of the name of Jesus Christ. When he said this, he was declaring war on the Roman Empire. Caesar Augustus had spread through the Roman Empire, after a star appeared in the heaven around, I think, 30 B.C., and had proclaimed, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved other than the name of Augustus Caesar."

Caesar was claiming Godhood and lordship. When Peter quoted Acts 4:12 and applied it to Jesus Christ, he was saying, Caesar is not Lord; Jesus Christ is Lord. He was declaring war upon Caesar.

May I remind you of Proverbs 28:4? The Bible says, "They that forsake the law praise the wicked: but such as keep the law contend with them." What law? God's law. A king rules by his law. If you forsake God's law, if you deny God's sovereignty and forsake His law,

you are praising the wicked. You are swearing allegiance to the sovereign state. But such as keep the law contend with them; that is, they fight against them.

How do I fight against them? By obeying Christ, recognizing His sovereignty, and bowing to His law word. William Penn said, "Disobedience to tyrants is obedience to God." Why? Because you recognize the sovereignty of God.

The second application is this: it is, and it should be, the sole happiness of the godly to be subject to the royal authority of Jesus Christ. We love His kingship, His law, His kingdom, His subjects, His worship, and His Word. He is our Savior, and He is our God.

When Caesar commands us to do that which is unbiblical and ungodly, we must say with Peter and the other disciples in Acts 5:29, "We must obey God rather than men." Jesus Christ is King of kings and God of gods and Lord of lords. Christ or Caesar—there is no other alternative. How do I know who my sovereign is? Whom do I obey? Whose law do I obey? To whom is my worship directed, and to whom is my prayer request sent?

I find it extremely irritating and aggravating that the average professing Christian will cry out to the federal government before he will cry out to God. Who is your sovereign? Either Christ or Caesar. Those Jews in John 19 rejected Christ for Caesar. We must bow His sovereign authority, obey His law, and bring our lives into agreement and conformity to His Word in every area that He gives us grace to.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank Thee, and we acknowledge Thy grace and mercy. Thou art the only Sovereign, and we bow to Thee through the Lord Jesus Christ. Thy law is supreme. May we bring our lives into conformity unto it. Help us, Lord, to give Thee glory, honor, worship, and praise, for Thou alone art worthy. Grant Thy people repentance; then grant us faith and obedience. Restore our dominion in Thee and through Thee, that we may bring our people and our country back to the true worship of the sovereign God of heaven and earth. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 6

Theology and Culture

Introduction: The Call to Endure Hardness as a Soldier

This is not my normal type of message, but it is a message that certainly needs to be emphasized and preached. I have often been asked as I preach away, “Do you preach this hard to your people?” I normally answer, “I practice all these messages on my people before I preach them anywhere else.” I have been asked to deal with this subject while I am out in California, so Clay, since you are not going to be in California, you are going to get a little sneak preview.

Paul writes to Timothy: “Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also. Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier. And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully.”

Go back, if you would, please, to verse 3. I want to take this thought momentarily: "Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." May I remind you, before I even give you my introduction, that all truth is God's truth? I do not care whether we are talking about theological truth, cultural truth, or scientific truth—all truth is God's truth.

When you go to John 8 and verse 44, our Lord said, "You are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him." All lies are of the devil; all truth is of God. All truth belongs to God. Therefore, the Bible tells us that we are to endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ.

What does that mean? It means, first of all, that we are at war. Does that surprise you? We have been at war, we are at war, and we will continue to be at war. It was Solomon who wisely said in Ecclesiastes 3 and verse 8, there is no discharge in that war. You do not get discharged from the war to which I am referring. If you are a Christian, you are personally involved in a war, whether you realize it or not.

The War on Christian Culture

Your culture, your society, and your life as you know it, and as you have known it, is being deliberately destroyed. Revolutions are constantly being planned, fomented, and executed against God, His Word, and the Christian faith, and most Christians are totally unaware of what is happening until it is too late. In fact, you could say that most Christians are AWOL—absent without leave—because the average professing Christian wants only a color TV and a comfortable couch where he can watch his football games undisturbed. Now let me ask you: are things wrong in our society?

Evidence of Cultural Decline

Have our values, ethics, and morality changed in our lifetime? When did they change, and how did they change? What happened to our Christian culture? It seems almost as if we went to sleep and everything was fine, and when we woke the next morning, everything was going to hell as fast and as quickly as it could possibly

travel. Why has our culture changed? Why has our society changed? Why is our society today no longer like it was 50 years ago?

Anyone over 60 will remember when society had a little more moral balance, when the average person, whether Christian or not, could at least quote the Ten Commandments, and when deals were made with a handshake and a man's word was his bond. Anyone over 60 will remember when divorce was uncommon and most children had a father and a mother. We remember when ladies dressed modestly and men were gentlemen. We remember when you did not have to guess the sex of an individual: men looked like men and women looked like women.

We remember when children, even teenagers, would say "yes sir" and "no sir," "yes ma'am" and "no ma'am" to their parents and to any other adult. We remember when the father was the head of the home and both father and mother disciplined the children, and when most children wanted to do what was right and to please their father and mother and even the Lord.

So you have to ask: what has changed? What has happened to our culture and our society? We know that it has changed, but for the most part, we do not know why. The answer is very simple: our culture and our theology have changed. Our culture and our society have changed because our theology has changed. This is the one point that I am going to emphasize over and over and over today.

The Principle: Theological Change Precedes Cultural Change

A theological change always precedes a cultural change. You cannot have a change in culture until first you have a change in theology. If you have a change in theology for the better, then your culture and your society are going to be better. If you have a change in your theology for the worse, then your culture and your society are going to be worse. It is impossible to have a change in culture or society without having a change in theology.

Paul shows us this principle in 1 Timothy 1:3: “As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine.” He

continues: “Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: so do. Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.”

Notice what he says in verse 5: “Now the end of the commandment.” What commandment? It is the commandment mentioned in verse 3: “As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some.” The word “charge” is parangelia, which is often interpreted and translated as “commandment.” The commandment, then, is that they teach no other doctrine. The opposite of that is found in verse 4: they are not to give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions rather than godly edifying, which is in faith.

The charge or commandment in verse 3 is that they teach no other doctrine, the pure doctrine of God. The end of that commandment to preach the pure, unadulterated Word of God is “love out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.” In other words, if you want a godly culture, it must be produced by godly people. If you want godly people, they must be produced by the Word of God and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Historical Illustrations of the Principle

Our country, even our government, used to send missionaries to foreign lands. Our foreign aid was tied to our missionaries. If you wanted our missionaries, you might have some foreign aid. If you wanted foreign aid and not the missionaries, you did not get it. In other words, there was a time when even the folks in our government understood that you cannot have a change in culture without first having a change in theology.

Now let me tell you what has happened in the last hundred years. We used to, as a government, send missionaries. Now we send armies. We used to try to change people through the power of the Word of God. Now we try to change them through force. Even those in our government once understood this simple truth: a theological change must precede a cultural change.

A few years ago there was a movie entitled "Black Hawk Down." It was a story of 123 elite US soldiers dropped in Somalia to capture two top lieutenants of a renegade warlord. While they were dropped in, they found themselves in a desperate struggle for survival, known as the Battle of Mogadishu. That is where we were as a country trying to capture Somali warlord Mohammed Farah Aidid. I saw the movie when it came on TV.

Sometime later it was shown again, and I decided to watch it for the second time. I am certainly glad that I did because there was a scene that escaped me the first time. You remember when those Black Hawk helicopters were shot down? One pilot survived. He was beaten viciously by the Somalis, tied, and thrown against the wall. He was still alive, and in this scene one of Aidid's warlords says something like this—almost exactly, but not quite a quote: "You stupid Americans, you think you can change us? You think you can come over here and force your democracy down our throats and stop us from killing each other when killing has been a way of life for us for over a thousand years?"

Why was killing a way of life for those people for over a thousand years? Because of their paganism, witchcraft, rebellion, and wickedness. If there is no biblical truth, there cannot be a biblical culture. You cannot change a culture by force, foreign aid, politics, diplomacy, or by being Mr. Nice Guy or Mr. Bad Guy. The only way a culture can be changed is through the power of the Word of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ.

If there is not a change in theology, there will not be a change in culture. If you want a change in culture in America, we have to change our theology back to the Word of God. If we want to continue to go downhill in America, all we have to do is deny, denigrate, and destroy the Word of God, and we will continue downhill very rapidly. Anytime you have a change in theology, good or bad, you will always have a change in culture.

Have you ever wondered why the Marxists and the Communists targeted our seminaries and our churches? They understood that it is impossible to change a society or a culture that tenaciously holds to the Word of God. It was Karl Marx himself who said that a people deprived of their history are easily persuaded. If depriving us of our

history will lead us to deception, what in the world will it do if we are deprived of the Word of God? Those who do not know the Word of God will fall prey to the cults, isms, schisms, and all manner of deception.

Consider the country of India. Think of all the multi-billions of dollars of foreign aid that has gone to India from America, knowing that India is one of the poorest countries in the world. In response to all those multi-billions of dollars they have received, they are still one of the poorest countries in the world. Why? They have gotten all this money.

Why have they not bettered themselves? The answer is their theology—or bad theology or lack of theology. In India they worship the rats and the cows, and all the grain sent there the cows and rats eat. What they do not eat, they defecate on, or germs get in and make it unpalatable for anyone else. You could continue to send money to India from now to the end of the world, and India will never improve, never get rid of the caste system, never overcome its poverty rate, and never eliminate its illiteracy. Why? Because they have no biblical theology.

There is no reason to change. Their culture is doomed, and they are doomed. You cannot have a change in culture until first you have a change in theology. America became great because of the grace of God and the Word of God. Our forefathers believed it, applied it, and obeyed it. What has happened in America is that we have lost practically everything our forefathers gave us.

Psalm 11 and verse 3 asks, "If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" Isaiah answers that question in Isaiah 58:12: "And they that shall be of thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in." When Isaiah wrote this, God was speaking about repentance and a return to Him and His Word. Only as there is repentance and a return to God do we begin to build the old waste places, raise up the foundations of many generations, restore the paths, and repair the breach.

Theology and Culture

Bill Bennett, on a talk show, said this: "America has become the kind of country that we used to send missionaries to." How can this be? The answer is that our theology has changed, and our culture has changed.

Theology is the study of the doctrine of God: what we believe about Him, His attributes, His worship, and His Word. Culture—listen carefully—is merely theology in action. It is religion externalized. Do you realize that you actually work out what you believe? You do. That is why Proverbs 23:7 says, "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." And in Psalm 116:10, David said, "I believed, therefore have I spoken." We work out and apply what we believe. If we believe right, it will be right; if we believe wrongly, it will be wrong.

Martin Luther, the reformer, said, "There are only two men in the world, Christ and Adam, and everyone hangs from their girdles." He meant that you are either in Christ, the second and last Adam, or in the first Adam. You are either a Christian or a humanist. One author said it another way: you are either a follower of John Calvin or Jean-Jacques Rousseau. John Calvin was the theologian, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau was the humanist. You are either a covenant keeper or a covenant breaker. All of this says the same truth: you are either a Christian or a humanist.

Western culture, particularly American culture, was based upon the Word of God. We were called a Christian nation not because everyone was a Christian, but because this country was originally based upon biblical principles and the Word of God as a whole. Have we considered where and how we derive these precepts and principles? One easily discernible illustration of the fact that a change in theology produces a change in culture is the Reformation. Europe before the Reformation was experiencing what history knows, and still knows, as the Dark Ages.

From about 800 to 1500, ignorance, darkness, illiteracy, and overall degeneracy prevailed and permeated that period. The Bible was a suppressed book. You were not supposed to read it during those days. The priest would tell you what the Bible meant,

supposedly, and he did not even know himself. Any other scientific work was suppressed as well, especially work based upon biblical truth.

During those years, if you possessed a Bible or any other scientific book, you were usually classified as a witch. The Roman Catholic Church viewed such things basically as of the devil, and if you possessed them, you were in danger of being burned at the stake. They did burn many at the stake, by the way.

But in the providence of God, God raised up men like Martin Luther, John Calvin, Zwingli, and Gutenberg. Calvin particularly created the patterns and thought that would dominate Western culture, and particularly American culture. Just about everywhere you turn in America, even in economics, it is grounded upon principles and precepts taught by John Calvin.

There was a change in theology in the 1500s, and it produced a momentous change in culture. The doctrines of justification by faith, the priesthood of believers, the sovereignty of God, and the full and final authority of God's Word were bound to produce a momentous change in culture. This produced not only a theological reformation, but a cultural reformation as well.

Christians realized during that time that their cultural activity—that is, every part of their everyday life—was part and parcel of their worship of God. Before then, if you wanted to worship God, you went into a monastery, a nunnery, or the priesthood. That was the sacred worship according to the Roman Catholic Church. No.

When Calvin, Luther, and some of these other men began to preach, everything that you do in word or deed—1 Corinthians 10:31—whether you drink or eat, you do all for God’s honor and glory. Christians suddenly realized they did not have to enter a monastery to worship God, to be spiritual, or to be holy. They had to live by faith and by the Word of God, and whatever they did, do all to God’s honor and glory.

Everything began to change because there was a change in theology. They realized that they were obligated, responsible, and duty-bound to apply the Word of God in every area of life. Such

thinking had to change culture. The Reformation did indeed change not only the medieval way of life in Western Europe, but modern culture as well.

A change in culture is always produced by a change in theology. This change in theology permeated the foundations in the settling and making of America. America was organized upon the principles of the Word of God, but humanists continued to attack those principles. A war started at the very beginning of our country's founding. Finally, a breach was made when one section of the country tried to destroy another section.

One of the most vicious attacks came before and during what is known as the War of Northern Aggression, better known by humanists as the Civil War. The War of Northern Aggression was not a civil war. A civil war is between one people; this war was between two separate people and two separate nations.

The War of Northern Aggression as a Theological Conflict

The South had lawfully and legally seceded and begun a separate nation, so it was not a civil war at all. Many people have studied this war from varied aspects, but very few have studied it from a theological perspective. C. Greg Singer, in A Theological Interpretation of American History, said, "After 1830 there was a growing philosophical and theological cleavage between the North and the South. While the North was becoming increasingly subject to radical influences, the South was becoming increasingly conservative in its outlook."

He was saying that there was a significant theological difference between the North and the South: the North was becoming more and more humanistic, while the South was becoming more conservative, or more biblically oriented. You must remember that the term "Bible Belt" was originally given to the South by the North as a term of derision. Why?

Because we were not the free thinkers that they were, and we were not the rationalists that they were, but held tenaciously to the Word of God, we were derisively referred to as the Bible Belt. James

Henley Thornwell, a Presbyterian pastor, theologian, and author, said it very plainly concerning the war: "The parties involved in this conflict are not merely abolitionists and slaveholders. They are atheists, socialists, communists, Red Republicans and Jacobins on the one side"—the North—"and the friends of order and regulated freedom on the other"—the South. "In one word, the world is the battleground, Christianity and atheism the combatants, and the progress of humanity is at stake."

Here was a man alive in 1862 who said that this war was a theological war. He understood that there was a connection between theology and culture. A very clear understanding of this connection can be gained if you simply study the War of Northern Aggression. Many have never perceived the consequences of a changing theology upon a culture.

If you want to know when we lost our republic, if you really want to know when we lost our freedom, and if you really want to know when we became an empire, study the War of Northern Aggression, and you will find those answers. The North as a whole refused and rejected the biblical worldview. In its place, they substituted rationalism, transcendentalism, and Unitarianism. The elitists of that day in the North were much like the elitists in our day in America.

They wanted absolutely nothing to do with the Word of God, nothing to do with the Bible. Now, that does not mean that every individual in the North was not a Christian. It does not mean that at all. There were many Christians in the North, and many of those individuals were sympathetic with the South. They sympathized with the South, they supported the South, and the Unitarians, Transcendentalists, Rationalists, and Freethinkers of the North labeled them Copperheads.

A Copperhead is a very poisonous snake that gives no sound before it strikes. Thus, the rationalists turned on the Christians in the North and accused them of being Copperheads because they sympathized with and supported the South.

Some things may shock us because we are so accustomed to thinking in our modern-day terminologies. Before the 1800s there

were no Southern Baptists, no American Baptists, and no Northern Baptists. There were just Baptists. Likewise, there were no United Methodists, no Southern Methodists, and no Independent Methodists. There were just Methodists.

The same happened with the Presbyterian Church and the Episcopalian Church. Where did we get all these different Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian churches? A division came into all the major denominations because of a theological change, and this theological change was directly related to northern rationalism and humanism. Remember, when you change theologies, cultures change.

Culture is religion externalized. The Presbyterians were the first to divide, in 1837 and again in 1857. There was a battle between what were known as the old lights and the new lights. While there were indeed doctrinal differences, abolitionism figured very prominently in these divisions. Abolitionism was being pushed by the rationalists, by the Unitarians in the North.

The Methodists split in 1844. The Baptists split in 1845, and in that year the Southern Baptist Convention, or the Southern Baptists, came into existence. Until then, there were no Southern Baptists; if you were Baptist and lived in the South, you were simply Baptist. Churches began to split, and soon the nation was torn in two as well. There was a change in theology in the North and consequently a change in culture. Singer and Thornwell were right: the North began to want to enforce its theology upon the South. When the South rejected the Northern theology and worldview, there was a division not only in the church, but in politics and government as well.

The abolitionists wanted to abolish slavery. There were violent abolitionists, pacifistic abolitionists, and disunion abolitionists. They wanted to destroy slavery even if they destroyed the Union, even if they murdered people in the South. It did not matter. Thus, the abolitionists were rationalists and humanists.

Charles Hodge was a great Presbyterian pastor, teacher, preacher, and author. He blamed the abolitionists for the destruction not only of the union of the churches, but also of the union of the states. He said, "Their stigmatizing of slavery as a sin and a crime must operate

to produce a disunion of the states and the division of all ecclesiastical societies. We shall become two nations in feeling, which must soon render us two nations in fact."

He said there was going to be a war, and the war would be over theology, which would produce a change in culture. William S. Plumer, another Presbyterian pastor, theologian, and author, said before the split in 1837—before the war broke out in 1861—"Should the assembly"—he was speaking of the Presbyterian assembly—"legislate and decide that slaveholding is a sin, the southern churches would feel themselves instructed by the Apostle Paul to withdraw from such"—1 Timothy 6:1–5.

"Thus our church would be rent asunder. Then nothing left except to rend the star-spangled banner in twain. Soon hostile forces will be marshaled against each other and the Potomac will be dyed with blood. Can it be that the righteous judge of all the earth has so dreadful a controversy with the Presbyterian Church of the United States as to give her up to the folly and madness of being the first to hoist the gate and to let the flood of desolation roll in?"

In 1837, he said the church was going to be rent in twain. The next thing that would happen was that the star-spangled banner would be rent in twain, and then the Potomac would be dyed with blood. What did he say? A change in theology is a change in culture, and a change in culture is going to result in a change in government.

James Henley Thornwell, also known as the Calhoun of the Southern Church, said in 1851, ten years before the war broke out: "We are solemn and earnest, not only because we deplore a schism in the body of Christ, but because we deplore a schism among the confederated states of this union. We declare our deliberate conviction that the continued agitation of slavery must sooner or later shiver this government into atoms. If slavery be indeed consistent with the Bible, their responsibility is tremendous." Who?

“In obedience to blind impulses and visionary theories, pull down the fairest fabric of government the world has ever seen, rend the body of Christ in sunder, and dethrone the Savior at His own kingdom. Are our country, our Bible, our interest on earth, our hopes for heaven to be sacrificed on the altars of a fierce fanaticism?

Slavery is implicated in every fiber of Southern society. It is with us a vital question and it is because we know that interference with it cannot and will not be much longer endured."

We raise our warning voice. Listen, we would save the country if we could. Ten years before the war, he said they were going to pull down the fairest fabric of government this world had ever known. What did he say? A change in theology is going to lead to a change in culture, which ultimately is going to change our governmental structure. All the pastors and theologians of that day understood that a change in theology led to a change in culture. They also understood it would lead to a change in government. So the schisms and divisions in war and the loss of our republic and our Constitution all came about by a change in theology. You cannot change a culture until you first change the theology.

Modern Consequences: Abortion and the Homosexual Agenda

Now, I want you to think with me. I have given you a lot of historical background, but I want you to think about two of what you and I would probably refer to as the most horrendous changes in our culture and society. These are changes that horrify us and cause us to cringe. We think, How in the world could anything like this ever happen in our society?

First, consider with me the outrage of abortion. How in the world did abortion come to pass in what the world would call a Christian nation? Of course, we understand that it is no longer a Christian nation. But in our modern-day society, abortion is now considered just a form of birth control. It is no longer considered murder. Why has this happened? Let me show you.

Turn very quickly in your Bibles to Genesis chapter 1, and look at verses 27 and 28. “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.”

"And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth." This is known as the great

mandate, the cultural mandate, or the dominion charter. God said, "Be fruitful and multiply." We have abandoned the cultural mandate. This is the first great commission, where God told us to be fruitful and multiply and to exercise dominion. A rejection of this cultural mandate, a rejection of this theology, has resulted in abortion, euthanasia, and genocide.

In fact, the elitists of the world are now talking openly about population control. Some say we need to reduce the population of this world by as much as nine-tenths. You say, what has this got to do with abortion? "Be fruitful and multiply." Do you realize the average Christian today despises large families? This despising of large families has led to abortion as a convenience and as a means of birth control.

Unhappily, many professing Christians have absorbed the world's pagan worldview and now view their children as an inconvenience, or at most a curse. We cannot afford them. It is amazing, as you look at some of the larger families, not only how much happier they are, but how they work together, cooperate, and help each other. Even my father—I would have to stop and count; I do not know, eight or nine children. My mother, the same thing, eight or nine children. She had sisters and brothers.

When we hear today of someone having ten or eleven children, we ask, what? And when you hear of the Duggars, and they have nineteen now, we really say, "Oh Lord have mercy." I want you to turn in your Bibles to Psalm 127. I am trying to show you that there has been a change in theology, which has resulted in a change in our thinking and consequently a change in our culture and society. Look at Psalm 127, beginning with verse 3: "Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them."

"They shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate." "Children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the..." Wait a minute. As arrows? What do you do with arrows? You shoot them at your enemy. That's what you do.

"Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them." Why? "They shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate." The gate was the place of politics and government. In other words, godly children are to be raised to have dominion in government. That is exactly what he is saying.

Here is what Spurgeon said concerning children: "They are tokens for good if men know how to receive them and educate them. They are doubtful blessings only because we are doubtful persons. Where society is rightly ordered, children are regarded not as an encumbrance, but as an inheritance. And they are received not with regret, but as a reward. If we are overcrowded in England, and so seems to be embarrassed with too large an increase, we must remember that the Lord does not order us to remain in this narrow island, but would have us fill those boundless regions which wait for the axe and the plow."

Even with all the straits of limited incomes, our best possessions are our own dear offspring, for whom we bless God every day. The reason we do not value children is because we have lost our theology. We had a change in theology, and therefore a change in our culture. We no longer fight against abortion simply because we have finally come to accept it—no—but because we have changed our theology. We have rejected what the Word of God teaches concerning children. Now even thirteen- and fourteen-year-old girls in school may have abortions without their parents' knowledge and permission. What has happened? We have a change in culture because we have a change in theology.

Consider the sodomite or homosexual agenda. Today, the perverts are everywhere, in nearly any and every important position—lawyers, judges, politicians, and even seminaries and churches. How in the world did this come to pass? Note how a change in theology produced a change in culture.

Look in Romans chapter 1, beginning with verse 21: “Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.” What did they do? They had already changed theology. They rejected the God of revelation and His truth.

They became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

"Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man"—that is, idolatry—"and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: who changed the truth of God into a lie." A change of theology produces a change in culture and society.

"Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: and likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of"

"Evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them." How did you get a society of perverts? By rejecting true theology, rejecting the Word of God, and changing the truth of God into a lie. You cannot have a change in culture without a change in theology.

Our society has changed since I was a boy, and it is changing every day—not because we are advancing, but because we are losing our theology. It is becoming more wicked and more depraved. We have lost our Christian culture, our Christian government, and our Christian heritage. Why? Because we have lost our theology.

The Need for Theological Reformation Today

Tim Baldwin, a constitutional attorney, wrote an article, "Freedom Is for the Living," on June 23, 2010. He said, "The reason we or they will never get back to the Constitution of 1787 is because those people, those principles, that culture, those times, that circumstance, those beliefs, and those feelings are no longer accepted by most and are certainly not shared to unite the people of the states today. Do we expect that the representative of those same disunited and diverse people will get back to the Constitution of 1787? The culture, morals, religion, education, priorities, families, and experiences of the people of 1787 simply do not cohesively exist today. That is a fact."

We are not going back to the Constitution of 1787, that culture, or those truths, because our theology has changed. Once theology changes, it always produces a change in culture. John Adams said at the founding of our country, "Our constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other." If we want what our founding fathers gave us, we must repent, believe, and apply the Word of God as they did. We can change our culture only by changing our theology. Since our theology has changed for the worse, we must repent and find what the Word of God teaches on every thought and doctrine, and submit to it.

We have to learn that ideas have consequences. When one has a theological shift, inevitably there will be a cultural shift. What did Adams say? Our Constitution was made for a moral and religious people—a Christian people. R. J. Rushdoony wrote many years ago, "Men cannot find peace in Christ until they accept the necessity for war with a fallen world, and Christ as the principle of that warfare."

We are at war. We will be at war, and we shall be at war until our Lord returns. Christ is the principle of this warfare. We have to fight for our heritage, our theology, and truth. The long-term answer is to produce a completely Christian culture, a reformation of culture that provides a true alternative to what we have today: the institutionalized love of death culture. It is a love of death. For our Lord said in Proverbs 8, verses 35 and 36: "For whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the LORD: But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me love death."

We have a culture of death. If we want a culture of life, we must go back to Christ and His Word. We must have a culture where everything is centered around Christ and His law-word.

Tom Ascol, Executive Director of the Founders Ministry, said, “All the calls to reclaim America for Christ leaves me cold.” He continued: “Our real need is to reclaim the church for Christ. When Christ is exalted in His church, when he is loved and revered and cherished with passion by those who bear his name”—in other words, when the church starts living like the church—“then his body can't help but make an impact on culture.” Ascol spoke the truth. We must learn to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our being, and then learn to apply that word and His truth to every area of our lives. As we do that, we will be changing our culture.

But you cannot have a change in culture without a change in theology. If we want our culture back, we must go back to the Word of God. Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank Thee for Thy love and truth. We ask that Thou wouldst help us see the absolute importance of loving Thee and Thy Word, and applying it in our daily lives. Give us grace, Lord, that we may serve Thee acceptably with reverence and godly fear. In Thy name we ask. Amen.

CHAPTER 7

Stand Still This Will Take a While

Introduction: The Command to Stand Still

In 1 Samuel 9:27, as Samuel and Saul were going down to the end of the city, Samuel said to Saul, “Bid thy servant pass on before us.” And he passed on. “But stand thou still a while, that I may show thee the Word of God.” Today, stand still. This will take a while. I mean to preach it too.

Anyone who has ever had children has repeated the words “stand still” many times. It seems as if children were born with running shoes on, and it is impossible to get a child to stand still for any length of time. There have been many instances in which we have used those words to our children, from trying to tie their shoes, to dressing them, to cutting their hair, and even to picking out splinters. Standing still seems almost an impossible task for any child.

I remember when our twins were younger. Occasionally, they would go to sleep with chewing gum in their mouths. Naturally, as

they slept, their mouths would open, the gum would fall out, and it would always end up in their hair. Then Alice would say to them, as she tried either to get it out or cut it out, “Stand still, this is going to take a while.” And certainly it did.

The Busyness of Adult Life

Our parents can probably testify to the same thing concerning us, that we too were impossible children. But the question that has to be asked is very simple: Has anything really changed since they and we have matured into adults?

We are busy, busy people. In fact, as I said yesterday, most folks are so busy making a living they have actually forgotten how to live. One of my favorite stories is that of the old man who called his son the week before Thanksgiving and told his son that he and his wife of fifty years, the boy’s mother, were getting a divorce. The old man told his son, “There’s nothing you can do about it.”

“Our minds are made up. Your mother and I are going through with this divorce.” The son begged and pleaded with his father not to do anything rash until he and his sister could get there over the Thanksgiving holidays and speak to them concerning the issue. Finally, the old man consented and said, “All right, we’ll wait until y’all come for Thanksgiving and then we’ll discuss it.” When he hung up the phone, he looked at his wife and said, “Well, that settles it. The kids are coming for Thanksgiving. I don’t know what we’re going to do for Christmas.”

We smile and laugh at that, but the truth is that most adult children hardly ever make time for their elderly parents. They are too busy living their lives and raising their children, and they forget the debt that we owe to our parents. Have you ever noticed that we really do not have time to do certain things? We always make time for essentials, but we do not have time for what we consider the non-essentials, and the non-essentials fall by the wayside. It never dawns on us that we are the ones who determine what is essential and what is non-essential in our lives.

We set our own priorities. We say, “Wake up and smell the coffee,” “Take time to smell the roses,” or “Take time to be holy.” Yet

the most frequently quoted saying is, “Don’t let the grass grow under your feet.” In other words, we want to be busy and stay busy. We do not have time for coffee, roses, or holiness. We have to make hay while the sun shines.

The Parable of the Great Supper

I understand that an idle mind is the devil’s workshop, and that slothfulness and laziness are condemned in the Word of God. But look at Luke chapter 14, beginning with verse 16, and let me show you the mentality of the average individual: “Then said He unto him, A certain man made a great supper and bade many. And he sent his servant at suppertime to say to them that were bidden, Come, for all things are now ready. And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it.”

“I pray thee have me excused.” And another said, “I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them. I pray thee have me excused.” And another said, “I have married a wife, therefore I cannot come.”

Now, the point is not simply that these people were making excuses, although they were most certainly offering excuses. You have to stop and think this through. No one buys property unseen. If he does, he is an absolute fool. Neither does anyone buy oxen without previously proving them. Who wants to buy a bunch of unruly, untrained, and worthless oxen? No one. Someone has pointed out that, really and truly, the last one only had a legitimate excuse: his wife would not let him come. But think about the situation for a moment. Is there anything wicked and wrong with purchasing property? The answer is no. Is there anything wicked and wrong about buying oxen? The answer is no. Is there anything wicked and wrong about being married? Absolutely not.

The point of this story is that these individuals were too involved, too concerned, and too busy with their everyday lives to have time for the Lord. They were caught up in everyday activity, living and doing what they thought they needed to do. It may be that they really did not want to come to the supper, and that may be true. But it may be equally true that they did not think they had time to come. They

were too busy making a living and believed they had more important things to do.

I believe this is one of the problems we have, both for the saved and the unsaved: we do not really think we have time to consider the things of God. We either do not think we have the time, or we do not wish to take the time to enjoy the things of God.

Alice and I have commented on this innumerable times. Since the Lord has allowed us to travel in many states, we have seen some of the most stunning and beautiful scenery imaginable. We look in absolute awe at the mountains, the oceans, the deserts, and the sunsets, yet the people who live there are so busy running up and down the road that they never even look at the scenery. But we do the same things here.

We will run up to North Carolina and Tennessee to see all the leaves change. Do you realize we have the same kind of trees here? We have the same colors here. Now, we may not have as much, but we would drive 200 or 250 miles to see leaves change up there and all that beautiful scenery, while we totally ignore it right where we live. We do exactly the same thing.

We need to heed the counsel and advice of Samuel, because Samuel said to Saul—and I will explain this later—"Stand still. This is going to take a while." I want you to learn to look and listen. Do you know what God has commanded us? He said in Psalm 46 and verse 10, "Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth." Listen to what He said: "Be still, and know that I am God."

Now Habakkuk said something similar, a little differently, but the same principle. He said in Habakkuk 2 and verse 20, "But the Lord is in His holy temple, let all the earth keep silence before Him." The point of these two passages is very simple. In order to hear God and observe His works and His Word, there must be stillness and there must be silence. We miss a lot of things by our rushing hither and yon, especially as we do our daily tasks.

Stand Still and Consider the Wonder of God in Salvation

Before returning to 1 Samuel chapter 9 and developing the thought, consider this first thought: We need to stand still and consider the wonder of God in salvation. We need to stand still and consider the wonder of God in salvation. I know that each of us is thankful to be saved; we are thankful for the salvation that is given to us, and that salvation is only found in Jesus Christ our Lord. The Bible tells us, and asks this question in Hebrews chapter 2 and verse 3, “How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?” Now note what the question asks: “How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?” In other words, this salvation is extremely great. The salvation that we have in Jesus Christ is far superior and far greater than the salvation that God gave to Israel when He delivered them out of Egypt. However, look back in your Bibles to the book of Exodus—not Ephesians, but Exodus, the book of Exodus.

The salvation that God gave to Israel as He delivered them out of Egypt is emblematic. It is typical, a shadow, and pictorial. It pictures the salvation that God is going to give us in Jesus Christ. As God was about to deliver Israel, take them through the Red Sea, and slay the Egyptians, Moses said this in Exodus chapter 14 and verse 13: "And Moses said unto the people, Fear you not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will show to you this day. For the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you shall see them again no more forever." Note what Moses said: "Fear you not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord."

Let us reason from the lesser to the greater. If Israel had to stand still to see the picture, the type, and the emblem, how much stiller should we need to stand when we consider the wonder of God in the reality that we have in Jesus Christ our Lord? How much more should we stand still and gaze at God's so great salvation?

We tend to take salvation for granted. In fact, some people even tend to think that God owes them salvation. How seldom do we really comprehend that the only thing God owes us is judgment. I have news for you: I do not want that. I do not want what God owes me.

Grace has been defined as unmerited favor. In Romans chapter 11, verses 5 and 6, the Apostle Paul says, "Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then it is no more of works. Otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace. Otherwise work is no more work." Notice that there is a remnant according to the election of grace. Paul's argument is simply this: election and salvation must be by grace. It cannot be by works, nor can it be a combination of works and grace.

It must be one or the other. That is what Paul is arguing. No one has ever been chosen or saved based upon works. Election and salvation are by grace because you cannot earn it, merit it, or work for it. There is no way that you can claim it by your own deeds in any stretch of the imagination. Therefore, it is by grace, which is indeed unmerited favor.

But grace is far more than unmerited favor—unearned and unworked for. Suppose I was a multimillionaire, and Joe came in. I said, “Joe, come here; I want to give you something,” and handed him a million dollars. Someone might say, “That’s grace. Joe didn’t work for it or earn it.” That is true. But let us go further. Suppose Joe had just murdered my only son, and I still gave him a million dollars. Understand this: grace is not merely unmerited favor. It is that, but it is far more.

But it is more than that. Grace is given to those who are not only positively undeserving, but who are also positively hell deserving. Romans 5:6–8 says, "For when we were yet without strength in due time, Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die, yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commended his love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

I want you to know that we were not only ungodly; we were sinners. We were ungodly, wicked, disobedient, and rebellious. In spite of our sins, in spite of our rebellion, God chose us and God saved us.

Romans 8:7–8 says, "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be, so

then they that are in the flesh cannot please God." So when God chose us and when God saved us, we were not only hell deserving, we were not only sinners and rebels and wicked; we hated God. We did not want Him. We did not please Him. We did not do anything for Him.

In fact, Ephesians 2 gives a description of what we were by nature: "And you hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins, wherein in time past you walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience, among whom also we all had our conversation in times past, in the lust of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and the mind, and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others."

When God came to us, we were lost, hopeless, helpless, undone, impotent, condemned, under the curse and judgment of the law. The only thing that you and I earned and merited was God's wrath, God's anger, and God's judgment. Grace is more than unmerited favor.

It is not that we simply do not earn salvation. God was merciful, and He gave us an unspeakable gift. He gave us His only begotten Son to be our surety, our sacrifice, and our substitute. That is why the Bible says in 1 John 4:10, "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be a propitiation for our sins." Herein is love, not that we loved Him, but that He loved us.

Salvation, from beginning to end, is the work of God alone. It is not synergistic. That word simply means that some people say, "You have to do your part and God has to do His part." They say salvation is a combination of the work of God and man. No, it is not synergistic—two working together. It is monergistic, that is, God working alone. That is why Jonah 2:9 says, "Salvation is of the Lord."

From beginning to end, and everything in between, salvation is of God, not of man. If you genuinely want to know where you stand, you have to honestly ask yourself this question: Who am I that God would choose me and save me? Why did God choose us?

Our Lord said in John 15:16, "You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain. And that whatsoever ye shall ask

of the Father in my name, he may give it you." Again, in John 15:19, He said, "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you."

In 2 Thessalonians 2:13, the Apostle Paul expresses the gratitude that should be in our hearts: "But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation.

So let us ask some questions. Why did God choose you? Why would God choose you? Many of us can testify that we are saved only by the grace of God, while many of our family members and closest friends are still lost. Why would God choose us? Why would God save us? Why would God give His only begotten Son for me? Why would Jesus Christ, the sinless Son of God, come to be my surety, my substitute, and my sacrifice?

If you really want to understand the answer to those questions, stand still; it will take a while. It will take a while for you to comprehend the matchless, marvelous grace of our Father and of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. It will take a while to consider everything that Jesus Christ has done for you in salvation. He drew you. He called you. He regenerated you. He convicted you. He converted you. Salvation from beginning to end, and everything in between, is the work of God. If you want to really understand, you might as well stand still. It will take a while.

Stand Still and Consider the Works of God in Creation

I want you to stand still and consider the works of God in creation—not just the wonder of God in salvation, but the works of God in creation. In Job 37, Elihu said to Job, “Hearken unto this, O Job, stand still and consider the wondrous works of God.” Do you realize that God has worked wonderfully in creation, redemption, and providence? Have you ever really considered the work of God in creation? Have you stood still long enough to behold His works? Have you studied them or sought them out? If you have not, why not? Is it because you have no pleasure in them?

Hold Job 37; we are coming right back. Look in your Bibles to Psalm 111 and verse 2. Concerning the works of the Lord, David writes, “The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein.” If you are not seeking out the works of God, is it because you do not really have any pleasure therein?

They mean nothing to you. Look in Job 37, verse 1: “At this also my heart trembleth, and is moved out of his place. Hear attentively the noise of his voice.” Listen: “Hear attentively the noise of his voice, and the sound that goeth out of his mouth.” Is God speaking? Well, how does God speak?

We know that He has spoken through His Word, but watch this: “He directeth it under the whole heaven, and His lightning unto the ends of the earth.” He is talking about thunder and storms. “After a voice roareth, He thundereth with His voice of His excellency, and He will not stay then when His voice is heard. God thundereth marvelously with His voice. Great things doeth He, which we cannot comprehend.”

Now watch: “For He said to the snow, Be thou on the earth, likewise to the small rain, and to the great rain of its strength.” What he is saying is this: God speaks to us through the rain and through the snow. Verse 7 says, “He sealeth up the hand of every man, that all men may know his work.”

Then the beasts go into the dens and remain in their places. Out of the south cometh the whirlwind, and the cold out of the north. By the breath of God, frost is given, and the breath of the waters is straightened. Also by watering he wearieth the thick cloud, he scattereth his bright cloud, and it is turned round about by his counsels, that they may do whatsoever he commanded them upon the face of the world in the earth.

He causes it to come, whether for correction, or for his land, or for mercy. “Hearken unto this, O Job, stand still, and consider the wondrous works of God. Dost thou know when God disposed them, and caused the light of His cloud to shine? Dost thou know the balancing of the clouds, the wondrous work of Him which is perfect in knowledge?”

"How thy garments are warm when he quieteth the earth by the south wind. Hast thou with him spread out the sky which is strong and is a molten looking glass?" You can continue reading Job 38 and Job 39 when you get home. What he is saying is this: it is God, in all of His marvelous works, who teaches not just man but animals as well. The beasts go into their dens. The animals know when to get out of the way. They know when to go into their dens when a storm is coming. God teaches them.

Here are the wonderful works of God. Concerning the storms, He says that God causes those things to come, whether for correction—that is, in judgment—or for His land, or for mercy.

Look in your Bible to Psalm 19. I am simply pointing out the wondrous works of God in creation. "The heavens declare the glory of God." What? Have you ever noticed the immensity of the sky? Have you ever noticed the stars, the sun, and the moon? "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth His handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech. Night unto night showeth knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun, which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber from east to west, and rejoicing as a strong man to run a race. His going forth is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit into the ends of it, and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof."

Notice what God is talking about. The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth His handiwork. Day unto day, every day, He uttereth speech, and every night showeth knowledge. The sun, the moon, the stars—all of God's creation—reveal the majesty, greatness, and glory of God.

I love Genesis 1:16. "And God made two great lights, the greater to rule the day, and the lesser to rule the night."

God made two great lights, the greater to rule the day, the lesser to rule the night, and He made the stars also. Is there any way that you can number the stars? We do not even know how many galaxies we have. They are still discovering galaxies and stars that are unknown.

But I want you to see something. God not only knows how many stars there are. Psalm 147:4 says, “He telleth the number of the stars, He calleth them all by their names.” Out of all the multi-trillions of stars, God has them all named, and He calls each one by their names. Can you conceive of that in your mind?

We have never really stopped to consider how vast God’s creation really is, or paused to see how great it really is. We need to consider the works of God in creation—from the mountains to the seas, from the swamps to the plains, from the hills to the deserts. God made them all. If you are going to behold the wondrous works of God in creation, stand still, because it is going to take you a while. Try numbering the stars, and you will understand. It will take you a little while—and you do not even have to try to number the ones you cannot see.

You just try to number the ones you can see. Stand still. It’ll take a while.

Stand Still and Consider the Word of God in Exposition

Now, go back in your Bibles to 1 Samuel chapter 9. I told you I was coming back to that passage. This is the verse that got me thinking and prompted me to consider the other two thoughts. In 1 Samuel 9:27, we read: “And as they were going down to the end of the city, Samuel said to Saul, Bid thy servant pass on before us. And he passed on. But Samuel said to Saul, But stand thou still a while, that I may show thee the word of God.”

Without going back and reading all of the content and context, Saul and his servant had been sent on a mission to find the lost asses of his father. If you look back very quickly at verse 5: “And when they were come to the land of Zuph, Saul said to his servant that was with him, Come and let us return, lest my father leave caring for the asses and take thought for us.”

They had been gone about three days and had not found them. Saul therefore suggested that they go back home, because his father would be more concerned about them now than about the lost asses. In the context, the servant said, “Well, wait a minute. You know,

there's a man of God in this city. Let's go see him. And he will tell us about those lost asses, where they are, what's going on." Saul replied that he had nothing to give the man of God, but the servant had a little shekel or two to offer. So they went.

The whole thing was in the providence of God, because Saul was chosen to be king. When Samuel saw Saul, he told him to cease worrying about the lost asses: "Well, they've been found." A sacrifice had been held, and everybody was waiting for Saul to come up. They ate together, and then Samuel walked out with Saul to the end of the city. He said, "You bid your servant pass on. This is not for him. This is for you. But for you, Saul, stand thou still a while, while"

Now I have some very important information for you: it takes time to learn the Word of God. You may not learn it on the run. You will not learn it in the fast lane, and you will not learn it in Bible school or at the seminary. You may learn about the Bible at Bible school or in seminary, but the only way you can learn the Bible is to study it yourself. You are going to have to study, meditate, think, and seek God for enlightenment, illumination, and understanding. I am going to tell you up front: you might as well stand still, because it is going to take a while. The only way you can learn that Bible is by going over and over and over it.

I have heard people say, "Well, I've read the Bible all the way through." George Bush's father said George Bush had read it through twice. I do not think it did him any good, but at least he said he read it through twice. I have got news for you folks: reading the Bible through twice is nothing. You cannot comprehend everything on one page. How in the world do you think you can comprehend the whole Bible just by reading it through twice?

I have been studying the Bible for nearly forty-six years. I have no idea how many times I have read the Bible; I have never kept count. A multitude of times, and I still do not know it. If God lets me live another forty-five years, I probably still will not know it. No one can conquer it. It is unconquerable. But I do know this: if you are going to conquer any part of it, it is going to take time.

Now let me show you a principle. In Mark chapter 4, beginning at verse 23, He says: "If any man have ears to hear, let him hear. And

He said unto them, Take heed what ye hear, with what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you, and unto you that hear shall more be given. For he that hath to him shall be given, and he that hath not from him shall be taken even that which he hath."

Here is a very simple principle: to the same degree that we give ourselves to learning the Word of God, God will measure truth back to us in that same degree. Listen to what He said: "Take heed what ye hear, with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured unto you." God says, "I am going to measure truth to you to the same degree that you give in learning truth." One does not get a week's worth of truth from a thirty-minute Bible study, nor a year's worth of truth from a month-long Bible study. No. God measures truth to us according to the degree that we give ourselves to seeking to understand it, studying it, and meditating upon it.

You know what the Bible says in 2 Timothy 2:7? Paul told Timothy, "Consider what I say, and the Lord give thee understanding in all things." But what did he tell Timothy? "Consider what I say." The Lord is not going to give us understanding without consideration. He is not going to give us understanding without meditation, without study. It is true that God must give us understanding, but He normally uses means, and that means is our studying the Word of God.

In Numbers 9, Moses was asked a question to which he did not know the answer. Look at Numbers 9 and verse 8. Moses was asked a question and did not know the answer, and he said, "And Moses said unto them, Stand still, and I will hear what the Lord will command concerning you." In effect, Moses said, "I don't know the answer, but you wait a while. You just stand still."

How many times have we had questions, and even asked those questions, but were unwilling to wait for an answer? How many times have we really wanted to know something, but were unwilling to put the time and effort into study and find out? We were unwilling to stand still. David says this a little differently, but consider it. In Psalm 4:4, he says—

David said, "Stand in awe and sin not, commune with your own heart upon your bed. Be still." If you will not stand still in the

daytime, stand still at night while you are lying on your bed. Commune with the Lord. Think. Meditate. It does not matter if it is daytime or nighttime. But here is our problem. Every one of us has used the expression, "Easy come, easy go," and we know it, but we never apply it to truth.

When you simply ask a question and get a quick answer, you normally forget the answer. Why? It never cost you anything. Your attitude is, "Well, if I forget it, I can always ask the question again." But have you ever noticed that when you have a question, sit down, take the Bible and a commentary, and begin praying and searching, finally finding the answer, you do not forget it? You forget it when you put nothing into it. You do not forget it when you put something into it because it costs you something. You know what the Bible says in Proverbs 23 and verse 23? "Buy the truth, and sell it not." Buy the truth. In other words, it is going to cost something. I am going to tell you what that something is a little bit later, but it will cost something.

Look in your Bibles to 1 Samuel chapter 12 and see what Samuel told the people. We are talking about time right now. Standing still requires time. In verse 7, Samuel is speaking to the people: "Now therefore, stand still, that I may reason with you before the Lord of all the righteous acts of the Lord which he did to you and your fathers."

Now wait a minute: "Now therefore stand still." Stand still, he said, "that I may reason with you before the Lord of all the righteous acts of the Lord which he did to you and to your fathers." Samuel tried to reason with the people about all the righteous acts God had done for them and for their fathers. If he was reasoning of all the righteous acts, he was also reasoning of all the benefits God had bestowed upon them and all the promises He had fulfilled. He was probably also reasoning of all the chastisements and judgments that fell upon them because of their sins. So what he was saying was, "Stand still; this is going to take just a little while."

“I’m going to reason with you.” The question is this: will we stand still long enough to be reasoned with? In Isaiah 1:18, God says, “Come now and let us reason together, saith the Lord. Though your sins be scarlet, they shall be white as snow. Though they be red like

crimson, they shall be as wool." How long do you think it would take God to reason with you? How long do you think it would take you to reason with God?

Now let me show you something. If you're going to reason with God, you had better be prepared to argue.

When I use the word argue, I'm not talking about fussing, bickering, bellyaching, or fighting. I'm using the word the way Job did in Job 23:4. Job said, "I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments." When Job said this, he was saying, "I'm going to reason with Him scripturally. I don't understand this, and I'm going to bring these verses and this truth before Him to see what God is going to say." If I'm going to argue with God, if I'm going to reason with God, I'm going to have His Word say, "Now Lord, You said this right here, and Lord, You said this right over here, and Lord, I don't understand this. How can this be happening, Lord, if this and this is true?" I'm going to fill my mouth with arguments; I'm going to fill my mouth with the Word of God and reason based upon the Word of God.

So if you're going to reason with God, even in prayer, you had better learn to stand still, because it will take a while. You can instruct God, but you can't fill your mouth with biblical arguments and say, "Lord, You'll have to give me illumination. You'll have to give me understanding. I don't see how all this comes together. I just don't understand." That is why Paul told Timothy, "Consider what I say, and the Lord give thee understanding in all things." If you're going to consider the wonders of God in salvation, the works of God in creation, or the Word of God in exposition, you had better stand still, because it's going to take a while.

Applications: No Shortcuts and Learning to Enjoy God's Gifts

Let me make a couple of applications. First, there are no shortcuts or quick ways to stand still and wait upon God. Brother McCurry always said that God is the slowest individual you will ever get hooked up with, because He is eternal. Time is nothing to God because God is above and beyond time. It simply takes time if we truly want to learn to praise Him, worship Him alone, and magnify

Him. If we are going to do that, we might as well stand still. It is going to take a while.

Has it ever really entered your mind that the only thing we can give to God is our time? He owns everything else—the cattle on a thousand hills, the hills, and everything else. God has ordained the day of our birth and the day of our death, and the only thing we have in between is time. As we present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto Him, which is our reasonable service, we need to learn to stand still, sit still, be still, hear from God, and worship Him.

Second, we need to learn to slow down, take time to live, and enjoy all that God has given unto us.

You say, "I don't have much money." That doesn't matter. God's given you family, friends, health, and creation. 1 Timothy 6:17 says, "Charge them that are rich in the world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God who gives us richly all things to enjoy."

Stonewall Jackson said that he never took a sip of water without thanking and praising God for the water of life which is in Christ Jesus. That's how you enjoy a glass of water. We may not be rich in this world, but there are so many other things that God has given us: our children and grandchildren. We need to learn to enjoy them, to stand still before it is time for us to lie still, when everything will be gone.

I rejoice in the many memories I have concerning my mother. When I was home, at least three days a week I had her. I would take her out to dinner, bring her to the house, and fix coffee and cake for her. My mother would always say, "Don't you have other things to do?" I would always say, "No ma'am, not today. Today I'm with you." Today you can be with your husband, your wife, your child, your father, your mother, or your friend.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we praise Thee today for everything that we have in Jesus Christ, our Lord. Thou art so wonderful, gracious, and merciful. Lord, help us to consider the greatness of Thy grace in salvation, the greatness of Thy majesty and glory in creation, and the greatness of the truth of Thy Word. Enable

us to stand still, and be still, and love Thee, and worship Thee. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 8

An Unexpected Warrior

SCRIPTURE READING - Genesis 14:1-14 (KJV)

Introduction and Scripture Reading

And it came to pass in the days of Amraphel, king of Shinar, Arioch, king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer, king of Elam, and Tidal, king of nations, that these made war with Bera, king of Sodom, and with Birsha, king of Gomorrah, and Shinab, king of Admah, and Shemeber, king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela, which is Zoar.

All these were joined together in the Vale of Siddim, which is the Salt Sea. Twelve years they served Chedorlaomer, and in the thirteenth year they rebelled. And in the fourteenth year came Chedorlaomer and the kings that were with him, and smote the Rephaims in Ashteroth Karnaim, and the Zuzims in Ham, and the Emims in Shaveh Kiriathaim, and the Horites in Mount Seir, unto El-paran, which is by the wilderness. And they returned and came to En-mishpat, which is Kadesh, and smote all the country of the Amalekites, and also the Amorites that dwelt in Hazezon-tamar.

> There went out the king of Sodom, and the king of Gomorrah, and the king of Admah, the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela, the same as Zoar. And they joined battle with them in the Vale of Siddim, with Chedorlaomer, the king of Elam, and with Tidal, king of nations, and Amraphel, king of Shinar, and Arioch, king of Ellasar, four kings with five. And the Vale of Siddim was full of slime pits. And the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled and fell there, and they that remained fled to the mountain. And they took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their victuals, and went their way. And they took Lot, Abram's brother's son, who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods and departed. And there came one that had escaped and told Abram the Hebrew, for he dwelt in the plain of Mamre, the Amorite, brother of Eshcol, and brother of Aner. These were confederate with Abram. And when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his trained servants, born in his own house, 318, and pursued them unto Dan.

And he divided himself against them, he and his servants, by night, and smote them, and pursued them unto Hobah, which is on the left side of Damascus. And he brought back all the goods, and also brought back again his brother Lot and his goods, and the women also, and the people.

Abraham is well known for being the friend of God. He is also well known for his faith, obedience, and righteousness. He is not very well known for his tactical, military, and warrior skills. In Genesis chapter 14, you have the only military action we ever read about that Abraham was engaged in. Abraham was engaged in this military action, not because he was prompted by avarice or ambition, but purely on a principle of mercy and charity. He did not engage in military tactics to enrich himself but only to rescue his nephew Lot. Never was any military expedition undertaken, prosecuted and finished more honorably than this military action taken by Abraham.

Background: The Separation of Abram and Lot

Abram went up out of Egypt, he and his wife and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the south. And Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold. And he went on his journeys from the south even

to Bethel, even to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, unto the place of the altar which he had made there at the first, and there Abram called on the name of the Lord. And Lot also, which went with Abram, had flocks and herds and tents.

The land was not able to bear them, that they might dwell together, for their substance was great, so that they could not dwell together. There was a strife between the herdmen of Abram's cattle and the herdmen of Lot's cattle, and the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land.

Abram said unto Lot, “Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen, for we be brethren. Is not the whole land before thee? Separate thyself, I pray thee, from me. If thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left.” Lot lifted up his eyes and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere, before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar. Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan, journeyed east, and they separated themselves one from another. Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelt in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom.

Notice to begin with that there was a division between Lot's herdsmen and Abram's herdsmen. It was not necessarily a division between Abram and Lot themselves, although they were certainly affected by it. This division was also because of their wealth. They were exceedingly rich. The Bible says that Abram was rich in cattle, silver, and gold, and Lot had cattle, tents, and all these things. Thus there developed fighting between Lot's herdmen and Abram's herdmen, undoubtedly over the best grazing lands as well as the best water holes.

It is interesting to see why Abram suggested that they separate themselves. There was strife between the herdmen of Abram's cattle and the herdmen of Lot's cattle, while the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled in the land. This was a testimony before the wicked. The wicked were surrounding them. Therefore Abram said,

"Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen, for we be brethren."

In other words, we ought not to be fighting, and we certainly ought not to be fighting before the wicked. Abram said, "Is not the whole land before thee? Separate thyself, I pray thee, from me. If thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; if thou depart to the right, then I will go to the left."

Notice how gracious Abram was. He was not going to be the one who made the choice; Lot could choose. If Lot went to the right, Abram would go to the left; if Lot went to the left, Abram would go to the right. Abram was not going to fight over the matter.

The Bible tells us that Lot deliberately chose the plain of Jordan because of its lushness and fruitfulness, even though it was on the way to Sodom. Genesis 13:11 says, "Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan, and Lot journeyed east, and they separated themselves one from the other. And Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelt in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom."

Lot's Downward Spiral

Lot evidently knew of Sodom's wickedness and depravity, for verse 13 says, "But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly." Yet he still pitched his tent toward Sodom. When we read Genesis 13, we learn of the altars Abram had built, where God had revealed Himself to Abram and even to Lot. Lot did not choose the place where God's altar stood or where God had revealed Himself. He chose the plain of Jordan, which was on the way to Sodom. Obviously, he made a bad choice: he chose money, prosperity, luxury, and friendship with the world over the worship and honor of God.

Many people do exactly the same thing today. How many people have you ever heard of who moved into a city or town because of the excellent preaching and teaching of the Word of God there? How many have moved to a certain place because the Spirit of God was moving, people were being convicted of their sins and converted, and people were standing for truth and righteousness? How many of you have ever heard of anyone doing that at all?

The truth of the matter is that when most people move, they move because they want a better job, more money, greater benefits, or a better security package. Sometimes people move because of family or friends. But very few ever move because they are hearing the truth of God and the Word of God has priority in their lives.

The Bible says in Genesis chapter 13 and verse 12, “Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelt in the cities of the plain,” and then notice this phrase: “and pitched his tent toward Sodom.” He simply pitched his tent in the direction of Sodom. Now, in Genesis 14:12, which we read earlier, the kings “took Lot, Abram’s brother’s son, who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed.” In one chapter, Lot is pitching his tent toward Sodom; in the very next chapter, he is in Sodom. The Bible is telling us that it is only a small step between going toward Sodom and joining in and living in Sodom.

“In other words, once you begin on the road away from God and God’s people, it is but a small step to join hands with the wicked. Once you leave the fellowship of God and His people, where else can you go but to the wicked? If you leave the fellowship of God and His people, you have no other place to go.”

Lot had already pitched his tent toward Sodom; he finally ended up dwelling in Sodom as well.

Abram's Response to Lot's Capture

When Abraham received the news that Lot, his nephew, had been captured, all of his goods had been taken, and Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, and the other cities of the plain had been sacked, I can imagine that Abram could have rationalized his way out of this military action. He must have understood that Lot knew of the dangers and knew of the wickedness of the people of Sodom. He could have taken this attitude. When he heard that Lot had been captured, he could have said this:

“He made his bed; let him lie in it.” That is certainly an attitude I have heard expressed, and in some instances it is indeed a biblical attitude. Abram could have rationalized, “Maybe this will teach him a lesson. Maybe he will learn the hard way.” He could have asked

himself, “Why should I jeopardize my family, my friends, my servants, and my own life to try to save people who are not even concerned enough to get out of danger? Why should I jeopardize everything I have for someone who was so stupid as to move right into the middle of danger and wickedness?” He could have said, “I will leave him alone and see whether he learns from his mistakes.”

But when Abram heard that Lot, his nephew, had been captured, none of those rationalizations probably entered his mind. At least, they certainly are not recorded in Scripture. The Bible says that immediately, when he heard that his nephew had been captured, he armed his own trained servants.

Why was Abram so quick to go after Lot and rescue him? The answer is obedience to the sixth commandment. The sixth commandment is, “Thou shalt not kill.” The positive is, “Thou shalt preserve life.” Lot’s life was in danger; his children’s lives were in danger; his wife’s life was in danger; and other people were in danger. Abram was therefore willing to go quickly to the rescue, not only of Lot but of the other people as well.

Even though Abram and Lot may have had a light falling out between themselves—and I do not know that they did—I am sure the strife between their herdsmen affected them. It affected them so much that Abram suggested they separate because of their great wealth and the strife that was going on. But grace does not cease to exist in a believer, even when he has been wronged by the individual to whom he is about to be gracious. Abram could have rationalized, “He did me wrong; let him suffer.”

The Circumstances

First, consider the circumstances. I read them to you in Genesis chapter 14, verses 1 through 12. A war has broken out between kings: five kings fighting against four kings.

The Circumstances of the War

Albert Barnes says, “The dominant confederacy consists of four kings. Many generations back, the first world power consisting of four cities was established by Nimrod in the land of Shinar, Genesis

10 verses 8 through 10. This is now given way to a world confederacy consisting of four kings. From the vicinity of the places in which they reigned, it is evident that they were petty princes of domains varying from a town and its suburbs to a comparatively extensive territory."

He is saying that these four principal cities have now given rise to four principal kings, and they now have a world confederacy. Five kings rebelled against Chedorlaomer after serving him for twelve years. Chedorlaomer then joined affinity with three other kings in order that he might reconquer the territories that were rebelling against him.

But if you look especially at Genesis 14, verses 5, 6, and 7, as well as verse 8, they were not interested merely in reconquering Sodom and Gomorrah, Zeboiim and Admah, these cities of the plain. They went and conquered other territories as well. Their design was not just to reconquer the people who were rebelling, but to add new conquered territory to their domain. In this expedition of the four kings were pride, greed, avarice, and self-glory. They wanted not only those rebelling territories back; they wanted additional territories as well. These kings were infatuated with themselves, their power, and their ability. Someone has aptly stated, "Those whom God intends to destroy, he delivers up to infatuation," and certainly they were infatuated with themselves.

The Bible tells us that this battle took place in the slime pits, or deep holes, around the Vale of Siddim, where the Dead Sea is located. There the five kings, with Sodom and Gomorrah and all these towns, were defeated. Sodom, along with the other cities, was sacked; the citizens were captured; and the goods were confiscated. But look at verse 12 again: "And they took Lot, Abram's brother's son, who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed." God says specifically that they took Lot and everything he had. They got many others, but they got Lot and everything.

Lot's Ineffective Witness in Sodom

John Calvin says that the history related in this chapter is chiefly worthy of remembrance for three reasons. First, because Lot, with a gentle reproof, exhorted the men of Sodom to repentance. They had, however, become altogether unteachable and desperately perverse in

their wickedness. But Lot was beaten with these scourges because they had been allured and deceived by the richness of the soil; he had mixed himself with unholy and wicked men.

Secondly, Calvin says, God, out of His compassion to Lot, raised up Abram as his avenger and liberator to rescue him when he was a captive from the hand of the enemy. In this act, the incredible goodness and benevolence of God toward His own people are rendered conspicuous, since, for the sake of one man, He preserves for a time many who are utterly unworthy. Thirdly, Abram was divinely honored with a signal victory and was blessed by the mouth of Melchizedek, in whose person, as appears from other passages of Scripture, the kingdom and priesthood of Christ was shadowed forth. As it respects the sum of the history, Calvin says, it is a horrible picture both of the avarice and pride of man.

Thus, Calvin gives three reasons we ought to remember Genesis 14: Lot gently reproved the men of Sodom; God, out of His compassion, raised up Abram to rescue Lot; and Melchizedek foreshadowed Christ. Overall, when we read Genesis 14, we must come away with an understanding of the avarice and corruption of man.

I disagree with Calvin's first point. I cannot find anywhere in Genesis 14, 15, 16, 17, or 18 where Lot reproved the men of Sodom. He may have. I have no earthly idea. But the Bible does not record him doing that. The only time he gives any reproof at all is found in Genesis 19.

If you look in Genesis 19, you will find that God is already determined to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham has already interceded with the Lord, and the Lord said that if He found ten righteous people, He would spare it. So He sent these two angels to Sodom. Genesis 19:1 says, “And there came two angels to Sodom at even; and Lot sat in the gate of Sodom.” You remember that the gate speaks of authority. Evidently, Lot was a man of authority in this wicked town.

Lot, seeing them, rose up to meet them, and bowed himself with his face toward the ground. He invited them into his house to tarry all night, wash their feet, and rise early to continue their journey. At

first they refused, saying that they would abide in the street all night, but he pressed upon them greatly. They turned in unto him, entered his house, and he made them a feast and baked unleavened bread for them.

Before they lay down, the men of Sodom, both old and young, surrounded the house. They called to Lot, demanding that he bring out the men who had entered his house. Lot went out, shut the door behind him, and said, "I pray you, brethren, do not so wickedly." He then offered them his two virgin daughters, saying that they could do to them as seemed good in their eyes, but that they should do nothing to the men, for the men had come under the shadow of his roof.

The men answered, "Stand back!" They said that Lot had come to sojourn and now needed to be a judge, and threatened to deal worse with him than with the strangers. They pressed upon him and came near breaking the door. Then the angels pulled Lot into the house, shut the door, and smote the men with blindness.

There are several problems with Lot's rebuke in Genesis 19. First, he called them brethren, identifying himself as one of them, although he was not. Secondly, he only mildly pointed out their wickedness, saying, "I pray thee, my brethren, do not so wickedly." Thirdly, he offered them his virgin daughters, which is difficult to understand. Fourthly, he stated that these men, the angels, had come to him for protection and that he was obligated to protect them.

We do not understand the mentality of that time and of that part of the country. Even today, if I go to a Bedouin's tent, and he invites me in and I stay the night, he is duty-bound and honor-bound to protect my life because I am his guest. He is responsible for me, maintains that honor, and will defend my life.

He may not agree with you religiously or culturally. But if he invites you into his house, he will fight for you. He will die for you.

I understand when Lot said, "I'm going to protect these men. They came into my house and they're under my protection." But here's my question: Was he not also obligated to protect his daughters? They were not only in his house; they were his children and therefore

under fatherly protection as well. The point I'm trying to make is this: It seems, according to Scripture, that the men of Sodom affected Lot far more than he affected them.

One never elevates the wicked by condoning their wickedness or acting and doing as they do. Mild rebukes will never deter the wicked. Conformity and acquiescence to their lifestyles will never change the wicked; it only encourages them. When you compromise, the only individual affected by compromise is the individual who compromises. It never affects anyone else.

Hear what God says concerning Lot while he was in Sodom. In 2 Peter 2:6-8 we read, "And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them with an overthrow, making them an example unto those that after should live ungodly. And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: (For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds)."

How many men of Sodom did Lot influence? None. He even lost influence over his own family. When he went out and spake unto his sons in law, which married his daughters, and said, "Up, get you out of this place; for the Lord will destroy this city," he seemed as one that mocked unto his sons in law. They did not pay any attention to him.

The Bible tells us that Lot was vexed with the filthy conversation, the conduct, of the wicked. I'm going to tell you, if God had not specifically told me that Lot was a righteous man, I would have really doubted his righteousness. Anybody who could volunteer his four daughters to such wicked, reprobate men—yet the Bible says that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds.

The Consequences of Lot's Choices

He had to put up with that trash, and it affected him. We need to learn a very valuable and important lesson: If you sin with the wicked, do not be surprised if you suffer with the wicked. If you choose the wicked, do not be surprised when you are judged with the wicked. Lot was not a citizen of Sodom by birth, but by choice. He

chose him all that plain. He pitched his tent toward Sodom, and then he went into Sodom.

If you have lost your common sense and your biblical principles, do not think it strange if you lose your family and your possessions. I think that is why, if you go back to Genesis 14 and look at verse 12, we read this specifically: “And they took Lot and his goods, and departed.” If you lose your biblical principles and your common sense, you should not be surprised when you lose your family and your goods. Stop and think about this. The Bible says, “And they took Lot and his goods, and departed.”

These four kings, who had defeated five kings, had sacked all of these cities and undoubtedly many homes. Yet we are specifically told they took Lot and his goods. It was his goods that caused him to separate from Abraham. It was for the benefit of his goods that he chose the plain of Jordan. It was for the benefit of his goods that he pitched his tent toward Sodom. It was for his goods that he ended up in Sodom, and now he had lost all his goods to these four marauding kings. When we think we can protect ourselves and our goods by forsaking God, His principles, and His truth, we are deceiving ourselves.

We will discover that whatever we place ahead of God, we will ultimately lose, for God will brook no rivals. He said, “I am the Lord, and my glory will I not share with another, nor give my praise to graven images.” God is not going to let us hold on to those idols that we place above Him. It is absolute justice with God to deprive us of those enjoyments by which we have suffered ourselves to be deprived of our enjoyment of Him. Lot put his goods ahead of everything, and he lost his goods.

Thankfully, God was still merciful to Lot and allowed the news of his capture to reach Abram. One escaped to inform Abram of Lot’s capture. Abram was dwelling by the oaks of Mamre, the Bible says, near Hebron.

The Conflict: Abram's Military Action

Therefore, he was really not far from the scene of war. He was also in league with Mamre and his two brothers, Aner and Eshcol, evidently

for mutual defense. These three brothers were probably chieftains as well, heads over clans much like Abram was. Thus, these three men joined with Abram.

Secondly, consider not only the circumstances, but the conflict. Verse 14 says, "And when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his trained servants born in his own house, 318, and pursued them unto Dan." There was a great deal of bravery in the enterprise itself, considering the disadvantages Abram lay under.

What in the world could a bunch of herdsmen and shepherds do against five kings or four kings? They defeated the five. What could they do against four kings who were flush with victory, having just experienced the thrill of victory, shed much blood, taken great spoil, and now considered themselves a victorious army? They had all the loot; they had everything. They were the winners.

Yet Abram, with his 318 men, and Mamre, Aner, and Eshcol with their few men, were going to attack these four kings, who had been victorious over five kings. Evidently, those four kings had a rather large army—not only large enough to defeat the five kings and reconquer the rebellious territories, but also large enough to conquer additional territories and control all the booty, spoil, and prisoners they had taken. That's a pretty good-size army. So Abram armed his 318 trained servants, which were born in his house.

Consider how great Abram was. We were told that he was rich in cattle, gold, and silver. If Abram had 318 trained fighting men, they would have to be mature men, which meant they probably had families themselves. They were his servants. Moreover, if he took 318 men, think of all the other men he had to leave behind—not only to protect the families, but to care for and protect all his animals, silver, and gold. I would say that Abram probably had a household of well over a thousand individuals. That is a substantial household.

When you consider that Mamre, Eshcol, and Aner were chieftains as well, let me ask you a question. If I have a thousand fighting men and Henry has five, why would I enter into a league with Henry? What are five men? Five men can help me. But if I have a thousand fighting men and Henry has eight or nine hundred, twelve hundred, or a thousand fighting men, there is mutual benefit. If Abram had

318 trained servants, and the other three men had an equal or almost equal number, the fighting men with Abram would number approximately 1,000 to 1,400. Thus, around 1,200 men were fighting four kings.

There are several things we must consider about the conflict. First, Abram had 318 trained fighting men in his household. Obviously, he had a store of arms, probably the best available at that time. Abram was an extremely wealthy man, and I cannot envision him supplying his men with cheap or defective weaponry. His swords were probably the best swords; the bows and arrows were probably the best available, and so were the spears, shields, and habergeons.

When your life depends upon a weapon, you do not go cheap. You may say, "I can buy one of these Saturday night specials over here for 89 bucks." Go ahead. But I can buy a Glock for 600 bucks. I would rather spend 600 bucks and have something I can depend upon than spend 89 and have something tear up when my life depended upon it or fail to work correctly.

Abram obviously had a store of weapons. He had to supply these trained men with weaponry. Secondly, note that these men were trained. He prepared them, taught them, and made them ready for action. It is too late to train when the conflict is upon you, or tonight if you have to fight in the morning. Abram prepared his men in a time of peace for a time of war. The time to train is when you can train. These men were disciplined, trained, and ready. Training requires time as well as motivation; it is impossible to be trained overnight.

When the Scripture says that he brought out his trained servants, you could also interpret that word as "his catechized servants." They were not only catechized in the art of war, but also in biblical principles, truth, and righteousness. In Genesis 18, verse 19—in fact, let us read verse 17—we find what God said concerning Abram:

"And the Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I know him, this is what God said, for I know him, that he will

command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord to do justice and judgment, that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he has spoken of him."

So Abraham had catechized and trained his servants, not only in the art of war, but also in principles of truth and righteousness.

Thirdly, when the Bible tells us in Genesis chapter 14 and verse 14 that he brought out his 318 trained men, the cause for fighting at that time was just and righteous. Therefore, there was no hesitation on Abram's part. When truth and righteousness and biblical principle and lives are at stake, you do not hesitate. It is not time to dilly-dally around. Abram knew that if he dilly-dallied around, the kings who had Lot and all the other people would get farther and farther away from him.

The Combat

The Combat: Strategy and Victory

If it is right, we fight. If it is an emergency, we fight. Abram could not afford to wait while the wicked escaped. When he received the news, he acted, and he acted instantly. Likewise, you and I must understand that we must be prepared to act instantly upon that which is holy, right, godly, and biblical. There cannot, and there can never, be a delay in our lives when truth and righteousness are at stake.

Look in verses 15 and 16: "And he divided himself against them, he and his servants, by night, and smote them, and pursued them unto Hobah, which is on the left side of Damascus." "And he brought back all the goods, and also brought back again his brother Lot and his goods, and the women also, and the people."

Abram understood the art of war and the use of stratagems. He made use of strategy in attacking his enemies. He not only attacked them at night, when they were most vulnerable; he also divided his army. Remember, he had Mamre, Eshcol, and Aner. There were four kings, and therefore four different armies. Probably—though I do not know for sure—Abram took one army, Mamre took another, and Eshcol and Aner took the other two. They probably attacked

simultaneously. Attacking simultaneously on every hand would indicate to those being attacked that the attacking force was much greater than it appeared.

Moreover, in all probability, many of the enemy soldiers would have been asleep. Many would have been drunk, because they would have been celebrating their victory and all the spoil they had obtained. It would certainly be disconcerting, to say the least, to wake from a deep sleep or from being drunk and find that you were fighting for your life, being attacked on every hand, without knowing where the enemy was coming from or how many there were. You would not even know whether to fight or flee; and if you chose to flee, where would you flee? You would not know where they were. Abram certainly knew what he was doing.

He realized that these kings would be caught in a very slothful state. They would be rejoicing in their victories and celebrating all the booty that they had gotten. They would not be expecting pursuit because they had conquered all their enemies, and they certainly would not be expecting an attack at night. But Abram was totally and completely successful. The Bible says in verse 16 that he brought back all the goods, and also brought back again his brother Lot and his goods, and the women also and the people.

While it is absolutely undeniable that Abram and his men fought and fought well, it is also equally undeniable that they used strategy. Their fighting and their strategy, however, were blessed by the sovereign God of heaven and earth. It was God who gave them the victory. Verse 20 calls for Melchizedek. In fact, verses 18 through 20 say, “And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine; and he was the priest of the most high God. And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth: And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all.”

Applications for Believers

So it was God who gave Abram the victory. Abram had to fight. Abram had to use strategy. Abram had to plan. But it was God who gave the victory. If you expect victory without fighting, without planning, and without using the means that God has ordained, you

are deceiving yourself. Abram had to fight, plan, and use strategy. But it was his faith in, obedience to, and worship of the one true and living God, in whom he trusted, through which God gave him the victory.

Let me try to tie this together and make some applications. The first one should be absolutely astoundingly obvious: one does not need to be a military genius or military leader to be used of God in battle. Do you realize that one of the greatest warriors in the War of Northern Aggression never went to a military school in his entire life and knew nothing of military tactics? General Nathan Bedford Forrest. Yet he was one of the greatest military geniuses and warriors of that era. In fact, Rommel, the Desert Fox, took many of his tactics from Forrest. He studied Forrest, as have many military men.

The point is this: in order to be used of God, we must be willing and present our bodies a living sacrifice. The battle is not to the brave, the trained, the one who has the most weapons, or the greatest army. The battle belongs to the Lord.

Remember when little David went out to meet Goliath? Goliath had the sword, the spear, the shield, and all those greaves of brass to protect him. David had a sling. David said in 1 Samuel 17:47, "And all this assembly shall know that the Lord saveth not with sword or spear: for the battle is the Lord's, and he will give you into my hands." What did he say? "For the battle is the Lord's." The battle is not to the strong; the battle belongs to the Lord.

So the very first application is this: you do not have to be a military genius to be used of God. Abraham was a shepherd and a herdman. It is just that simple.

Secondly, biblical truth and the truth of Christianity tend to make men courageous, valiant, and strong. Please think about that. The Bible says in Proverbs 28:1, "The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion." I know; I see Henry smiling. I have been asked that question before: What is the meanest insect in the Bible? The flea—the wicked flea. The wicked flee when no man pursueth. But notice what he says: the righteous are as bold as a lion. It is the grace, mercy, and truth of God that places a desire to fight

within our breast. The true Christian is the true hero. Let me give you a quote: Hedley Vicars.

You will have to study who he was. He was a Christian warrior. Here is what he said: "I have often heard it said, the worse the man, the better the soldier. Facts contradict this untruth. Were I ever, as a leader of a forlorn hope"—that means one that is absolutely hopeless and helpless—"allowed to select my men, it would most certainly be from among the soldiers of Christ. For who should fight so fearlessly and bravely as those to whom death presents no after terrors?" And that is a fact.

Do you realize that, all down through history—not only Bible history, but what you and I would call world history—Christians have always made the best warriors and the best fighting men?

The third application is this: Those who venture in a good cause, with a good heart and a right motive, are under the special protection of God and have reason to hope for a good issue. Abram knew that when he went after Lot to rescue him, he was not going to make himself rich. He was not going for self-glory. He was going out of a generous, gracious heart, not only for his nephew, his family, and his goods, but for the others as well.

When God is in the fight, numbers do not matter. You remember Jonathan said to his armourbearer in 1 Samuel 14:6, "Come, and let us go over to the garrison of these uncircumcised. It may be that the LORD will work for us: for there is no restraint to the LORD to save by many or by few." Jonathan and his armourbearer took on the Philistine garrison and defeated them. God can save by many or by few; it does not matter. No armaments or amount of weaponry will make up for a lack of willingness to fight. Jonathan was willing to fight. He trusted the Lord, and they defeated the Philistines.

The fourth application is this: The world will one day see many unexpected and unexplained warriors who will fight wonderfully for Christ and His crown rights, just as Abram was an unexpected warrior. One of these days, God through His Spirit will awaken His men and His people, and they will once again stand and fight for truth, righteousness, and godliness. Abram, in this battle, foreshadowed Christian victory over the world. What did Abram do?

He defeated these four kings that had defeated five kings. They were the world power at that time. Abram, with just a few men, overcame them, overpowered them, and destroyed them. You know what the Bible says in 1 John 5 and verse 4? “And this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.” Just as Abram overcame those four mighty kings, so we as God’s people will overcome our enemies, the world, the flesh, and the devil, for we are more than victorious in Jesus Christ our Lord. In fact, Paul said it like this: “We are more than conquerors in Christ.” God has already given us the victory in Christ.

What He needs and wants are men and women who will stand for truth, righteousness, and holiness. We will turn out to be unexpected warriors, for the world would never believe that we can fight in faith for truth and righteousness.

Father, we bow to Thee this day. We thank You for Jesus Christ our Lord and for the truth Thou hast given us in Abram. Help us to see, Lord, that You are more than able to use any of us for Your honor and glory. Make us willing to stand for Thee, Thy Word, and Thy truth. We ask, Father, that You would help those on the prayer list. We pray especially for each one again and ask that You would undertake, Father. Give us grace that we may serve Thee acceptably, with reverence and godly fear. In Thy name we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 9

How Deep is Your Faith - Part 3 of 4 (Do Thorns Bother You?)

Do Thorns Bother You?

Introduction to the Thorny Ground Hearer

This is the third part of a four-part series on the parable of the sower. Today we come to the thorny ground hearer. The title of the message is, “Do Thorns Bother You?”

Our Lord said in Mark 4:7, “And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no fruit.” In verse 18, we see our Lord’s interpretation: “And these are they which are sown among thorns, such as hear the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches and the lust of other things entering in choke the word and it becometh unfruitful.”

We have previously talked about the two hearers, the wayside hearer and the stony ground hearer. The wayside hearer has another

name: he is known as the hard-hearted hearer. The stony ground hearer is known as the shallow-hearted hearer. We found that the wayside hearer is a negligent individual. He could care less about the word of God. The Bible says, “Satan cometh immediately, and stealeth away the word.” It was easily stolen from him.

The stony ground hearer was the man who had no root in himself. When trials, tribulations, and persecutions arose, immediately he was offended, and he forsook the faith. Today we come to what we consider the thorny ground hearer. The thorny ground hearer is sometimes referred to as a half-hearted hearer. You will see shortly why he is called a half-hearted hearer as well.

Remember that this entire parable concerns hearing the Word of God and responses to the Word of God. It could not only be called the parable of the sower; it could also be called the parable of the soils. Just as in our Lord’s day there were these four types of hearers, so in our day there are four types of hearers. Every time the Word of God is preached, you will respond in one of these four ways. Everyone responds in one of these four ways.

Thorns Are Distracting

You're either a negligent hearer, like the wayside hearer; a shallow-hearted hearer, as the stony ground hearer was; a half-hearted hearer, as the thorny ground hearer is; or a wholehearted hearer, as the good ground hearer is. Before considering the principles from the thorny ground hearer, notice a few things about thorns. First, according to the Word of God, thorns are distracting.

Characteristics of Thorns: Distracting, Disturbing, Deadly

Adam was cursed for his disobedience, and part of the curse was laid upon him in Genesis 3:17-18: "And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened to the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it, cursed is the ground for thy sake, and sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life, thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee, and thou shalt eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat

bread till thou return into the ground. For out of it was thou taken, for dust thou art, and in dust shalt thou return."

Notice particularly that thorns and thistles shall the ground bring forth unto him. Thus, thorns are distracting in a number of ways. First of all, they keep us busy from the work we need to do. Since the fall of man, thorns have been a nuisance and a distraction. Those who garden know that a garden needs no special attention or fertilizer to bring forth thorns and weeds. They simply grow and appear.

The next time you are weeding your garden, pulling out thorns, thistles, and weeds, and your back begins to ache, blame Adam. It was Adam's original sin that caused these thorns and thistles. And the next time you are weeding your garden or walking through the woods and get a thorn in your finger, remember that it will distract you—so much so that you will stop and pick it out.

In fact, this week Trip and I were burning off some woods, and I was spreading the fire with a rake. As I went through, two thorns from a briar got in my finger, and I had to stop and pick them out. They immediately hurt. Thorns are distractful. They will always stop you sometimes; as I will point out later, they will stop you permanently.

When I was a boy, to show you how distracting thorns really are and can be, I had a good friend, and we decided we were going rabbit hunting. But at that time, we did not use guns. In fact, we considered guns an unfair advantage in hunting these poor, helpless rabbits. So we would take a log chain about eighteen inches long, with a C-link where we could hold it in our hands, and run the rabbit down. We would outrun him and, as we went past him, hit him with the chain, either killing or stunning him so that we could get him.

We got tired of doing that. You are running all the time. By the way, it is possible to outrun a rabbit. I outran plenty of them when I was a boy. I could not do it today, I am sure, but I used to do it. We decided we needed a little help. Since the pasture was fairly level, with a little downhill grade, we decided to use the car.

We would alternate: I would drive while Jimmy sat on the fender, and Jimmy would drive while I sat on the fender. When we saw a

rabbit, we would go up to him, stop, and let the individual on the fender run and hit the rabbit. I happened to be on the fender. Jimmy was driving, and I saw a rabbit out of the corner of my eye and pointed that way. He quickly turned the car toward the rabbit and sped up a little too much. He was almost on the rabbit.

He realized what he had done and slammed on the brakes. Now, if you put two and two together, when I am sitting on the fender, the car is headed downhill, and the driver slams on the brakes, it tends to throw a body into motion—and very quickly. When I came off that fender, my feet were already two or three feet in front of my body.

Thorns Can Be Disturbing

I was running as hard and as fast as I could. My body was basically trying to catch up with my feet. I passed that poor rabbit like he was sitting still. I was running so fast that I could not swing the chain or do anything else; all I could do was try to maintain my balance. In front of me was a briar patch. I genuinely wanted to stop, but I could not.

I was not in control. I ran through that briar patch and was only able to stop on the other side. For the next hour, Jimmy and I took a great deal of pains in picking thorns out of my arms and legs. That so distracted me that I no longer wanted to hunt rabbits. In fact, as far as I remember, I have never been rabbit hunting since. I do not care anything about rabbit hunting, especially after picking those briars out for all that time.

The truth is that briars can be very distracting. Thorns can be very distracting. Secondly, I want you to understand that thorns can also be disturbing. Occasionally, someone will get a thorn in a finger or some other part of the body and somehow miss it. It does not hurt right away, but give it a day or two. Then the finger becomes very sore, red, and swollen, perhaps with a little white patch around the thorn. You wonder, How in the world did this happen? How did I miss something like this?

Now the thorn is infected and still has to be dug out, even though it is surrounded by infection. Thorns are disturbing physically. Let me point out that they are also disturbing economically, familially,

and spiritually. I want to show you how the Bible speaks about a thorn-filled life.

Hopefully, you do not want such a life. Thorns are distracting and thorns are disturbing as well. Proverbs 15:19 says, “The way of the slothful man is as a hedge of thorns: but the way of the righteous is made plain.” The slothful man is like he is living a life that is hedged up by thorns. The way of the slothful man is as a hedge of thorns, but the way of the righteous is made plain.

Proverbs 22:5 says, “Thorns and snares are in the way of the froward: he that doth keep his soul shall be far from them.” The froward man has a life that is full of thorns and snares. The Word of God shows that thorns and snares are in his way, while the person who keeps his soul shall be far from them.

Isaiah 32:13 says, “Upon the land of my people shall come up thorns and briars, yea, upon all the houses of joy in the joyous city.” God will curse this disobedient people with briars and thorns. The picture includes the land of the people, the houses of joy, and the joyous city; all are brought under judgment. There is a whole lot more in Scripture concerning thorns, but these passages plainly show the character of a thorn-filled life.

Jeremiah 12:13 says, “They have sown wheat, but they shall reap thorns: they have put themselves to pain, but they shall not profit; and they shall be ashamed of your revenues because of the fierce anger of the Lord.” They have sown wheat, but they are going to reap thorns. They have put themselves to pain, yet they shall not profit, and they shall be ashamed of their revenues because of the fierce anger of the Lord.

A life of thorns is certainly not one to be desired. I have no desire to live a life that is constantly troubled by disturbances and inundated with the fierce anger of God. Thorns, then, are distracting; they are disturbing; and thirdly, thorns are deadly. Some thorns produce deadly effects, that is for sure. If someone does not die just from the poison of a thorn, there is still such a thing as blood poisoning as well. Additionally, understand that when God judges a nation, a society, or a people, He often gives us the picture of that nation, city, or people being judged by thorns and briars.

In Isaiah 34:13, here is how God describes a people, or a nation, or a city upon which His curse rests: “And thorns shall come up in her palaces, nettles and brambles in the fortresses thereof. And that shall be habitation of dragons and a court for owls.” In other words, God will thoroughly judge the people and judge the city until it is uninhabited. Thorns and nettles and brambles will grow there, as well as its being a habitation of dragons and of owls.

In the judgment of God, He uses a picture of thorns and briars. In Hosea 2:6, God says, “Therefore behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall that she shall not find her paths. I’ll hedge up thy way with thorns.” Have you ever tried to walk through thorns? It is very distressing. God said, “I’m going to hedge up their way with thorns.”

The book of Hosea is against Israel because of her sins and because of her wickednesses. So God said, “I’m going to judge her; I’m going to hedge up her ways with thorns.” In Hosea 9:6, He says, “For lo, they are gone because of destruction. Egypt shall gather them up. Memphis shall bury them. The pleasant places for their silver. Nettles shall possess them. Thorns shall be in their tabernacles.” God said, “I’m going to send them into captivity, and thorns and nettles are going to grow all around them.”

In Nahum chapter 1 and verse 10, God says, “For while they be folded together as thorns, and while they are drunken as drunkards, they shall be devoured as stubble fully dry.” So it is important to remember that our Lord is teaching us in the parable of the sower about hearing the Word of God. Just as He showed the wayside hearer who did not hear scripturally and the stony ground hearer who did not hear scripturally, so likewise He shows us the thorny ground hearer who did not hear scripturally.

The Seed Fell Among Thorns: Pre-existing Sins

In Mark 4 and verse 7, the Bible says, “And some fell among thorns. And the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no fruit.” The very first thing that you need to understand about the thorny ground hearer is that the seed fell among thorns. Why is that important? It teaches us that the thorns were already there. They were deeply rooted and already had possession of that part of the soil. The

ground had not been prepared. The thorns had not been pulled up, dug up, chopped, or eradicated in any way whatsoever. No, they were already there and had already developed a root system. They were already alive and healthy when the seed fell among them.

Our Lord, in this thorny ground hearer, is drawing us a picture of someone who half-heartedly accepts the Word of God, yet has never truly dealt with the sins in his life. Here is a man who wants to be saved in his sins and not from his sins. He wants salvation because he wants to escape the judgment of God, but he does not want salvation to the point where he is willing to repent and turn from those things that God has condemned.

Remember Matthew 1 and verse 21. When the angel Gabriel told Mary she was going to have a child, he said, “and she shall bring forth a child and she shall call his name Jesus for He shall save His people from their sins.” Christ did not come to save us in our sins. He came to save us from our sins.

Salvation is not just from hell. It is not from damnation or condemnation. Salvation is from sins, which ultimately send you to judgment, condemnation, and hell. Our Lord came to save us from our sins. Being saved from hell or judgment is a byproduct of being saved from your sins. If you are not saved from your sins, you are not saved from damnation, condemnation, or the judgment of God.

When our Lord was talking to those Pharisees in John chapter 8, He said, “I said therefore unto you that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.” When our Lord emphasized that these people were lost, condemned, under the judgment and curse of God, and on their way to damnation, He did so by saying, “Ye shall die in your sins.” Dying in your sins is therefore equivalent to facing eternal judgment and the fierce anger of a holy, righteous God.

It is thorns that prevent the Word of God from taking root. The thorns already there have never been dealt with, and they overpower the seed that was sown. When they abound on every hand, it is impossible for the seed to take root.

Identifying the Thorns from Matthew, Mark, and Luke

I want to show you this from Matthew, Mark, and Luke. The parable of the sower occurs in each of these three books: Matthew 13, Mark 4, and Luke 8. I want to take the time and read these three passages and show you what the thorns are that our Lord is dealing with. So let us go in our Bibles to Matthew chapter 13. Then we will go to Mark 4 and then to Luke 8.

Our Lord is identifying what will cause you to be a half-hearted hearer. In Matthew 13, verse 22, He says, “He also that receives seed among the thorns, is he that heareth the word, and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful.”

Our Lord is interpreting this parable and telling us what the thorns really are. In Mark 4:18–19 He says, “And these are they which are sown among thorns, such as hear the word, and the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lust of other things entering in choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful.” Notice what happens: the word is heard, but these things enter in and choke it. Then, in Luke 8:14, our Lord says, “And they which fell among thorns are they which when they have heard go forth and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life and bring no fruit to perfection.” Our Lord lists these thorns: the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, the lust for other things, and the pleasures of this life.

The Thorn of the Cares of This World

It is these four thorns that will hinder you from receiving the Word of God in a beneficial manner. Let us take them one at a time. Our Lord gives us the first thorn, and that is the cares of this world. Without answering out loud, think in your mind: What are the cares of this world? Before considering some of them, let us explain the words cares and world.

The word “cares” is the Greek word merimna, which is literally translated as care or anxiety. It means to be troubled with cares, to seek to promote one's interests, and to be anxious. Secondly,

consider the word “world.” There are at least two different words in the Greek New Testament for “world.” Cosmos is the most frequent one, but aion is pretty frequent as well. Here the word is aion, and it is translated in our Bibles as “world” or “age.” It refers more specifically to a specific age or a period of time.

When our Lord speaks about the cares of this age, or the cares of this period of time, He is speaking about the present. There is not a person in this room who is carefully anxious about the problems and cares of a thousand years ago. To be honest, I am not anxious about the cares of a thousand years in the future. That which bothers us is the cares in this present life.

In other words, man by nature is concerned with the here and now, or, as some would say, the dirty now and now. Let me give you three passages from the Bible that explain the cares of this world, or the cares of this age. You will find that some of these cares are what you and I would call innocent things. Let us begin by looking in our Bibles to Matthew chapter 6.

In each of these passages, it is the same essential Greek word every time. In Matthew chapter 6, whenever you see the word thought, place in that word anxious cares, because it is exactly the same Greek word. Beginning with verse 24, our Lord says, “No man can serve two masters. For either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say unto you, take no thought for your life.” There is the word thought: take no anxious care for your life, what you shall eat, or what you shall drink, nor yet for your body, what you shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?

“Behold the fowls of the air, for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns. Yet your heavenly Father feedeth them, are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought, or by taking anxious care, can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought, or anxious care, for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil, not neither do they spin. And yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all of his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which as today is and tomorrow is cast in the oven, shall he not

much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, or anxious care, saying, What shall we eat?"

"Or what shall we drink? Or wherewithal shall we be clothed? For all of these things do the Gentiles seek after. Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all of these things." Notice that He talked about taking thought over food, raiment, and things that you and I need all of the time. You and I must plan and prepare to the best of our ability. But, on the other hand, He says that we are not to be overly anxious about these things, overly concerned, or worked up.

Eating and clothing are not to be the primary focus of your life. God knows we have to eat. You know you have to eat, and I know I have to eat. But what our Lord is saying is very simple: we are not to be overly concerned with eating all the time. Eating is not to control our lives, and what we wear is not to control our lives. God knows that we have need of these things.

Everybody knows the story of Mary and Martha. Our Lord was there, and Martha was cumbered about with much serving. She came to Him and said, "Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me." And Jesus answered and said unto her, "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things. But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her."

What was Mary doing? She was sitting at the feet of Jesus Christ, worshiping Him, listening to Him, and learning from Him. What was Martha doing? She was busy cooking and getting everything ready for everybody to eat. She was overly burdened, overly cumbered about with much care: "I've got to get this on. I've got to have it here at this particular time, and it's got to be this way." So Martha said, "Lord, make her help me." And what did our Lord say? No. You are too concerned about this.

We need to fellowship with each other, and we need to exercise biblical hospitality. If you come to our house and it is not perfect, guess what? We do not have a perfect house. We live in it, and it gets dirty from time to time. If you come to visit me and my house is dirty, I am not going to say, "I can't have company right now until

my wife cleans up the house." No. You come on in; you will just have to understand that Henry has been there, and the grandkids have been there.

Doggies have scattered their toys around the yard. Well, that's the way it is. And so our Lord is saying this to Martha. Everything does not have to be perfect, Martha. The one thing is needful. And Mary's chosen that good part, and it's not going to be taken away from her.

Turn to Philippians chapter 4. If anybody in this room has a perfect house, raise your hand. Nobody. I didn't think so. Look in Philippians chapter 4 and verse 6. Look what the Apostle Paul says. "Be careful for nothing." That is, do not be anxiously careful for anything. "But in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God."

So let me summarize this. Be careful for nothing. Be prayerful in everything. And be thankful for anything. Be careful for nothing. Be prayerful about everything. And be thankful for anything. So he admonishes us that we're not to be carefully anxious for anything. We are to pray and praise and petition and trust our Lord for anything and everything.

Now, here is the point concerning the thorn of the cares of this age. Our Lord is forbidding us to place an inordinate amount of anxiety and worry over things that really do not matter or should not trouble us to that degree. None of us are going to starve if we do not get what we think is a suitable amount of food for today. In fact, some of us could do without for several days and probably be happy.

God says He knows that we must eat. He knows that we must wear clothes. He knows that we have bills. He knows all of this. Yet there are so many people so intent on making a living that they never live. They are consumed with the cares of this age. So many are so engrossed in business that they believe their business is the most important thing in the world. It requires all their attention. They have no time for the Bible, preaching, church, prayer, or anything else. The cares of this world engulf them until that is all they are about; they are absolutely consumed with it.

Let me give you a good illustration. Look back in your Bibles to Luke chapter 14. We are still talking about the cares of this life. Here

is an illustration of how these cares can truly overcome us. Let us begin reading with verse 16: “Then said he unto them, a certain man made a great supper and bade many.” The supper is already fixed. “And he sent his servant at supper time to them that were bidden to say to them that were bidden, come for all things are now ready.” Watch what happens.

“And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I bought a piece of ground and must needs to go and see it. I pray thee have me excused. Another said, I've bought five yoke of oxen and I go to prove them. I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I married a wife and therefore I cannot come.” So the third one only had a legitimate excuse.

Who is going to buy a piece of ground without looking at it first? Who is going to buy five yoke of oxen without proving them, without knowing whether or not they are trained? If you want to buy some property without ever seeing it, I could sell you some. But when you saw it, you would want your money back. Nobody is going to do it.

Here is the whole thing: “I do not have time. I do not have time for Christ. I do not have time for preaching. I do not have time to go to church. I do not have time to read my Bible.” I am consumed with this property that I have bought. I am consumed with these oxen. I am consumed with my marriage and my wife. I do not have time for all of this.

That is the thorn of the cares of this life. It is an over-anxiousness about things that are lawful. Is it unlawful to buy property? No. Is it unlawful to have oxen? No. Is it unlawful to be married? No. But when those things consume your life to the point that you neglect the things of God, it is a thorn. It is the cares of this life.

The Thorn of the Deceitfulness of Riches

The second thorn that our Lord mentions is the thorn of the deceitfulness of riches. There are plenty of people who think that if they could simply be rich, everything would be well. But that is certainly not true. Riches bring their own problems. Once you have them, you have to struggle to keep them. Usually, the more you have, the more you want. Have you ever noticed that?

I told you before about the rich farmer. He said he did not want to own the world; he just wanted to own all the property next to his property. Pretty soon, he would own everything. Many have observed that those who are rich are never satisfied. They always want more.

Their lives are consumed with making money and increasing their wealth. Nothing comes between them and their wealth, not even salvation. Some wealthy men have told me, “My hobby is making money. I love to make money.” That is exactly what they do. Many are like the rich young ruler in the Bible, who preferred his wealth over salvation. There are many who prefer the comforts of this life to the comfort of the next life.

The Puritans used to have a saying: God oftentimes curses His enemies with riches. And that is true, because they end up trusting in their riches instead of Christ. Turn in your Bibles to 1 Timothy chapter 6. Let me show you what our Lord is talking about concerning this thorn of the deceitfulness of riches. Look first at verse 9: “But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.” Being wealthy has its own problems.

Now, in that light, go back to verse 7: “For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment, let us be therewith content.” Do you realize that everything we amass in this life, when we die, we leave it? It is like the rich man who took all his money and hid it in the attic. He told his wife that when he died, he was going to take it with him; he was going to get it on the way up. When he died, she went up, and the money was still there. She said, “I knew he should have hid it in the basement.”

The truth of the matter is, it does not matter where he puts it; it is still going to be there, because you take absolutely nothing with you.

Now look at 1 Timothy chapter 6, verses 17 through 19: “Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy, that they do good, and that they may be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate, laying up in

store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life." Notice what God says: charge them that are rich in this life. I know that there are some rich Christians. But the Bible tells us that God gives riches for the use and benefit of His kingdom and His people. He does not give riches for selfish ends and designs. It has been accurately said that when a Christian gets rich, God either gains a fortune or loses a man.

And that is the truth. God warns us not only about the cares of this life, but also about the deceitfulness of riches. I never will forget a fellow I knew a long time ago. His goal back then—we are talking about the 60s—was to be a millionaire. He wanted to be a millionaire so he could serve the Lord, go everywhere, and do whatever the Lord wanted him to do. I told him, "You need to serve the Lord now. If He makes you a millionaire, wonderful. If He does not, that is wonderful too. Just serve Him." There is the deceitfulness of riches.

The Thorns of Lust for Other Things and Pleasures of This Life

The third thorn that He mentions is the lust for other things. The word lust is very informative. It literally means to set your affection or your desire upon something. The Greek word is epithumia. Thumia means a passion or burning desire, and epi is a preposition meaning upon. You know what your lust is? It is whatever you set your desire or your heart upon. When the Bible talks about the lust for other things, it is not necessarily referring to sexual sins, though it could include that. It also refers to promotion, pride, praise, recognition, hobbies, work, or a host of other things.

And when He talks about the lust of other things, let me tell you, I love this word. The Greek word for other things is loipoi, and it means the rest, residue, and remainder. Our Lord talked about the cares of this life and the deceitfulness of riches. Now He talks about the lust for whatever is left—whatever remains, whatever the residue is after you deal with the cares of this life and the deceitfulness of riches. I have known people consumed by sports, hunting, and fishing.

I love to hunt and fish, but they are not my burning passion. During hunting season, when I have so many meetings and

preaching opportunities, I have often said that God is testing me as to whether I want to preach or hunt. So I err on the side of preaching. Your hobby can be the lust of other things. Some people are so sports-oriented that they can tell you every baseball player's batting average, every football player's yards gained and touchdowns made, and all this kind of stuff, yet they cannot quote a verse of Scripture because their life is consumed with that.

There is a fourth thorn, and our Lord says it is the pleasures of this life. The pleasures of this life attract a lot of people. You remember what the Apostle Paul wrote about Demas? He said, "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present evil world." It is the pleasures of this life. Incidentally, the Greek word for pleasures here is hedone. It is where we get our English word hedonist or hedonistic. A hedonist is someone who lives for pleasure. It is all he wants: the maximum amount of pleasure with the least amount of pain. If you want to think about a hedonist, think about Hugh Hefner and the Playboy clan. They would be classified as hedonists, as would many other people who simply live for a good time and for pleasure.

They are mainly concerned about themselves. Our Lord is talking about the pleasures of this life. Zoe in the Greek talks about the spiritual life, but the word life here is bios, which means our life. We use bios in biology, the study of life, and in biography, the writing of life. Our Lord is talking about the pleasures of this life—anything that pleases us, which can be gotten out of control. Thorns are distractful. They are deceitful, disturbing, and deadly.

The Thorny Ground Hearer is Unsaved

There is not a person in this room who would take a handful of good seed, regardless of what kind it is, and throw it into a briar patch or a bunch of brambles, expecting to reap a good harvest. It is impossible. Those briars and brambles are going to choke that word, or choke that seed, to the point that it will not produce anything. It is there, and it is gone. It is worthless. Our Lord is talking about someone who hears the Word of God and has all these thorns in his life: the cares of this age, the deceitfulness of riches, the lust for

other things, and the pleasures of this life. When he hears the Word, he half-heartedly receives it.

Because who wants to go to hell? Who wants to face God in judgment? But he never really deals with his sins. There is no sorrowing, no repentance, and no turning. The thorny ground hearer is someone who hopes to make it into heaven while living a life of sin and rebellion. He prefers his own kingdom to God's kingdom. He wants to live life the way he wants to live it and somehow expects God to receive him into His kingdom when he dies.

Before we come to the applications, consider one other passage. Turn in your Bibles to Jeremiah, chapter four and verse three, and see what God says. This is excellent counsel for thorny-ground hearers: “For thus saith the Lord to the men of Judah and Jerusalem, Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns.” It does you no one bit of good to sow among thorns. Sow not among thorns. The thorns have to be dealt with. It is important to note what our Lord points out concerning the four types of hearers in Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

Our Lord tells us that the wayside hearer, or the hard-hearted hearer, is lost because Satan cometh immediately and stealeth the word, lest he believe. When you come to the stony-ground hearer, our Lord says, “and these are they likewise.” So the stony-ground hearer is equally lost as the wayside hearer. When you come to the thorny-ground hearer, the Bible says he brings forth no fruit. So the thorny-ground hearer is unsaved as well. In fact, the next message you are going to hear concerns the good-ground hearer, and he is the only one that brought forth fruit. So three out of four are lost.

If you come to the Word of God with a hard heart, you will never be benefited by it. If you come with a shallow heart, you will never be benefited by it. If you come with a half heart, you will never be benefited by it. The only way that you can ever benefit from the Word of God is with a whole heart.

Applications: Dealing with Sin, Neglect, and Repentance

Let me make a couple of applications. First, according to the Word of God, sins must be dealt with. Where there is no genuine and honest dealing with sin, there is no salvation. Faith and repentance are the two sides of one coin. He that truly exercises faith at the same time repents, and he that truly repents at the same time exercises faith. You cannot have one without the other; they go together. Without true, genuine repentance—without dealing with these thorns—the thorns will overpower the Word to the point that it will not benefit the one who hears it.

Second, it does not necessarily have to be great sins that destroy the soul. When we think about sins, we think about drunkards, murderers, and whoremongers. But you do not have to be a drunkard, whoremonger, or murderer. Neglect will destroy you just as easily as those atrocious sins. All you have to do is neglect Christ, the Bible, prayer, or the preaching of the Word, and you will be destroyed as easily as the drunkard, whoremonger, and murderer. It is the man who neglects his soul who is condemned. It does not matter whether you are moral or immoral; you are still condemned. You remember the passage in the Song of Solomon where the Bible says, “Little foxes spoil the vines.” It does not have to be a big fox, just a little fox. Little sins will destroy your soul as easily and as quickly as great sins. One little thorn can do a lot of damage; many thorns will do the damage more quickly.

Third, we must actually turn from our sins, not coddle them and pretend they are not there. I have counseled many people who liked to pretend that they did not have any sins, or at least that one sin controlling them was not there. It was there; it was obvious. But they pretended it was not there. The Apostle Paul tells why God sent him in Acts 26:18.

Paul wrote, “to open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light, from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith that is in me.” Why did God send Paul? To turn them from darkness to light, from the power of Satan unto God. In other words, we must be turned. In 1 Thessalonians, chapter 1, Paul tells the

Thessalonians how they turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God. He also said, in Acts chapter 26 and verse 20, that he showed first to those at Damascus and at Jerusalem, throughout the coast of Judea, and to the Gentiles "that they should repent and turn to God and do works meet for repentance." The word meet literally means to do works evidencing, demonstrating, and manifesting repentance.

If a man truly and genuinely repents, there will be evidence of that repentance in his life. There will be fruit. Where there is no repentance, there is no fruit. We cannot coddle our sins or pretend that they are not there. They are, and they must be honestly and genuinely dealt with. You do not want to be a wayside hearer, a stony ground hearer, or a thorny ground hearer. You should want to be a good ground hearer, because according to the Word of God, that is the only one who is genuinely converted and produces fruit.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we ask for your grace, mercy, goodness, and kindness. Help us to hear the word scripturally and biblically. Help us to have our hearts prepared, that we may receive the full benefit of thy word and thy truth. May we not be the wayside hearer, the stony ground hearer, or the thorny ground hearer; make us wholehearted hearers, Lord, that we may honor Thee, glorify Thee, and bring forth fruit for Thy honor and Thy glory. Give us grace to serve Thee acceptably with reverence and godly fear. In Thy name we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 10

Praising The Wicked

Introduction and Text

Proverbs 28:4 says, “They that forsake the law praise the wicked, but such as keep the law contend with them.”

Last week I dealt with a message entitled “Reality, Faith, and Obedience.” I pointed out that reality is not what man thinks, wants, or determines. Reality is what God says and what God states. I also pointed out the use of the English word utopia. It comes from the Greek and is made up of two Greek words: topos, meaning place, and u, meaning no, which is negative. Therefore, there is no such thing as a communist, Marxist, or socialist utopia, because it is all a figment of the imagination. It is in somebody’s mind; it is not reality.

I could have considered this message a continuation of that one. But I titled it “Praising the Wicked,” hoping that perhaps it would catch someone’s eye when it appeared on the Internet and they would want to hear what it means to praise the wicked. Seemingly, everywhere you look, the wicked are being praised. Certainly, it is unseemly to praise them. It is a strange and perverse condition when

those who reject God's law are honored rather than confronted by those who keep it.

The Wicked Are Praised Everywhere

Who in his right mind would want to glorify murder, rape, kidnapping, and theft? Well, except for Hollywood, obviously. No one else would certainly want to do that. It is absolutely foolish to try to honor dishonorable men. And yet many wicked people are publicly praised. In fact, many wicked people are extremely wealthy. Think of George Soros, the Kennedys, the Clintons, or any of these old family dynasties. They are not only extremely wealthy; many of them hold high offices and possess a great deal of power.

These individuals are usually constantly held up as virtuous and generous, when in reality what they are doing is destroying the lives of other individuals, families, societies, and even our own nation. The truth is that God forbids us to put our hand with the wicked, and He forbids us to cooperate with them in any way whatsoever. In Exodus 23:1–2, God says very plainly, "Thou shalt not raise a false report."

God Forbids Cooperation with the Wicked

Certainly, we are not to be people who begin rumors, lies, scandals, and things like that. God says, "Thou shalt not raise a false report." Then He says, "Put not thine hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness." We are not to cooperate with them to bring forth fraud or perjure ourselves. That is wicked and wrong.

Then verse 2 says, "Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil." It does not matter if the largest majority is doing that which is wicked and wrong; God says we are not to follow a multitude to do evil. He continues, "Neither shalt thou speak in a cause to decline after many to wrest judgment." We are not to do anything that would take away from His judgment and justice. In fact, God not only tells us not to cooperate with the wicked; He tells us to stand against them.

In Psalm 94:16 He asks, "Who will rise up for me against the workers of iniquity, who will stand up for me against the evildoers?"

God is looking for men and women who will rise up and stand against the wicked. In Amos 5:15 He says, "Hate the evil and love the good and establish judgment in the gate."

God's Anger and Judgment on the Wicked

Now look in Psalm 7, because I could multiply passages. Let me show you one reason God tells us not to cooperate with the wicked, help them, praise them, or commend them: God is going to destroy them. Psalm 7:11 says, "God judges the righteous and God is angry with the wicked every day." Sinners may have many feast days, but they never, ever have a safe day. There is not a day in which God's anger is not burning hot against the wicked.

Then he says, "If he that is the wicked turn not, he, God, will whet his sword. He, God, hath bent his bow and made it ready. He, God, hath also prepared for him the instruments of death. He, that is God, ordaineth his arrows against the persecutors." He is talking about the wicked: "Behold, the wicked travaileth with iniquity, hath conceived mischief, and brought forth falsehood."

"He, the wicked, made a pit, and digged it, and is fallen into the ditch which he made. His mischief, that is his sin, his wickedness, shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing shall come down upon his own pate." God is going to make them reap what they have sown. Ultimately, it is all going to come back upon the head of the wicked.

How Can a Christian Praise the Wicked?

In light of these Scriptures, and there could be a multitude of Scriptures multiplied in the same vein, we have to ask this question: How could a Christian praise the wicked? I am sure that probably there is no real Christian who would publicly praise and honor someone who is a truly wicked and vile individual. The Bible tells us in Habakkuk chapter 1 and verse 13, talking about God, "Thou canst not look upon iniquity and thou dost not see it." Certainly God sees it to judge it, but Habakkuk is saying that God does not look upon it condoningly or approvingly. If God does not condone and approve it, very obviously neither can we.

I am also sure that there are multitudes of professing Christians who ignorantly praise the wicked. They have no idea exactly what they are doing. There are many who profess to be saved who are not saved. There is a vast difference between profession and possession, and between being in the church and being in Jesus Christ. Multitudes are in a church who are not Christians and have not been converted. Therefore, many in the church who are unconverted will praise the wicked because they are wicked themselves and see absolutely nothing wrong with it.

You can look at some of the mainline denominations today and find that many have taken public stands for abortion, for sodomy, and for all these other things. They have swallowed the line of Marxism, communism, socialism, or the social gospel hook, line, and sinker. Multitudes of illustrations could be given in that area, but those churches and people are not really what I want to deal with.

What I want to deal with is this: How could a Christian praise the wicked? How could anyone with what you and I would say is one eye and half sense want to do something like that? The truth is that God has graciously given us principles to govern, guide, and direct our lives, and we are to be governed and controlled by those principles. But here is the problem.

Living by Principle vs. Feeling

Most professing Christians, and most real Christians, are not guided by principle. They are guided by their feelings, emotions, situations, and circumstances. You have to remember this: principles do not die, principles do not have funerals, and principles do not change. Yet your emotions change, your feelings change, and your situations change. Pat could testify that feelings change. He can feel good one day and hurt the next, and you and I could do exactly the same. All we have to do is fall as well.

The truth of the matter is this: we cannot live by our feelings. I hear so many people say, “I didn’t feel like going to church,” or, “I didn’t feel like praying,” or, “I didn’t feel like studying my Bible.” Or they mention the situation or circumstances that prevented them. Really? I want you to understand something. Basically, there are two lifestyles. One is guided, directed, and controlled by biblical

principle. The other is guided, controlled, and directed by feelings, emotions, situations, and circumstances.

Each of these lifestyles has its own particular fruits and manifests itself in different ways. In this day and age, most churches, regardless of whether they claim to be Bible-believing churches, still have most people living by their feelings and emotions. I have seen Christians, real Christians, come up and say something absolutely stupid: "Well, I don't care what the truth is; I know how I feel." That is exactly how they live.

I have also heard the complaint that the reason someone is this way is because the Bible does not cover every situation and circumstance. It is true that you cannot find, on a page in the Bible, every possible scenario you could encounter in life. If you did, you could not carry it. But God has given us principles, which we are to deduce, apply, and follow, and those principles will cover every situation and circumstance. God has given us a concise carry. He has also given us a concealed carry, because you can take one so small and put it in your pocket. No one even knows it is there, yet you can still take it out and live by the principles there.

Psalm 111:2 says, "The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein." God has some great works. It is not just His providence, His creation, and His redemption; the works of the Lord are great. Notice that those works, those truths, those principles, and those things are sought out by all who have pleasure in them. If someone does not have pleasure in truth and righteousness, he is not going to seek them out.

Proverbs 25:2 says, "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing, but the honor of kings is to search out a matter." It is the glory of God to conceal a thing, but it is the honor of kings to search out a matter. What does Scripture tell us? Our God, our Lord Jesus Christ, has made us kings and priests to the Father. If it is the glory of God to conceal a thing and the honor of kings to search out a matter, then He is telling us something very simple: it is our duty, our responsibility, our obligation, as well as our privilege, to search out the principles in the Word of God and learn to apply them to our lives.

Look at Proverbs 28:4. Before we examine this verse in detail, notice some things lying plainly on its surface. It says, “They that forsake the law praise the wicked, but such as keep the law contend with them.” What kind of principles can we draw just from this verse?

Principles from Proverbs 28:4

First and most obviously is the principle of sowing and reaping. You are familiar with that. When it says, “They that forsake the law praise the wicked,” in other words, you are sowing something and reaping something. When it says, “But such as keep the law, contend with them,” again, you are sowing something and reaping something. That is why Galatians 6:7–8 says, “Be not deceived, God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. He that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption, and he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.” Here, then, is the principle of sowing and reaping.

All these principles are intertwined; that is, they work together. The second principle I will point out in verse 4 is the principle of unintended consequences: “They that forsake the law praise the wicked.” What does this principle mean? A man who says he is a Christian and a believer may not intend to praise the wicked. He may intend only to satisfy the lust of his flesh or the pride of life, but the result is that he ends up praising the wicked. I can give a number of illustrations of unintended consequences. For instance, here is a man who wants to get drunk. That is his intention. He purposefully, deliberately, and premeditates, “I’m going to get drunk. That’s all I want to do. I don’t want to hurt anybody. I just want to be drunk.” He gets drunk, then starts driving. There is a head-on collision, and he kills a man, his wife, and two of their children.

Did he intend to kill those people? No. But he is responsible because he was responsible not to get drunk. Here is what we call unintended consequences. He did not necessarily sit down and say, "I'm going to drive drunk and murder some people today." It happened. In the same way, a man could go in with the intent of robbing a convenience store or a bank. All he wants to do is get the money, that is it. But when things go south and there is a

confrontation, he ends up shooting and murdering the clerk. Once again, you have unintended consequences. You can see in this passage that there are these unintended consequences.

Romans 14:7 shows this very clearly: "For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself." Everything that we do affects someone else. Whatever the children do ultimately affects the parents, and whatever the parents do ultimately affects the children. What the husband does affects the wife, and what the wife does affects the husband. None of us liveth to himself. None of us dieth to himself. We may intend a certain thing, but the outcome is quite different. Here, then, is the principle of unintended consequences.

The third principle is that of contending for the faith. He says in verse 4, "But such as keep the law, contend with them." Jude wrote in verse 3, "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints." There is, then, a principle of contending for the faith.

The fourth principle clearly seen in verse 4 is the principle of unfaithfulness with its attendant results, and the principle of faithfulness with its attendant results. Proverbs 28:4 tells us that there are two principles running side by side. There is a principle of unfaithfulness.

This would include reaping what you have sown and suffering unintended consequences. There is also the principle of faithfulness, which includes reaping what you have sown and its attendant consequences. Both principles are taught in the Bible.

If we look at the principle of unfaithfulness and its circumstances, we do not have to look farther than Adam, the very first man in the Bible. Romans 5:12 says, "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." When Paul says, "for all have sinned," it is an aorist passive: it happened once and for all; it is over and done with. When did all sin at one time? The answer is in Adam when he fell, because Adam was our federal head and representative. Read 1 Corinthians 15 and find that out.

Examples of Faithfulness and Unfaithfulness

Do you think for one instant that Adam arose that morning and said, "Wow, this is the day that I'm going to sin against God and plunge my entire posterity into sin and death"? Probably not. He may not have intended to do that, or even thought about its consequences, but that is exactly what happened. You can see how these principles mesh together.

I have known only one man, and he was not a Christian, who would actually sit down and think things through. Probably none of us say, "Wait a minute. Before I act, let me think this through. What are the possible scenarios? What could possibly go wrong? What could happen? What would be the outcome? What would be the fruit?" We do not do that; we simply act and do what we want.

What did Paul say concerning Demas in 2 Timothy 4:10? "For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica." Did Demas intend to apostatize or leave the Christian faith? Probably not. Perhaps he thought, "This is hard work. I'm tired of this and of denying myself. I think I'll go to Thessalonica, rest awhile, and have a little fun and relaxation." He probably did not intend to apostatize, yet he did. All these principles mesh and run together.

Let us consider the principle of faithfulness for a moment and try to develop that thought. We could look at Abraham, Noah, Moses, and a host of others, but let us consider Abraham and Moses. Turn to Genesis chapter 18, and then to James chapter 2. We will come to James second. In Genesis 18, beginning with verse 17, we find what God says concerning Abraham. I tell you, this is absolutely phenomenal.

God had come down to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, and He knew Lot was there. And the Lord said, “Shall I hide from Abraham the thing which I do; seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?” Now watch what God said: “For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord to do justice and judgment, that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he has spoken of him.”

Notice what God said: “I know him.” God knew Abraham would teach his children and his household after him. He knew Abraham would teach them to obey, to keep His word, and to establish justice and judgment. “I know him.” I wonder if God could look upon any of us and say, “I know him. I know he’s going to do what’s right. I know he’s going to be obedient. I know he’s going to be holy. I know he’s going to be godly.” That is what He said about Abraham. Abraham was faithful.

James chapter 2, verse 23, says, “And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.” That’s amazing. Abraham’s obedience and Abraham’s love won for him the title “the Friend of God.” I wonder if that could be said of any of us—that we are the friend of God.

Now, one last illustration. Turn right back to Hebrews chapter 3, just a few pages back from James. Let us begin reading verses 1 through 5. Here is, in one sense of the word, a comparison between Jesus Christ and Moses, and yet there is no comparison. But there is a comparison in this sense of the word: Moses was faithful.

Hebrews 3:1 says, “Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus; who was faithful to him that appointed him, as also Moses was faithful in all his house. For this man was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he who hath builded the house hath more honour than the house. For every house is builded by some man; but he that built all things is God. And Moses verily was faithful in all his house, as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after.” We do not have to look any further than Abraham and Moses for examples of faithfulness, how they reaped what they sowed, and how even the unintended consequences in their lives were blessed and good.

They did not think of all the things that could happen, and yet it simply worked out. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 4:2, “Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.” Each one of us is a steward of whatever God has given us, and God has said that it is required that we be found faithful.

Forsaking the Law Praises the Wicked

Now I want to show you two things in Proverbs 28:4. First, consider forsaking the law of God and its consequences: "They that forsake the law praise the wicked." There is a great deal that could be said on this point; indeed, a series of sermons could be developed from it. But consider this truth on a much broader scale. Forget for the moment the statement, "They that forsake the law praise the wicked." We will deal with that, but first see the broader truth: when we forsake the law of God, we forsake God. You cannot separate God and His law. A king rules by his law; his law is an expression of his will for his people.

In 1 Samuel chapter 8, the Israelites demanded a king that they might be like all the other nations. The Bible says in verse 6, "But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto the Lord." Then notice the Lord's response: "And the Lord said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them."

"According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, wherewith they have forsaken me, and served other gods, so do they also unto thee." The Lord again says, "Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: here it is, for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me." That was a personal rejection of God.

Notice the next phrase: "that I should not reign over them." How did God reign over them? By and through His law. What they wanted was a man to be their king, and that king would establish his own law. Therefore, the only way to understand 1 Samuel chapter 8 is to see it as a transition from one law structure to another. The only way to understand what is happening in this country is to see it as a transition from one law structure to another. We used to be based upon biblical law; now we are based upon humanistic law. In 1 Samuel chapter 12, verse 12, Samuel said, "And when ye saw that Nahash the king of the children of Ammon came against you, ye said unto me, Nay; but a king shall reign over us: when the Lord your God was your king." Actually, they traded God for a man.

When you despise God's law, you are actually despising God. God and His law are inseparable.

Consider 2 Samuel 12. David had committed adultery with Bathsheba and had Uriah the Hittite, her husband, killed with the sword of the children of Ammon. God asked David, “Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in his sight?” Thus, when we sin, it is a despising of God's law.

God continued: “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.” Then He declared: “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.” The judgment shows that the offense against the commandment is an offense against the Lord Himself.

Obviously, you cannot despise God's law without despising God. Therefore, God and His law are inseparable.

Sin never comes by itself. Sin produces sin, and sin always has a multitude in its harvest. Consider what David did when he saw Bathsheba. He coveted her. Perhaps that was all he intended at first, but it led him to inquire of her. When she came in, since he was the king, he took her. Perhaps that was all he intended until he discovered that she was with child, which then led to the murder of Uriah.

The point is that we must see both sowing and reaping and unintended consequences. We must also see whether we are living by principle or by feelings. All these things merge together. When we sin, we dethrone God and enthrone ourselves. In essence, we are saying, “I don’t care what God said. I want this, and I am going to do this. I don’t care what God’s law is; I am going to make my own law and do it right now for myself.”

When we look back at Proverbs 28:4, it says, “They that forsake the law praise the wicked.” That is one consequence of forsaking the law, forsaking God, and despising God. There are other consequences. Sin does not travel alone.

Look at Luke 11. Here is the illustration our Lord gave: a man attempts to reform himself. There is no salvation; he is simply going

to reform himself. Beginning with verse 24, our Lord says, “When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he saith, I will return unto my house whence I came out. And when he cometh, he findeth it swept and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh to him seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and they enter in, and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first.”

Sin produces sin. Therefore, the result of forsaking the law of God mentioned in Proverbs 28:4 is praising the wicked.

Now, I want you to stop with me, and I'm just showing you that this is just one of those consequences. Whether it's intended or not, it's one of the consequences. But in Proverbs 28 and verse 4, he says, "They that forsake the law praise the wicked." Let me tell you what the word praise means. It literally means to make praiseworthy, to boast, to commend, and to be worthy of praise. Now I want you to think with me just for a moment. What does God mean and what are the implications when He says, "They that forsake the law praise the wicked"? So praising the wicked is one of the natural consequences of forsaking God's law. You have to remember this, that the law of God curses and condemns the wicked.

We saw that at the beginning of this message. The law of God curses and condemns the wicked. When we forsake God's law we side with the wicked and we say, no, the wicked are not wrong, God is wrong. These are wonderful people. They need to be commended. They need to be praised. They need to be held up. They need to be magnified. And so what we are doing in essence is we are siding with the wicked instead of siding with God.

And moreover, by praising them, we're helping to silence their conscience. Why? "Look at that preacher over there, or look at that Christian. Well, he doesn't think I'm that bad." I want you to look in your Bibles to Proverbs chapter 12. I'm sorry, it's Psalm 12, Psalm 12. Psalm 12. And look if you would please at verse 8. You want to know what has happened in our country? Here it is. Psalm 12 verse 8. Look at it.

God says, "The wicked walk on every side, when the vilest men are exalted." You exalt vile men? Magnify them, you praise them, you

hold them up as virtuous and praiseworthy. God says the wicked are going to abound and they're gonna walk on every side. Just look at Washington DC. Look at Atlanta, Georgia. Look at Tallahassee, Florida. Look in your Bibles at Psalm 10 and verse 3. Psalm 10 verse 3. He says, "For the wicked boasteth of his heart's desire, and blesseth the covetous, whom the Lord abhorreth." Or whom the Lord hateth. What does the wicked do? They boast of their heart's desire and they bless the covetous or they bless the wicked to whom God is absolutely opposed. And then let me just quote this from the book of Malachi chapter 3 in verse 15. He said, "And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered."

In other words, we turn everything upside down. In Romans 1:32, after God delineates the wickedness and perversion of these people, He says, “Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.” There are people who uphold and praise the wicked because they have pleasure in those things. They do the same things, and some who may not do them, if they could do them, would do them.

John Gill said it like this: “Who are like them who forsake and transgress the law as they do? Every like loves its like. Wicked men delight in sin and the transgression of the law and those that do it. One covetous man will bless and praise another whom the Lord abhors, and commend his covetousness as frugality and good husbandry. One proud man will call another happy, and praise him as a man of spirit, that will not debase himself, but keep up his authority, rank, and dignity, and not condescend to men of low estates. The workers of iniquities are set up, and extolled, and tempters of God. Men of atheistical and deistical principles are not only delivered from the punishments they deserve, but are commended as bold spirits.”

Look at what is happening in America. If you desire to praise the wicked, the easiest way is to forsake God’s law. That is why there is such a push in this country now to establish Sharia law: we have forsaken God’s law, and in doing so we are praising the wicked, those who are absolutely contrary to God.

Proverbs 28:7 says, “Whoso keepeth the law is a wise son: but he that is a companion of riotous men shameth his father.” A wise son keeps the law. An unwise and foolish son dishonors his father and praises wicked men by associating with them and participating in their wickedness. Faithlessness to the law of God results in praising the wicked and siding with them. The second truth is faithfulness to the law of God and its consequences: “But such as keep the law contend with them.”

Keeping the Law Contends with the Wicked

Now, if forsaking the law praises the wicked, the opposite is keeping God's law and contending with the wicked. When God speaks about keeping the law, He is not simply referring to obeying, though that is certainly part and parcel of it. The word keep is the Hebrew word shamar, and it literally means to keep, to guard, and to protect. It is translated in our Bibles as watchman eight times and as keeper twenty-eight times. It is the same word used of the Levites, who were to keep the tabernacle and the charge of Aaron and his sons. If some stranger ran into the tabernacle or temple and tried to enter the Holy of Holies, or even attacked Aaron, what would happen to that individual? He would be executed. Who would put him to death? The Levites, because they had the charge.

They were the sentry keepers and the doorkeepers. They were responsible. The word keep means more than simply to obey; it also means to guard and protect. We treasure up God's law, obey God's law, and guard against violating it. We want to keep it inviolate, and we want to make sure that others keep God's law as well, because we recognize that this is the law of the great King. As Isaiah 33:22 says, "For the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our king; he will save us." God is King, Lawgiver, and Judge. It is only as we obey that we contend with the wicked. Proverbs 28:4 says, "But such as keep the law contend with them."

The word contend means to stir oneself up, to strive, to excite oneself against, to engage in warfare, and to wage war. It basically means to fight. Thus: "They that forsake the law praise the wicked, but such as keep the law fight with the wicked." Whether it is real battle, fake wrestling on television, or the UFC, which may not be

quite as fake, the men who fight are always called contenders. That is why we are told to contend for the faith: we are to fight for the faith.

Let me show you a couple of examples. David could not stand the foul-mouthed Goliath, nor could he stand to have the true God of Israel blasphemed by an uncircumcised Philistine. And what did David say?

“Let no man's heart fail him for fear. I'll fight him. I'll take care of him. God delivered the bear and the lion into my hand and he'll deliver this uncircumcised Philistine. Don't worry about it. I'll take care of it.” And what did he do? He contended, he fought. King Asa was a godly man and a godly king, and he hated idolatry. He hated anything that was contrary to God, and he hated it so much that King Asa removed his own mother from being queen because she made an altar and an idol. What was he doing? He was contending for the faith. He was fighting for the faith.

Those who love God and love God's Law cannot be silent when evil is present. We cannot tolerate it. We cannot condone it. We cannot approve it in any way. We must lift up our voices and cry against it.

The Necessity of Preaching the Law

Proverbs 28:4 says, “They that forsake the law praise the wicked, but such as keep the law fight with the wicked or contend with them.” Proverbs 29:18 says, “Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he.” These verses are actually parallel verses. They go together. A separate message needs to be preached on this verse, especially to explain the word vision: “Where there is no vision, the people perish.” When you look at the word vision there, it has nothing to do with a dream or trance, or with some preacher saying, “I envision great things for this church,” or, “I had a vision you would work with me.” That's not what that word means. The word refers to prophecy, or what you and I would call public preaching. Literally, it says, “Where there is no public preaching of the law, the people perish.”

"But he that keepeth the law, happy is he." Now look at this again: "Where there is no public preaching of the law, the people perish."

The word perish is a very interesting word. Turn in your Bibles to Exodus chapter 32, because I want to show you how this word is translated in the Bible. The Bible says that where there is no public preaching of God's law, people perish. The word perish is translated in our Bibles as naked, made bare, B-A-R-E, made naked.

You remember how Aaron formed this golden calf from the earrings of these people in the fire. They were dancing around, praising this stupid calf, and saying, "These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt." Notice Exodus 32:25. Moses is coming down from the mount. "And when Moses saw that the people were naked, (for Aaron had made them naked unto their shame among their enemies)."

Now go back to Proverbs 29 and look at verse 18: "Where there is no public preaching of the law, the people are made naked." They are made bare. What does that mean? If you do not understand, let me invite you to where we live in South Georgia in summertime. I will let you strip naked and run in my woods all you like, day and night. You can find all the ticks, mosquitoes, and deer flies and

Horseflies and whatever you want all over you will eat you alive. If you are naked, you are vulnerable and in trouble. You are in a state of perishing. You may not be dead at that moment, but you are not too far down the road from it. So here is what God is saying: when there is no public preaching of the law, people are perishing. We are left naked, stripped, defenseless, and ready to perish. God's law is our clothing, our armor, and our protection.

We cannot live without it. "Whoso keepeth the law, happy is he." It is not merely our happiness that is involved in keeping the law; our life depends upon it. That includes individual life, family life, church life, and national life. Without it, we perish.

Forsaking God's law praises the wicked. It sides with them, commends them, lifts them up, elevates them, and magnifies them. Keeping God's law is contending or fighting against them. God's law enables us to discern right and wrong, and what is holy and unholy. How can I look at Steve and say that he is a wicked man, or a godly man, if I do not know God's law? How can I look at David and say,

"Well David, that's wrong"? Right and wrong are not my determination; that is God's determination.

Applications and Conclusion

That is why the Bible says in Psalm 15, speaking of the righteous man, "In whose eyes a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the Lord. He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not." How can I say that someone is a vile person? Because he violates God's law. How can I say that someone is honorable? Because he obeys God's law. When we forsake His law, we praise the wicked; when we keep His law, we contend with them.

Keeping God's law means fighting against the wicked. Our obedience condemns their disobedience. That is why they say, "We don't want anybody preaching against sodomy. We don't want anybody preaching against abortion. We don't want anybody preaching against fraud or socialism or Marxism or communism." It condemns them, and they do not like being condemned or having their consciences laid bare by God's Word.

The Bible says in Ephesians 5:11, “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.” The third application is this: a failure to keep God's law, or disobedience, hinders our prayer life. It not only hinders our prayer life; it makes our prayers such that they can never be answered. Proverbs 28:9 says, “He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination.” The word abomination means a stench in God's nostrils. God says, If you don't listen to me, I'm not going to listen to you. You turn your ear away from hearing my law, and even your prayer will stink in my nostrils. I won't hear it.

The last application is this: we have to learn to live by principle. The principles are founded upon God's law-word, the Bible. When we refuse to live by these principles, it is idolatry, because we're denying God and establishing ourselves and our own law. When we establish our own law, whenever we deny, despise, and dethrone God, we're destroying ourselves and our families, our societies, and our nations.

In Proverbs 8:35-36, our Lord says, “For whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the Lord.” Whoever finds Jesus Christ finds favor of the Lord and obtains life. But verse 36 goes on to say, “But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul. All they that hate me love death.” All that a man can do without Jesus Christ, without the principles of the word of God, is die. All a family can do without Jesus Christ and without the law of God is die. All a society or nation can do without Christ and His law is die. All they that hate me love death.

You want to know why we are in the state we are in in this country? It is because the wicked and vile who are in control love death, and they are willing to murder an entire society and population. They hate God, despise Him, and think they know more than He does. “All they that hate me love death.” We must live by principle, not by feeling.

Let us pray. Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we thank You for Your love, Your Word, and Your truth. We thank You for the principles You have laid down in the Bible. Help us, Lord, to search them out, live by them, apply them, and let them be our daily guide and counsel. Give us grace that we may serve Thee acceptably, with reverence and godly fear. In Thy name we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 11

Sola Gratia

Part One of Two

Sola Gratia—Grace Alone

Introduction to Sola Gratia and the Reformation Solas

Ephesians 2, verses 8 and 9, says, "For by grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast."

The message begun today will be finished next week, Lord willing. As the Apostle Paul did in his writings, I will address the doctrinal first and the practical second. In Romans, chapters 1 through 11 are doctrinal, while chapters 12 through 16 apply that doctrine. Likewise, Galatians 1 through 3 is doctrinal, and chapters 4 through 6 are practical applications. You will need to listen closely, because I will probably introduce terms you have never heard before. The title of the message is Sola Gratia, Latin for grace alone.

The Reformation of the sixteenth century was nothing less than a recovery of the gospel. Men such as Martin Luther in Germany, John Calvin in France, and Ulrich Zwingli in Switzerland were used by God to bring forth both reformation and revival by emphasizing once again the centrality of Scripture alone. This brought forth a gospel by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, so that God alone received all the glory.

Five phrases are especially prominent in theological circles and in the study of the Reformation: sola scriptura, the Scriptures alone; sola fide, faith alone; sola gratia, grace alone; solus Christus, Christ alone; and soli Deo gloria, to God alone be the glory.

It would be difficult to choose which of these five truths is most important. They all stand or fall together. Yet if we did not believe sola scriptura—the Scriptures alone for our full faith and practice—we would know nothing about the other four solas. Scripture reveals these other truths as well.

The Bible says much concerning grace. The first occurrence of the word is Genesis 6:8: "But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord." The last occurrence is Revelation 22:21: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen." From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible is full of absolute grace.

The term sola gratia is important, not only because it is a distinguishing point of the Reformation, but because it is a truth that separates the true gospel from all false gospels. Therefore, sola gratia is as important today as it was when the Reformation began. The Latin word sola means alone or only: sola scriptura, Scripture alone; sola fide, faith alone; sola gratia, grace alone; solus Christus, Christ alone.

The Importance of 'Alone' in Salvation

All of these are closely tied together. Deviation from any one of these points leads to doctrinal error and to a gospel that will not save—a perverted gospel, powerless to save. Ephesians 2:8–9 acknowledges that the totality of our salvation is by grace alone: “For by grace are you saved through faith, that not of yourselves is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast.” As one author stated, “Sola

gratia means grace at the start, grace to the end, grace in the middle, grace without fail, grace without mixture, grace without addition, grace that allows no boasting, grace that precludes all glorying except that which is in the Lord."

The little word "alone" makes the difference between truth and error. Most Christians will say they believe in grace and that we are saved by grace. But when they explain what they mean, they often mean grace plus something: either grace and the will of man or grace and the works of man.

Monergism and Synergism

Monergism vs. Synergism Defined

Thus we come to this point: you have to understand two theological terms—monergism and synergism. These are theological concepts that refer to the doctrine of soteriology, or the doctrine of salvation. The truth of the matter is this: one either believes in monergism or synergism. There is no in-between and no third alternative. You are either a monergist or a synergist.

You say, "Well, I can't be one. I don't even understand those words." Remember this: every 50-cent word can be broken down into nickel words that we can understand. The word mono in monergism means one or alone. The Greek verb is ergo, which means "I work." The noun is ergon. Thus monergism is from mono-ergon, meaning God alone works in salvation. Regeneration is an act of God alone.

Theologically speaking, synergism is the doctrine that says the human will cooperates with divine grace in the work of regeneration. The Greek word syn means together, and ergon means to work. Synergism means a working together: God and man must work together.

When you stop and think about this, synergism destroys sola gratia, grace alone. If man has to cooperate, do something, or use his will, then it is not grace alone; it is grace plus something. Synergism also destroys sola fide, faith alone, and solus Christus, Christ alone.

It destroys soli Deo gloria, to God alone belongs the glory, because now God's glory has to be divided between Himself and man.

Isaiah 42:8 says very clearly, "I am the Lord. That is my name. My glory will I not share with another, nor give my praise to graven images." God would have to share His glory if synergism were true, because it is man cooperating with God. In synergism, God cannot save without the help, work, or will of the individual. Hence, He would have to share His glory with man for salvation to be accomplished.

Therefore, synergism is apparently false and contrary to the clear teaching of Scripture. Monergism and synergism are opposites: monergism says salvation is the work of God alone, while synergism says salvation is the work of God and the work of man.

The only alternatives are these: salvation is either of God alone and by grace alone, or it is partly of God and partly of man, and therefore partly of grace and partly of man's will or work. Anything that man adds, or anything that man has to perform in order to be saved, would constitute works.

Biblical Example of Adding to Grace

Consider Acts chapter 15 and verse 5. At the council at Jerusalem, certain Judaizing Pharisees wanted to add something to God's grace. The Bible says: "But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying that it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the laws of Moses." These were professing Christians who believed.

The interesting thing is that the word "needful" is from the little Greek word dei, spelled D-E-I—Delta, Epsilon, Iota. That word dei is translated as "must" fifty-nine times in the Bible. So this could be read: "But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying that they must be circumcised and be commanded to keep the law of Moses." In other words, they were saying, It is all right to believe in Jesus Christ and to trust in Christ, but if you really want to be saved, you have to be circumcised and keep the law of Moses.

Their synergism, then, was faith plus circumcision, faith plus works, or God plus man. Monergism teaches that God is the necessary and sufficient cause for our salvation. Synergism agrees that God is the necessary cause and condition, but denies His sufficiency. It teaches that salvation must be God plus the will or works of man. According to synergism, God actually does not save anyone; God only makes salvation possible. Man ends up saving himself.

Have you ever thought that if salvation is really and truly dependent upon the will of man, there is a possibility that no one would ever be saved? God does not actually save anyone according to synergism. If synergism were true, salvation could not be by grace alone; it would have to be grace plus the work of man.

Who initiates salvation, and who guides the individual to salvation? Is it God, or is it God and man? Does the human will cooperate with God in the work of regeneration? Was Jonah correct when he said in Jonah 2:9 that “salvation is of the Lord”?

The issue is quite simple. Does man's faith depend upon regeneration by God alone, or does regeneration depend upon man's faith? To ask the question another way, is it possible for a dead man to believe or to do anything that is necessary to salvation?

John Hendricks said this concerning monergism: “Monergism simply means that it is God who gives ears to hear and eyes to see. It is God alone who gives illumination and understanding of his word that we might believe. It is God who raises us up from the dead, who circumcises the heart, who unplugs our ears. It is God alone who gives us a new sense that we may at last have the moral capacity to behold his beauty and unsurpassed excellency.” It is the work of God alone.

John Owen, a Puritan, said, “To suppose that whatsoever God requires of us that we have the power of ourselves to do is to make the cross and the grace of Jesus Christ of none effect.” If God requires something of us—and he does, faith and repentance—but you say that this is in man and man can do it, in essence it makes the cross of Jesus Christ and the grace of God of none effect.

The apostle Paul said it similarly in Galatians 2:21: “I do not frustrate the grace of God, for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.” If man can be saved in any other way than by pure, undiluted grace, then Christ died in vain. Anything that man adds, or endeavors to add, to grace frustrates pure, undiluted grace. The problem is that we do not understand the term grace.

The Meaning of Free Grace

We do not understand the term free grace. You hear people say, “I was saved by the free grace of God,” and most people explain grace this way: it did not cost anything. I did not earn it or merit it. It was a free gift.

But we usually pervert the phrase free grace. If I said, “David took me out and bought my supper; therefore, I got a free supper,” I would mean that it did not cost me anything because David paid for it. That is usually what we think of when we think of grace: it simply did not cost us anything.

But look at Romans 3:23-24: “For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” The passage continues: “Whom God had set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past through the forbearance of God, to declare, I say at this time, his righteousness, that he might be just and the justifier of him that believeth on Jesus.” The Bible tells us plainly that we are “being justified freely by his grace.” That is free grace.

But what does that mean? In John 15:25, our Lord said concerning the Jews, “But this cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law. They hated me without a cause.” The phrase “without a cause” is exactly the same Greek word translated “freely” in Romans 3. They hated Him freely. He was the sinless, holy Son of God, and there was nothing in Him that merited, earned, or drew forth their hatred, anger, or wrath. There was nothing inside Him that drew or merited that. Thus, when our Lord said, “They hated me without a cause,” He meant that their hatred had no cause in Him.

When the Bible says we are being justified freely by His grace, it does not simply mean that salvation did not cost us something. It means that there was absolutely nothing in us that drew forth or caused God to save us. He did not save us simply because we needed saving. He did not save us because He looked down and foresaw, "Oh, he's going to believe on me one day, so I'll..." No, there was nothing in us that caused God to give His pure grace.

He was under no coercion or compulsion. The fact that He did so, He did so freely. That is free grace: nothing in us drew it, earned it, or merited it. When God saw us, He saw us as wicked rebels, not as someone who might believe on Him in the future through our own work or power.

The Westminster Confession of Faith says it like this: "Those of mankind that are predestinated unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to His eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of His will, have chosen in Christ unto everlasting glory, out of His free grace and love alone, without any foresight of faith, or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature as conditions or causes moving him thereunto, and all to the praise of his glorious grace." So, nothing, absolutely nothing in man, drew forth the grace of God.

Historical Confessions on Free Grace

James Pettigrew Boyce, who was born in 1827 and died in 1888, founded and became the first president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. He was also president of the Southern Baptist Convention from 1872 to 1879 and in 1888, and is regarded as one of the outstanding Baptist theologians of the nineteenth century. He was also a Confederate chaplain. Listen to what he said concerning election: "...is that God, not man, of his own purpose in accordance with his will, and not from any obligation to man, nor because of any will of man, has from eternity the period of God's action, not in time in which man acts, determined to save, not as actually saved, but simply determined so to

God's purpose is to do and to save, not merely to confer gospel or church privileges, upon a definite number of mankind—not the

whole race, nor merely some indefinite portion, nor indefinitely a certain proportionate part, but a definite number as individuals. They are not the whole or part of the race, nor of a nation, nor of a church, nor of a class, such as believers or the pious. They are individuals, not chosen for any merit or work of theirs, nor for anything of value in them to Him; not because of their good works, holiness, excellence, faith, or spiritual sanctification, although the choice is to a salvation attained through faith and sanctification. Their election was not for their value to Him, though their salvation greatly tends to manifest the glory of His grace, but was according to His good pleasure—simply because He pleased to do so.

So there is James Pettigrew Boyce, and he is talking about God's free grace. Here is the question: How do we understand free grace? How do we perceive it? How do we comprehend it? What does it take for you and me to see that it is grace and grace alone?

Let me answer that question first of all, very quickly and with a Scripture. To see grace and grace alone, it takes the grace, power, and illumination of God to open our eyes and see the beauty of His grace and mercy, that He alone can save us. Here is the absolute truth: if God does not sovereignly and powerfully open our eyes, we will never see.

Now, let me give you the Scripture. Turn in your Bibles, if you would, very quickly, to 2 Timothy chapter 2 and look at verse 7. Here is what the apostle Paul told Timothy, having given that brief answer. Here is a principle in Scripture that we need to apply not only to this truth, but to every truth from the Word of God.

The Necessity of Divine Illumination

In 2 Timothy chapter 2, verse 7, the Apostle Paul tells Timothy, “Consider what I say, and the Lord give thee understanding in all things.” The Greek word for “consider” means literally to consider, to ponder, to think upon, to heed, and to understand. When you think about the words consider and ponder, you think about meditation. You think about cows chewing the cud, how they chew it over and over. They swallow it, burp it back up, and chew it some more. That is exactly what this word means.

Paul told Timothy, “Consider what I say.” You have a responsibility to study, to think, and to meditate. Then he says, “And the Lord give thee understanding.” In other words, God’s gift is the gift of understanding. But God does not give his gift willy-nilly.

We do not go to bed dumb and wake up smart. We do not go to bed stupid and wake up knowing everything. God does not simply say, “I’m going to open his brain and pour some truth in it.” He says, “Consider what I say.” That is our duty and responsibility. But as we consider, we have a responsibility to seek God to give us his gift of understanding, because unless he opens our eyes, we will never see and never understand. When it comes to understanding any doctrine, we must consider it and seek God to open our eyes, give us light, and give us illumination.

God's Freedom, Sovereignty, and Independence (Aseity)

To answer the question, What will it take for you and me to see that salvation is by grace alone? There are several truths that we must grasp. The first is this: We must consider the freedom, sovereignty, and independence of God if we want to understand Sola Gratia, grace alone. What do I mean by the freedom, sovereignty, and independence of God? Let me explain that, beginning with this statement.

This is an eye-opener: God does not need you. He does not need me. He does not need anything. He is God. It is nothing more than pure humanism and pure garbage when preachers and other people say, “The reason God created the world, made man, and saved us is because God was lonely and wanted us there.” That is pure trash. When you say that God has a need, you have just denied God. God does not need anything. If God has needs, He is dependent; He is not independent. When you say that God needs me, you are denying the person, the power, and the perfection of God.

I heard one preacher say many years ago, “If you want to live a long life, make yourself indispensable to God.” Really? The cemeteries are filled with indispensable men. God does not need anybody. Robert Shaw, in his exposition of the Westminster Confession, says this: “God is self-existent and independent. He has

all life, glory, and blessedness in and of Himself. His existence is necessary and underived. For His name is I am that I am. His glory and blessedness are likewise underived. His glory necessarily results from, or rather consists in, the absolute perfection of His own nature. And His blessedness is all summed up in the possession and enjoyment of His own infinite excellencies. Being thus all-sufficient in and unto Himself, He must be independent of any other being. He stands not in need of any creatures which He has made, nor can He derive any glory from them."

When Robert Shaw says, "He stands not in need of any creatures which He has made, nor can He derive any glory from them," you have to distinguish between what is known as God's essential glory and God's external glory, or God's manifestative glory. Shaw is talking about His essential glory—that is what God is in and of Himself. It is true that God has an external glory in the heavens and in His creation. It is true that He has manifested that glory, and that we can honor or dishonor His manifested or external glory. But we add nothing to His essential glory; that is what He is talking about. "He stands not in need of any creatures which He has made, nor can He derive any glory from them."

"Every other being receives its all from Him, but He receives no advantage from any. For his pleasure all things are and were created, but none can be profitable to God, as he that is wise may be profitable to himself, nor is it any gain to him that they make their way perfect." God did not have need of anything.

The Philadelphia Baptist Confession and the Westminster Confession are almost word for word exactly alike, except when it comes to ecclesiology and baptism. Chapter 2, Paragraph 2 of each says: "God, having all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in and of himself, is alone in and to himself all-sufficient, not standing in need of any creature which he has made, nor deriving any glory from them, but only manifesting his own glory in, by, unto, and upon them. He is the alone fountain of all being, of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things. And he hath most sovereign dominion over all creatures, to do by them, for them, and upon them, whatsoever himself pleaseth. In his sight all things are open and manifest. His knowledge is infinite, infallible, and independent upon

the creature, so as nothing is to him contingent or uncertain. He is most holy in all his counsels, in all his works, in all his commands. To him is due from angels and men whatsoever worship, service, or obedience as creatures they owe unto the Creator, and whatsoever he is further pleased to require of them."

God is the most free and independent being, without any need. God is absolutely perfect. Nothing can be added to Him; nothing can be taken from Him. He is not in need of anyone or anything. He is absolutely free and independent. If you have needs, you are not free and you are not independent.

Look in Psalm 50. God is reproving the children of Israel, testifying against them: "Hear, O my people, and I will speak. O Israel, and I will testify against thee. I am God, even thy God." Then He says, "I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices or thy burnt offerings to have been continually before me."

You were supposed to do it, but you did not. He says, verse 9, "I will take no bullock out of thy house, nor he goats out of thy folds." Why will God not do that? He says in verse 10, "For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountain, and the wild beasts of the field are mine." Watch: "If I were hungry, I would not tell thee, for the world is mine and the fullness thereof." Let me tell you what God said in good South Georgia lingo: I do not need you. I do not need anything from you. I am God. I am self-existent. I am independent. I own everything.

Now, turn to Psalm 16. I want to show you something that may be amazing, and you are going to hear this stated again shortly. We read earlier in Romans chapter 3 where God sent forth and set forth His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. We know that Jesus Christ is the sinless Son of God, and that He obeyed the Father perfectly. Let me say this: the person and work of Jesus Christ added absolutely nothing to God the Father.

Christ's Work Added Nothing to God's Essential Being

Psalm 16 is a Messianic psalm, and it is quoted in the New Testament concerning Christ. Notice verse 1: "Preserve me, O God,

for in thee do I put my trust." "O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, My Lord, here it is, my goodness extendeth not to thee." Nothing that Jesus Christ did added one thing to the essential being of God. He said, "My goodness extendeth not to thee," but "to the saints that are in the earth, and to the excellent in whom is all my delight." So all the personal work of God the Son did was extend to us. It did not extend to the Father.

If you pick up any systematic theology book and look under the doctrine of God, you will find the word aseity—A-S-E-I-T-Y. The aseity of God means that God is absolutely independent. He is so independent that He needs nothing. In Acts 17, the Apostle Paul is preaching on Mars Hill. He says, "God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands, neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed anything, seeing he giveth to all life, breath, and all things." God does not need anything. We need Him, but He does not need us. That is the aseity of God: God is free and independent and sovereign.

How does this help us understand salvation by grace alone? A.W. Pink explains it in several paragraphs on the solitariness of God:

"In the beginning God. There was a time, if time it could be called, when God in the unity of his nature, though subsisting in three persons that his father, son and Holy Ghost, dwelt all alone. In the beginning, God.

A.W. Pink on the Solitariness of God

"There was no heaven where His glory is now particularly manifested. There was no earth to engage His attention. There were no angels to sing His praises. There was no universe to be upheld by the word of His power. There was nothing. No one but God. And that not for a day or a year or an age, but from everlasting. During a past eternity, God was alone, self-contained, self-sufficient, in need of nothing. Had a universe or angels or human beings been necessary to Him in any way, they also would have been called into existence from all eternity. Creating them when He did added nothing to God essentially. He changes not. Therefore, His essential glory can

neither be added to or diminished. God was under no constraint, no obligation, no necessity to create.

"That he chose to do so was purely a sovereign act on his part, caused by nothing outside of himself, determined by nothing but his own good pleasure, for he worketh all things after the counsel of his own will. That he did create was simply for his manifestative glory or external glory. Do some of our readers imagine that we've gone beyond what scripture warrants? Then we'll appeal to the law and to the testimony."

"Stand up and bless the Lord your God forever and ever and blessed be thy glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise." Nehemiah 9:5.

God is no gainer even from our worship. He was in no need of that external glory of his grace, which arises from his redeemed, for he is glorious enough in and of himself without that. What was it that moved him to predestinate his elect to the praise of the glory of his grace? It was according to the good pleasure of his will, Ephesians 1:5.

We're well aware that the high ground we tread upon here is new and strange to almost all of our readers. So it is well to move slowly. Let us appeal again to the scriptures. As the apostle brings to a close a long argument on salvation by sovereign grace, he asks, "For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been his counselor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again?"

The force of this is that it is impossible to bring the Almighty under obligation to the creature. God gains nothing from us. "If thou be righteous, what givest thou him? Or what receiveth he of thine hand? Thy wickedness may hurt a man as thou art, and thy righteousness may profit the Son of man," Job 35:7-8. But it certainly cannot affect God, who is all blessed in and of himself.

"When you shall have done all these things which you were commanded, you say we are unprofitable servants." Our obedience has profited nothing. We go farther. Our Lord Jesus Christ added nothing to God in his essential being in glory, either by what he did or suffered. True, gloriously true. He manifested that glory of God to

us, but he added nothing to God. He himself expressly declares so, and there is no appeal from his words: "My goodness extendeth not unto thee," Psalm 16:2.

The whole of that psalm is the psalm of Christ. Christ's goodness or righteousness reached to his saints in the earth, but God was high above and beyond it all. It is true that God is both honored and dishonored by men, not in his essential being, but in his official character. It is equally true that God has been glorified by creation, by providence, and by redemption. We dare not dispute this for a moment. But all of this has to do with this manifestative or external glory and the recognition of it by us. Yet had God so pleased, he might have continued alone for all eternity without making known his glory unto his creatures. Whether he should do so or not he determined solely by his own will. He was perfectly blessed in himself before the first creature was called into being. And what are all the creatures of his hands unto him even now? The scripture answers.

“Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as a small dust of the balance. Behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing, and Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt offering. All nations before him are as nothing, and they are counted to him less than nothing in vanity. To whom then will ye liken God, or what likeness will ye compare him unto?” Isaiah 40. That is the God of Scripture. But alas, he is still the unknown God to heedless multitudes. “It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers, that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them as a tent to dwell in, who bringeth the princes to nothing, he maketh the judges of the earth as vanity,” Isaiah 40. How vastly different is the God of Scripture from the God of the average pulpit. In eternity, there was nothing and no one but God, who was alone, self-sufficient, self-existent, independent, sovereign, in need of nothing and no one.

Application: Answering Why God Saves

He did not need the world, angels, men, or anything. The fact that he created, that he sent Christ, and that he saves has to be nothing but

pure grace, because He did not need us. Why did God create the world? Why did God create you? Why did God allow you to be born? Why did God allow you not only to be born but to live and have an intellect and abilities, when so many are born without an intellect and without any abilities whatsoever? Why were you born when you were born? Why were you born in America? Why were you born when the gospel was being preached? Why did God allow you to hear the gospel?

Why did God give you repentance and faith? Why did God draw you to himself? Why did God quicken you by the Holy Spirit? Why did God regenerate you? Why did God open your eyes so that you could understand biblical truth? Why did God allow you to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved? The answer to every one of those questions is grace: pure, undiluted, sovereign grace alone.

In 1 Corinthians 4:7, the Apostle Paul asks three questions: "For who maketh thee to differ from another?" Why is it that you are saved while many of your family members or friends are unsaved? Why do you believe the Scripture when countless multitudes do not? Why did you hear the gospel when millions never hear? Who made you to differ from another?

The second question is, "And what hast thou that thou didst not receive?" What do you have that God did not give you? The answer is nothing. Everything that we are and everything that we have, God gave us. Then comes the next question: "Now, if thou didst receive it, why didst thou glory?" Why do you boast as if you had not received it?

You had better understand that it was grace and grace alone. It was not your will, works, smartness, abilities, or intellect. It was pure, absolute, undiluted, unadulterated grace. God did not need us; He was and is perfectly blessed in and of Himself. He sent His only begotten Son for our salvation. What is that? Grace alone—free, unmerited, undeserved, uncaused grace. God was not obligated to do anything.

If you understand that God is free, sovereign, and independent, the mere fact that He creates, saves, and sent His Son is nothing but pure, undiluted grace. Sola gratia, grace alone. That is how we are

saved: by faith alone, through grace alone, and in Christ alone, so that God alone receives all the honor and all the glory.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank You for Your Word and Your truth, and we ask that You would help us and teach us. Build us up in the most holy faith, and may we perceive and understand Your grace. In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 12

But God

Introduction: The Significance of 'But God'

Notice Romans 5 and verse 8: “But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” Note the first two words: “but God.”

Most Christians can either quote in full or at least finish the truth of 1 John 4:19 when that verse is begun: “We love Him,” because “He first loved us.” Very obviously, most of us have really very rarely ever considered the truth of that verse. We love Him because He first loved us.

The fact is that our sovereign God had to love us first because He is the eternal God. Moreover, had He not first loved us, we certainly would never ever have loved Him. Our Lord said something very similar in John 15 and verse 16: “You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you.” You can reply, “Well, I did choose Jesus Christ.” Yes. But the only reason you chose Him is because He first chose you. Had He not first loved you, you would have never loved Him. Had He not first chosen you, you certainly would never have chosen Him.

God's Eternal Love in Christ

When you stop and think about God loving us, you cannot just think about His love for us in time. The Bible teaches us in Jeremiah 31, verse 3: “The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love. Therefore, with the loving kindness have I drawn thee.” Notice what He said: “I’ve loved thee with an everlasting love.” It had no beginning. It had no ending. “I’ve loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with the loving kindness have I drawn thee.” God sovereignly loved us in eternity past, and therefore He drew us to Himself in time and in history. You are going to ask, “How in the world could God love me in eternity past when I had no existence?”

When did He love us? When I had no being? The truth of the matter is, He loved us in our federal head and representative, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Scripture tells us that He chose us in Christ. He gave us grace in Christ. He loved us in Christ, all before the world ever began.

Ephesians 1:4–6 says, "According as he that is God the Father hath chosen us in Him, that is in Jesus Christ, before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestinated us of 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, when He hath made us accepted in the Beloved."

Notice verse 4: "According as He hath chosen us in Him." When did He choose us? Before the foundation of the world, before the world ever began. He chose us in Christ before we had any being, before the world ever began.

In 2 Timothy 1:8–10, the Apostle Paul tells Timothy, "Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but be thou partaker of the affliction of the gospel according to the power of God." Now notice what God has done. This is according to the power of God, "who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began."

He gave us grace in Christ Jesus before the world began. He not only chose us and loved us; He gave us grace in Christ before the world began. He gave us grace according to His own purpose, not according to our works. Verse 10 continues: "But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Savior, Jesus Christ, who have abolished death and brought life and immortality to life through the Gospel."

God has loved us, chosen us, and given us grace in Christ before the foundation of the world. He did all this before the world began. Then, according to verse 10, He now calls us to Himself through the Lord Jesus Christ, who brought both life and immortality to life through the Gospel.

There are many astounding facts in the Bible concerning the love of God. However, I want to call your attention today to one of those that I think is the most astounding, or at least one of the most astounding. It is in Romans five and verse eight: “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

Divine Intervention in Scripture

Anytime you see the little phrase “but God,” it usually speaks of divine intervention. God has done something miraculous and marvelous. He has intervened in the affairs of men. Consider this in Scripture, and then we will come back and look at the context. Hold Romans chapter 5, and go back to Genesis chapter 50, verse 20. Joseph is talking to his brothers. You remember that the brothers sold him into captivity. He says, “But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.” The brothers tried to shanghai Joseph and were evilly entreating him, but God meant it for good.

You do not have to turn there, but in Acts 7 and verse 9, the Scripture says, “And the patriarchs moved in envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him.” There is that divine intervention.

Psalm 68, verse 21, gives another “but God”: “But God shall wound the head of his enemies, and the hairy scalp of such an one as goeth on still in his trespasses.” In other words, men may think they

are going to escape the righteous judgment and vengeance of God. They may think that because God has not smitten them instantly, they have gotten away with everything. But God shall wound their head, and the hairy scalp of such an one as goeth on still in his trespasses.

Then Acts chapter 13: everyone will understand this one. Here is divine intervention.

The Jews hated the Lord Jesus Christ and sought to put Him to death; indeed, they had Him crucified. In Acts chapter 13, beginning with verse 26, we read: "Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent. And they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets, which are read every sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning him. And though they found no cause of death in him, yet desired they Pilate that he should be slain. And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulchre. But God raised him from the dead."

Whenever you see the phrase "but God," call to mind divine intervention. It would be encouraging and beneficial for you to get a concordance or use your Bible program on the internet to look up the phrase "but God" and see how often it occurs in the Bible—how often God intervenes in time, in history, and in the lives of His people. Deism teaches that God wound this world up like a clock, then sits back and lets it run down without intervening. That is certainly not true, because all through the Bible, God intervenes.

The Apostle Paul wrote of Epaphroditus in Philippians chapter 2 and verse 27: "For indeed he was sick nigh unto death: but God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow." Epaphroditus was sick, nigh unto death—but God. Certainly, God does intervene.

Human Helplessness and Sinfulness

One of the most wonderful interventions in the Bible is found in Romans 5 and verse 8: "But God commendeth his love toward us, in

that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Before looking at verse 8, consider verses 6 and 7: "For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die." When verse 6 says that we were "without strength," it indicates that we were impotent, powerless, helpless, and hopeless.

We were unable to help ourselves in any shape, form, or fashion. We were totally, completely impotent. Note, if you would, he says, "For when we were yet without strength in due time, Christ died for the ungodly." The ungodly is the word asebes, which literally means the ungodly: those who are destitute of reverential fear toward God, those who are impious, and those who actually condemn God. So when we were yet without strength in due time, Christ died for the ungodly. In verse six, we are called the ungodly and told that we were without strength. In verse eight, he says that we were sinners. But look at verse seven: "For scarcely for a righteous man will one die, yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die."

Verse seven is designed to illustrate the great love that God has for His people by contrasting the love that man has with the love that God has. Most people are not willing to die for someone whom they know to be right with God, who lives holy and godly. Yet, for a good man, some would even dare to die. Morally speaking, and humanly speaking, there are good men in the sense that they are helpful, kind, and beneficent; they do whatever they can. We would describe such a person as one who would give us the shirt off his back.

The highest form of love, humanly speaking, is that some would even dare to die for their friend, or for a good man. In fact, the Scripture says in John 15, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." There are numerous examples, not only in the Bible but in history as well, of individuals who have laid down their lives for their friends.

I recently read of an armed robbery in which one of the robbers was about to shoot a woman. Her son jumped into the path of the bullet and died rather than his mother. He gave his life for his mother. There are some who would even dare to die for what they consider a good man.

But here is the contrast: “For scarcely for a righteous man will one die, yet for a good man some would even dare to die. But God”—see the contrast?—“commendeth His love toward us, that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for His bitter foes.” God gave His only begotten Son for His worst enemies. We were neither good nor holy nor righteous; we were sinners. The Bible says, “But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners.”

The Nature of Sin and Federal Headship in Adam

Hermatolos is the Greek word. It literally means a sinner: someone who is sinful, devoted to sin, and pre-eminently sinful. Here is the problem: we are not only by nature devoted to sin and pre-eminently sinful; we are the servants and slaves of sin. In Romans 6:17, he says, “But God be thanked, that ye were”—past tense—“the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.” The word servants is the Greek word doulos, which literally means a slave. Thus, “But God be thanked, ye were the slaves of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.”

Sin was our master, and we rendered to sin a very practical and submissive obedience. When sin commanded us to jump, we would say, “How high?” When sin told us to do something, that is exactly what we did.

We were sinners, preeminently sinners, in bondage to sin. So the question has to be asked: How did we get in such a state? The answer is that we were born into sin by virtue of our position in Adam, who is our federal head and representative. Look in Romans 5:12: “Wherefore as by one man”—that is, Adam—“sin entered into the world, and death by sin.” Death came as a consequence of Adam’s sin. “And so death passed upon all men.”

Now watch this: “For that all have sinned.” It is not that all are sinning. Yes, we are sinning. But “all have sinned” is past tense. It is an aorist tense, which means it has happened once and for all. When did all men sin once and for all? The answer is, we sinned in Adam. We fell in him. Adam, then, was our federal head and federal representative. What he did, we did. What he sinned, we sinned. What he fell, we fell.

Original sin is very easy to prove. Some philosophers speak of tabula rasa, meaning that every man comes into this world with a clean slate and merely learns sin from others. No. You never have to teach a baby how to sin. The Bible says they go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies. You know the baby cries and pretends that something is wrong when nothing is wrong. You pick him up and, good gracious alive, he stops crying.

There is original sin. People say, “Well, I don’t believe in original sin.” I can prove it. How? Hang on. Just wait a little while. You are going to die, because death is the consequence of sin. Obviously, all die; therefore, all are sinners, and all have sinned in Adam. We fell in him. In that sense, original depravity is easily understood: all we have to do is observe the graveyards and the fact that everybody dies.

We are all going to die, even though we have not sinned after the similitude of Adam’s transgression. Adam was unique in that he was placed in a perfect environment, with no sin around him. He was created with original righteousness, holiness, and knowledge, and yet he sinned. Not many of us sin exactly as he sinned. But look, if you would please, in Romans 5:14.

The Bible says this: “Nevertheless, death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come.” Now, we are sinners, and our sin may not be exactly the way Adam's was, but still the wages of sin happens to be death. And every sinner is ultimately going to die.

Adam as a Type of Christ

Now, here's the interesting thing. The Bible says in verse 14 that Adam was “the figure of him that was to come.” That's an interesting phrase. The Bible is telling us that Adam was a figure or a type of Jesus Christ who was to come. So now you have to ask yourself this question: How in the world could Adam be a type of Jesus Christ? Adam sinned. Adam failed. Adam plunged his posterity into depravity and death. Jesus Christ was victorious. Jesus Christ brought forth life and immortality to life through the Gospel. So how then can Adam be a figure or a type of Christ?

Well, the answer is given to us actually in 1 Corinthians 15, beginning there with verse 45. “And so it is written, the first man Adam was made a living soul.” Now notice this phrase: “The last Adam was made a quickening spirit. How be it that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural, and afterwards that which is spiritual. The first man, the first Adam, is the earth earthy. The second man is the Lord from heaven,” that is Jesus Christ. “As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy. And as the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. As we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.” Now I want to call your attention to the fact that the Bible calls Adam the first man. It refers to Jesus Christ as the last Adam.

Adam is called the first man in verse 47, and Jesus Christ is called the second man in verse 47. How can Jesus Christ be called the second man? Since Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God, and He created Adam, He was in existence well before Adam was ever made. How, then, could He be called the second man? And why is He called the last Adam?

He is called the second man because He is the second man in time, chronologically speaking, to sustain a federal relationship and representation of a people. Adam was a federal head and representative of all those who were in him. Jesus Christ is the federal head and representative of all those who are in Him. Adam is called the first Adam, and Jesus Christ is called the last Adam. He is called the last Adam because there is never going to be anyone else who will sustain such a relationship as Jesus Christ sustains as the federal Head and Representative of the people.

Let me spell it out for you. Scripture is saying that if you are not saved by Jesus Christ, you are not going to be saved, because He is the last Adam. No one else will ever be where He is. Adam was the figure of Him who was to come, only in the sense that he was the federal head and representative of a people.

Some have said, “I do not like being in Adam, because when he sinned, I sinned; when he fell, I fell. I would like to have my own opportunity.” But if you had been alive when Adam was alive, you would have done exactly the same thing that Adam did. And if you do not like the fact that Adam was your federal head and

representative, you would also not like the fact that Jesus Christ is your federal head and representative, because what He did, we did.

Contrast Between Adam and Christ

When He died, we died. When He was buried, we were buried. When He rose from the dead, we rose from the dead. When He ascended into heaven, we ascended into heaven. When He sat down at the right hand of God, we sat down at the right hand of God with Him. Ephesians 2:5 says, "Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ." Verse 6 continues, "By grace are ye saved; and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." Everything that Christ did, we did.

Colossians 3:1-3 says, "If you then be risen with Christ," or literally, "since you be risen with Christ." The grammatical force is significant: "If" may be understood as "since" when the construction is joined with the indicative. "If you then be risen with Christ," or "since you be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is on the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, not on things of the earth. For you are dead, and your life is hidden with Christ in God." The emphasis is this: if, or since, you are risen with Christ, seek those things which are above.

Now turn back to Romans 5. There is a strong contrast in this passage between what Adam did and what Jesus Christ did. There are similarities, but the contrast is what is being emphasized. It is true that Adam was a type or a figure of Christ. Compare Adam's fall and Adam's sin with the victory of Jesus Christ.

Romans 5:17 says, "For if by one man's offence death reigned by one, much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one Jesus Christ." When Adam sinned, death entered, and death reigned. When Jesus Christ was victorious, righteousness entered in, and life reigned.

Verse 18 says, "Therefore as by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation." That was Adam. "Even so, by the righteousness of one," that is Jesus Christ, "the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life." Verse 19 continues, "For as by one man's disobedience, many were made sinners. So by the obedience

of one, shall many be made righteous." You can see how the position of Adam and the position of Jesus Christ are contrasted.

Look back in Romans 5:8. The impact of Romans 5:8 can only be understood in light of the fact that God commended His love toward us while we were yet sinners. That is, we were God-haters and rebels. We were hanging from Adam's girdle. Martin Luther, the reformer, said there are only two men in the world, Adam and Christ, and everyone hangs from their girdle. You are either in Adam and lost, or in Christ and saved.

The truth is that while we were in Adam, God manifested His love toward us. We were not lovely, righteous, holy, or obedient. We were lost, depraved, sinful, God-haters, and rebellious. It goes like this: "But God commendeth his love toward us. And that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

Ephesians 2: The 'But God' of Salvation

Can you imagine sending your only son to die for the man who hates you, tries to kill you and steal from you, and denies you? Turn to Ephesians chapter 2, because the Apostle Paul develops Romans 5:8 there. I want to take the time to read the first ten verses. We will not go over all of them, but I will deal with the first four or five. Notice Ephesians chapter 2, beginning with verse 1:

"And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins, wherein in time past you walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience, among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lust of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature the children of wrath even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ. By grace you are saved, and hath raised us up together and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace and his kindness toward us through Jesus Christ. For by grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast."

"For we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk therein." Now I want to call your attention to the fact in verse one. He says, "and you hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and in sins."

There could not be any more explicit proof of depravity than this, and no stronger language could be used. The Bible tells us that man by nature is dead in trespasses and in sins. We were dead to a relationship to God. We were dead to his righteousness. We were dead to his holiness. It was the Puritan John Trapp who said, "Natural men are living carcasses, walking sepulchers of themselves."

Stop and think about that. Natural men are living carcasses, walking sepulchers of themselves. In Colossians 2 and verse 13, he says it like this: "And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all your trespasses." So the Scripture tells us that we were dead to life. We were dead in our souls. We were dead toward God. Our entire existence was wrapped up in disobedience and rebellion to God. We lived only for our flesh, our desires, and our feelings.

What does it mean to be dead in trespasses and sins? If you look at verses 2 and 3, Paul explains it: “Wherein in time past, you walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience, among them also we all had our conversation in times past, in the lust of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.”

When I quoted John Trapp earlier, saying that natural men are living carcasses and walking sepulchers in and of themselves, you have to understand that in some prisons there is indeed a death row. Those men are awaiting their execution on a certain date. Many other prisoners refer to them as dead men walking, because it is only a matter of time before they are executed.

May I point out that this is exactly what the Apostle Paul is saying in Ephesians 2, verses 2 and 3? All of us, by nature, are dead men

walking. Unless God sovereignly, miraculously, and marvelously intervenes, our execution is certain and sure. It is a subtle fact: we are nothing more than dead men walking.

Paul says that even as Christians, we had, like others, our time in the flesh and in the world. That is why he says, in the latter part of verse 3, "and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others."

What is life without God? Stop and think about your life before you were converted. Paul sums up what our life was like in verses 2 and 3: "Wherein in time past you walked according to the course of this world." In other words, you wanted to keep up with the Joneses. You wanted the manners, habits, and desires of this world—the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. You wanted everything everybody else wanted and lived the way they lived. He goes further: "Wherein in time past you walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience."

The World, the Flesh, and the Devil

Undoubtedly, this refers to Satan. But how does that relate to the world? Look in your Bibles, first of all, to 1 John 2, beginning with verse 15: "Love not the world."

He is not talking about creation, but about the world system—the world that is in opposition to God. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." Here is why: "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world pass away and the lust thereof. But he that doeth the will of God abideth forever."

Walking according to the course of this world literally means that we walked in the lust of our flesh, the lust of our eyes, and the pride of our life, totally ignoring God, because these things are not of God. They cannot be of God. In light of this, Ephesians 2 speaks of walking according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.

Undoubtedly, he is referring to Satan, because they are under the leadership of the Prince of the Power of the Air. Just as air permeates everything, so, in their world, Satan permeated everything. Most of the time, when we think of Satan and that which is evil, we think of a drunk lying in the gutter, wallowing in his own vomit and filth. That is the flesh. We think of a prostitute with all kinds of diseases. That is the flesh. Satan is far more refined. He wants worship. He wants people to bow down to Him. The spirit now works in the children of disobedience.

A drunk is disobedient, and a prostitute is disobedient. But it is equally true that a Pharisee is disobedient, that a hypocrite is disobedient, and that a self-righteous individual is disobedient. The evidence that someone is living according to this world and walking according to the prince of the power of the air is that he is walking in disobedience. That demonstrates he is under the control of the world and the prince of the power of the air.

John Trapp said it like this: “As a smith worketh in his forge, and a craftsman in his shop. A natural man, as he is the heir of original and the father of actual sin, so his soul and all his powers thereof are but Satan’s shop of sins. His body and all the parts thereof, tools of sin, his life and all his actions are both soul and body, a trade of sin by the same reason.” All he is saying is that everything a man does when he is unsaved is nothing but sin.

In verse 2, Paul calls us “children of disobedience.” That is the Hebrew idiom which literally means that we were addicted to disobedience. We were obstinate sinners—headstrong, recalcitrant, rebellious, and determined to persevere in our sins and disobedience.

Some of you may have seen this illustration. There was a protest somewhere recently with all kinds of signs. One man was so absolutely stupid and wicked that he had a sign which said, “When Jesus returns, kill him again.” You do not understand. Second Thessalonians tells us that when He comes back, He will come in flaming fire, taking vengeance on those that know not God and obey not the gospel of Jesus Christ.

There will be no killing Him the second time, I can assure you. But that shows how people are so addicted to rebellion, disobedience, and sin that they cannot even think straight. In verse 3, Paul acknowledges that each of us, at one time, was by nature a child of wrath, even as others. We lived in the same condition. We all had our conversation, our conduct, in times past, in the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life.

Oftentimes I see people doing or saying things, and I will look to Alice and say, "I could never do that." She looks at me and says, "Well, you used to." I say, "Well, I don't remember it." If God has forgiven me and forgotten it, so should I. We all had our sins, our lusts, our pride, and our arrogance. That is what he is saying: we were children of wrath, even as others. But something happened. I remember when I was a boy, and I can take you today to the exact same spot in the road, to show you how wicked man is by nature.

Personal Testimony and Application

I was riding a motorcycle, probably fifteen or sixteen years old. In one certain spot in the road, the thought entered my mind out of nowhere: "If you died today, where would you spend eternity?"

I was raised in church, but no one ever witnessed to me, and I do not remember really hearing the gospel in church. It may have been preached; I just did not hear it, but I do not think it was even really preached. That question hit my mind again: "If you died right now, where would you spend eternity?" I remember the answer I gave in my mind: "Well, I'll make it in heaven somehow. I've made it all my life in every other area." You don't have blasphemy. I was thinking somehow God was going to make an exception of me. That is blasphemy.

My question is, what happened? What changed us? What changed our status in our relationship? Let us go back to Ephesians 2 and watch this carefully.

"And you hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins, wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience, among whom also we

all had our conversation, our conduct, in times past, in the lust of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses and sins, hath quickened us together with Christ."

"By grace are you saved." In other words, it was a divine intervention. Had God not intervened, we would have continued in verses 2 and 3: walking according to the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, being children of disobedience, and living for the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. So when you look at Romans 5 and verse 8: "But God commendeth His love toward us and while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

Ephesians 2 enlarges, expounds, and explains. The Apostle Paul could never get over the "but God." If you look in your Bibles to Colossians chapter 1, verses 12 and 13, although "but God" is not used there, it is still the same exact thought: "Giving thanks unto the Father who have made us meet or suitable to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light, who have delivered us from the power of darkness and have translated us into the kingdom of his dear son, in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins."

Note what he says: "Giving thanks unto the father who has made us suitable to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." What made the difference in your life? What brought you to your senses and to your knees? Who opened your eyes? Why are you different now than you were back then? Why are you now sorrowful and ashamed of your sins and your rebellion? Who made you to differ? If you go back in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians chapter 4, you will find that same question asked by the Apostle Paul: "For who maketh thee to differ from another? And what hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?"

Each of us would have continued in the course of this world under the power of the prince of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience. We would be fulfilling the lust of the flesh,

the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, except for divine intervention.

But God intervened. But God gave his only begotten son. But God gave us repentance and faith. But God brought us into Himself. But God enables us to persevere in repentance and faith. But God divinely intervened, not only in time and history in sending His only begotten Son, but in our lives.

We should obey Colossians 1 and verse 12: "Giving thanks unto the Father." When you stop and think of what the Father has done—how He loved us in eternity past before we ever had any being, how He chose us in Jesus Christ, how He gave us grace in Jesus Christ, and how He loved us when we were God-haters, idolaters, and rebellious—you must remember that He knew every sin you and I would ever commit, every lust, every act of pride, and every act of rebellion. He knew how desperately wicked we were.

And yet he set his love upon us regardless and divinely intervened in our lives. We need to learn to confess with the Apostle Paul. Paul said it in 1 Corinthians 15, verse 10: "But by the grace of God, I am what I am." If it was not for the grace of God, we would be just as lost, just as ungodly, just as undone as everyone else. But God intervened and brought us to Himself. We should constantly praise and thank Him for His great love.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank Thee for the "but Gods" in the Bible and for divine intervention. We thank Thee for sending Thy Son in time and history, for granting us repentance and faith, and calling us into Thyself. We thank Thee, Heavenly Father, for all Thou hast done. Help us to praise Thee, acknowledging Thy goodness, kindness, and grace. We ask these things in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

CHAPTER 13

Overcoming The Fear Of The Jews

Introduction and Review of 'For Fear of the Jews'

In Mark chapter 15, verses 42 and 43, we read: “And now when the even was come, because it was the preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, Joseph of Arimathaea, an honourable counsellor, which also waited for the kingdom of God, came, and went in boldly unto Pilate, and craved the body of Jesus.”

This is the second part of the message that I began last week. I will take time to review, especially for Francis and Van, who are not here, and I trust that you will be able to follow very easily today.

Last week, I preached a message which I entitled, “For Fear of the Jews.” Today, the message is entitled, “Overcoming the Fear of the Jews.” Last week, I pointed out that in the Scripture, over and over, the Bible talks about “for fear of the Jews.” This phrase has many implications.

I also reminded you that years ago I preached a six-part series on “Who Is Israel” and later another five-part series on “Jews, Judaism

and Christianity." I encourage each one of you, if you have heard those messages, to listen to them again. If you have not heard them, please do so. I am going to give a quote or two from those messages in order to try to catch us up.

The very first time the word "Jews" occurs in our King James Bible is in 2 Kings chapter 16 and verse 6. There the Bible says, "At that time Rezin king of Syria recovered Elath to Syria, and drove the Jews from Elath: and the Syrians came to Elath, and dwelt there unto this day." When it says that he drove the Jews from Elath, it means that he drove away the Judeans. The Judeans were from the southern kingdom, and here they are called the Jews. You have to remember that in Israel there were two kingdoms.

Defining 'the Jews' in Scripture

There was the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom. The southern kingdom contained particularly the tribe of Judah, as well as the tribes of Benjamin and Simeon. But the word "Jews" is used in different ways in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word is Yehudi, and it literally refers to someone who is a Judahite or a descendant of Judah.

It is also used in the Bible in six ways. Number one, to describe a person or persons from the tribe of Judah. Number two, it describes the kingdom of Judah. Number three, the land of Judah or Judea. Number four, the nation of Judah. Number five, the house of Judah, referring to anyone belonging to the kingdom, house, tribe, or nation of Judah. Lastly, it refers to the religion of the Jews in the New Testament.

The Greek word is Ioudaios, and it simply means a Judean. When you see the word in the New Testament or Old Testament, particularly, it refers to someone associated with or connected to the land of Judea, the nation of Judah, or the tribe of Judah. In the New Testament, it refers more to the religion. That is why the Apostle Paul said that he prospered in the Jews' religion above many of his equals. In Galatians chapter 1, he talks about the religion of the Jews twice.

Have you ever noticed that today, when someone says anything about the Jews, whether it is deserving or not is immaterial, you are very quickly labeled as anti-Semitic? Most people have never understood what that term actually means.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines Semite as "a member of any of the peoples who speak or spoke a Semitic language, including in particular Jews and Arabs," the Arabian people or Semitic people as well. The word derives from the modern Latin Semita through the late Latin from Greek Sēm, or Shem, the son of Noah in the Bible, from whom these peoples were traditionally supposed to be descended. In Genesis chapter 11, you see the genealogy relating to Shem. Reading down through it, you find that Abraham is among the descendants of Shem. Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

Everything comes through Shem as far as the line of the Messiah is concerned. Interestingly enough, when you talk about Semites or Shemites, you have to remember that Abraham not only had Isaac with Sarah; he also had Ishmael with Hagar. Hence the Arabians. If you look very quickly in your Bibles to Genesis chapter 25, you will find that Abraham produced an awful lot of seed. After Sarah died, he took another wife. Her name was Keturah. The Bible says, beginning with verse 1 of Genesis 25, "Then again Abraham took a wife, and her name was Keturah. And she bare him Zimran, and Jokshan, and Medan, and Midian, and Ishbak, and Shuah." Then you read verses 3, 4, and 5, and you find some of the grandchildren of these children. Obviously, now you have more Semites because they are through the loins of Abraham.

Usually, when you hear the term "Jews," especially in the Old Testament, it referred to those who were in the Southern Kingdom. In the southern kingdom, you had the tribe of Judah. You also had the tribe of Benjamin, and you also had the tribe of Simeon. Although Benjamin and Simeon had their inheritance in Judea, they maintained their tribal identity.

Romans chapter 11 explains this. In verse 1, the Apostle Paul, referring to himself, asks, "I say then, Hath God cast away his people?" Then he says, "God forbid." Watch his explanation: "For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of

Benjamin." Paul is claiming to be an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. I suppose he could also have said that he was a Judean, because Benjamin had his inheritance in the land of Judea. Nevertheless, he says, "Here I am, I'm a Benjamite."

The point is very simple. I could say that we are all Southerners, except for one of us here. When I talk about Southerners, we could talk about Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Missouri. I could say that all these people are Southerners, but although we are all Southerners, we would be Georgians or Floridians. You understand what I'm saying?

So this is the way it was in those days. They may have been Judeans in the sense that they had their inheritance there, but they were Benjamites. They were Simeonites. They just happened to live in that land. They kept their tribal identity per se.

Now, the point that I made last week is this: when you see the word, term, or phrase "the Jews," which appears many times in the New Testament, it does not refer to all the Judeans. It does not refer to all of those who lived in the southern kingdom. It does not refer to all those who were of the tribe of Judah. It refers mainly to what you and I would call the ruling elite in those days. The ruling elite had to be, and was, the Sadducees and the Pharisees.

The Power and Corruption of the Ruling Elite

In John 9, Jesus Christ had healed the man who had been born blind. In verse 22, here is what the parents said to the Jews: "These words spake his parents, because they feared the Jews." They were Judeans themselves. Yet it says they feared the Jews, for the Jews had agreed already that if any man did confess that he was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue. Therefore said his parents, "He is of age; ask him."

So what Jews had agreed already? Those who were in control, those who had the power and authority to ostracize, excommunicate, and kick someone out of the synagogue.

In John 20:19, we read, "Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples

were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you." The disciples were meeting behind closed doors, probably locked doors. Why? The Bible says, "for fear of the Jews." This refers to those who were in control, the ruling elite who had the power and authority to act against them.

Well, they were not afraid of every Judean. They were afraid of the ruling elite because of their power and their authority. So, if you look back in your Bibles now to the book of John chapter 12, John chapter 12, and notice if you would please verse 42. We'll come back to this verse a little bit later anyhow. John 12 verse 42, "Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue." Wow. So even some of the chief rulers who were part and parcel of the Pharisees would not confess Christ lest they be kicked out by the others. And now you have to remember that the Pharisees had control of the people, the general populace, the synagogues. The Sadducees had control of the temple. Now interestingly enough the Sadducees and the Pharisees not only had some religious authority and religious power, they also had some civil power and criminal power, that is to arrest criminals. If you would look in your Bibles to the book of Acts chapter 5 and let's begin there with verse 18.

In fact, let's read verse 17 just so you can see the context. Acts chapter 5 verse 17, the Bible says, "Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation." So what did they do? They were filled with indignation against the apostles, "and laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison." So evidently they either had power to incarcerate or authority to incarcerate or they were very closely connected to someone who did. If you would look in the book of Acts chapter 8, you remember Saul of Tarsus before he was saved and became the mighty Apostle Paul. The Bible says this, "And as for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison." You remember Paul was a Pharisee. In fact, he identified himself as a Pharisee of the Pharisees. So here is a Pharisee hauling men and women off to prison. Then if you look in Acts chapter 26 at the

testimony that the Apostle Paul gave, notice what he said in Acts chapter 26 and verse 10. Acts 26 and verse 10.

He's giving his testimony before King Agrippa and he says this: "Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities."

Paul says that, before his conversion, he shut up many of the saints in prison, having received authority from the chief priests. In other words, they sanctioned it. When the saints were put to death, he gave his voice against them. It was not merely that he consented to the death of Stephen; he did so in Acts chapter 6, but evidently there were many more as well.

Here you find the power of this ruling elite, the power of the Jews. The Pharisees had control of the populace because of the synagogue, while the Sadducees had control over the temple, because it was from the Sadducees that you had the priestly order. Both Pharisees and Sadducees made up the Sanhedrin, the ruling court. During the time of the Romans, especially under governors such as Pontius Pilate, the Sanhedrin had jurisdiction only in the province of Judea. The Sanhedrin also had its own police force.

It had civil authority and criminal authority as well. However, in the New Testament, under the Romans, although they could arrest and condemn, they could not execute. It was the Sanhedrin that condemned Jesus Christ, but the Romans reserved to themselves the right to execute. Hence Jesus Christ was crucified, which is a Roman death, and not stoned to death, which was an Israelite or Mosaic death. Although they could condemn, they did not have the power to execute; the Romans had taken that away from them.

Remember when Jesus Christ was standing before Pilate and Pilate asked, "Whom shall I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus?" They all called for Barabbas. "What evil hath he done?" They answered, "We have a law, and by our law he ought to die." Yet they did not have the power to execute him.

John chapter 18 shows that they had the power to arrest: "Then the band and the captain and officers of the Jews"—not all the Judeans, but the ruling elite—"took Jesus, and bound him, and led him away to Annas first; for he was father in law to Caiaphas, which was the high priest that same year." The Sanhedrin, the Sadducees, and the Pharisees were notoriously corrupt. They were not only corrupt; they were tyrannical and despotic. You either agreed with them or submitted to them, or else you were ostracized, excommunicated, imprisoned, or executed. They considered themselves above the law. Much like our government and our politicians today, they could do whatever they thought they wanted to do.

To show how corrupt they were, remember when these individuals came to John's baptism. In Matthew 3:7, he said to them, "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" He called them a bunch of vipers. In Matthew 23:33, Jesus Christ said to them, "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" Our Lord said they were not only serpents and vipers, but that they were doomed and damned and could not escape the damnation of hell, because they were so exceedingly corrupt.

Because of their corruption, there were a lot of people who feared their authority and their power. It was usurped authority most of the time, and it was corrupt power most of the time, because these people basically did as they pleased.

Joseph of Arimathea: A Secret Disciple

John 12:42 says, “Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.” So here you had all of these corrupt individuals. However, there were exceptions. One of those exceptions happened to be a man by the name of Joseph of Arimathea. The Bible tells us he was a rich man. He was an honorable man. He was a counselor.

He was a secret disciple. The Bible tells us that he waited for the kingdom of God. But you are going to ask this question: Why was

Joseph of Arimathea a secret disciple? And here is the answer: for fear of the Jews.

I want to show you something that may astound you. It may amaze you. I want to show you four passages concerning Joseph of Arimathea. As you understand who this man was, you are going to understand the power and the influence that the Jews had. In Matthew 27, beginning with verse 57, the Bible says, “When the even was come, there came a rich man of Arimathaea, named Joseph, who also himself was Jesus' disciple: He went to Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be delivered. And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth.”

Now, verse 60 he said, "And laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre, and departed." Note if you would, first of all we are told that Joseph was a rich man of Arimathea. We're also told that he was Jesus' disciple. We're also told that he went in and begged the body of Jesus Christ. Now look if you would please in the book of Mark chapter 15 and notice if you would verses 42 and 43. This was our text, but I want to point some things out as we read about Joseph. Mark chapter 15 verse 42: "And now when the even was come, because it was the preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, Joseph of Arimathaea, an honourable counsellor, which also waited for the kingdom of God, came, and went in boldly unto Pilate, and craved the body of Jesus." Now we're told that Joseph was an honorable counselor. We're told that he waited for the kingdom of God. We're also told that he went in boldly unto Pilate and craved the body of Jesus.

The interesting thing is this: when the Bible says in verse 43 that he was an honorable counselor, the word "counselor" refers to a senator. In other words, Joseph was a member of the Sanhedrin. Let me show you. Look in your Bibles to Luke chapter 23. Luke chapter 23 beginning there with verse 50. Luke 23 verse 50, read what is said about Joseph: "And, behold, there was a man named Joseph, a counsellor; and he was a good man, and a just." Are you ready?

"(The same had not consented to the counsel and deed of them;)" that is the rest of the Sanhedrin. "He was of Arimathaea, a city of the

Jews: who also himself waited for the kingdom of God. This man went unto Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus." So here is Joseph of Arimathea, who is in the Sanhedrin himself, who is a secret disciple. And the reason he has not made known his faith is for fear of these Jews who had control

of the temple and the synagogue and the people. Now, if you would turn right over to the book of John, chapter 19, and look in verse 38. John 19, verse 38. Here it is spelled out in black and white for you: "And after this Joseph of Arimathaea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus: and Pilate gave him leave. He came therefore, and took the body of Jesus." So

Here was a man who was rich, honorable, a secret disciple of Jesus Christ, and one who waited for the kingdom of God. He had power and authority himself and was a member of the Sanhedrin, and yet he still feared the Jews—that is, the rest of those who were in the Sanhedrin. When Jesus Christ was tried and condemned, he did not consent with their verdict or their deed.

Joseph's Boldness at the Crucifixion

The Bible tells us it was this man who went in and boldly asked for the body of the Lord Jesus Christ. Where were the twelve disciples? Where were the twelve apostles? Judas had hanged himself, and Mark 14:50 tells us that when they took Jesus, the rest of the disciples forsook Him and fled.

As far as I can tell, only one of the original twelve was at the crucifixion, and that was John. In John 19:25, we read: “Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved”—that is John—“he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.” Here is John standing there, and our Lord commits His mother into the hands of the Apostle John. There was one other who may or may not have been there.

I would probably say not, but it is a matter of interpretation when you come to 1 Peter 5:2, where Peter says that he was an eyewitness to Christ's sufferings. You can be an eyewitness to the sufferings without being an eyewitness to all of them. Certainly Peter was in the garden when Jesus prayed and sweat great drops of sweat as blood, and Peter was with Him when they came to arrest Him, for it was Peter who cut off Malchus's ear with a sword. Certainly Peter was at the hall of judgment, because it was there that he denied the Lord three times. So just how far we can interpret what he said about being an eyewitness to the sufferings of Christ, I do not know. He may have been hiding somewhere, beholding afar off. The Bible simply says that he was there.

After the death of Jesus Christ, the disciples assembled behind closed doors for fear of the Jews. I want to emphasize the great bravery and courage exhibited by Joseph of Arimathea. We may not think much of it today, but it took a great deal of courage.

John Chrysostom, an early Church father, says, "The courage of Joseph is greatly to be admired, in that for the love of Christ he exposed himself to the danger of death."

How could Joseph have exposed himself to the danger of death? Albert Barnes writes: "God had raised up this distinguished counsellor and secret disciple for a special and most important vocation. The disciples of Jesus had fled, and if they had not, they had no influence with Pilate. Unless there had been a special application to Pilate in behalf of Jesus, his body would have been buried that night in the common grave with the malefactors. For it was the law of the Jews that the body of an executed man could not remain on the cross on the Sabbath. At this critical juncture, God called forward this secret disciple, this friend of Jesus, though unknown as such to the world, and gave him confidence. He dared to express sympathy for the Saviour. He went in boldly and begged the body of Jesus."

"It needed no small measure of courage to do this. Jesus had just been condemned, mocked, spit upon, crucified—the death of a slave and of the most guilty wretch. To avow attachment for Him now was proof of sincere affection. And the Holy Spirit has thought this

worthy of special notice, and has set down this bold attachment of a senator for Jesus for our imitation."

Stop and think about this. Jesus Christ had already been condemned. He had been mocked, spit upon, and crucified. And now Joseph goes in and says, "I want his body." He does not go into a funeral home. He goes to Pilate, the man who had sentenced Him to death. Adam Clarke says it like this—now put two and two together when you hear this.

"He who was a coward before, now acts a more open, fearless part than any of the disciples of our Lord." The Holy Spirit has thought this worthy of special notice. It needed no small measure of courage to declare now for Jesus, who had been a few hours ago condemned as a blasphemer by the Jews and as a seditious person by the Romans. And this was the more remarkable in Joseph, because hitherto for fear of the Jews he had been only a secret disciple of our Lord.

The providence of God has a way of bringing His followers to light, even in the face of death and condemnation. Jesus Christ had just been crucified as a blasphemer by the Jews and a seditious person by the Romans. Yet Joseph went in and said, "I want the body of Jesus Christ." He was identifying himself as a follower of Jesus Christ. Do you know who provided all the spices for the burial of Jesus Christ?

Nicodemus was another secret disciple. Look at John 19:39: “And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight.” Here we have two secret disciples now boldly coming out, confessing and acknowledging Jesus Christ.

Now go back to Mark 15. I want to show you something. Here is a word that is very interesting. Mark 15:43 says, “Joseph of Arimathaea, an honourable counsellor, which also waited for the kingdom of God, came, and went in boldly unto Pilate, and craved the body of Jesus.” The word “boldly” is the Greek word tolmaō, and it means extreme conduct.

Joseph was courageous, bold, daring, and brazen. He may have been asking, but it was almost more like demanding: “I want the

body of Jesus Christ." When Pilate had inquired and found that He was already dead, he allowed Joseph to have the body. So I have a question for you.

What do you think made the difference? What do you think made the difference in Joseph's life? Joseph of Arimathea was now willingly, openly, boldly, and defiantly identifying himself as a follower of Jesus Christ, whereas before he had kept silence for fear of the Jews. As a member of the Sanhedrin, he undoubtedly was an eyewitness to the trial of Jesus Christ, so he had firsthand information. He knew exactly what had happened and was a witness to the proceedings.

Luke 23 tells us that he had not consented to their counsel and deed. In other words, he was not willing to condemn Jesus Christ because he was a secret believer. But now Jesus Christ had been condemned, sentenced to death, and crucified. A time came when Joseph understood, It is now or never. I will acknowledge Him. I will confess Him. Now is the time. I will tell you what I honestly believe brought Joseph to this point: he understood the sacrificial and substitutionary death of Jesus Christ.

Joseph was an honorable counselor who waited for the Kingdom of God. He had to have known the Old Testament Scriptures and understood that all the lambs sacrificed in the Old Testament could never take away sin or cover sin. They were only a picture, a type, an emblem of the One who could take away sin. John the Baptist had already identified Jesus Christ as "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." I believe Joseph probably grasped and understood the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ.

For Joseph, then, it was not the end. It could not be the end because he believed that Jesus Christ was not only the king of Israel and the King of the Jews, quote unquote. He believed that Jesus Christ was King of Kings and Lord of Lords and God of Gods. It did not matter if He had been crucified, or if it appeared that His kingdom had been crushed and everything was gone and done away with. He was still going to admit, confess, and acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord.

You remember that passage in Mark 8:38, where our Lord said, “Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.” Joseph reached the point where he said, “I'm not going to be ashamed of him.” By going into Pilate, Joseph undoubtedly identified himself completely as a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. While Jesus was alive, Joseph may have admired Him and followed Him secretly from a distance. He may have refused to condemn Him. But now he was not only refusing to condemn Him; he was espousing His cause at what we would call the worst possible time, because Jesus Christ had not yet been resurrected.

You would think that it was all over. We can see what gave Joseph a little courage and boldness. Undoubtedly, God had a special calling upon him for this. But here is my other question: There was a transformation in the lives of the other apostles. What made the difference in their lives? When Jesus Christ was arrested, they all forsook Him and fled. When they got back together after His crucifixion, they were behind closed doors for fear of the Jews.

SCRIPTURE READING - Acts 4:5-13 (KJV)

The Transformation of the Apostles

They were afraid of the ruling elite, the power and authority of the Jews. So what made the difference? Let us look at Acts chapter 4, where the disciples had healed a lame man.

“And it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers, and elders, and scribes, and Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem.” It was a clique, a corrupt cabal. Here were the rulers; here were the Jews. “And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?” How did you heal this man?

“Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; Be it known unto you all, and to all the

people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."

"Now, when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus." In Acts chapter 1, our Lord told his disciples, "But tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high." In Acts chapter 2, the Holy Ghost came upon them, and they began to witness, preach, and teach.

SCRIPTURE READING - Mark 3:13-14; Acts 4:23-31 (KJV)

And now they have been arrested and called to account for healing this man. What does Peter say? "You rulers, you wicked men, you have taken the Lord Jesus Christ and crucified him. This was your responsibility; you killed him, but God raised him from the dead. And it is through this man and through his power that this impotent man is now made whole. Be it known unto you, you listen to us."

Notice the last verse that I read: "And they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus." What was it that gave these disciples a holy boldness? It was not just the Holy Spirit. Certainly it was him, but they were with the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is a passage in Mark chapter 3, verses 13 and 14, where Jesus calls his disciples. The Bible says: "He goeth up into a mountain, and calleth unto him whom he would." So he sovereignly selects his disciples; he calls unto himself whom he would. The next verse says: "And he ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach." Sending them forth to preach the gospel is secondary. Being with him is primary. So they took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus.

> Now, since we are in Acts 4, let us go down to verse 23. They had already been arrested, thrown in prison, and released. "And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them. And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is: Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done. And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus. And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness."

I wonder why we have lost the boldness in our day and age. The answer is that we have never asked the Lord for holy boldness. We have not continued in abiding with the Lord in order to receive holy boldness. Have you ever asked the Lord for holy boldness? Have you ever asked Him to make you a witness and a testimony in the face of tyranny, wickedness, and despotism? Have you ever asked the Lord to use you to confront evil and wickedness? Have you ever asked Him to make you an example in your Christian walk?

The Need for Holy Boldness Today

I believe the time has come when we need a holy boldness. We need to stand for Jesus Christ like we have never stood for Him before. Look at all the wickedness prevalent today: humanism, corruption, perversions, and all the filth that is going on. Look at how America has sunk, how the Christian church has gone down, how Christians have gone down, and how families have gone down.

The truth is, we had better get our act together. Religious tyranny is just as bad as civil tyranny. Wickedness in the church is just as awful and corrupt as wickedness in civil government. When we sit silently and say nothing and do nothing, it is to sin by consent. God says, "But unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth? Seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee." To the wicked God says, "What hast thou to do to declare my statutes? Or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth? Seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee."

I remember that people would ask me from time to time, “Have you heard Elvis Presley sing this beautiful hymn?” My response was, “No, and neither do I want to hear him.” Why would I want to hear an ungodly man try to sing a godly hymn? Stop and think about that. Why would I want to hear an ungodly man mimic and proclaim the Word of God? God said, “What hast thou to do to take my word in thy mouth?”

We have not had television in years, and I always hated those Christmas specials in which movie stars sang all sorts of songs, but at the end had to sing one hymn together. Everything else was corrupt. Why would they do that? God said, “What hast thou to do to take my word in thy mouth?” You hate instruction. You will not listen, live it, or receive it.

Now look at verse 18: “When thou sawest a thief, then thou consentedst with him, and hast been partaker with adulterers.” “Thou givest thy mouth to evil, and thy tongue frameth deceit. Thou sittest and speakest against thy brother; thou slanderest thine own mother's son. These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes.”

“Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver.” When you saw a thief, you consented with him. You did not say anything, rebuke him, or try to stop him. When you silently let someone sin, God says that is approval. You have been partakers with adulterers because you do not disavow or rebuke it; you consent to it. To consent is to sin by silence.

There is a time, I believe, for holy boldness. That holy boldness is needed and necessary today in light of all the sin and wickedness that is prevalent on every hand. It takes the fear of God to overcome the fear of man. What happened to Joseph of Arimathea, to Nicodemus, and to the apostles? They came to the realization that God is sovereign, that they should fear Him and fear Him alone. I quoted last week Proverbs 29:25, "The fear of man bringeth a snare. But whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe." The fear of man does indeed bring a snare.

Conclusion and Prayer

If we are going to have the fear of God, we must meditate upon His Word. We must assimilate His Word, stay with the Lord Jesus Christ, abide with Him, and be with Him. We must understand that He alone is to be feared.

There are probably people who are believers in Jesus Christ whom you and I would never think of as believers in Jesus Christ. Who would have thought Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Sanhedrin, would be a secret disciple of Jesus Christ? How about Nicodemus? But God kept those men behind the scenes until they were needed. Then they came out boldly, brazenly, and courageously and stood for the Lord Jesus Christ.

I know there are brethren who will stand with me, but there are brethren who will probably stand even more so whom we do not know about, or whom we would not consider Christians. I would imagine Joseph of Arimathea would have been under suspicion simply by being a member of the Sanhedrin. God uses heroic men in desperate times. At the crucifixion of our Lord, it was a desperate time, and God sovereignly called forth Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. After the resurrection, He gave the apostles power that they might be bold in the name of Jesus Christ.

That is what we need. We need to learn to ask the Lord for holy boldness, that we may proclaim His Word and stand for His truth.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to You this day. We thank You for Your Word. We ask for holiness. We ask for boldness. We ask for grace and mercy,

that we may serve Thee acceptably with reverence and godly fear. In Thy name we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 14

Watch Out

Introduction: God's Preservation

In 2 Samuel 8:6, the Bible says, “Then David put garrisons in Syria of Damascus: and the Syrians became servants to David, and brought gifts. And the Lord preserved David whithersoever he went.” Verse 14 says, “And he put garrisons in Edom; throughout all Edom put he garrisons, and all they of Edom became David's servants. And the Lord preserved David whithersoever he went.”

We are talking today about God's preservation. Preservation is the act, grace, and mercy of God, whereby He preserves His own in the face of wicked men and events. We will see shortly a greater example of God's preservation in the life of David. However, you have to understand that God also preserves His creation. There are many things God preserves that we never even think about.

For instance, Nehemiah 9:6 says, “Thou, even thou art Lord alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein, and thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worshippeth thee.” Thou preservest them all. God is not simply the

Creator of the universe; He is the sustainer and preserver of the universe and everything therein.

Of course, God also preserves His Word. Psalm 12:6–7 says, “The words of the Lord are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. Thou shalt keep them, O Lord, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever.” Psalm 119:89 says, “For ever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven.” God not only preserves His creation; He also preserves His Word. Thankfully, God also preserves His people.

God Preserves His Creation, Word, and Saints

The Bible tells us in Psalm 37:28, "For the Lord loveth judgment, and forsaketh not his saints; they are preserved for ever: but the seed of the wicked shall be cut off." One of my favorite passages is 1 Thessalonians chapter 5. The Word of God says in verse 23, "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly"—W-H-O-L-L-Y—"the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." Then, in Jude 1:1, we read, "Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ."

God not only preserves His creation and His Word; He preserves His saints as well. When you stop and think about Israel and God leading them out of Egypt through the entire wilderness, it was only by His preservation that Israel was brought through the wilderness. In fact, Joshua 24:17 says, "For the Lord our God, he it is that brought us up and our fathers out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, and which did those great signs in our sight, and preserved us in all the way wherein we went, and among all the people through whom we passed."

It was God who sovereignly preserved them as they went through the wilderness and traveled through all those nations. Deuteronomy 8:4–5 tells us that He also provided for them as well as preserving them: "Thy raiment waxed not old upon thee, neither did thy foot swell, these forty years" in the wilderness. God provided the food, the manna, and the water out of the rock. He provided everything. For forty years their feet did not swell from all that walking, and they

were satisfied with the same raiment; it did not wax old. I wish that were true today.

Personal Illustrations of Preservation

I could save a lot of money on dresses, I can assure you. There is nothing wrong with them; she just wants new ones, you know. But that is the way it is.

It was God who preserved Israel. Many times, when we talk about God's preservation, we do not comprehend how great that preservation is until we get into our straits. Job had a wonderful life until he was afflicted. Then, in Job 29:2, he said, "Oh that I were as in months past, in the days when God preserved me." During his suffering and affliction, he recognized and understood God's preservation. I am sure most of us could give illustration after illustration of how God sovereignly preserved us.

I just showed you a picture of that four-foot diamondback rattlesnake that I killed yesterday. He was about a foot and a half from my trail camera, and I was about to step over him to reach it when I saw him. I think I probably jumped back about fifteen feet. I do not know how far I jumped, but I can assure you I jumped back, and I thank the Lord for preserving me and taking care of me.

There are many times that God has sovereignly preserved us, and we were totally unaware of the danger. We did not discern the danger, see the adversary, or hear or heed the warnings. We were not cognizant of our surroundings, and yet God, in His grace and mercy, sovereignly preserved us.

Years ago, I went golfing with an old friend. He was older, and I was younger. I could care less about golf; as a boy, I called it "cow pasture pool." I went mainly to be with him and for the exercise, because we walked. To reach the golf course, we had to cross a train track. He slowed down and rolled a little, looking to his left. When he did, I looked to my right, and here came a train, barreling down the track.

I said very calmly, "You better whoa or go." Thankfully, all he heard was "whoa," and he slammed on the brakes in time. The train shot by. We would never have made it across that track. When the

train had passed, I looked at Brother Colter and said, "Don't you think it would be wise if we just sat here a few moments and praised the Lord and thanked Him for His deliverance?" It could have been over that quickly, but God sovereignly preserved us. One of our daily praises ought to be thanking God for preserving us, even when we are totally unaware of His preservation.

We need to thank Him for that. The Bible says that God preserved David whithersoever he went. Remember that David was a man of war. Saul was king when David killed Goliath, and David began fighting under Saul. When he returned, the women would sing, "Saul has killed his thousands, and David his ten thousands."

David's Preservation in Battle

When we consider the mode of combat in Bible times, it is astounding that anybody lived through it. Archery was long-distance combat, but that distance would not have been very far. Spears were used at a little greater distance, but most fighting was with short swords and daggers—up close and personal. When I was in boot camp many years ago, they took us out for a night exercise and showed us an eleven-man squad. In those days there were no AR-15s or M-16s; we had only M-1s. There were two BARs, Browning automatic rifles, on each end. The men in the middle each had sectors of fire, with cross sectors. Every fifth round was a tracer. When the firing started, all I could see was a solid sheet of red, meaning I was seeing only every fifth bullet; there were four I could not see. I never will forget the thought that entered my mind: "Oh Lord, how could anybody crawl through that and live?"

And yet hundreds and thousands did. When you stop and think about these battles in the Bible, some people killed twenty, thirty, fifty, or sixty thousand in one day. When you read about Alexander the Great and some of these men, it was nothing to kill eighty to a hundred thousand men in one day. It was all up close and personal. When you consider this combat in the Bible, you understand how Saul wanted David dead, but he did not want to be the one to kill him.

Look in your Bibles to 1 Samuel chapter 18, beginning at verse 17. Saul had promised David his daughter to be his wife, but he did not

give his older daughter to David. The Bible says: “And Saul said to David, Behold my elder daughter Merab, her will I give thee to wife: only be thou valiant for me, and fight the Lord's battles. For Saul said, Let not mine hand be upon him, but let the hand of the Philistines be upon him.”

In other words, Saul wanted David dead, but he said, “I just want you to fight, and if you fight, I am going to let you marry my daughter Merab.” Now watch verse 18: “And David said unto Saul, Who am I? and what is my life, or my father's family in Israel, that I should be son in law to the king? But it came to pass at the time when Merab Saul's daughter should have been given to David, that she was given unto Adriel the Meholathite to wife. And Michal Saul's daughter loved David: and they told Saul, and the thing pleased him.”

Now see why it pleased him: “And Saul said, I will give him her, that she may be a snare to him, and that the hand of the Philistines may be against him. Wherefore Saul said to David, Thou shalt this day be my son in law in the one of the twain.”

“And Saul commanded his servants, saying, Commune with David secretly, and say, Behold, the king hath delight in thee, and all his servants love thee: now therefore be the king’s son in law.” Saul’s servants spoke those words to David, and David said, “Seemeth it to you a light thing to be a king’s son in law, seeing that I am a poor man, and lightly esteemed?” Saul then commanded them to tell David that the king desired no dowry, but an hundred foreskins of the Philistines, to be avenged of the king’s enemies. Saul thought to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines. But David arose with his men, slew two hundred Philistines, and brought their foreskins to the king. “And Saul gave him Michal his daughter to wife.”

Now, Saul wanted David dead. He knew that combat was very close and personal, and he thought David would probably fall. Therefore, he would be rid of David. The only thing Saul did not consider was God’s sovereign preservation—how God protected and preserved David.

David could rightly sing, and did so in Psalm 140:7: “O God the Lord, the strength of my salvation, thou hast covered my head in the

day of battle.” Certainly, God did indeed cover his head. When you stop and think about God’s sovereign preservation of David, his confrontation with Goliath was an astounding miracle. David was a mere lad, confronting Goliath, who was not only a giant but also a warrior from his youth—a trained military man. David was fifteen or sixteen years of age when he fought him.

Moreover, you remember what David told Saul before he fought Goliath. He said that a bear and a lion came and took a lamb from his father’s flock, and he said, “I caught the bear by the

beard and slew him, and slew the lion as well. So obviously the hand of God was on David, preserving him as well. But out of all of David's battles, there was one very close call. In 2 Samuel 21, beginning with verse 15, we read: "Moreover the Philistines had yet war again with Israel; and David went down, and his servants with him, and fought against the Philistines: and David waxed faint." I don't know if it was heat exhaustion or tiredness, but he was faint. Watch verse 16: "And Ishbi-benob, which was of the sons of the giant, the weight of whose spear weighed three hundred shekels of brass in weight, he being girded with a new sword, thought to have slain David."

SCRIPTURE READING - 2 Samuel 22:1-7 (KJV)

> But Abishai the son of Zeruiah succoured him, and smote the Philistine, and killed him. Then the men of David sware unto him, saying, Thou shalt go no more out with us to battle, that thou quench not the light of Israel. So Ishbi-benob thought he had taken care of David, but he did not. And whoever David fought against, and wherever David fought, and whenever David fought, it was the Lord that preserved him. When he fought against the Syrians, the Lord preserved David whithersoever he went; and the same was true when he fought against the Moabites, the Edomites, the Ammonites, or the Philistines.

David's Song of Deliverance (2 Samuel 22)

It was precisely with this preservation in mind that David wrote 2 Samuel chapter 22. I would encourage you to read this entire chapter. Notice, beginning there with verse 1: "And David spake

> unto the Lord the words of this song in the day that the Lord had delivered him out of the hand of all his enemies, and out of the hand of Saul: And he said, The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; The God of my rock; in him will I trust: he is my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my high tower, and my refuge, my saviour; thou savest me from violence. I will call on the Lord, who is worthy to be praised: so shall I be saved from mine enemies. When the waves of death compassed me, the floods of ungodly men made me afraid; The sorrows of hell compassed me about; the snares of death prevented me; In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried to my God: and he did hear my voice out of his temple, and my cry did enter into his ears."
>
> But note the words that David uses: The Lord is my rock. The Lord is my fortress. He is my shield.

He is my high tower. He is my refuge. You are my Saviour. You will save me from violence. All of these are places of defense. You will find that 2 Samuel chapter 22 is repeated in your Bibles as Psalm 18. I encourage you to read it and note how David praises the Lord for His sovereign preservation.

Seemingly, the wicked could not destroy David. The giants could not destroy David. None of his enemies could touch him. David was almost totally destroyed—not by a Philistine, not by a giant, but by a woman. She was not a wicked woman; she was an Israelite, and she happened to be a very beautiful and married woman.

The Danger of Women: Biblical Warnings

Have you ever stopped to think about the men in the Bible who were basically destroyed because of a woman? Do you realize it was a woman who caused the fall and destruction of Adam? Eve said, "Here it is. Take a bite." It was a woman who caused the fall and destruction of Samson. It was a woman who provoked and caused the wickedness of Ahab. Jezebel, the Bible says, stirred him up to do evil. It was a woman who caused King Jehoram to fall as well.

There are a multitude of warnings given in the Bible concerning women. Not all of these necessarily are wicked women, but most are

in these passages. Notice Proverbs chapter 5, beginning with verse 1 through verse 13. I tell every young man and every old man: you ought to read Proverbs 5, 6, and 7 about every day.

SCRIPTURE READING - Proverbs 5:1-13; Proverbs 6:23-35 (KJV)

"My son, attend unto my wisdom, and bow thine ear to my understanding: That thou mayest regard discretion, and that thy lips may keep knowledge." And now watch what he begins to say: "For the lips of a strange woman drop as an honeycomb, and her mouth is smoother than oil"—in other words, very enticing, very seductive, very beautiful, very delicious. But watch verse 4: "But her end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a twoedged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps take hold on hell. Lest thou shouldest ponder the path of life, her ways are moveable, that thou canst not know them. Hear me now therefore, O ye children, and depart not from the words of my mouth. Remove thy way far from her, and come not nigh the door of her house: Lest thou give thine honour unto others, and thy years unto the cruel: Lest strangers be filled with thy wealth; and thy labours be in the house of a stranger; And thou mourn at the last, when thy flesh and thy body are consumed, And say, How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof; I have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me."

So here is a warning. "For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light; and reproofs of instruction are the way of life." What are these reproofs of instruction to do? "To keep thee from the evil woman, from the flattery of the tongue of a strange woman. Lust not after her beauty in thine heart; neither let her take thee with her eyelids. For by means of a whorish woman a man is brought to a piece of bread: and the adulteress will hunt for the precious life. Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? Can one go upon hot coals, and his feet not be burned? So he that goeth in to his neighbour's wife; whosoever toucheth her shall not be innocent. Men do not despise a thief, if he steal to satisfy his soul when he is hungry; But if he be found, he shall restore sevenfold; he shall give all the substance of his house. But whoso committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding: he that doeth it destroyeth his

> own soul. A wound and dishonour shall he get; and his reproach shall not be wiped away. For jealousy is the rage of a man: therefore he will not spare in the day of vengeance."

"He will not regard any ransom; neither will he rest content, though thou givest many gifts." Now look in Proverbs 7, beginning at verse 24: "Hearken unto me now therefore, O ye children, and attend to the words of my mouth. Let not thine heart decline to her ways, go not astray in her paths. For she hath cast down many wounded: yea, many strong men have been slain by her. Her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death."

Let me repeat this: David fell to a woman, not a giant. He fell to a woman, not a Philistine warrior. Here is the question: Since we know that God sovereignly preserved David in all of these battles, because the Scripture says so, why did God not sovereignly preserve David in the situation with Bathsheba?

God certainly had the power to do so. In Genesis chapter 20, when Abimelech had taken Sarah, Abraham's wife, into his house because Abraham said, "She's my sister," and Sarah herself said, "He's my brother," God came to Abimelech in a dream by night and said, "If you touch her, you're a dead man. I'm going to kill you." Abimelech replied, "In the innocence of my hands and integrity of my heart have I done this thing." God said, "Yea, I know that thou didst it in the innocence of thy hands and integrity of thy heart. Therefore I withheld thee from sinning against me." He told him that if he did not return her to her husband, he was a dead man, and Abimelech certainly did so.

Why God Did Not Preserve David from Bathsheba

We know God could have done that for David. But why did God preserve David in all of these battles, and yet not preserve him in the situation with Bathsheba? I would answer this in two ways. First, God's preservation of David during those battles was connected to the fact that David was fighting the battles of the Lord. He was not merely fighting for David; he was fighting for the Lord and for the Lord's people, as well as defending his own life many times. David was not simply fighting for his own lusts and desires. He was a warrior, and the Bible tells us that God taught David how to fight

and often directed the battles Himself. When God preserved David, David was doing the will of God and honoring God in all that he did.

The second answer is this: God's preservation does not nullify, abrogate, destroy, or set aside our responsibilities.

Since David was a warrior, he had a responsibility to prepare for war. He had a responsibility to have his arrows sharp, his bow ready, and his sword sharp. In other words, he had a responsibility to make sure his men had the horses, the weapons, and everything that he needed to fight. But David also had that same responsibility to make sure that he was ready to fight spiritually as well. He had the same responsibility to make sure that he could control his own lusts and his own desires.

In just a moment, we are going to be looking at 2 Samuel chapter 11, and you are going to see that David totally ignored all of the warning signs, all the warning lights, and all the blaring sirens. Before this, let me tell you this, and then I am going to show you: there is absolutely no excuse for David to have committed adultery with Bathsheba. Absolutely no reason, no excuse.

How can I say that? Because David already had at least seven wives, and I do not know how many concubines. Six of his wives are listed in 2 Samuel chapter 3, verse 2: "And unto David were sons born in Hebron: and his firstborn was Amnon, of Ahinoam the Jezreelitess; And his second, Chileab, of Abigail the wife of Nabal the Carmelite"—she was the widow he had married—"and the third, Absalom the son of Maacah the daughter of Talmai king of Geshur; And the fourth, Adonijah the son of Haggith; And the fifth, Shephatiah the son of Abital; And the sixth, Ithream, by Eglah David's wife. These were born to David in Hebron." There are six mentioned right there. Moreover, Michal was given to David; that was Saul's daughter. That makes seven wives that he had right there. Then 2 Samuel chapter 5, verse 13, says: "And David took him more concubines and wives out of Jerusalem, after

Watch Out

David was come from Hebron, and there were yet sons and daughters born to David. These were the names of those that were

born unto him in Jerusalem: Shammua, Shobab, Nathan, Solomon, Ibhar, Elishua, Nepheg, Japhia, Elishama, Eliada, and Eliphelet. Note that Bathsheba would be named here. She would be number eight, because Solomon is named here.

Note also all these other children. The Bible says in verse 13 that David took him more concubines and wives out of Jerusalem. How many wives did he have? I have no idea. How many concubines did he have? I have no idea. But the truth of the matter is this: if David had a particular physical need, he had plenty of wives and plenty of concubines. He did not need Bathsheba.

David's Five Failures to Watch Out (2 Samuel 11)

All through the Bible, we have been admonished over and over to watch out. That is why I titled this message, “Watch Out.” Let me give you just one passage. First Corinthians chapter 16 and verse 13 says, “Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong.”

The Greek word for “watch” is gregoreo, and it literally means to watch, to be cautious, to be diligent, to watch out lest you be overtaken. It is a military term meaning to set out sentries or sentinels and put out guards. Do not let anyone or anything slip up on you. You watch out. You be careful. Over and over we have been commanded to watch out. In fact, those same words are in the Old Testament as well.

Now turn in your Bibles to Second Samuel chapter 11. I want you to see where David failed to watch out. David failed to watch out. Verse 1 gives us the very first failure: “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. 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, while David tarried still at Jerusalem.

David was not only king; he was also captain and leader of his people. It was his duty and responsibility to be with his men. In fact, Joab had to send for David and say, “If you don't get here, then I'm

going to take this city, and the city's going to be called by my name and not your name."

This was the same city Joab was fighting against in chapter 11, verse 1. "And Joab fought against Rabbah of the children of Ammon, and took the royal city. And Joab sent messengers to David, and said, I have fought against Rabbah, and have taken the city of waters. Now therefore gather the rest of the people together, and encamp against the city, and take it: lest I take the city, and it be called after my name. And David gathered all the people together, and went to Rabbah, and fought against it, and took it."

Joab had done all the fighting, while David was still in Jerusalem. Joab said, "You better get out here. If you don't get out here, the city's going to fall to me. I'm going to get the honor. I'm going to get the glory, not you. It'll be called after my name." David was in Jerusalem when he should have been fighting and directing his men.

Let me put it to you very plainly: usually bad things happen to us when we are in the wrong place at the wrong time. When you become slack in your responsibilities, shirk your responsibilities, refuse to fulfill your duties, and fail to perform your obligations, you're headed for trouble in one way or the other. David had responsibilities and obligations, and he was a shirker in this particular instance.

There was no excuse for him to be in Jerusalem. He should not have been there at all. I've said it like this before; I'm going to say it again: Don't go to stupid places with stupid people and do stupid things. David should not have been in Jerusalem. It was a stupid thing and a stupid place to be when he should have been out fighting, leading his men against the Ammonites.

So his first failure was that he did not do what he was supposed to do. If you look in verse 2, you will see a second failure to watch out: "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." Now note, "it came to pass in an eveningtide." When we think of eveningtide, we think of dusk, when you can see a little bit, but it is not quite dark. However, according to Albert Barnes and

several other commentators, eveningtide began at 3 p.m. There was plenty of daylight, and it had to be daylight for David to see Bathsheba.

David was in the wrong place at the wrong time. He had no business being in Jerusalem. Secondly, David had erred from his regular routine. Probably he had a big meal. Since Joab and all the men were out fighting, he had nothing to do, so he lay down and took an afternoon nap. He woke up, walked out to the roof of his house in the cool of the day, and saw Bathsheba.

Why do I say that he erred from his regular pattern? I am taking the words from David's own mouth in Psalm 55:17: “Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice.” David said he prayed at evening, morning, and noon. If he was following his regular routine, he should have been praying, but he was not. He should have been meditating, but he was not. The reason was that he should not have been in Jerusalem to begin with. Since he was there, he had nothing to do but eat and take a nap.

I usually tell people, if you have absolutely nothing to do, come to my house. I can assure you, I have plenty for you to do. But if you are not going to come to my house, and you have nothing to do, how about reading your Bible? How about praying? Many times I wake up during the night. Sometimes I can go back to sleep, and sometimes I cannot, so I lie there and pray. I might as well; I am not sleeping. There have been many times when I have literally prayed myself asleep. If you have nothing to do, try reading and studying, especially the Bible, and certainly pray.

So David failed because—here is warning sign number one—he should not have been in Jerusalem. He was shirking his responsibilities. Number two: he was shirking his regular routine, because he should have been praying. But here is the third warning sign in verse 2: “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.” The third warning sign is this: he saw her.

Where did he see her? I do not know. There was probably some garden, or perhaps she thought she was in some secretive place. In other words, she was not openly washing where everyone could see her. She was in a place where she thought no one could see her, but evidently David could see her. Now look at what the Bible says: “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.” Why did he continue to look?

You cannot always avoid a first glance or a first look. But you can avoid a continued look. You can turn your head, close your eyes, or walk away. David did not do that; he continued to look. Even our Lord said that adultery begins with the eyes: “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.” We must learn to control our eyes, because they are the channel by which a multitude of things enter our minds. Everyone has seen things they wish they had never seen. You cannot always avoid the first glance, but you can avoid a continued look. Why would anyone look at pictures, movies, magazines, or even people that promote lust and ungodliness?

The Fourth Failure: Failing to Watch

To me, that is absolutely insane. Alice has heard me say this many times: Why in the world would you window-shop if you have no money to buy? Why would I waste my time going to the furniture store to look at beautiful furniture I cannot purchase? People do that all the time. They wish and look at things they will never have. Why would you tempt yourself? Why would you tempt God? Why would you knowingly and willingly put yourself in a position to sin?

David kept looking when he should have turned and walked away. The fourth failure to watch out is found in verse 3. Look what David did: “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?”

Let me ask you a question. If David saw this beautiful woman and became excited, why did he not send for one of his own wives or one

of his concubines? He had plenty of them, that is for sure. Why must he have another? Why must he have Bathsheba? He not only looked; he sent and inquired after the woman. When word came back, “Is not this the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?” the word “wife” should have been a loud warning sound. He understood that she was a married woman. At that point he should have bowed out, but he did not.

He knew she was a married woman; therefore, he was willingly about to violate the seventh commandment, “Thou shalt not commit adultery,” and the tenth commandment, “Thou shalt not covet.” He may not have grasped that he was also violating the first commandment, “Thou shalt have no other gods before me,” because he was putting his lust ahead of God. He was also violating the fifth commandment, “Honour thy father and thy mother,” because he was about to dishonor them.

David was not simply violating these commands; he was despising the Word of God and despising God Himself. In 2 Samuel 12, verses 9 and 10, God charged him with this: “Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in his sight?”—notice a despisement of the Word of God—“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.”

God says, “You've despised my word. You've despised my commandment. And now you've also despised me.” David was violating the seventh, the tenth, the first, and the fifth commandment as well.

The fifth failure to watch out is found in 2 Samuel 11, verse 4: “And David sent messengers, and took her; and she came in unto him, and he lay with her; for she was purified from her uncleanness: and she returned unto her house.” The Bible says, “He took her.” The Hebrew word here is laqach, and it literally means to take hold of, to carry along, to take away, to get possession of, to capture, to seize, and to steal.

So he was also violating the eighth commandment, “Thou shalt not steal,” because he was stealing Uriah's wife. This would ultimately lead him to violate the sixth commandment, because he was going to murder Uriah to cover his sins.

David neglected his duties. He was slothful, idle, and negligent. He fell into lust, violated God's law, and then endeavored to cover up his conduct. All of these were warning sounds and signs to David. Can you imagine what went through David's mind when someone said to him, “Is not this the daughter of Eliam, and the wife of Uriah the Hittite?” He must have been thinking, “I don't care if she's married. I don't care if she belongs to someone else.” David was totally ignoring all of the warning sounds and signs.

I do not care how loudly the sirens wail. I do not care how bright the lights flash. I do not care how loudly someone screams. If you are not going to pay any attention, nothing is going to help you. If you refuse to hear, if you refuse to heed the warning signs and sounds, nothing is going to help you. You will sin, and you will pay for that sin.

Applications: Stay Vigilant and Busy

David failed to watch out in five different ways, and David ended up paying for his failure.

The application is this: oftentimes it is not the dangerous and difficult situations that destroy us. It is the easy, soft, and delicate things that end up capturing us and enslaving us. When we are in danger and know that we are in danger, we are on our toes. We are aware, conscious, looking around, and we know something is up. But when we think we are safe and begin to relax, fail to watch out, and fail to pay attention to the signs, that is when we are captivated. That is when we sin. That is when we are enslaved.

You know what the Bible says in Amos 6 and verse 1? “Woe to them that are at ease in Zion.” There is never a time to let down our guard when it comes to sin. There is never a time when you and I can fail to watch out for our hearts, our thoughts, and our eyes.

One of the ways to fight discouragement, depression, and even lust is to stay so busy that you do not have time for any of them.

Neglect of business, slothfulness, idleness, and the wandering eye will usually cause the downfall of the most diligent. The Bible says, "The sleep of a labouring man is sweet," and "to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet." If you put in a full day's work and work hard, you will be glad to come in at night, go to bed, and go to sleep.

But if you have nothing to do, what is it they say? An idle mind is the devil's workshop; also idle hands. Obviously, that was the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah: pride, fullness of bread, and idleness. The Bible says in Proverbs 13 and verse 4, "The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing: but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat."

The sluggard is the one who will not work. They are slothful, idle, and lazy. They are always wishing and wanting something, but they will never have it because they are failing to work. If you are working, doing everything that you can, and staying busy, you are not going to be depressed or discouraged, and you are not going to be doing things you should not. You will not have time for it.

If you do have an abundance of time, please visit me. I can assure you I could fill your time very wisely and very efficiently. Alice and I cut up trees, carried them off, and burned them this week. I do not need a gym membership, I can assure you. There is plenty left if you are game for it; we have plenty more to do. You need to learn to stay busy.

Do not expect God to fulfill your responsibilities for you. God gave you your heart, your mind, and your eyes. You are responsible to keep each one and to apply the principles of God's Word to your life. When you place yourself in a situation that you should never have been in to begin with, you are not only tempting yourself; you are tempting God as well. You need to learn to stop challenging God.

There is a vast difference between faith and foolishness. It is foolishness for me to jump off the Empire State Building and say, “Lord, catch me.” That is not faith. That is stupidity and foolishness. Why would I put myself in a bar, if I loved alcohol, and say, “Now, Lord, protect me and keep me from drinking”? If I want to be protected and kept from drinking, I ought not to be in the bar to

begin with. Remember how Joseph acted when Potiphar's wife tried to seduce him. He left his coat and ran out.

In 2 Timothy chapter 2 and verse 22, Paul writes to Timothy, "Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart." Timothy was in his forties. Years ago, there was a television program called Hee Haw, an old country music program. I was never really a fan of country music, but every now and then I saw some of it, and I will never forget one scene. It was supposed to be funny, but it really was not funny; it conveyed the truth and stuck with me.

It was Grandpa Jones. He had overalls and a white mustache, and he was standing in front of a cornfield. A beautiful young woman in short shorts and a mighty little tight shirt walked across in front of him, and he let out a long wolf whistle. Someone said, "Why, Grandpa, you old man, you ought to be ashamed of yourself." Grandpa Jones replied, "Well, you know the old saying, you're never too old to yearn." Instead of being funny, it was the truth.

I do not care if you are twenty, forty, sixty, or eighty: stay out of places that will make you yearn for whatever it is, if it is wicked, wrong, ungodly, and sinful. Watch out.

Conclusion: Watch Out

That is exactly why David failed. He did not watch out. It was not the giant that got him; it was a beautiful woman, an Israelite. Watch out. Sin is so deceptive. If we are not on our toes, it will nail us.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank You for Your Word. We thank You for Your truth. We ask, Father, for Your grace and mercy, Lord, that You would indeed protect us and preserve us and keep us from sin, that we may honor and glorify Thee. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 15

Political Correctness Brings Judgment

Introduction and Scripture Reading

Isaiah 24, verse 1: “Behold, the Lord maketh the earth empty, and maketh it waste, and turneth it upside down, and scattereth abroad the inhabitants thereof. And it shall be as with the people, so with the priest; as with the servant, so with his master; as with the maid, so with her mistress.

“As with the buyer, so with the seller; as with the lender, so with the borrower; as with the taker of usury, so with the giver of usury to him.” In other words, no one's going to escape. “The land shall be utterly emptied and utterly spoiled, for the Lord hath spoken this word. The earth mourneth and fadeth away. The world languisheth and fadeth away. The haughty people of the earth do languish. The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof, because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore hath the curse devoured the earth, and they that dwell therein are desolate. Therefore the inhabitants of the earth are

burned, and few men left. The new wine mourneth, the vine languisheth, all the merry-hearted do sigh."

The Nation's Departure from Biblical Foundations

Have you ever paused to ponder the topic of where we are going as a nation? Have you ever considered what we have left and forsaken as a nation? You could simply ask, What are we becoming as a nation? Have you ever really considered the methods that have been used and are being used to move us from a biblical framework, from a constitutional framework, into what you and I would call a politically correct position? When you look around, you're going to see that paganism is being revived and relived even in front of our eyes.

Words are now having their meanings changed. Meanings are being changed, and ignorance and stupidity prevail. Orwell's doublespeak is now the standard. If you've never read George Orwell's 1984 or his book, Animal Farm, I would encourage you to do so. They're very enlightening. George Orwell is the one who came up with doublespeak and doublethink. When you talk about doublespeak, everything is basically turned upside down.

We live in a time much like that described in Psalm 82, a psalm given to the judges. There, the judges transgress God's law, persecute the innocent and helpless, and refuse to be instructed, repent, or listen. They turn the world upside down. Psalm 82:5 says, "They know not, neither will they understand; they walk on in darkness: all the foundations of the earth are out of course." Their ignorance, apathy, and unrepentant attitude turn everything upside down. In other words, the Department of Justice, or our judicial system, is really and truly no longer interested in justice.

Examples of Political Correctness and Insanity

What it is interested in is conformity to new norms, political correctness, and upholding what we would call socialistic and Marxist principles. In a land of free speech, we now have to watch our speech, lest we be arrested for saying certain things. According to the social justice warriors, it is incorrect to address a transgender man as "Mr." We are required to address a six-foot-tall bearded man as "ma'am." Dr. David Mackereth, a fifty-six-year-old Christian

doctor in the United Kingdom, lost his job after refusing to call such a man "ma'am." He was trashed and kicked out of his job because of his Christian convictions; he would not address that man as a woman.

All of this is absolutely total nonsense, and it is also a blatant denial of Scripture. Genesis 1:27 says, "So God created man in his own image"—"in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them." God created only two genders. Someone has aptly pointed out that the Democrats created the rest of the genders. Well, there are only two: male and female.

You either have XX chromosomes or XY chromosomes, and that is all there is to it. Men cannot become women, and women cannot become men. You may claim a different gender, but that does not make it reality. All the hormone drugs in the world may change the shape of the body, but they will not change the gender. A man is still a man, and a woman is still a woman. One may claim to identify as a different sex, but that is not reality; it is a sign of the mental and emotional instability that individual possesses.

Walter Williams wrote this article: "It is not just academics and judges who now see sex as optional. Federal, state, and local governments are ignoring biology and permitting people to make their sex optional on one's birth certificate, passport, social security card, and driver's license. In New York City, intentional or repeated refusal to use an individual's preferred name, pronoun, or title is a violation of the New York City Human Rights Law. If I said that my preferred title was 'Your Majesty,' I wonder whether the New York City Commission on Human Rights would prosecute people who repeatedly refuse to use my preferred title."

He has a point there. I have a picture of three does—that's female deer—standing erect in a line on their hind feet, with their front legs up in the air. I sent the picture to one of my friends and put at the bottom, "We identify as chorus girls." You can call those three female deer chorus girls all you want, but they are still three female deer. They are not chorus girls. They cannot sing, dance, or kick their legs out. It is just that simple, at least not while they are standing up.

To show you how absolutely crazy we have become, here is an article posted by USA Featured Media on December 19, 2019. It said, "A transgender woman is suing the Miss America pageant after being turned away from competition, claiming the rule requiring contestants to be natural-born females to enter was unfair." The article showed his picture. He could not have won anyhow; he was extremely ugly. People have got to be insane.

I am trying to show you where we are going and where we are headed, and I am going to show you why. Listen carefully: the ACLU, the American Civil Liberties Union, wants to put tampons in men's bathrooms for menstrual equality. On December 19, 2019, the group argued that it was not a full or accurate portrayal to say that women are the only people who get pregnant, breastfeed, or have periods. They added, "Menstrual stigma and period poverty can hit trans and non-binary people particularly hard." Really?

I do not know who in the world comes up with all of this trash. I saw an article—I did not read it; I am sure it would have made me angry—that said, "Dozens of men in Australia have babies." That is not true. Dozens of women who claim to be men have had babies, but no men can have babies. We have a retired OB-GYN in our church.

Believing Lies as Divine Judgment

I asked him this morning, “How many men have come to you pregnant?” None. “How many men have you delivered a baby for?” None. I mean, come on, this is absolutely insane. America has gone insane, and we’re believing lies instead of truth. We have become so politically correct that we have basically lost our minds.

It was George Orwell who said, “The very concept of objective truth is fading out of the world. Lies will pass into history.” When you try to tell me that a dozen men in Australia have had babies, that’s a lie—a bald-faced lie. That is sorry reporting and extremely sorry journalism. May I point out the fact that believing lies is a judgment from God?

In 2 Thessalonians 2, verses 10 through 12, listen carefully: “And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish;

because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause"—because they would not receive the truth—"God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." When people believe lies, it is part and parcel of the judgment of God.

George Orwell also came up with the terms doublespeak and doublethink. Doublespeak is the language of opposites: up is down and down is up; freedom is slavery; war is peace; ignorance is strength. It is turning everything upside down.

Biblical Example of Doublethink

Doublethink is when you hold two contradictory beliefs in your mind simultaneously and believe and accept both of them. Doublespeak is particularly the language of the leftists, liberals, social justice warriors, and humanists. A clear example of doublethink is professing to believe in the one true and living God while at the same time worshiping idols. Look in your Bibles to 2 Kings chapter 17, beginning in verse 25: "And so it was at the beginning of their dwelling there, that they feared not the Lord: therefore the Lord sent lions among them, which slew some of them."

These were the people whom the king of Assyria had moved into Samaria. They said to the king of Assyria, "The nations which thou hast removed and placed in the cities of Samaria know not the manner of the God of the land: therefore he hath sent lions among them, and, behold, they slay them, because they know not the manner of the God of the land." Then the king of Assyria commanded, "Carry thither one of the priests whom ye brought from thence; and let them go and dwell there, and let him teach them the manner of the God of the land."

Israel, however, was worshiping the golden calves, one in Dan and one in Bethel. So this priest was not really teaching the truth. Verse 28 says, "Then one of the priests whom they had carried away from Samaria came and dwelt in Bethel, and taught them how they should fear the Lord." Yet every nation made gods of their own and put them in the houses of the high places which the Samaritans had made. The men of Babylon made Succoth-benoth; the men of Cuth

made Nergal; the men of Hamath made Ashima; and the Avites made Nibhaz and Tartak. The Sepharvites burnt their children in the fire to Adrammelech and Anammelech, the gods of Sepharvaim. “So they feared the Lord, and made unto themselves of the lowest of them priests of the high places, which sacrificed for them in the houses of the high places.” Verse 33 says, “They feared the Lord, and served their own gods, after the manner of the nations whom they carried away from thence.”

Isn’t that amazing? On the one hand, they claimed, “We’re serving the Lord, the one true and the living God,” while also serving their own idols.

You do not have to doublethink. How in the world can you reconcile serving God and worshiping Him while at the same time worshiping everything contrary to Him? That is certainly doublethink. Words have meanings. If the meaning is corrupted, the thoughts are corrupted; and if the thoughts are corrupted, it is manifested in our everyday language. George Orwell pointed out, “But if thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought.” Again, Orwell said, “The most effective way to destroy people is to deny and obliterate their own understanding of their history.”

Reasons for the Land's Defilement: Transgressing Laws

Now, here's my question: Why are we in such a mess in this country? Well, here's the answer. Go back to Isaiah 24 and look at verse 5: “The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof; because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant.” The reasons are listed why it is defiled. Before considering those three reasons, look at the first statement: “The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof.”

The word “defiled” means to be polluted, corrupted, profaned, and made godless. The defilement and corruption referred to in verse 5 result from the wickedness, disobedience, and rebellion of the inhabitants. In other words, the land was made godless. According to Scripture, there are many ways in which a land can be polluted, corrupted, and made godless.

According to the Bible, the land is corrupted when those who should be executed are not executed. God demands the death penalty for murderers, kidnappers, and rapists. Look around at all the murderers we have been feeding on tax dollars for years. Some get out of prison and murder again.

Listen to Numbers chapter 35, verses 29 through 34: "So these things shall be for a statute of judgment unto you throughout your generations in all your dwellings. Whoso killeth any person, the murderer shall be put to death by the mouth of witnesses: but one witness shall not testify against any person to cause him to die. Moreover ye shall take no satisfaction for the life of a murderer, which is guilty of death: but he shall be surely put to death. And ye shall take no satisfaction for him that is fled to the city of his refuge, that he should come again to dwell in the land, until the death of the priest. So ye shall not pollute"—or defile—"the land wherein ye are."

"For blood it defileth the land: and the land cannot be cleansed of the blood that is shed therein, but by the blood of him that shed it. Defile not therefore the land which ye shall inhabit, wherein I dwell: for I the Lord dwell among the children of Israel."

God repeatedly said that murderers are to be put to death. If they are not, the land is defiled. When you consider all the murderers, rapists, kidnappers, and other death-penalty cases that have continued for years without execution, the land is obviously defiled. Blood pollutes, defiles, and corrupts the land, and God says the only way it can be cleansed is by the death of those who deserve to die.

Here is why we have such a high crime rate. Ecclesiastes 8:11 says, "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." When someone who needs to be executed is not executed speedily, it encourages others to do the same thing. I have had people say, "The death penalty will not deter crime." I have news for you: it will deter the man who is executed. He will not commit any more crimes; that is for sure. God says one reason we have such crime is simply that we do not execute those who need to be executed.

When you consider that blood pollutes and defiles the land, you must also consider the sin, murder, and idolatry connected with

abortion. Abortion is not only murder; it is idolatry. It is human sacrifice, offering our children to the gods of convenience and pleasure.

Consider King Manasseh in 2 Kings 21. He was a wicked man who shed much innocent blood. He killed many children and had others do the same in sacrificing to false gods. Verse 16 says, "Moreover Manasseh shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another; beside his sin wherewith he made Judah to sin, in doing that which was evil in the sight of the Lord." The passage then asks whether the rest of his acts and his sin are not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah. Again, it says that Manasseh shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end unto another. In other words, he was sacrificing children and had others sacrifice children.

If you do not think that abortion is murder and idolatry and brings the judgment of God, then consider Jeremiah chapter 15. Beginning with verse 1: "Then said the Lord unto me, Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my mind could not be toward this people: cast them out of my sight, and let them go forth. And it shall come to pass, if they say unto thee, Whither shall we go forth? then thou shalt tell them, Thus saith the Lord; Such as are for death, to death; and such as are for the sword, to the sword; and such as are for the famine, to the famine; and such as are for the captivity, to the captivity. And I will appoint over them four kinds, saith the Lord: the sword to slay, and the dogs to tear, and the fowls of the heaven, and the beasts of the earth to devour and destroy." Why? Verse 4: "And I will cause them"—that is, the people—"to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth, because of Manasseh the son of Hezekiah king of Judah, for that which he did in Jerusalem."

It was not just Manasseh that was sacrificing children. Psalm 106, beginning with verse 35, speaks of Israel: "But were mingled among the heathen"—that is Israel—"and learned their works. And they served their idols: which were a snare unto them. Yea, they sacrificed their sons and their daughters unto devils, and shed innocent blood, even the blood of their sons and of their daughters, whom they sacrificed unto the idols of Canaan: and the land was polluted with

blood.” There it is: the land was polluted, defiled, corrupted, and made godless through offering these children to false gods.

Now consider what God says in Jeremiah chapter 7, beginning with verse 29: “Cut off thine hair, O Jerusalem, and cast it away, and take up a lamentation on high places; for the Lord hath rejected and forsaken the generation of his wrath. For the children of Judah have done evil in my sight, saith the Lord.”

"They have set their abominations in the house, which is called by my name, to pollute it. And they have built the high places of Tophet, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire; which I commanded them not, neither came it into my heart. Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that it shall no more be called Tophet, nor the valley of the son of Hinnom, but the valley of slaughter: for they shall bury in Tophet, till there be no place."

The word "Tophet" means to roll like a drum. When they offered their children as sacrifices to Baal, an image of Baal stood with his hands stretched out. A fire was heated beneath until the metal became absolutely blazing red. The child was placed in the hands of Moloch or Baal—the same thing—and the drums began playing to drown out the child's screams as he rolled down the arms into the belly of Moloch or Baal, to be consumed by the flames. This is why it was called the valley of Tophet. That is where they burned their children in the fire.

The foundation for all wickedness, disobedience, rebellion, and apostasy is forsaking God and His law. When anyone wickedly parts from God and His law, the saying "anything goes" is clearly manifested in attitude and actions.

Now turn to Jeremiah chapter 3. Look at the first three verses. I want to point out one word; then we will go to verse 9 and consider another word. Jeremiah 3:1–3 says: "They say, If a man put away his wife, and she go from him, and become another man's, shall he return unto her again? shall not that land be greatly polluted?"

Jeremiah says, “But thou hast played the harlot with many lovers”—that is, their idolatries—“yet return again to me, saith the Lord. Lift up thine eyes unto the high places, and see where thou

hast not been lien with. In the ways hast thou sat for them, as the Arabian in the wilderness; and thou hast polluted the land with thy whoredoms and with thy wickedness." Therefore the showers were withholden, and there hath been no latter rain; they had a whore's forehead and refused to be ashamed.

Notice the word "polluted" in verse 2. In verse 9, "through the lightness of her whoredom, that she defiled the land, and committed adultery with stones and with stocks"—that is, with idols. The word "polluted" in verse 2 and the word "defiled" in verse 9 are exactly the same Hebrew word translated "defiled" in Isaiah 24 and verse 5. Return to Isaiah 24, verse 5. We are considering these things one at a time to see where we are headed because of what Israel did, what Judah did, and what we are doing.

Reasons for the Land's Defilement: Changing the Ordinance

"The earth is also defiled under the inhabitants thereof; because"—number one—"they have transgressed the laws." Number two, "changed the ordinance." Number three, "broken the everlasting covenant." Three truths evidence the defilement of the land: transgressing the laws, changing the ordinance, and breaking the everlasting covenant. Consider first that the land is defiled because they have transgressed the laws. Whose law is being transgressed? Obviously, it is God's—the law of the Creator, the Sovereign, and the Judge, who originated and issued these laws. He has the authority and the right to issue forth His law. In this instance, it is referred to as "the laws."

Just as the Bible is referred to as "the Word," that is simply by way of eminence. It would be no transgression for a man to transgress his own law, because his own law has no authority, and he has no right to issue it, particularly because he is certainly not God. Moreover, they could change their laws at their whim. But transgressing God's law is sin, iniquity, rebellion, disobedience. It is also blasphemy because it is a denial of God and His right to rule and command. First John 3:4 says, "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law."

Look around today at the blatant disregard for God's law and the blatant transgression of it. People do it on every hand. You will find all types of iniquity and sin in individuals, families, societies, churches, and governments.

In fact, most people do it openly, publicly, and with no shame. Zephaniah 3:5 says, "The unjust knoweth no shame." In Isaiah 3:9, speaking of Israel and Judah, God says, "The shew of their countenance doth witness against them; and they declare their sin as Sodom, they hide it not. Woe unto their soul! for they have rewarded evil unto themselves." They declare their sin to be the sin of Sodom. It is open and public. They could care less; they are happy and proud of it. They are not merely transgressing God's law; they are shoving it in God's face and in ours as well. And they expect anyone who believes the Bible to be tolerant of their wickedness.

Joe Biden, who was running for president of the United States, said—and I am quoting—that Christians who do not support the LGBT agenda should be put on a terror watch list. In other words, people today believe they have an absolute right to sin against God and others. Unless we condone it, approve it, or tolerate it, we are considered bigots, homophobes, unchristian, and unkind.

Let me say it plainly: no one has a right to sin against God. No one has a right to violate God's law. Men do so, and they will pay for it, but no one has a right. You have no right to sin, and you have no right to violate God's law. The very fact that you do it to God's face means that one of these days you are going to wake up and find another truth that is very real. What is it?

Deuteronomy 7:9–10 says, "Know therefore that the Lord thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations;" and, "repayeth them that hate him to their face, to destroy them." You want to throw something in God's face? Go ahead, help yourself. But remember: you reap exactly that which you sow. "He will not be slack to him that hateth him: he will repay him to his face."

Understand that the very faithfulness of God is at stake in this. In verse 9, first of all, He is the faithful God who keepeth covenant and

mercy, but He is just as faithful in exercising His wrath and His vengeance on those that hate Him. God says, "You throw it in my face? Wonderful. Fine. Help yourself. I'm going to throw it right back in your face. I will repay you to your face." Just as surely as God is the faithful God, He will deal with those who transgress His laws blatantly, openly, publicly, and willingly.

One of the reasons the land is polluted is because of the transgression of God's law. Isaiah 24:5 gives the second reason: "The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof; because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance." The Hebrew word for "ordinance" is choq, referring to statutes, commandments, and civil enactments prescribed by God. This word is translated in our Bibles as "statutes" eighty-seven times. Literally, the verse says, "because they have transgressed the laws and changed the statutes." That is, they have changed God's law for man's law.

Men Deny God's Law

I want to show you the three clearest and most prominent passages on how men have denied God's law and established their own law. Go back in your Bibles to 2 Kings chapter 17, verses 7 and 8. Remember how God delivered the children of Israel out of Egypt. Verse 7 says: "For so it was, that the children of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God, which had brought them up out of the land of Egypt, from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and had feared other gods."

They sinned against the Lord by fearing other gods. How do we know they feared other gods? What was the evidence? How was it manifested? The latter part of verse 7 says: "and had feared other gods, and walked in the statutes of the heathen, whom the Lord cast out from before the children of Israel, and of the kings of Israel, which they had made."

They totally denied God's law, set it aside, and started following the statutes, or laws, of the heathen and of the kings of Israel. May I remind you that there was not one godly king in Israel? Each one was a reprobate—not one. The people had denied God's law and substituted man's law; not merely man's law, but wicked man's law. They were walking in it willingly and knowingly.

Now look in your Bibles at Psalm 94, verses 20 and 21. Look there at verse 20.

Psalm 94, verse 20: “Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with thee, which frameth mischief by a law?” Look at verse 21: “They gather themselves together against the soul of the righteous, and condemn the innocent blood.” The throne speaks of government. It speaks of power. No, it is a throne of iniquity, a wicked civil government. So here is the question: Shall a wicked civil government have fellowship with thee, that is, with God, which frameth mischief by a law? “Mischief” is another word for sin in the Bible. Let me read this the way you and I can easily understand it: Shall a wicked civil government have fellowship with God when that wicked civil government makes sin legal? In other words, it leaves God’s law and God’s definitions and turns to its own law and its own definition. And what is the consequence? Look in verse 21: “They gather themselves together against the soul of the righteous, and condemn the innocent blood.”

What does God demand? God demands that the innocent be justified. God demands that the soul of the righteous not be condemned. And yet today, everything is turned topsy-turvy, upside down, because we have forsaken God’s statutes and have enacted our own statutes. Micah 6:16 says, “For the statutes of Omri are kept, and all the works of the house of Ahab, and ye walk in their counsels”—that is, you walk in their statutes, you walk in their laws, you do what they tell you to do—“that I should make thee a desolation, and the inhabitants thereof an hissing: therefore” Omri was the father of King Ahab; he was a wicked, wicked man, like Ahab. The statutes of Omri were kept, and all the works of the house of Ahab were followed. God says that this produces desolation and makes the inhabitants an hissing.

"Ye shall bear the reproach of my people." What does God say? God says, "The reason I'm kicking you out is because you've changed the ordinance. You've changed the statutes. You rejected my law. And now you're having your own law." They had changed God's law by enacting new statutes and, in essence, had repealed the law of God, which He gave through Moses. And that's exactly what we've done today. We have changed God's law for man's law. We've

basically condemned ourselves, enslaved ourselves, and destroyed ourselves, just like ancient Israel.

So God says, here's how you defile the land: you transgress the laws, you change the ordinance. Then, thirdly, if you go back to Isaiah 24 and verse 5, here's the third reason. He says, "The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof; because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant." Now, the word "covenant" here is evidently used, as it often is, in the sense of law. And by the term "everlasting covenant," some scholars have correctly supposed it denoted the laws of nature, the immutable laws of justice and right, which are engraved upon the conscience and which are inflexible and perpetual.

Reasons for the Land's Defilement: Breaking the Everlasting Covenant

Calvin says, "They have broken the everlasting covenant. The third term employed by him is 'berith,' by which he means a covenant or contract. This word is limited to those contracts by which the Lord, who adopted his people, promised that he would be their God. He therefore charges them with ingratitude, because when the Lord revealed himself by all these methods and gave proofs of his love, they were disobedient and rebellious, transgressed the laws, and broke the holy covenant. He calls it the covenant of eternity, or the everlasting covenant, because it ought to be perpetual and inviolable, and be in force in every age."

"It was to be transmitted in uninterrupted succession from father to son, that it might never be effaced from the memory of man, but might be kept pure and entire. He therefore represents in strong terms their treachery and wickedness, because they dared to violate that covenant which God had made with them, and to overthrow what the Lord intended to be firm and permanent. This was monstrous, and therefore we ought not to wonder that the earth take vengeance on this wickedness and refuses to give food to men."

Some scholars go a little bit farther, saying that this everlasting covenant refers to the Lord Jesus Christ, because of the covenant given to Abraham, Isaac, and David.

Hebrews 13:20 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." We are talking about the covenant of grace, the everlasting covenant that God made with His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, pictured in the Abrahamic covenant, the covenant with Isaac, and the covenant with David.

Is it possible that rejecting the law of God as given through Moses would lead to rejecting the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ? The answer is yes. In John 5:46, our Lord said, "For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me." In other words, if you do not believe Moses, you do not believe Christ. If you had believed Moses, you would have believed Him.

Moreover, in Deuteronomy 18:15, Moses said, "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me." Then he said, "Unto him ye shall hearken." When you look at Deuteronomy 18, you find that this passage is applied to the Lord Jesus Christ twice in the New Testament. Acts 3:22 says, "For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you." Acts 7:37 says, "This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear." Twice in the New Testament, it is applied to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Could rejection of the law of God lead to rejection of the Messiah? Again, the answer is yes. John 1:11 says, "He came unto his own, and his own received him not." Our Lord said, "Had you believed Moses, you would have believed me."

Unless God in His absolute grace and mercy gives us repentance—not just individually, but ecclesiastically, as churches; societally, as a society; nationally, as a nation; and governmentally, as a government—unless God gives us repentance,

The Inevitable Judgment and Call to Repentance

Proverbs 8, verses 35 and 36, sums up everything very well. Our Lord said, "Whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favour of

the Lord." And then verse 36 says this: "But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me love death." The only thing political correctness can bring is death: death to individuals, death to families, death to churches, death to societies, death to governments, and death to nations. In fact, it was George Orwell who gave us the picture of what it means to live without God and His law: "If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face—forever." Forever.

Political correctness brings judgment. God says, "The land shall be utterly emptied, and utterly spoiled: for the Lord hath spoken this word." By the way, God is unchangeable. If this was true with Israel, if this was true with Judah, it is true with us today. "For the Lord hath spoken this word. The earth mourneth and fadeth away, the world languisheth and fadeth away, the haughty people of the earth do languish. The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof; because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore hath the curse devoured the earth, and they that dwell therein are desolate: therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men left. The new wine mourneth, the vine languisheth, all the merryhearted do sigh. The mirth of tabrets ceaseth, the noise of them that rejoice endeth, the joy of the harp ceaseth. They shall not drink wine with a song; strong drink shall be bitter to them that drink it. The city of confusion is broken down."

"Every house is shut up, that no man may come in. There is a crying for wine in the streets; all joy is darkened, the mirth of the land is gone. In the city is left desolation, and the gate is smitten with destruction." The rest of the chapter is nothing but judgment. You cannot alter God's law, change God's law, or break the everlasting covenant without receiving the judgment of God.

Things have changed drastically in the short years I have been alive. Unless we do as Jeremiah said, "Ask for the old paths, and the old ways, and walk therein," I would tell you this—excuse my English—but we ain't seen nothing yet. We haven't. Political correctness brings nothing but judgment and death.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee this day. We thank You for Your truth and warnings. We ask, Father, that You

would help us to hear, help us to turn from our sins, and give us repentance and faith. May we honor Thee in all that we say and do. In the name of Jesus Christ, whose name we ask and pray, amen.

CHAPTER 16

Crumbs

Introduction: Who Wants Crumbs?

Then Jesus went hence and departed into the coast of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coast and cried unto Him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David. My daughter is grievously vexed with the devil. But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away, for she crieth after us. But he answered and said, I am not sent, but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Then came she and worshipped him and said, saying, Lord, help me. But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread and to cast it to dogs. And she said, Truth, Lord. Yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from the master's table. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith. Be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.

Crumbs. Who wants crumbs?

Well, we could normally say mice, roaches, rodents, birds, anything, an ant, any insect would appreciate crumbs. The truth of the matter is, most of us do not appreciate crumbs. And we would

quickly say, we don't want crumbs, we want the whole loaf. Of course, there would be times that we would be desperately appreciative of crumbs, especially in times of famine, in times of hunger. And in fact, the Bible says in Proverbs 27 and verse 7, to the hungry soul, every bitter thing is sweet. And certainly crumbs, as long as there are enough of them, would fill the stomach exactly like a full meal would.

But when I ask the question, who wants crumbs, I cannot help but think of dogs. Have you ever noticed it seemingly that dogs are thankful for anything and everything that you give them? Now, Alice feeds our dogs very well, as some of you can testify, I am sure. But usually when Alice and I sit down to eat, they gather around the table with us even though they have already eaten.

The Lesson from Dogs and Scripture

Claiborne will come up under the table and put his head on one of my legs. Jackson, the big mastiff, will come on this side and lay his head on the other leg. Belle usually lies on the other side of me on the floor. Dabney sits beside Jackson, and Emma is on the other side of Alice. Of course, they eagerly wait for a morsel to drop or for us to hand them something. Usually, if we hand something to one, we have to hand something to the other. Emma is the most observant. She sits by Alice, and when Alice hands her just a morsel of food, Emma jumps up and runs to me because now it is my turn. I hand her something, and she jumps up and runs right back to Alice, continuing back and forth until she gets exactly what she wants.

Dogs are really appreciative of crumbs. They appreciate anything that comes their way. I believe there is a lesson here that we can learn from dogs, and we can learn the same lesson from Scripture if we pay attention: we must learn to be thankful, grateful, and appreciative for anything and everything, even crumbs. Enough crumbs would be sufficient to fill a hungry stomach.

We usually despise what we call little things. We are always thankful for and looking for the big opportunities, the big deals, the big money, and the big meals; we despise and look down upon what is trivial and what we consider crumbs. We must remember that

anything we receive from God outside of justice is mercy, even if it is given in little segments.

That is why the Bible says in Lamentations, chapter 3, verses 22 and 23, “It is of the Lord's mercies that we're not consumed, because His compassions, they fail not, they are new every morning. Great is thy faithfulness.” The truth is, we do need crumbs. We need those crumbs of mercy daily—every morning and every night. Zechariah, chapter 4 and verse 10, tells us not to despise the day of small things. There is also a verse I would encourage you to memorize if you have not: Philippians, chapter 4 and verse 6.

“Be careful for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.” So here are three things in this verse. First, we are to be careful for nothing. Second, we are to be prayerful about everything. Third, we are to be thankful for anything.

The Canaanite Woman's Plea

I think often of Ruth, especially in light of this message. You remember how Ruth went to glean in the field of Boaz? Gleaning is hard, back-breaking work. Actually, you are picking up crumbs, so to speak—things that the servants have dropped, or something that fell off and they overlooked. But when Boaz saw Ruth and understood who she was, he said to his servants, “Let fall also some handfuls of purpose for her.” I tend to think that when you and I are really thankful and genuinely appreciative of any crumb that God sends our way, He also lets fall some handfuls on purpose just for us.

We often sing that hymn about streams of mercy never ceasing. We could also sing, “Crumbs of mercy forever falling,” because He does indeed give us our daily portion. So let me ask this question: Who wants crumbs? Our text in Matthew 15 speaks of crumbs. Could you be thankful for crumbs? The woman in our text was thankful for crumbs. Would you like to be called a dog? The woman in our text was called a dog, and she was thankful and grateful to be called a dog, which I will explain a little later.

Before beginning the message, let me clear up a discrepancy. Matthew 15:21 says, “Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the

coasts of Tyre and Sidon." Verse 22 says, "And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil." Mark records the same story. In Mark 7:24, Jesus entered into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, and verse 26 identifies the woman in that account.

From there Jesus arose and went into the borders of Tyre and Sidon and entered into a house. He would have no man know it, but He could not be hidden. A certain woman, whose young daughter had an unclean spirit, heard of Him, came, and fell at His feet. The woman was a Greek, a Syrophoenician by nation, and she besought Him that He would cast forth the devil out of her daughter.

In Mark 7:26, the Bible says that she was a Greek, a Syrophoenician by nation. In Matthew 15:22, she is called a woman of Canaan. Was she a Greek, a Syrophoenician, or a Canaanite? The answer is, she was all of that. How could that be so? Tyre and Sidon were two main cities of Phoenicia, and the Phoenicians were descendants of the Canaanites, who were the original inhabitants of Palestine. Phoenicia, like other countries, had been conquered by the Greeks and had been under Greek control.

The truth of the matter is that Alexander the Great conquered so many areas, so much territory, and so many countries that Greek culture and the Greek language expanded greatly. Anyone who could not speak Greek was considered to be a barbarian. For instance, the Apostle Paul said in Romans 1:14, "For I am a debtor both to the Greeks, and to the barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise." Note the distinction: he was a debtor to the Greeks and to the barbarians, to the wise and to the unwise.

Now hold Matthew 15, but turn to Acts 28. Paul and his company had been shipwrecked and came to a little island called Melita. Acts 28:1 says, "And when they were escaped, then they knew that the island was called Melita." Then it says, "And the barbarous people showed us no little kindness, for they kindled a fire, and received us every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold."

They are called barbarous people, yet they received these strangers. They built a fire for them, sheltered them, fed them, and,

when they left, even gave them everything that they needed. But look in verse 4.

When the barbarians saw the venomous beast hanging on Paul's hand, after a snake had bitten him, they said among themselves, “No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he had escaped the sea, vengeance suffereth not to live.” Paul shook off the beast into the fire and felt no harm. But note that Luke called them barbarians. How in the world could he call these people barbarians when they were so kind and gracious unto them?

The answer is very simple: they could not speak Greek. Anyone in those days who could not speak Greek was considered a barbarian. Obviously, they were not barbarous people in the sense that you and I would think of barbarians—as uncouth, uncultured, unkind, uncivilized, and out-and-out pure heathen.

John Calvin explains the difference between the Canaanite and the Syrophoenician: “The woman whom Matthew describes as of Canaan is said by Mark to have been a Greek and a Syrophoenician by birth. But there is no contradiction here. For we know that it was the prevailing custom among the Jews to call all foreign nations Greeks, and hence the contrast between Greeks and Jews, which occurs so frequently in the writings of Paul.”

“As she was a native of the territories of Tyre and Sidon, we need not wonder that she is called a Syrophoenician, for that country was called Syria and formed part of Phoenicia. The Jews disdainfully gave the name Canaanites to all the inhabitants of that district, and it is probable that the majority of them were descended from the tribes of Canaan, who, when banished from their native country, fled to a sort of retreat in the neighborhood.”

Both agree that the woman was a native of a heathen nation, had not been instructed in the doctrine of the law, and came of her own accord to Christ humbly to entreat His aid. John Calvin says there is no discrepancy. Adam Clarke goes further, saying she was called a Canaanite because of the people from whom she sprang, the descendants of Canaan, while Mark called her a Syrophoenician because of the country wherein she dwelt. She was a Canaanite, a

Syrophoenician, and a Greek. There is no discrepancy between Mark 7 and Matthew 15.

Consider another question: Did Jesus Christ ever leave the land of Palestine? When you look in Matthew 15, verse 21 says, “Then Jesus went hence and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon.”

Clarifying the Woman's Identity and Jesus' Location

Now consider what our Lord said to His disciples in Matthew 10:5: “Then these twelve, Jesus sent forth and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, nor into any city of the Samaritans, enter ye not.” Our Lord told His disciples not to go into Gentile cities or Samaritan cities. Did Jesus Christ do what He told His disciples not to do? Well, some commentators and scholars say yes. But understand this: Jesus Christ as Lord is not bound by the orders He gave His disciples. Since Jesus Christ is God, He may do as He pleases.

Moreover, they would say that He did enter the coast of Tyre and Sidon, but His incursion there was just a precursor to opening the door of the gospel to the nations. Let me explain that carefully.

If you would hold Matthew 15, but look in your Bibles to John chapter 12, beginning with verse 20. Remember, he had instructed his disciples originally not to go into any city of the Gentiles, and certainly not into the city of the Samaritans. But now the Bible says, “And there were certain Greeks among them that came up to worship at the feast.” This would be the Passover. These Greeks came to Philip, who was of Bethsaida, of Galilee, and desired him, saying, “Sir, we would see Jesus.” Philip came and told Andrew, and again Andrew and Philip told Jesus. Jesus answered them, saying, “Now is the hour come that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.”

In other words, our Lord says, here these other nations are seeking after me, and now is the time of my sacrificial death, the time that I die for my people. Those who say he entered into Tyre and Sidon would say this was a precursor to opening the door of the

gospel to the Gentiles. Other commentators and scholars say, no, he did not leave the land of Palestine.

Now look in verse 21: “Then Jesus went hence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon.” If you look on a map of the land of Palestine during the time of Jesus Christ, you would find that the area of Galilee, and even Nazareth where he grew up, bordered the land of Phoenicia. It was right on the border. The country of Galilee bordered Phoenicia. Now here is an interesting thing. Look in verse 21 again: “Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon.”

The Greek word for “coast” here is meros, which literally means a portion, a part, a lot, or one of the constituent parts of the whole. In other words, He could have stepped His foot across the line, so to speak. But that is what it says. Now look in verse 22: “And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him.” The word “coast” in verse 22 is different from the word “coast” in verse 21. In verse 22, the Greek word is horyon, which refers to a boundary, a border, a coast, a region, a district, or a territory.

Note something else in verse 22: “And, behold, the woman of Canaan came out.” The Greek word apo, a preposition, means literally that she came out of, came from, or left. The word implies a separation or a leaving. So our Lord could have been merely on the border and entered into a house situated on the border, and she came to Him.

In reality, anyone who would make a real issue of this is being too strict. Why? The answer is simple: Jesus Christ is God. He can do as He pleases, whenever He pleases, to whomever He pleases, anyhow He pleases, and whatever He does is right. Whether He stepped across the line or did not step across the line, He is God. He created everything. He has the right to do as He pleases.

This woman in Matthew chapter 15 was very persistent. She would not give up. She found our Lord in the house, and she came and fell at His feet and begged Him for mercy. Originally, our Lord would not even speak to her. Yet He commends her in Matthew 15:28 by calling her a woman of great faith.

The Woman's Persistence and Worship

Matthew Poole says concerning this woman, “Though the woman appears to have been a pagan, yet living so near Galilee, she had doubtless heard of Christ, both what he had done in casting out devils, and also that he was looked upon as the son of David, and usually called by that name by those that went to him for any cures.” Mark said that He said to her, “Let the children first be filled.” To the observing reader, this will appear no contradiction. By Mark, it should appear that she first came to our Savior into the house into which He had gone, that He might be private, and there fell at His feet.

Here Christ answered her not a word and took no notice of her at all. But, as it appears in Matthew, Christ soon left the house, and she followed after Him in the way. This is when the disciples were saying, “Send her away, for she crieth after us.” Hold Matthew 15, but look back in Mark chapter 7, beginning with verse 24.

“And from thence he arose, and went into the borders of Tyre and Sidon.” He entered into a house and would have no man know it, but He could not be hid. Our Lord probably wanted some rest and privacy, so He went into this house; but the Bible said He could not be hidden. How this woman found out where He was, I have no earthly idea. This is when she came to Him, and the Bible says she fell at His feet.

“And Jesus said unto her, Let the children first be filled, for it is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it unto the dogs.” After our Lord left the house, she followed Him. She persisted in begging for mercy and grace. In Mark 7, He rebuffed her with the words, “It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to dogs.” He leaves the house, and she follows Him.

She calls Him the Son of David. In calling Him the Son of David, she recognizes that He is the Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed One, a Savior, and the Lord. Therefore she cries constantly, continually, and persistently—so much so that our Lord seems to ignore her. The Bible said that He answered her not a word. In verse 22 she cries, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David: my daughter is

grievously vexed with a devil," but He answered her not a word. He totally ignored her.

But she kept crying, pleading, and begging. Her crying evidently was a grief or an embarrassment to the disciples. How can I say that? If this woman was crying consistently and constantly, in all probability a crowd was gathering around—onlookers asking what was happening and why she was crying. It is like driving down the interstate, seeing a wreck, and watching everybody rubberneck until another wreck occurs as they stretch around to see what is happening. It could have been that a crowd was gathering. It could have been something else: the disciples may simply have been absolutely irritated and frustrated.

They were tired of it. She just kept on. Finally, they came to our Lord and said, "Send her away; for she crieth after us."

The word cry there is a present active indicative in the Greek. What does that mean? It means she was crying, she kept on crying, and she kept on crying. She was not stopping. She was not giving in. She was not giving up. She was not giving out. She was consistently and constantly crying. She continued to cry even when there appeared to be no immediate answer. So they came and said, "Lord, send her away; for she troubleth us."

Now, in verse 24, He finally speaks and says this. How could Christ say that? Hold Matthew 15, but look in your Bible at Romans 15:8. I want you to see this in light of the mission. Here is the office of Christ, and here is one thing that Christ certainly came to do. Romans 15:8 says, "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."

Why did Jesus Christ come? He came in that office to confirm the promises made unto the fathers. There was an administrative office; He came to do a specific thing. But I want you to note what was included in that. Look at verse 9: "And that the Gentiles, or the nations, might glorify God for his mercy; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, or nations, and sing unto thy name. And again he saith, Rejoice, ye Gentiles, or ye nations, with his people."

So He came indeed to confirm the promises that were made to the fathers, but ultimately those promises were to extend beyond that one nation. That is for sure. He said, “I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

Now look at verse 25 of Matthew 15. Do not merely look at this verse; consider it, meditate upon it, and apply it. “Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me.” I will come back to the word worshipped momentarily, but I want you to look at that plea: “Lord, help me.”

That is a simple prayer: “Lord, help me.” The Greek word is boetheo. It means to help, to succor, to bring aid. The word signifies a cry, a call for help: someone in distress crying out, and at the same time someone running to aid that individual who is in distress and needs help. It is much like a mother running to her child who is crying and screaming, not only to feed the child but also to defend that child. So she cries, “Lord, help me.” How easy and simple it is to cry for help. She used three words: “Lord, help me.” The word Lord is kurios, meaning boss, owner, master, and sovereign. She was acknowledging Him as the sovereign God and saying, “Sovereign God, help me.”

The Dog Metaphor and the Woman's Faith

Have you ever noticed that proud, arrogant, haughty hearts never think they need help? “I can handle it myself. I can do it myself. I don’t need you. I don’t need God. I don’t need anybody.” In Matthew 9, the Pharisees were like that. As Jesus sat at meat in the house, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples. When the Pharisees saw it, they did not ask our Lord; they said to His disciples, “Why is your master with publicans and sinners?” In other words, “If He is really a prophet, if He is really righteous and holy, what is He doing with these publicans and sinners?”

But when Jesus heard that, He said unto them, “They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.” He continued, “But go ye and learn what that meaneth. I will have mercy, not sacrifice, for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” You are never going to a doctor as long as you are

perfectly well. As long as you think there is absolutely nothing wrong with you, you will not wake up and decide to visit your doctor simply to give him a check for one hundred fifty dollars. No, you will not do that. When someone is proud, arrogant, and haughty, he says, “I don’t need any help. I don’t need God.”

Proud, arrogant, haughty hearts will never cry out for help. But hearts that have been humbled, contrite, and submissive want all the help they can get. They understand that help is not only needed; it is absolutely necessary.

When is the last time that you, in desperation and genuineness, simply said, “Help me”?

That is what this woman said: “Lord, help me.” Twice this woman said, “Have mercy upon me”—in verses 22 and 25. Her daughter needed the help, yet she identified with her daughter. I am sure she was suffering with that daughter as well. Still, she asked the Lord to have mercy upon her when it was her daughter who actually needed the help.

In verse 25, she came and worshipped Him, saying, “Lord, help me.” That was her plea before Him.

But he answered and said, It is not meet. It is not suitable to take the children's bread and to cast it to dogs.

Now, I want you to think about our Lord's response to this woman. He called her a dog. The Jews referred to the Samaritans as dogs; in fact, they referred to all other nations as dogs. Even Islam refers to everyone who is not Islamic as a dog. They hate and despise literal physical dogs as well. Mohammed did not have one, and he hated dogs. I read recently where one Islamic cab driver got fired because he refused to take a woman in his cab who had a little puppy in her arms. I am simply saying that they hate dogs.

Our Lord said to this woman, when she came and worshipped and said, “Lord, help me,” “It is not meet to take the children’s bread and cast it to dogs.” I would imagine in my mind—I cannot prove this from Scripture—but I can see our Lord smiling when He said this.

Why can I say that? Because He used the Greek word kunarion, which refers to a little dog, a household pet. It is amazing to me that

this woman perceived this as an encouragement. She said in verse 27, “Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table.” She said, “Truth, Lord. Whatever You say, whatever You call me, whatever You want me to be, that is what I am. If You want me to be your little pet dog, I am willing to be your little pet dog. A dog I may be, but I am a pet dog, a family dog. And the family dog eats the scraps and crumbs that fall from the master’s table.”

Do you remember Caleb in the Old Testament, Joshua and Caleb? They were the only two who brought back an honest report of the twelve spies. The word Caleb means dog. Caleb was God's little pet dog as well.

Go back to verse 25: “Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me.” The Greek word for dog is kuon. Our Lord called this woman a dog, but He used the nominative form, which refers to a little dog or a little household pet. The word worshipped is proskuneo: pros to afford, kuneo from kuon. Kuneo would be the verb. Worship actually means to kiss or to lick the hand of the master, as a dog does.

I can hold my hand down to any of my dogs, and they immediately begin licking. For a dog, it is a sign of love, submission, reverence, and recognition of me as the master. This is the word for worship. We normally speak of falling prostrate at His feet or bowing. All of those are forms and demonstrations of love, submission, reverence, and obedience.

I have always encouraged people, especially those who have animals, to watch them, because there is much we can learn from animals. The Bible says in Job chapter 12 and verse 7, “But ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee.”

Just this past week, Alice and I were out with the cows. She was standing outside watching while I worked a gate, letting certain cows out and trying to keep certain cows in. One outside was a 2,000-pound Santa Gertrudis bull named General Hampton. I helped deliver him. I caught him in my arms when his mother had him; he had to be pulled because he was a big calf. I cleaned the mucus from his nostrils and blew my breath into them. He could not

stand because the cords had been on his legs where he had been pulled, so I held him up while his mother cleaned him.

She would lick him and then lick me. After she got him cleaned up, I had to hold him up so he could nurse. I held him for several days until his feet grew strong again. I suppose my scent had gotten all over him. Maybe he thinks I am his daddy, I do not know. But there I was, working with that gate, when this two-thousand-pound bull came up to me. For fifteen minutes, all he did was rub his head on me and lick my hand, my arm, and my pants.

I turned and walked away. "Hampton, leave me alone. I am busy now." But he followed me, continuing to follow me. Why? Because it was a sign of love and submission. I have been able to speak, point to my animals, and see them obey my finger and my voice. This is exactly what this woman was saying: "Lord, I might be a dog, but I am Your dog."

"I will kiss Your hand. I will lick Your hand. I will submit to You. I will acknowledge You in every area of my life." It is absolutely impossible to worship God apart from love, reverence, and submission. This woman took the place of a dog and was willing to take the name of a dog if taking that name and position pleased the Lord Jesus Christ. She was willing to be a dog and settle for the crumbs that fell from His table. When was the last time you really thanked God for crumbs—for the little things, the small mercies? Our Lord said to this woman, "How great is thy faith."

Applications: Thankfulness, Humility, and Prayer

Here is the first application: I would rather eat the crumbs that fall from my heavenly Father's table than sit at a full-course meal with Satan, any day of the week. Every crumb from my heavenly Father, every crumb that falls, every crumb He provides, is healthy, nourishing, satisfying, and tends to life. Every meal the devil provides is full of misery, heartache, poison, and death. Thank you; I will take the crumbs. Do not despise the crumbs. Whatever your heavenly Father gives you, thank Him, because He does not owe us anything. Everything we receive is mercy.

Those whom Christ intends to honor, He first humbles and lays low so they will comprehend, understand, and sense their own meanness and unworthiness. We must first see ourselves to be as dogs—in that sense of the word, deserving less than the least of all God's mercies—before we are fitted and made right to receive the greater privileges, blessings, and mercies. Do you realize that Jacob confessed this truth in Genesis 32:10 when he said, “I am not worthy of the least of all thy mercies, and of all the truth which thou hast showed unto thy servant”? I am not worthy of the least of thy mercies.

Do you see the test that God put this woman through? A proud, unhumbled heart would never have stood the test. When our Lord simply refused to speak to her, most people would say, “Ha! You won't talk to me? I don't need you; I'll go somewhere else. What? You call me a dog? Who do you think you are?” Every proud, arrogant, haughty, high-handed heart would have failed this test. This woman passed gloriously.

When you realize you deserve absolutely nothing, you'll be thankful for anything. You will. The least of Jesus Christ, every crumb of Jesus Christ, is precious to a believer. The very crumbs of the bread of life are worth more than the baubles of this world. We sing, “Break thou the bread of life, dear Lord, to me.” Break it? What do you do when you break bread? There are always crumbs. Every crumb is full of mercy.

It should be obvious that it is the will of God that we continue instant in prayer. Our Lord spoke an entire parable in Luke 18, saying that men ought always to pray and not faint. We are commanded in 1 Thessalonians 5 to pray without ceasing.

Have you ever noticed how easily hindered we are in our prayers, how easily offended we are? If God does not answer as quickly as we think He should, or does not answer in the way we think He should, and we do not get what we want, then we are extremely upset with Him. What sin and what blasphemy! The truth is, God gives us so many blessings.

When we look around at these little crumbs that we take for granted, overlook, and are ungrateful for, it is no wonder He does

not give us more. But this woman's attitude was this: Canaanite or not, I am coming to the Son of God. I am coming to the Lord Jesus Christ. I am begging Him for mercy. Who I am and what I am does not matter. If He wants me to be a dog, I will be a dog. All I want is mercy.

Fleeing to Christ for Mercy

This truth can also be applied to those who struggle with the doctrine of election. I have had people ask me over and over, “How can I know whether or not I am one of God's elect?” For one thing, you cannot climb up into heaven and look in the Lamb's book of life. That is impossible. Of course, there are ways that you can know, but let me point this out for someone who is struggling with that.

In 2 Kings chapter 7, the Syrians had encompassed Samaria and were besieging it. The people inside Samaria were starving to death; famine stalked the city. If they stayed inside the city, they starved. If they went outside, the Syrians killed them. There happened to be four lepers seated outside the city gate. Usually, the lepers ate what was thrown over the wall—the crumbs, the scraps, and the garbage—because they could not go into the city. But now, since there was a famine, nothing was coming over the wall. According to the Bible, women were even killing, cooking, and eating their own children.

Look at what it says in 2 Kings 7:3: “And there were four leprous men at the entering into the gate. And they said one to another, Why sit we here until we die? If we say, We will enter into the city, then the famine is in the city, and we shall die there: and if we sit still here, we die also. Now therefore come, and let us fall into the host of the Syrians: if they save us alive, we shall live; and if they kill us, we shall but die.”

Consider their argument and logic. They were sitting at the wall, starving to death. If they stayed there, they would die; if they went into the city, they would die. So they said, “Let us fall to the Syrians. If they kill us, we cannot be any more dead by a sword thrust than we would be by famine. Dead is dead.”

They reasoned that, just possibly, the Syrians might save them alive. We should use this logic. If someone says, “I do not know whether I am saved or whether I am one of God's elect,” here is what I tell you: Flee to the Lord Jesus Christ in repentance and faith, and beg Him for forgiveness, reconciliation, and mercy.

Suppose you fled to Jesus Christ, begged Him for life, mercy, and salvation, and He looked you straight in the eyes and said, “No! I am not going to save you.” Would you be any more condemned or any more under the wrath of God? No, because you are already condemned and already under the wrath of God. But if you flee to the Lord Jesus Christ, begging Him for grace and mercy, recognizing that He owes you nothing, bowing before Him, kissing His hand, and worshiping Him, you will find the truth of John 6:37, where our Lord said, “All that the Father giveth”

He that cometh unto the Lord Jesus Christ will find that he is received. When you get to the Lord Jesus Christ, you will find out, yes, you are an elect, or you would have never gone to Him to begin with. You would have never begged for mercy to begin with. And yes, He took you in. There is a good reason to flee to Jesus Christ and beg for mercy.

Conclusion: Satisfied with Crumbs

Our Lord said, “It is not meet to take the children's bread and give it to the dogs.” You know what the woman said? “Truth, Lord. I am willing to be a dog if that is what You want me to be. I am willing to be Your little pet dog. I am more than willing to lick Your hand. I am more than willing to be satisfied with crumbs.”

Those who take the crumbs of life from the Lord Jesus Christ and worship Him in spirit and truth will soon find themselves seated around a full-course meal at the marriage supper of the Lamb. “Truth, Lord, I will take all the crumbs that You throw my way, because I do not deserve anything, and I should be thankful for everything that You give me.” Do not despise the crumbs.

Father, in the Lord Jesus Christ, we pray to Thee and ask that You would open our eyes, teach us, and make us grateful, appreciative, and thankful. May we see how many times we despise the small

things, though they were full of Your mercy, grace, and love. Forgive us for our ungratefulness and unthankfulness, and build us up in the most holy faith, we pray. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

CHAPTER 17

A Biblical Ethic but a Vulgar Word

Genesis 1:28 says, “And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.”

Genesis 3:17–19 says, “And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it. Cursed is the ground for thy sake, and sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life. Thorns also and thistles shalt it bring forth unto thee, and thou shalt eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return into the ground, for out of it wast thou taken, for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.”

Introduction: Work as a Vulgar Word

There is a four-lettered word that most people absolutely detest and despise. They endeavor to avoid it. They refuse to speak of it, pronounce it, or even engage in its usage. It has become an

extremely vulgar word among many people, and seemingly only the lowest of men engage in it, enjoy it, and find satisfaction in it. If you have not guessed, the four-lettered word is work, W-O-R-K.

Work Before the Fall: Genesis 1:28

Very few people truly love to work. But we must understand that there is indeed a biblical work ethic. Work did not come into existence after the fall. Work existed before the fall of man. Certainly, it did not become onerous until after the fall, but it did exist before the fall. Look at verse 28, where God has created man: "And God blessed them. And God said to them, Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the fowl of the air and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth."

Before getting into verse 28, let me point out the word replenish. First of all, replenish is the Hebrew word male.

It does not imply that people existed before Adam, neither does it imply that there was a creation before Adam. Some people look at that and say, well, there must have been a fuller earth at one time, and now God says to replenish it. But the Hebrew word male is translated in our Bibles 250 times. It is translated fill 108 times, full 48 times, consecrate 15 times, accomplish 7 times, replenish 7 times, and there are 8 other ways it is used as well. So basically, this word literally means to make full, to satisfy, to accomplish, and to complete. Literally, God said in verse 28, be fruitful and multiply and complete the earth, or fill the earth. In other words, I created the earth to be full. Go ahead and fill it.

There is another word that must be pointed out, and that is the word subdued. He says, and subdued it. The word subdued is the Hebrew word kabbash, and that word literally means to bring into subjection, to bring into bondage, to bring under, or to dominate and to tread down. Then, of course, in verse 28, we also have the word dominion. The Hebrew word there is rada, which means to rule, to prevail, to reign, to have dominion, to dominate, to subjugate, and to tread down.

When you take these three words—replenish, subdue, and dominate—obviously there is work involved in all of these items. There is indeed a biblical work ethic. Work is an aspect of dominion, and dominion cannot be accomplished without work. Most people may not want to hear this, but here it is: man was created for work. He was created to work. He was made basically for work.

It is just that simple. When God created Adam, He created him mature; that is, He created him full grown. So when God created this mature individual, He put him in the garden and assigned him responsibility and accountability, and that responsibility included work and knowledge. Man was then supposed to bring everything into captivity unto God for God's honor and God's glory.

Adam's Responsibility in the Garden: Genesis 2:15

Look in Genesis 2:15. Here it is spelled out: “And the Lord God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it.” In this verse, there is a twofold responsibility given to us. First, God told Adam to dress the garden. The Hebrew word dress is abod, which means to labor, to work, to service, and to till. Then, in the same verse, He says to dress it and to keep it. The Hebrew word is shamar, which basically means to watch, observe, guard, protect, and act as a watchman.

God placed Adam in the garden and gave him a dual responsibility. He had not only to till and work the garden—to dress it and keep it dressed—but also to guard and protect it, which was work. When these thoughts are put together, it should be easily understood that man was created for work.

You cannot work without knowledge. Adam was created not only with original righteousness and holiness, but also with knowledge. He had to know in order to perform the work. The more he worked and performed his work, the more knowledge he would attain. Inherent in dressing and keeping the garden were responsibility, accountability, knowledge, and understanding. It is impossible to produce as we should without knowledge. Therefore, we greatly err and sin when we think our need to know and our need to increase in knowledge and understanding cease when we graduate from high school or college.

The truth is that once you finish those courses, your learning has basically only begun. The school of hard knocks usually teaches you a whole lot more than four years in college. I learned a whole lot more after getting out of college than I ever did in college. You must also understand that, in today's leftist, liberals, and Marxist schools, clearly the School of Hard Knocks is going to teach you a whole lot more as well. Most people think that if they go through high school or college and receive that little piece of paper with diploma written on it, then all is well.

A piece of paper is absolutely worthless if you do not have knowledge and understanding. A piece of paper is also absolutely worthless unless you can actually function and do that which really and truly needs to be done. The point is that it is impossible to really work, guard, or do whatever we are supposed to do without knowledge.

When is the last time that you read all the way through the Bible? When is the last time you simply read a book? When is the last time you listened to a lecture simply to learn and to increase your knowledge? You remember that passage in Hosea 4 and verse 6, which is very applicable in our day and time, when God said, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. And because you have rejected knowledge, therefore, I’m going to reject you.”

“You will not be a priest unto me. And because you have forsaken my law, also, I will forsake your children as well.” Adam was placed in that garden to work. He was created for work. But according to the Bible, Adam fell; he sinned. When you get to Romans 5 and verse 12, the Bible says, “Wherefore as by one man’s sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men. Why? For that all have sinned.” In Romans 5 and verse 19, the Bible again talks about the offense coming by one man. In 1 Corinthians 15, especially verses 45 through 50, we are again told that we fell in Adam. After the fall, the work became onerous according to the Bible.

Work After the Fall: Genesis 3:17-19

Now it comes only through the sweat of our brow. So, if you look in Genesis chapter 3 and verse 17, the Bible says, “And unto Adam he

said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it. Cursed is the ground for thy sake. In sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life. Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee, and thou shalt eat the herb of the field." Have you ever noticed how easily weeds, stickers, thorns, and worthless plants grow?

You never have to plant them. You never have to water them. You never have to fertilize them. They are just there. If you ever want a garden or field that is going to produce, you have to eradicate those weeds. It is just that simple.

God said, "Thorns and thistles also shall it bring forth unto thee, and thou shalt eat of the herb of the field." Everything has to be cleared out in order to have a profitable crop.

Look in verse 19: "...in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return into the ground, for out of it wast thou taken. For dust thou art, and in dust shalt thou return." Tie these things together. Look at the fact that God has cursed the ground in verse 17. In verse 18, thorns and thistles are going to bring forth to you; and in verse 19, he talks about the sweat of thy face: thou shalt eat bread.

When you tie these thoughts together, you see that hard, backbreaking, sweat-producing work, along with some smart thinking at times and determination, grit, are now necessary in order to produce a livelihood.

John Gill said this concerning "cursed be the ground for thy sake": "Cursed is the ground for thy sake, the whole earth which was made for man and all things in it which he had the possession and dominion, and might have enjoyed the use of everything in it with comfort and pleasure. That which was man's greatest earthly blessing is now turning to a curse by sin, which is a proof of the exceeding sinfulness of it, and it's just a merit. So in later instances, a fruitful land is turned into barrenness for the wickedness of them that dwell therein. Hence, whenever there is sterility in a country or one of provisions, a famine, it should always be imputed to sin. And this should put us in mind of the sin of the first man and the consequences of that sin."

"And sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life," meaning that with much toil and trouble in manuring and cultivating the earth, he should get his living out of its produce, though with great difficulty. "And this would be his case as long as he was on the earth."

We know from the Bible that the earth is cursed, and that we have plenty of thorns and thistles and all kinds of noxious plants. But have you ever stopped to think, even with the curse upon the earth, how much food this earth produces? When you consider the food that we throw away and the food that is allowed to ruin, can you imagine what it might have been like without sin, and what the produce of this earth would have been without the curse?

Now look back to Genesis 3:17: "And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it. Cursed is the ground for thy sake. In sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life."

The Curse for Our Sake: Idleness and Sodom

Notice what he said: "Cursed is the ground for thy sake." Here is an excellent question: How is it for our sake that the ground is cursed? How is it for our benefit that, according to the Bible, we now have to earn our living by the sweat of our brows? How could this be for our benefit?

Undoubtedly, there are a number of answers, but I want to give you one that you probably have never thought about. Hold Genesis chapter 3, but turn in your Bibles to Ezekiel chapter 16. As you turn there, think about this question: What was the sin of Sodom? I know what you are going to think. You are going to say, "That is obvious. The sin of Sodom was sodomy." That is true; it was a sin of Sodom, but it was not necessarily the sin. There were numerous other sins that led up to that particular sin.

In Ezekiel chapter 16 and verse 49, you will see it spelled out. God says, "Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom. Here it is. Pride, fullness of bread, an abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters. Neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and

the needy, and they were haughty and committed abomination before me. Therefore I took them away as I saw good."

Note, if you would, that God said this was the iniquity of Sodom: pride, fullness of bread, plenty to eat, and an abundance of idleness. It was the pride, the abundance of food, and the abundance of idleness that led to their perversion and their sins. Have you ever stopped to think about this? If you really have to work—if work is an absolute must and you must strive to earn your living—you are not going to have time to think of a lot of wickedness. You would certainly not have time to engage in it, and if you worked hard enough, you would not have the strength to engage in it.

Modern Denial of the Work Ethic

Here we are in our culture and society, in our day and time, where our government pays people not to work. Alice and I were listening to the news this morning, and several chambers of commerce were petitioning the government to stop all the supplemental giving to people who are not working, because companies can no longer find help. Two different men have asked me this past week whether I could recommend someone to help them. They pay well and work hard, but they cannot find helpers. There is even a sign on our local hardware store: "Please help yourself. We cannot find enough labor. If we can give you direction, we'll give you direction, but you must wait on yourself." Isn't that amazing? The supplemental income being given to these people were $300 was $300 bucks a week, not counting what they were already getting. Therefore, the people were making more by staying home and not working than they were at their jobs.

Why would they go back to their job? This past week I read that 34 percent of all household income in America is from the government. Think about that: 34 percent, a third of the population. That means 34 percent of 330 million people get all of their money from the federal government. Moreover, the federal government not only pays people not to work; they pay people to be immoral, because the more children some of these women have out of marriage, the more money they make. Obviously, in this day and time, we have a complete and total denial of what we know as the

biblical work ethic. We have a government paying people not to work and not to have a biblical work ethic. If I spelled it out, I could say this: they are paying people to violate the Word of God. That is exactly what they are doing.

We are now reaping some of the same destruction in our land as did Sodom and Gomorrah, because we are denying a biblical work ethic. Work is not simply for our benefit; it is to be done for God's honor and God's glory. You remember Colossians 3:17: “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks unto God and the Father by him.” In all that you do, in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus. Proverbs 21:4 also says, “A high look, and a proud heart, and the plowing of the wicked, is sin.”

Work as Ministry and Therapy

Since God has commanded work, how is it that the plowing of the wicked is sin? The answer is that the wicked do not plow in faith. They do not plow with reference to God's honor and glory; they plow selfishly, without any thought of God whatsoever. Therefore God says that the plowing of the wicked is sin.

When is the last time that you looked upon your work as a ministry? When is the last time that you looked upon your work, whatever it is, as a means to honor and glorify God? When is the last time you looked upon your work as obedience to the Bible? When is the last time you looked upon your work as the means God has given you to support yourself, your family, His ministry, and people to whom you want to give? When is the last time that you thanked God for your work, and that you were able to work?

I hope you are beginning to see that one of our biggest problems in this day and time is that we have lost a biblical work ethic. We have been taught to play and not to work. Here is an interesting thing: this society, this generation, would never have made it on the frontier—never. Moreover, this generation will not make it in a grid-down societal-collapse situation. Most people cannot work. They will not work, study, think, sacrifice, do without, or make do on very little.

I like that cartoon, a picture of old Archie Bunker seated by George Jefferson. Bunker looks at Jefferson and says, "The snowflakes of the day would never take in our TV program." That is about the truth. Alice and I have a very wonderful book titled We Had Everything But Money. It contains stories of the Great Depression—how people survived and what they did. Some of it was very brilliant, and yet they survived that Great Depression.

All I am trying to say is that most people today do not know how to plant a garden, harvest, or can. If they killed an animal, they could not skin it, gut it, quarter it, cut it up, and cook it. They do not know. When push comes to shove, this generation, this society, has basically gone far.

Most of you know that I do not like sports. If there is a ball in it, I do not care one thing about it. Recently, a friend coming down for a class asked me, "What are you going to do for the Super Bowl?" I said, "What do you mean, what am I going to do for the Super Bowl? I want to keep doing what I always do. I do not care one thing about the Super Bowl. I do not even know who is playing. I could care less." Moreover, we do not even have a television. I told him that if he wanted to see the Super Bowl while he was down there, he needed to let me know so I could make arrangements with someone who had a television, because he would not watch it at my house. I do not care anything about sports or any game that has a ball in it.

There is a reason for that. When I was a boy, I had to work all the time. I wanted to play ball, but Dad said, "No, I need you here, and you have to help me work."

We had a neighbor who was a friend of my father. He had one son, and he and I were exactly the same age. He was captain of the baseball team, captain of the football team, and captain of the basketball game. He played every sport imaginable. That required staying hours after school. One day I saw his father, called his name, and said, "May I ask you, how is it that your son gets to play ball? I know you're a farmer like my father, and I have to come home and help my father. I can't play. How does your son get to play all these games?"

He said, “When I was a boy, I had to work all the time. I made up my mind that if I ever had a son, he would not have to work, but would be able to enjoy just being a boy, playing sports, and doing whatever he wanted to do.”

That man was indeed a very hard-working man and was respected by everyone in the community. I really liked what he said, so I went home and told my father what his friend and our neighbor had said. I will never forget what my dad told me. He looked at me and said, “Son, let me tell you, I need you to help me here on the farm. It’s no concern of mine what other people do. I need you here.” Then he added, “Moreover, you can live your entire life without playing, but you can’t live your life without working, and you need to learn to work more than you need to learn to play.”

I didn’t appreciate that at the time, because as a boy I wanted to play. But let me finish the story. My friend, who got to play all the time, went on to become a recreational director. He knew sports; that’s all he was involved in. But my friend was married and divorced three or four different times. And the last job that he had.

He stole $10,000 from the city and ran off. Later on, he died of cancer. I am not making fun of him, but the point is that his life was a game. All he did was play, appease, and satisfy himself. He never learned to work. Here is where we are in our generation today: we have people who want to play, but they do not want to work. There will be a price to pay if you do not learn to work.

Moreover, work is therapeutic. When it is done in faith and for God’s honor and glory, work releases stress. It eliminates poisons from your body through sweat and gives the satisfaction of a job well done. It enables you to sleep at night. If you work hard all day, come home, take a bath, and get ready for bed, you will sleep very well. Work is good for us mentally, emotionally, and physically. When we accomplish a task successfully, there is always a sense of satisfaction. Why? Because God created us for work. When we do something and do it right, we are satisfied and fulfilled.

I am not speaking against retirement, but I am pointing it out. You can check this out for yourself on the Internet, but most men who retire from their work die within two to five years afterward.

That is a fact. I know there are exceptions, because some men retire from one job and simply go to another. I think Pat had about three, didn't he? There are also men who retire but do not stop. They find something to do at home; they keep gardening, working, and exercising.

My father-in-law beat the system. He retired at sixty-five and did not die until he was eighty-nine. He was an artist, played tennis, and in his eighties was beating thirty-year-old men. He played chess, served as the treasurer of the church, and drove the bus on church trips.

He stayed busy. Although retired, he did not stop. The point is this: the golden years are not so golden if you are dead. People—men especially—who retire, become television addicts and couch potatoes, and fill up on potato chips and doughnuts are not going to live very long. There is nothing for them to live for.

When I turned sixty-five, a friend who is now dead teased me: "Well, you're sixty-five; you can retire now." I knew he was teasing, but I thought, Why would I retire? What would I do? I am already doing what I want to do. I love what I do. I cannot even envision myself not preaching.

I know that God called me to preach, and I know that God can retire me. He can disable me. I can have a stroke, a heart attack, or die, like anyone else. Until He retires me, I plan to preach as long as I can preach, as long as He gives me breath and ability. If I can sit and preach, that is exactly what I will do. If I can stand and preach, I will stand and preach.

Pastor McCurry preached, I think, for seventy years. When his wife died, they had been married sixty-seven years. When Pastor McCurry was dying, one of the therapists came in, trying to encourage him and give him a little spunk and a little reason to live. She asked him, "If there was one thing, just one thing, that you could do before you go home to be with the Lord, what is it you would like to do?" He said one word: "Preach."

Well, that is true. Retirement may be beneficial as long as you keep going and keep doing. But if you sit down, become a couch

potato, and never do anything, your retirement is not going to last very long.

Many of our modern-day problems could be resolved with this biblical work ethic. Consider the welfare issue. Here is a great question: Why must we support men, women, and families who refuse to work? It is theft. It is theft to take from someone who works, produces, and gives, and give it to someone who does not work and will not work, supporting them in their sin and indifference. There is a huge difference between someone who cannot work and someone who will not work.

Biblical Condemnation of Sluggards

According to the Bible, charity and welfare are the responsibility of individuals, families, and churches. They are not the responsibility of government. God says, "Those that will not work, neither should they eat."

A man who will starve instead of working should starve; and the quicker he starves, the better. That is not being ugly or unkind. That is just being biblical. The apostle wrote in 2 Thessalonians 3:10, "For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat." That is very plain. If any will not work, neither should he eat.

If a man is too lazy to work, let him starve. If he really thought he was starving or about to starve, I believe he could find cans by the road to pick up, bottles to pick up, a ditch to dig, or some grass to cut. He would do anything to keep from starving. The point is this: God said, "If any will not work, neither should eat."

"For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies." You remember that abundance of idleness? Here it is: busybodies, disorderly. They are walking among the believers in disorder, working not at all, and concerning themselves with matters that are not their own.

"Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work and eat their own bread." This is a command and an exhortation by our Lord Jesus Christ. So if you are a Christian, God requires you to work. He requires you to

feed yourself and your family. The Christian is not to be disorderly, idle, and busy meddling in the affairs of others, but is to work with quietness and eat his own bread.

In 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, verse 11, he says, “And that you study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, that you may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that you may have lack of nothing.” We are required to work with our own hands and to do our own business, that we may walk honestly toward those that are without and have lack of nothing. The command is that we work, provide for ourselves and our families, and live in such a way that we lack nothing.

It is very interesting that the apostle said we should walk honestly toward those that are without. What is he saying? He is saying that if one refuses to work and provide for himself and his family, he is dishonest. Everybody knows it—even the ungodly, those who are without. Even the heathen understands that you should be working.

So if you refuse to work, you are simply dishonest. In 1 Timothy chapter 5, verse 8, the apostle Paul does not pull his punches: “But if any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he denied the faith and is worse than an infidel.” A man who will not work and provide for his own is not only dishonest; he is worse than an infidel. He is a thief. If you refuse to work, you are a thief, you are dishonest, you are not providing for your own, and you are worse than an infidel.

How can a professing Christian who is capable of working be content to live off the government dole? How can any Christian be content to live off the sweat and blood of others? How can any Christian be content to be characterized as worse than an infidel?

In Proverbs 6, when God is going to teach us about work, He teaches us to go to the ant, the lowliest insect: “Go to the ant, thou sluggard. Wow. Consider her ways and be wise, which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provided her meat in the summer and gathered their food in the harvest.” We are told to consider her ways and be wise. No one has to tell the ant to work. The ants work, having no guide, overseer, or ruler. Moreover, what do the ants do?

They put up. They gather meat in the summer and food in the harvest. They get it while they can and put it up for when it is not available. God is telling us to go to the ant so that we can learn to be hard workers, independent, and learn to prepare.

Note what else He says: "Go to the ant, thou sluggard." God condemns sluggards. A sluggard is someone who is sluggish. I did not check it out, but I guess the word comes from the slug. You know how slow that little slug is. I read the other day that a slug is a snail that has been divorced; he lost his house. I do not know, but the slug is so lazy and so slow. That is what a sluggish individual is: someone who is lazy and indolent, who will not work, will not act, and will not consider the future.

Then Proverbs 6 asks, "How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? When wilt thou rise out of thy sleep? Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep, so shall thy poverty come as one that traveleth, and thy want as an armed man." Here is a sluggard who loves to sleep. He is indolent, inactive, and unconcerned. Therefore, poverty is going to come upon him speedily, unavoidably, and irresistibly. It will come like an armed man. He does not expect it, but it is coming.

Proverbs 10:26 says, "As vinegar to the teeth and as smoke to the eyes, so is the sluggard to them that send him." Vinegar irritates the teeth, and smoke irritates the eyes. In other words, God says anybody who sends a sluggard—a lazy, sorry, indolent, worthless man—on a mission is going to hurt from it because he is going to fail. He is not going to accomplish anything. The sluggard is going to hurt you and not help you.

Proverbs 13:4 says, "The soul of the sluggard desireth and hath nothing, but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat." In just about every city you drive through, you will find men sitting around a burn barrel, smoking and drinking. They are there early morning, late at night, and all during the day. They are not workers. They will not work. The Bible says the soul of the sluggard desireth and hath nothing.

A new car goes by, and the sluggard says, "I sure would like to have one of those cars." But he will never have it because he will not

work, save, or prepare. A sluggard may say, “I would like to have a fine house like that,” but he will never have it. All sluggards can do is desire; they never possess. But the Bible says the soul of the diligent shall be made fat.

Proverbs 20:4 says, “The sluggard will not plow by reason of the cold, and therefore shall he beg in harvest and have nothing.” The sluggard will always offer multitudinous excuses for not working: it is too cold, too hot, too early, too late, too dangerous, or he is afraid.

Proverbs 22:13 says, “The slothful man says, There is a lion without, I shall be slain in the streets.” He cannot go outside and work because there is supposedly a lion roving around somewhere in the state. Proverbs 26:13 says, “The slothful man said, There’s a lion in the way. A lion is in the streets.” He had better stay in; it is too dangerous to go out. Consequently, he does nothing.

There are multitudinous excuses, but here is another excuse. Proverbs 26:16 deals with the sluggard’s own pride, arrogance, and conceit: “The sluggard is wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason.” The sluggard has no rationality and is not willing to listen to reason because, in his pride and arrogance, he believes that he is correct. He believes that he is right. A sluggard is not only a sluggard; he is also a fool. He will not listen to instruction. Proverbs 1:7 says, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.” Thus, a sluggard is not only a lazy, indolent individual; he is a fool because he will not listen.

Our Lord taught us clearly that there is a time to work, and He also taught us that there is a time when we cannot work. In John 9:4, our Lord said, “I must work the works of Him that sent me while it is day. The night cometh when no man can work.” Let me put it very plainly: If you are not willing to work when you are able to do so, do not complain when you are unable to do so. If you are not willing to prepare for the future while you can, do not complain when you have nothing.

You will suffer for being a sluggard. You will suffer for not having a biblical work ethic. Your family will suffer. You will have acted the part of a sluggard, the part of a fool, and, according to the Bible,

worse than an infidel. Therefore, we must learn to work, learn to make use of our time, and remember that maturity includes work, responsibility, and knowledge.

You cannot be mature without those things. It is impossible. God created man to work. Our work only became onerous after the Fall. Had men not sinned, it would always have been a pleasure to work.

Applications and Conclusion

The first application is this: R.J. Rushdoony wrote a book many years ago titled "Revolt Against Maturity." I read the book many years back. It basically discusses how, in this day and age, we are revolting against maturity. Maturity means work, knowledge, and responsibility. The truth of the matter is that this is exactly where we are in our society. Our country has basically been revolting against maturity for the last 50 to 100 years, because we have abandoned responsibility, accountability, and the work ethic. We have become absolutely childish, expecting everyone to support us and sacrifice that we may engage in all of our desires, whims, and pleasures.

We have developed an attitude of, "You owe me," or, "They owe me," and if you do not give me what you owe me, I will take it. If you do not believe that, just look at the riots. Look at the stores being robbed, ransacked, pillaged, and burned: "You owe me, and I will take it whether you give it or not." That is their mentality. When you deny a biblical work ethic, inevitably you produce a society that will take, coerce, steal, and defraud to get exactly what it wants. That is where we are today.

The second application is this: There is no such thing as a free lunch. Government cannot give to Steve except what it first takes from Steve and four or five other people. Government has nothing. It is nothing but politicians and power. Someone may object that government has the power to print money and give it to us, and therefore it is free. No, it is not free. The more money they print, the precious little that you already have is devalued.

Inflation is not higher prices; inflation is the value of your money decreasing. When Alice and I got married, I used to give her ten dollars a week to buy groceries. I would fuss at her a little if she did

not bring two or three dollars back. Fifty-eight years ago, she could buy meat, bread, milk, and everything we needed for a week for six or seven dollars. Today, you cannot even walk out of the grocery store with a loaf of bread and a gallon of milk for six or seven dollars.

I am simply pointing out the fact that inflation is theft. It is silent theft. Everybody says we are making more money today than we have ever made before. Yes, but it is far more worthless than it has ever been before as well. We have to understand that there is no such thing as a free lunch. When you think about the federal government trying to print and give away $1.3 trillion, you had better make some preparation, because everything is fixing to skyrocket. There is no such thing as a free lunch.

Now turn to one last passage, Romans chapter 12. Even in this passage we see a biblical work ethic. We often do not consider this, but everything about the ministry involves work. I never will forget that, when I was a boy, I wanted to be a preacher, but only because preachers had to work on Sunday and Wednesday night and could play the rest of the week. I was really deceived, I can assure you.

But look at Romans chapter 12, beginning in verse 6: “Having then gifts differing according to the grace of God that is given to us.” God has given each one of us different gifts.

"Whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith." In other words, you do your work according to that which God has given you. "Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering." If God called us to minister, let's do it. "Or he that teacheth on teaching," if you're going to teach, give yourself to teaching. "Or he that exhorteth on exhortation."

"Or he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity. He that ruleth with diligence. He that showeth mercy with cheerfulness, that love be without dissimulation, abhor that which is evil, cleave to that which is good, be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love, in honor preferring one another." Here it is: "Not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord, rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing instant in prayer."

Everything that God tells us concerning our gifts and ministries is to be done vigorously, with energy, for God's honor and glory. It is

work. Whatever it is—teaching, exhorting, ministering—it is work. What we need is a biblical work ethic.

I know, and how well I know this, that the older we get, the less we can do. Most of you know my dear friend Al Perry. Al reminds me from time to time that I should not be doing certain things considering my age. I always respond to Al, "But I'm not as old as you are." Of course, he is two months older than I am. I also say, "Well, I've been doing it all my life; why should I stop now?"

The point is simple. I realize there are some things I cannot do, and you have probably reached the stage where there are some things you cannot do. But you cannot stop doing what you can do and what you should do. You should be thankful that you are still able to do those things.

God has given us a biblical work ethic. I don't care if it is washing dishes, sweeping the floor, digging a ditch, or repairing clocks. If you can do it in faith and for God's honor and glory, you are fulfilling the biblical mandate and a biblical work ethic. We should be thankful, whatever age we are, for the abilities God still gives us and enables us to function, carry on, and live our lives for His honor and glory.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank You for Your Word. We thank You for Your truth. And we pray, Lord, that You would teach us, encourage us, help us to keep on keeping on and to never, ever give up, give in, or give out. May we honor Thee in all that we say and do. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

CHAPTER 18

The Sin Of Tempting God

SCRIPTURE READING - Acts 5:1-11 (KJV)

Introduction and Scripture Reading

"But a certain man named Ananias and Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, and kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, Ananias, Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and keep back part of the price of the land? While it remained, was it not thine own? And after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? Why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. And Ananias, hearing these words, fell down, and gave up the ghost.

"And great fear came on all them that heard these things. And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him. And it was about the space of three hours after when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. Peter answered unto her, Tell me, whether you sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much. Then Peter said unto her, How is it that you 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."

The Universality of Tempting God

> "So let me begin by asking several questions. Have you ever tempted God? Are you now tempting God? Do you perceive the consequences of tempting God? And the truth is that each of us has tempted God in one way or another. We have sinned, we've erred, we have certainly committed iniquity, we've transgressed His law, and yet He has spared us in His grace and His mercy. And we need, in light of this, simply to not only confess but acknowledge our sins to Him, while at the same time acknowledging and confessing His great mercy and His great grace to us as well."

If you are not really familiar with what it means to tempt God, I hope after this lesson that your ignorance will be blown away. Certainly, you cannot use ignorance as an excuse, because each of us is responsible to read, study, hear, listen, learn, and apply. Clearly, there is a grievous, grievous sin in tempting God. Once you realize the grievousness of this sin, and realize how each of us has basically tempted God in times past, it ought to motivate you to quote Lamentations 3:22–23 more frequently: "It is of the Lord's mercies that we're not consumed. Because thy compassions, they fail not. They are new every morning. Great is thy faithfulness." Certainly, the only reason we are alive today is because of God's mercies and compassions last night.

One of the problems that you and I have with, especially, specific sins is that our understanding is rather limited. Sometimes we are like the Pharisees. Instead of taking what has been revealed in the Scriptures, we take only what we understand or what we think. Usually, when someone talks about tempting God, the only thing that comes to mind is someone being so stupid as to climb the Empire State Building, jump off, and, as he is falling, holler, "God,

catch me before I hit the concrete below." That certainly is tempting God, but it is the height of stupidity as well. There are many other ways that we can tempt God, and each one is grievous, sinful, and wicked.

Background from Acts 4

In Acts chapter 5, Ananias and Sapphira also tempted God, and they tempted Him in a very unusual way. To understand Acts chapter 5, we need the background in Acts chapter 4: "Now the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and one soul. Neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own. But they had all things common."

This is not socialism. This is not communism. It is simply people taking care of themselves. When Alice and I were in the university many, many years ago, we had good friends from our own church who were there at the same time. It was standard operating procedure: when we had food and plenty, they had it also because we shared. There were times when we had nothing but they had plenty, and so they shared. It is very simple.

This is what it is talking about here. Notice verse 33: "And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. Neither was there any among them that lacked, for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet."

"And distribution was made unto every man according as he had need. And Joseph, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, which is being interpreted the son of consolation, a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, having lands, sold it, brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet." This was not socialism, and it certainly was not communism. No one was forced to sell the land.

Here is what you have to remember. When you look at Acts chapter 2, at the beginning of that chapter there were 120 disciples in the upper room. Then came the day of Pentecost, when 3,000 were added to the 120. Now look at Acts chapter 4 and verse 4. This does not count the 3,000: "Howbeit many of them which heard the

word believed and the number of the men was about 5,000." So now there were 8,000 men, not including women and children. By the time you reach Acts chapters 4 and 5, there could have been 10,000–20,000 believers. In Acts chapter 6, the widows were being taken care of, and the Grecian widows complained that they were neglected in the daily ministration. There were Hebrew widows and Grecian widows, and the apostles said, "It is not meet then that we leave the Word of God and serve tables. Look you out among you seven men full"

They were to be men of faith and the Holy Ghost, whom they might appoint over this business, while the apostles gave themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word. By the time you get to Acts chapter 6, there was a full-scale ministry taking care of the widows, and obviously a great deal of money was needed and involved.

Now notice Acts 4:34: "Neither was any among them that lacked, for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them and brought the prices of things that were sold and laid them down at the apostles' feet." In other words, they distributed the proceeds to those who had need. Verse 36 introduces a special individual: "And Joseph, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, which is being interpreted, the son of consolation, a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet."

Undoubtedly, those who sold their possessions and brought the money to be distributed to those in need were praised and regarded as sacrificial, generous, gracious, and kind. Barnabas would certainly have been one of them. He was also a Levite, the Bible tells us. Later, you will remember, Barnabas was selected to go with the Apostle Paul. He was probably a very unusual man and was undoubtedly praised for his sacrifice.

When you understand that the apostles were recognizing Barnabas and perhaps some of the others, you can understand what happened in Acts chapter 5 with Ananias and Sapphira. They desired the praise, recognition, and admiration being heaped upon others, but they were also selfish and very deceitful. "But a certain man named Ananias with Sapphira his wife sold the possession and kept back part of the price."

The Deceit of Ananias and Sapphira

His wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part and laid it at the apostles' feet.

Evidently, Ananias and Sapphira were very interested in the praise and the recognition of man. Our Lord made a tremendous statement in John 5:44: “How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?” Now listen to what He said: “How can ye believe that seek honour one from another?” In actuality, seeking the praise of man is an act of idolatry. What you are doing is estimating and valuing the praise of man more highly than the praise and recognition of God.

Here is another interesting thought. When our Lord asked this question in John 5:44, He asked, “How then can ye believe that seek honour one from another?” In other words, desiring, wishing, wanting, and longing for the praise of man actually makes faith impossible. Our Lord said, “How can ye believe?” If that is your goal, if that is your purpose, if that is your desire, our Lord says it makes faith impossible.

When you look in Acts 5:1-2, Ananias and Sapphira had this land, sold this land, and brought it and laid it at the feet of the apostles. If you look at Acts 4:37, here is what Barnabas did: “Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.” If you look at Acts 5:2, you will see Ananias and Sapphira did the same thing: “kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part and laid it at the apostles' feet.”

The difference between the two is very simple. Barnabas brought the total price; everything that he got, he brought and laid it down. Ananias and Sapphira did not do that. They pretended that they were giving the whole thing, but they had already agreed together: this is what we are going to say, this is what we are going to do, but we are actually going to keep back a part of it for ourselves. Barnabas gave all of it and received the praise and recognition, whereas they gave part of it and simply wanted the praise and the recognition.

When they brought the money, evidently the Holy Spirit of God opened Peter’s eyes, opened his understanding, and let him know what was happening. Peter said to Ananias, "Why has Satan filled

thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost and to keep back part of the price of the land?" Peter was accusing Ananias of lying not to him, nor to the other apostles, but to the Holy Ghost.

The Consequences and Meaning of Tempting God

This is why I can tell you this is not communism or socialism. Peter said in verse four, "Whilst 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." Ananias, the land that you possessed was yours. You did not have to sell it. And when you received the money from the sale of that land, it was yours too. You did not have to give any of it. But you indicated that you had given all of it when you had not. You had not lied to men, but you had lied to God.

Now watch what happened in verse five: "And Ananias hearing these words fell down and gave up the ghost. And great fear came on all them that heard these things." God struck Ananias instantly. He literally killed him. The young men came in, put him in a cloth, wound him up, carried him out, and buried him.

About three hours later, his wife, Sapphira, not knowing what had happened, came in. Peter answered her, "Tell me, whether ye sold the land for so much."

Peter was asking a lawful, legitimate question. She said, “Yea, for so much.” At that point Peter knew that she also was lying and deceitful. 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.”

How did Peter know that God was going to kill Sapphira? Because God had already killed Ananias for the same thing. If God had killed Ananias, Peter knew that Sapphira was going to be killed as well.

The whole point is their hypocrisy and deceit. They were attempting to lie not to man, but to the Holy Ghost, or to God. They were testing, challenging, and trying to prove whether God could detect their hypocrisy, lie, and deceitfulness. The truth is that there is no way in the world anyone can deceive God.

Not only is God omniscient—He is all knowing—but the Bible says in 2 Timothy 2:19, “Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his, and, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.” Clearly, the Lord knows who belongs to Him and who does not. It is impossible to deceive God. But when we lie to God, according to Acts 5, we are tempting God. When we fail to keep our vows or our word, we are tempting God.

Other Ways We Tempt God

Ecclesiastes 5:4-6 says, “When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it. For he hath no pleasure in fools. Pay that which thou hast vowed. Better it is that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay. Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin, neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error. Wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands?”

When you vow a vow before God, pay it. Fulfill your vow. Whatever you tell God you are going to do, do not lie to Him, try to deceive Him, or pull the wool over His eyes. It is far better not even to vow than to vow and not pay. I have seen this hundreds of times. Some of you families have sick children in the hospital.

They will ask you to come and pray: “Pastor, if God raises this child, I’m going to be in church. I will honor Him.” Yes, they will—for about a week or two—and then they quit. That is tempting God. It amounts to lying to God.

Now, turn in your Bibles to the book of James, chapter 3. You might as well hold that passage, because we will come back there in a little bit. Notice verses 13, 14, and 15. James 3:13 says, “Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? Let him show out of a good conversation,” that is, good conduct, “his works with meekness of wisdom.” Now watch this closely.

“But if in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom that is lying, bitterness, envy, and strife, this wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish.” If you have bitter envy and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not

against the truth. Have you ever stopped to think about what it is to lie against the truth? In Deuteronomy 32:4, the sovereign God of heaven and earth is truth. In John 14:6, the Son of God is truth: “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” The Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of truth. Even there in Acts chapter 5, He is called the Spirit of the Lord. The Scriptures are called the Scriptures of truth. So when he says, “Lie not against the truth,” he says you had better not lie against the sovereign God, the Son of God, the Spirit of God, or the Scriptures of God, because whenever we lie against them, we are in essence tempting God.

The Greek word for tempt is peirazo. It literally means to tempt, to try, to put to a test, or to put to a trial. It is used in the Bible in both a good sense and a bad sense. In the good sense, it refers to testing or trying someone to ascertain the quality of that person, what he thinks, or how he will behave in a particular situation—trying one's faith, virtue, or character. Joseph's experience when Potiphar's wife grabbed his coat and said, "Come lie with me," and he left the coat and ran out, was a test. Peirazo can be used in a good sense, but it can also be used in a bad sense: when one maliciously and craftily seeks to entice someone into sin and seduce him into wickedness.

God has every right to test us and try us, but we have no right to try to test or tempt God. God tested Adam when, in the Garden of Eden, He told him, "Of all the trees in the garden thou mayest freely eat except this one, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. That's mine. Don't touch it. Don't eat it. That's mine." It was simply a test. It could have been any tree; it did not have to be an apple tree, a fig tree, or a date tree. It could have been any tree that bore fruit. But the test was Adam: Will you submit to Me? Will you follow what I tell you? Will you believe Me, or will you rebel and do what you think, want, and desire?

Of course, Genesis 22:1 tells us, "Now, it came to pass that God did tempt Abraham." When we hear the word tempt, most of the time we think of temptation as sin. The word simply means to test or to try. The Hebrew word there is nasah, and it means to prove, to try, to assay, and to attempt. God was merely testing Abraham's faith, whether Abraham really believed Him and would truly trust Him.

He not only tested Adam and Abraham; He tested Job and David. And the fact of the matter is this.

He tests each of us. He tries our faith. He tries our character. He tries our virtue. Let me show you. In 1 Peter chapter 1, beginning with verse 4, the Bible tells us that we have an inheritance: “To an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away reserved in heaven for you.”

Now watch: “Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time, wherein you greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be,” here it is, “you are in heaviness through manifold temptations”—or manifold tests or trials—“that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.”

Notice that he talks about manifold temptations or testings. Then he talks about the trial of your faith. How do you try gold? You purge it. You purify it. This is exactly what he is talking about. The trials that we go through, the tests that we go through, and the temptations that we go through are the means by which faith is tried and purified. Obviously, each of us has already been tested and tempted, tried, and probably shall be in the future as well.

Now I want to point something else out. Go back to James chapter 1, and let us begin reading with verse 13. Here is another truth. Watch carefully: James 1:13. The passage deals with another aspect of testing, and we need to look at it carefully.

"Let no man say when he is tempted," that is, tempted to do evil, "I am tempted of God," for "God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man." In other words, God will test a man, but God never tempts a man to sin. He never tries to seduce him into doing something wicked and wrong. God cannot be tempted, neither tempteth he any man. "But every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed. And when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin. And sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." If you want to know where your sin comes from, it comes from your own lust. You are drawn away into sin and enticed by your own lust; when that lust is conceived, it brings forth sin, and when sin is

finished, it brings forth death. God does not tempt anyone in the sense of trying to seduce them to evil.

He will test our faith, test our character, try us, and prove us, but He will not try to seduce us into sin. I want to clarify a statement I made earlier. I said that God has every right to test us, but we have no right to test God. Let me put it another way: God has every right to tempt us, but we have no right to tempt God. The only exception is this: We may test God—using the word tempt to mean test or prove—only by our obedience, and in no other way.

In Malachi chapter 3, verse 8, God says, "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee?" The answer is, "In tithes and offerings." Because they have robbed Him, verse 9 says, "Ye are cursed with a curse. For ye have robbed me, even this whole nation. Ye have not given me what I have demanded." Then He says, "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house. And prove me, test me."

“Now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open to you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground, neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the Lord of hosts.”

Here is what God says: You have been thieving, stealing, and robbing. That is wrong, wicked, and contrary to what I have given you. But if you want to prove Me, obey Me, and when you obey Me I will pour out such a blessing that you cannot receive it. I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes. Your fruit will produce, your field will produce, and your cattle will produce. I will bless you.

The only way that we have any right to test God is by obedience to His Word. In Acts chapter 5, Ananias and Sapphira tempted God by lying to Him, trying to deceive Him, and being hypocrites. But there are other ways in which we can tempt God, and one of them most of us probably do not want to hear because we are guilty.

Do you realize that when we complain, bellyache, whine, whimper, bad-mouth, and question God and His providence in our

lives, we are tempting God? “Lord, why am I in this situation? What am I going through this for? Why am I going through this, Lord? If You love me, this would not be happening to me. I cannot understand, Lord, how You could ever put me in a position like this.”

Really? Let me show you. Turn in your Bibles to the book of Exodus, chapter 17. Look at verses 1 and 2. Exodus 17:1: The Bible says, “And all the”

The congregation of the children of Israel journeyed from the wilderness of Sin after their journeys according to the commandment of the Lord, so God ordered them there, and pitched in Rephidim; and there was no water for the people to drink. Wherefore the people did chide with Moses and said, “Give us water that we may drink.” And Moses said unto them, “Why chide ye with me? Wherefore do you tempt the Lord?” Lord, I do not understand how You put us in a place where there is no water. We have to drink water. What is going on, Lord? How could You do this to us?

Look in verse 7: “And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah because of the chiding of the children of Israel and because they tempted the Lord, saying, Is the Lord among us or not?” Did you hear that? “Is the Lord among us or not?” Lord, if You really love me, You would not be putting me in this situation. If You were really with me, Lord, I would not be here. That is tempting God. That is challenging God.

Look in Deuteronomy chapter 6 and verse 16. I could multiply these, but you understand this. Here it is stated very plainly: “You shall not tempt the Lord your God as you tempted him in Massah.” Have you ever questioned the providence of God? Have you ever whined about the circumstances in which you find yourself? Have you ever mouthed the words, “I wonder if God loves me?” Have you ever wondered, “Is God really involved in this? Is God really here? Why is all this happening?”

In other words, you are challenging His love, His wisdom, His power, and His direction. You are saying, “Lord, I’m bound to know more than You, because if it were left up to me, I would not be in this. I would not do this.” It is a challenge. It is tempting God. It is placing and elevating yourself above God.

Now let me show you another one. Look in your Bibles to the book of Matthew, chapter 4. There you have the temptation of the Lord Jesus Christ. I am not going to go over all of these temptations, but I want to show you one of them right away. Look at Matthew chapter 4, verses 5 and 6: "Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, Jerusalem, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple.

"And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down, for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee, and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou shalt dash thy foot against a stone." The temptation here was to presume upon the Father's power and protection. Temptation is to presume upon God and think that when you step outside of His promise, somehow He is going to protect you.

There is a vast difference between faith and foolishness. I can do something right, holy, and godly; I can seek the Lord's protection and blessing and trust Him to give it. But if I get in my car, drive down the busy interstate at a hundred and forty miles an hour, and start praying, "Now Lord, don't let me have a blowout. Lord, don't let anybody pull out in front of me," I think that is tempting God. When you step outside of the promise, you step outside of the blessing. It is just that simple.

Look at Matthew chapter 4 and all of these temptations. When the tempter comes to Jesus Christ, he says, "If thou be the Son of God." In the Greek, there are two different constructions. One is ei with the indicative, and then there is ean with the subjunctive. Ean is always a question. Ei with the indicative is always a statement of fact. Literally, in each of these temptations, the tempter is saying, "Since thou art the Son of God, command these stones to be made bread. Since you are the Son of God, jump down from this pinnacle." In other words, prove that you are the Son of God. "I know you are, but you prove it to everybody else."

Matthew Henry said, "Satan tempted Christ to presume on His Father's power and protection in a point of safety. Nor are any extremes more dangerous than despair and presumption, especially in the affairs of our souls. Satan has no objection to holy places as the scene of the assaults."

Remember, it took place on the Temple in Jerusalem. Let us not, in any place, be off our guard. The holy city is the place where he does, with the greatest advantage, tempt men to pride and presumption. All high places are slippery places. Advancements in the world make a man a mark for Satan to shoot his fiery arrows at. Is Satan so well-versed in Scripture to be able to quote it readily? He is.

It is possible for a man to have his head full of scriptural notions and his mouth full of scriptural expressions, while his heart is full of bitter enmity to God and to all of His goodness. Satan misquoted the words. If we go out of our way, out of the way of duty, we forfeit the promise and put ourselves outside of God's protection.

Satan quoted from Psalm 91, verses 11 and 12: “For he shall give his angels charge over thee to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.” So here our Lord was tempted as well. It was a temptation to sin against God. Temptations are not always to get drunk, or to be a whoremonger, or to be a murderer, or to be a bank robber. There are all kinds of temptations to pride and self-righteousness and all kinds of things.

Consider another passage. In Matthew chapter 22, beginning with verse 15, the Pharisees took counsel how they might entangle Him in His talk. They wanted to ensnare Him. You will also find this passage in Mark 12 and Luke 20, but we will look at Matthew 22. “Then went the Pharisees and took counsel how they might entangle him in his talk.” Verse 16: “And they sent out unto him their disciples with Herodians saying, Master, We know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth. Neither carest thou for any man, for thou regardest not the person of men. Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not? But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites? Show me the tribute money.”

"And they brought unto him a penny. And he said unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? They said unto him, Caesar's. Then said he unto them, Render therefore to Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things which are God's.

When they heard these words, they marveled, and left him, and went their way."

Now, forget the tax issue for a moment and look at the context. These Pharisees and Herodians came to Jesus Christ building Him up. They told Him, "Look, we know your character. We know that you're honest, fearless, and faithful. You have no regard for any man, and we know that you will tell us the truth."

Our Lord looked at them and said, "Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites?" Why were they hypocrites? Because they came to Jesus Christ asking Him for an answer, indicating, "Look, we just want the truth. We want our duty. We want to know what to do. Would you just tell us the truth so we can apply the truth and know what to do?" They were not interested in the truth. They could care less about the truth. All they were interested in was ensnaring Jesus Christ and turning Him over to the Romans. That's all. They could care less about truth.

Do you realize that when you pretend that you want truth, while in reality you do not want it, you are tempting Christ? You're testing Him to see if He can discern your deceit and hypocrisy. Believe me, I can tell you this: He can easily tell. He can easily discern it.

I was thinking about this just this week, and it dawned on me. I started preaching in the middle of May. I do not even remember the day. I think it was the 15th; I'm not sure. But it was the middle of May 1965. So that means I've preached now fifty-six years, going on fifty-seven. Did you know that in those fifty-six years of preaching, I have no idea how many people I've counseled? I've had husbands and wives, men, businessmen, and all kinds of people come to me and say, "What do you think about this? What would you advise? What would your counsel be?" And I would say, "Well, let's see what the Bible says on this question."

I would give them a biblical answer. And guess what? That was not what they wanted. They really did not want the truth. What they wanted was for me to put my stamp of approval upon what they had already determined to do. That is tempting God. It is pretending that you want truth when in reality you do not want truth.

You look at the people that attend church on a weekly basis. You would think that they really wanted truth. But begin to preach something they do not like, something that will upset them, or something with which they disagree, and they will get mad and leave. They do not really want truth. They could care less for truth. They want what they want, and they simply do not want the truth of God.

You will remember the council at Jerusalem, when there were certain questions concerning some of the ceremonies and rituals. The Judaizers wanted to impose all these rituals on the Gentiles who had been converted. They held a council about this. In Acts chapter 15, verse 10, Peter said, “Now, therefore, why tempt ye God to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?”

How in the world are you going to bind these disciples with rituals and ceremonies that have been fulfilled in Jesus Christ anyhow? Do you realize what the average modern church has done? They have discarded the law of God and made up their own rules, regulations, laws, and ceremonies. They bind the people with these rules, regulations, and ceremonies in order to manipulate and control them. It is just that simple. He says it is a form of tempting God.

SCRIPTURE READING - 1 Corinthians 10:1-11 (KJV)

All Sin as Tempting God

The sin of tempting God is not simply a sin among sins. Sin is wicked and awful in and of itself; there is no two ways about that. But the sin of tempting God is extremely blasphemous, because we have no right to test and tempt Him except by our obedience—and that is all.

In 1 Corinthians 10, the Apostle Paul takes what happened to Israel in the Old Testament, especially during the wilderness wanderings, and applies it to the New Testament Church, to the Church of Corinth, and to each of us, because the principles are the same. This may surprise us. He begins with verse 1:

“Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed

> through the sea”—that is, the Red Sea—“and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ. But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness,” all but two.
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> Now these things were examples for us. “Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer. Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.”
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> Interestingly enough, because that Rock that followed them was Christ, Paul takes the fact of their lust, their idolatry, their fornication, and their murmuring—all of these things were tempting. He says, “Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted.”

All sin is tempting God. Sin is the dare of God's justice, the rape of His mercy, the jeer of His patience, the slight of His power, and the contempt of His love. Sin is an insult, a blasphemy, and a contradiction of God. It challenges God to do His worst. It is an abomination to Him. That is why Jeremiah 44:4 says, "Oh, do not that abominable thing which I hate." God hates sin intently, thoroughly, and completely; there is not one thing in sin that is desirable to God in any way whatsoever.

Any sin is a temptation, a testing of God, because we are saying in essence, "I don't believe you can handle this. I don't think you're going to smite me. I don't think you're going to judge me."

We are not to live by our feelings, emotions, circumstances, situations, or determinations. Most people live by their emotions, feelings, and circumstances; they do not live by the principles of the Word of God. Deuteronomy 8:3 says, "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 alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

It is not our feelings by which we are to live, nor circumstances or emotions, but the Word of God. Any attempt to deceive, test, try, provoke, challenge, and sin is tempting God. Do not tempt the Holy One of Israel.

Those who are unsaved, unconverted, and unrepentant are tempting God by rejecting His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and refusing His grace and mercy. They challenge Him and test Him.

Look in your Bibles to John chapter 5, verses 22 and 23. Here is an astounding truth: “For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son.” Why has God the Father given all judgment to the Son? Here is why: “That all men should honor the Son even as they honor the Father. He that honors not the Son honors not the Father which has sent him.”

Jesus Christ is the Son of God. If we honor Jesus Christ, we honor the Father. If we dishonor Jesus Christ, we dishonor the Father. Jesus Christ is worthy of all power, all honor, all glory, all praise, and all worship. When an unrepentant, unconverted, unsaved individual refuses to bow to Jesus Christ, he is saying in essence to the Father, “Jesus Christ is not worthy of all praise, honor, worship, and glory, and I’m not going to give it to him.” And he is tempting God to destroy him.

Conclusion and Prayer

“Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.” As Christians, we need to make sure that we do not whimper and complain in the circumstances in which God places us. Sometimes we may not like those circumstances; sometimes we may not agree with them. But if God providentially brought us into those circumstances, He did so

for our good and His glory. We need to bow our heads, submit, and understand that “there is no temptation taken you but such as is common to man, but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted above that you are able, but will with the temptation make a way of escape that you may be able to bear it.” Whatever God puts on us, there is always a way out, and usually that way out is through submission and obedience. “Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.”

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to thee this day. We thank you for your word and your truth. Help us, Lord, to love thee, to live for thee, and to honor thee. Help us, Lord, not to sin against thee by tempting thee. May we be more cognizant of this grievous sin and determine in our hearts and lives that we will not commit it by your infinite grace and mercy. In the name of Jesus Christ we ask and pray, amen.

CHAPTER 19

Theft By Any Other Name Is Still Theft

Introduction: Theft Defined as Sin

“And he heard the words of Laban's sons, saying, Jacob hath taken away all that was our father's; and of that which was our father's hath he gotten all this glory. And Jacob beheld the countenance of Laban, and, behold, it was not toward him as before. And the Lord said unto Jacob, Return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred; and I will be with thee. And Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah to the field unto his flock, and said unto them, I see your father's countenance, that it is not toward me as before; but the God of my father hath been with me. And ye know that with all my power I have served your father. And your father hath deceived me, and changed my wages ten times; but God suffered him not to hurt me. If he said thus, The speckled shall be thy wages; then all the cattle bare speckled: and if he said thus, The ringstraked shall be thy hire; then bare all the cattle ringstraked. Thus God hath taken away the cattle of your father, and given them to me. And it came to pass at the time that the cattle conceived, that I lifted up mine eyes, and saw in a

dream, and, behold, the rams which leaped upon the cattle were ringstraked, speckled, and grizzled. And the angel of God spake unto me in a dream, saying, Jacob."

"And I said, Here am I. Verse 12: 'And he said, Lift up now thine eyes, and see, all the rams which leap upon the cattle are ringstraked, speckled, and grizzled: for I have seen all that Laban doeth unto thee.'"

You've heard the old saying that a rose by any other name is still a rose. The truth of the matter is, theft by any other name is still theft as well.

Is it a sin to steal? The answer, of course, is yes. But let me simply define sin. First John 3:4 tells us, "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law." Therefore, in the book of Exodus, chapter 20 and verse 15, God simply says, "Thou shalt not steal."

We have to understand that theft is a violation, a trespass, a transgression against God's law. Listen to these questions and think with me as I ask them: Is it a sin for an individual to steal? Is it a sin for a family to steal? Is it a sin for a church to steal? Is it a sin for an institution to steal? Is it a sin for a ruler to steal? Is it a sin for a government to steal? The answer, of course, is yes. It does not matter if it is an individual, a family, a church, an institution, a ruler, or a government. Theft is still theft. It is still a sin.

God certainly will judge all who engage in that. It does not matter if theft is accomplished by the lowliest peasant, the mightiest ruler, or even the most arrogant politician. Theft is still theft, and God certainly will judge it as well.

Background: Jacob's Deception and Flight to Laban

Now, in the book of Genesis, when we just read from chapter 31, you have to be aware that the context goes farther back than simply Genesis chapter 31. Everyone is aware of the struggles between Jacob and Esau. You remember how Esau despised his birthright? He sold that birthright to Jacob for a mess of pottage. When it came time for Isaac to die, Rebekah heard him say to Esau, "Go fix me some of this venison that I love, that my soul may bless thee before I

die." Of course, she conceived this idea, got Jacob dressed up as Esau, put garments on him and goat's hair on his arms to make him feel hairy like Esau, and fixed up something from the flock to make it taste like venison. Then Jacob went in and claimed to be Esau, and he got the blessing. He stole the blessing. In reality, he did not truly steal it, although he deceived his father, because the blessing actually went with the birthright.

Probably Rebekah and Jacob knew that if Isaac did not bless Jacob by deception, he was going to bless Esau instead. When Esau came home and found that Jacob had beaten him out of the blessing, Genesis 27:41 says, “And Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing wherewith his father blessed him: and Esau said in his heart, The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then will I slay my brother Jacob.” He may have said it in his heart, but he also said it out loud, or at least told someone else. Genesis 27, beginning with verse 42, says: “And these words of Esau her elder son were told to Rebekah: and she sent and called Jacob her younger son, and said unto him, Behold, thy brother Esau, as touching thee, doth comfort himself, purposing to kill thee. Now therefore, my son, obey my voice; and arise, flee thou to Laban my brother to Haran; and tarry with him a few days, until thy brother's fury turn away; until thy brother's anger turn away from thee, and he forget that which thou hast done to him: then I will send, and fetch thee from thence: why should I be deprived also of you both in one day?” She said, “and tarry with him a few days.” Yet Genesis 31:38 describes those few days: Jacob said, “This twenty years have I been with thee.” The few days turned into twenty years. As far as I can tell, Rebekah died before Jacob ever returned.

She never saw him again. Now we read in the Bible of Jacob and Esau burying their father Isaac. The only other thing we read about Rebekah is that she was buried in the cave of Machpelah along with Sarah and Abraham. Genesis chapter 35 and verse 29 says, “And Isaac gave up the ghost, and died, and was gathered unto his people, being old and full of days: and his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.” But nothing is said about Rebekah’s burial. Genesis chapter 49 and verse 31 explains where Rebekah was buried: “There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife; there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife; and there I buried Leah.” That was Jacob speaking. Isaac

and Rebekah were buried in the same cave where Abraham and Sarah were buried as well.

When Rebekah told Jacob, “You go tarry with Laban for a few days and I'll send and fetch you,” he never came back, and she died without ever seeing him again. He was there twenty years. Twenty years is an awful long time, especially if you are being stolen from for twenty years. I want to show you three things from the Bible in relationship to theft and Jacob and, at the same time, apply them to where we are living today.

First of all, understand that here is theft by deception. The deception did not begin with money. The deception did not begin with wages. The deception began with marriage. Jacob loved Rachel, and that was who he wanted to marry. So, in Genesis chapter 29, beginning with verse 15: “And Laban said unto Jacob, Because thou art my brother, shouldest thou therefore serve me for nought? tell me, what shall thy wages be? And Laban had two daughters: the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel.”

SCRIPTURE READING - Genesis 29:15-30 (KJV)

Theft by Deception: Laban's Marriage Trick and Modern Parallels

> Leah was tender eyed; but Rachel was beautiful and well favoured. And Jacob loved Rachel; and said, I will serve thee seven years for Rachel thy younger daughter. And Laban said, It is better that I give her to thee, than that I should give her to another man: abide with me. And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her.
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> Here was a deal, here was a contract, here was a covenant: I will serve these seven years for your daughter Rachel. So when it came time for him to marry Rachel, Jacob said unto Laban, Give me my wife, for my days are fulfilled, that I may go in unto her. And Laban gathered together all the men of the place, and made a feast. And it came to pass in the evening, that he took Leah his daughter, and brought her to him; and he went in unto her.

> Now you have to remember they wore veils in those days. And Laban gave unto his daughter Leah Zilpah his maid for an handmaid. And it came to pass, that in the morning, behold, it was Leah: and he said to Laban, What is this thou hast done unto me? did not I serve with thee for Rachel? wherefore then hast thou beguiled me? And Laban said, It must not be so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn. Fulfil her week, and we will give thee this also for the service which thou shalt serve with me yet seven other years. And Jacob did so, and fulfilled her week: and he gave him Rachel his daughter to wife also.
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> Seven years he served for Rachel, but he only got Leah. The word "beguiled" in the Hebrew is the word "ramah," and it literally means to deceive, to beguile, to betray, to mislead, and to deal treacherously. He served for Rachel, but he got Leah. And when he found out it was Leah, he asked, "What have you done to me?" "Oh, I forgot to tell you. I left this out of the contract."

“In this country, we don't give the younger before the elder. Now, since you've got the elder, I'm going to let you have the younger in a week, but you have to give me seven more years of your life.” If that is not deception, I certainly do not know what deception really is.

When we are talking about marriage, many individuals have entered into marriage through deception. I have known, and still know, couples where one was a Christian and one was not. Yet the one who was not a Christian professed to be one, went to church, and did everything just like a good Christian until they got married. Then, once he got his wife or she got her husband, they dropped out by the wayside. It was pure deception. Others have married through deception by pretending to be something they really were not.

I used to laugh and tell everybody that I married Alice for her money, and she married me for my money. We got married and found that neither one of us had any. But the truth of the matter is, there have been plenty of people like that. Deception abounds on every hand, even in marriage. We have been deceived in many ways, and we do not understand that deception is indeed a form of theft.

I remember laughing at what my father told me many years ago. When he and my mother had first married, there was a drought, and fleas were everywhere. Dad did everything he could to kill them. Finally, while reading, he saw an advertisement that guaranteed to kill every flea on the place if the directions were properly followed. It cost only fifty cents. We think fifty cents is not much money, but this was during the Depression, and fifty cents was a lot of money in those days.

Dad sent the fifty cents, and in a few weeks the product arrived. It guaranteed to kill every flea on the place if the directions were properly followed. What he received was two little blocks of wood, with these directions: Catch the flea, put him on one block, and smash him with the other block. Would it work? Of course it would work. But it was deception, and it was theft. Dad was simply out of his fifty cents.

Now, the interesting thing is, we have been deceived so many ways. I could ask this question: How many of you think that we have real money in our pockets? How many of you really think that you have a dollar in your pocket? The truth of the matter is, we really do not. We have been deceived by our own government, by the bankers, and deceived every which way you turn.

When Alexander Hamilton wrote the Coinage Act of 1792, it went into law, and the dollar was indeed, at that time, the market definition of a dollar: the Spanish milled dollar, which was 371.25 grains of silver. This is the historical definition of a dollar. A dollar is a unit of measurement, like an inch, a foot, a quart, or a gallon. You can no more change the definition of a dollar than you can change the definition of a foot or an inch. It is indeed a unit of measurement.

Many people think that our irredeemable paper money are dollars, but they are not. We have been deceived and tricked into thinking that. Before leaving the Coinage Act of 1792, consider part of Section 19. Our founding fathers had just completed an experiment with paper money, the continental currency. Hence the old adage, "It's not worth a continental." Continental paper money was usually referred to as shinplasters because soldiers would take it and cover their shins with it as they tied up their boots, since it was

worthless. Thus, the continental dollars were called shinplasters as well.

Here is Section 19 of the Coinage Act of 1792: "If any of the gold or silver coins shall be debased, every such officer or person who shall commit any or either of said offenses shall be deemed guilty of felony and shall suffer death." If you debased a dollar, you faced the death penalty. If you used 50% silver and 50% lead, that was debasement. If you used 90% silver and 10% zinc, that was debasement. The Coinage Act says that if you debased these coins, it was a felony, and you would suffer death.

This helps us understand why Article 1, Section 8 of the Constitution of the United States says, "Congress shall have the power to coin money and regulate the value thereof." Congress never had the power to print money, because gold and silver were the money of the Constitution, the money of history, and the money of the Bible. Article 1, Section 10 says, "No state, not Florida, not Georgia, not South Carolina, no state shall coin money, emit bills of credit, make anything but gold and silver coin a tender in payment of debts." Do you realize that every time we use paper money, we're violating the Constitution of the United States?

The interesting thing is this: the Constitution was denied and destroyed when our money was debased in 1965 and all the silver was taken out of our coins. The Coinage Act of 1965 eliminated silver from circulating coins—the dime, the 50-cent piece, the quarter, and others. Our coins are basically worthless today, as is our fiat paper money. It is absolutely worthless.

Thomas Jefferson, who died in 1826, said, “I believe that the banking institutions are more dangerous to our liberties than standing armies. If the American people ever allow private banks to control the issue of their currency, first by inflation and then by deflation, the banks and the corporations that will grow up around the banks will deprive the people of all their property until their children wake up homeless on the continent that their fathers conquered. The issuing power should be taken from the banks and restored to the people to whom it properly belongs.”

There was a time in this country when, if you found gold or silver on your land, you could mine it, take it to the mint, and have coins minted for you. This is what Jefferson meant by restoring it to the people. Reginald McKenna, past chairman of the board of Midland Bank of England, said, “I'm afraid that the ordinary citizen will not like to be told that the banks can and do create money. And they who control the credit of the nation direct the policy of the governments and hold in the hollow of their hands the destiny of the people.”

Representative Charles Lindbergh, a Republican from Minnesota, said, “The financial system has been turned over to the Federal Reserve Board. That board administers the finance system by authority of a purely profiteering group. The system is private, conducted for the sole purpose of obtaining the greatest possible profits from the use of other people's money.” Lord Josiah Stamp, director of the Bank of England, said this:

The modern banking process manufactures currency out of nothing. The process is perhaps the most astounding piece of sleight of hand that was ever invented. As one commentator said, “If you want to be the slaves of the bankers and pay the cost of your own slavery, then let the banks create currency.” Henry Ford said, “It is well enough that people of the nation do not understand our banking and monetary system, for if they did, I believe that there would be a revolution before morning.” When you stop and think that the Federal Reserve and our banking system are creating money out of thin air, it is called fiat money. You have to understand that Federal Reserve notes are not money. In fact, they are neither Federal nor Reserve nor real notes, because a note is an IOU, meaning that you can collect at some point. These notes have nothing backing them, since the silver is gone and the gold is gone as well. Federal Reserve notes are not real money.

They are instruments of debt and deception. Debased coins are not real money; they are instruments of debt and deception.

Historically, a host of other things have been used as money, but biblically speaking and historically speaking, the main thing has always been silver and gold. In colonial America, even preachers were paid with tobacco because tobacco was counted as the gold of that day. In Holland, many people accepted tulip bulbs when their

value was rising. Clamshells and all kinds of other things have also been used as a medium of exchange and as money. All of those things have gone and fallen by the wayside, but we still have silver and gold.

Electronic digits are not money. They can disappear with a computer crash. No matter how many millions of electronic digits you have, you cannot hold them in your hand, eat them, or use them when the system is down. The truth of the matter is that the system will be going down, I am sure, because it is a slap in the face of God.

People still accept Federal Reserve notes, and I understand that. But the only reason they are still being accepted is that most people are still deceived and most people still have a little bit of confidence in them. When that confidence disappears, everything goes down.

I am reminded of an incident that happened in Germany during the hyperinflation of the Deutschmark. I read about a woman who had taken a wheelbarrow load of paper money to the bakery to buy a loaf of bread. On her way there, a fight broke out in the street. Her curiosity got the best of her, so she put down her wheelbarrow and parted the crowd to see who was fighting. When her curiosity was satisfied, she turned around and found that someone had dumped all the paper money out of the wheelbarrow and stolen the wheelbarrow. The wheelbarrow was worth more than the paper money.

I am sure you have seen this kind of thing. In fact, a brother in the last class showed us a ten-trillion-dollar Zimbabwean note. Ten trillion dollars—and he said it would not even buy a cup of coffee. This is theft by deception. You have to ask yourself: Who possesses the silver and the gold today? Where is it? Who has it? In the 1970s, it was illegal for a United States citizen to own gold. That has changed, but I am pointing out the fact that most of the gold now is either owned by governments or by the bankers. There is theft by deception. Just as Jacob was deceived, we are also deceived.

Now notice, in verses 7 and 8 of Genesis 31, a second way: theft by change. Jacob says, "...and your father hath deceived me, and changed my wages ten times; but God suffered him not to hurt me. If he said thus, The speckled shall be thy wages; then all the cattle bare

speckled: and if he said thus, The ringstraked shall be thy hire; then bare all the cattle ringstraked."

Theft by Change: Laban's Wage Manipulation and Currency Devaluation

What Laban did was something like this. Suppose you are working for me, and I agree to pay you in apples. But suddenly my apple trees produce abundantly, and the price of apples rises tremendously. I realize I am giving you the most valuable thing on the property, so I say, "No, no, no, no. I am going to pay you in oranges. I am not going to pay you in apples anymore." Then I start paying you in oranges. The next thing I know, oranges rise and my orange trees are producing.

Laban's motive was simple: he wanted the profit and the increase. He would say, "I am going to pay you in lemons," and then, when the price of lemons rose, he would change it to pears. If pears rose, he would give figs. This is exactly what was happening to Jacob. If Jacob said, "Let it be ringstraked," all the cattle had ringstraked offspring. If he said, "Let it be grizzled," they had grizzled offspring. Everything Jacob said he would take, God blessed and gave him. Ten times Laban changed his mind.

Let me ask you a question: How often has the value of our money changed? When Alice and I first married, I would give her ten dollars a week to buy groceries. I would fuss at her if she did not bring two or three dollars back. She could buy all the meat, milk, bread, and other things we needed for a week on six or seven dollars. Today, you can hardly buy a loaf of bread for that.

I am simply pointing out the fact. In 1971, before Nixon took us off the gold standard, gold was thirty-five dollars an ounce. Today it is two thousand dollars, and it has been over that. The Federal Reserve note has lost ninety-eight percent of its purchasing power. I probably will not pronounce his name correctly: Egon von Greyerz. He is from Switzerland, and he has gold Switzerland.

Here is what he wrote: "But Nixon's promise to the American people 50 years ago, on August the 15th, 1971, that your dollar will be worth just as much tomorrow hasn't quite held true, to say the least.

Yes, $1 is still $1. But in purchasing power terms, it is worth only two cents today compared to 1971. So in a half a century, the dollar has lost 98% of its value compared to real money, that is gold. The dollar has outstayed its usefulness as sound money and will soon be in the graveyard where every single currency in history has ended up."

He printed a little chart showing the currency rate race to the bottom, giving the United States, United Kingdom, Germany and Europe, Canada, and Argentina. The interesting thing is this: today, in 2021, the dollar—the Federal Reserve note—has lost 98 percent of its purchasing power. In all the other countries, it has lost 99 percent. So we are one cent better.

Here is a quote from Dr. Alfred Friedberg, written July 27, 2021: "If inflation keeps accelerating beyond their 2.5% annum expectation, which in our view is guaranteed, increase of 1.25% in Fed funds will be implemented on a quarterly basis and then monthly. There is a long way to go and a long time necessary to reach a funds rate of just 2.5%. The last peak was in 2019. And dear reader, that won't cut it when inflation is running 500 to 800 basis points higher."

He continues: "It's useless for us to speculate any further. It will be a long time measured in years before the Fed regains control of prices. During this long period of time, inflation will rage and consumer purchasing power will shrink as wages struggle to keep up with prices. Economic activity will be severely affected by the loss of purchasing power and slowdowns and recessions will follow. Corporate margins will shrink. Price controls, always useless and counterproductive, will almost certainly reappear on the scene. The evils of social inequality will be compounded, and social unrest will follow. There are very few places to which we will be able to escape and find safety in the coming financial and economic disaster."

Recognizing the problem is the first step, and we believe that we have recognized it. He goes further: "As an executive with a multi-billion financial institution, I'm a financial insider also." Then he put in parentheses, "his and boo." He continues, "I also believe in preparedness. I believe that I have some insights into the money side of preparedness that you might want to consider. I will not delve too

deeply into the fragile nature of the global financial system, but I will share my biggest concerns without going into detail."

His first concern is that the fractional reserve banking system allows your bank to create money out of thin air. Second, the central banks of the world are creating unprecedented amounts of money out of thin air. They just passed this $2.5 or $3.5 trillion bill. Where is it coming from? It will be printed and manufactured out of thin air. The more money they print, the less value existing money has.

Third, fiat currencies are not real money; our Federal Reserve notes are fiat currency. Fourth, the central banking system of the major nations exists only to prop up large commercial banks and does not care about citizens. Fifth, there is an enormous amount of leverage in the financial markets, government's balance sheets, shadow banks, and the average household.

Some private equity firms operate in the shadows, taking enormous leveraged bets that can shake fixed-income markets when those bets go bad. Regulators are incapable of understanding the risks being taken by the firms they regulate; they do not know what is going on.

So, let me boil it down by showing you what happened to Jacob.

Theft of Labor Is Theft of Life

Theft of labor is theft of life. Jacob was basically stolen from for twenty years. Laban stole thirteen years of Jacob's life by deceiving him and constantly changing his wages. Add the seven years Jacob served for Rachel—during which he was also deceived—and the total was twenty years.

The point is this: our modern-day economic system is not designed for you and I to prosper. It is designed so that everything for which we work can be taken from us and stolen from us.

You look at people today who cannot plan ahead, take a vacation, or do anything because they have to work almost 24 hours a day, seven days a week just to keep their eyeballs above water and keep from drowning. That is theft of labor. When our labor is stolen from us, our lives are stolen from us, and we no longer have time for friends, family, or anything else. It is indeed theft by change as well

as theft by deception. Mark it down: theft of labor is theft of life because you are not able to live the life that God has designed for you.

When I was a boy, my father worked and my mother stayed home. She kept the house and cooked. Today, both husband and wife often work just to try to make mortgage payments, car payments, and whatever else. I am simply pointing out that theft of labor is theft of life.

Theft by Conversion: Laban's Misuse of the Dowry and Legal Plunder

You have theft by deception and theft by change. I am going to give you one more: theft by conversion. Look at verses 14 and 15 of Genesis chapter 31. Rachel and Leah answered Jacob, “Is there yet any portion or inheritance for us in our father's house? Are we not counted of him strangers? for he hath sold us, and hath quite devoured also our money.” Pay close attention to what these girls said concerning their father: “He hath sold us, and hath quite devoured also our money.”

Now it is obvious that Laban did indeed sell his two daughters. He sold them for 14 years worth of wages. It would have been the same thing if he had looked at Jacob and said, “Well, I’ll take 20,000 for this one and 10,000 for that one.” It would have been the same thing. So he did sell them. What, then, did they mean when they said that their father had quite devoured also our money? In the Old Testament, particularly, there was what is known as a bride price or a dowry.

Shechem said to Jacob and his sons in Genesis 34:12, “Ask me never so much dowry and gift, and I will give according as ye shall say unto me: but give me the damsel to wife.” He wanted to marry Dinah and said, “I’ll give you whatever you ask, ever how much dowry and gift you want.” Exodus 22:17 says, “If her father utterly refuse to give her unto him, he shall pay money according to the dowry of virgins.” A man had seduced a woman, and he had to marry her unless her father utterly refused; if the father refused, he still had to pay the dowry.

When you get to 1 Samuel chapter 18, King Saul had wanted David to be his son-in-law. He first promised him his older daughter Merab, but when it came time for David to marry her, he gave her to another man. When Saul learned that Michal loved David, he sought David's death by the hand of the Philistines. He told his servants to say that the king was pleased with David and wanted him as a son-in-law. David replied, “It is not a light thing to be the king’s son-in-law, and I have no money.”

In 1 Samuel 18, verse 25: “And Saul said, Thus shall ye say to David, The king desireth not any dowry, but an hundred foreskins of the Philistines, to be avenged of the king's enemies. But Saul thought to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines.” In other words, he really wanted David killed.

But David went out, killed the Philistines, accomplished the feat, and came back, and he and Michal were married.

A dowry was money given to the bride’s father and kept for the daughter in case her husband died, so she would have something to live on until she found another husband. Usually, the dowry was two years of wages. In this instance, it was fourteen years, because Jacob served seven years for Rachel and seven for Leah. Therefore, the money, or profits, Laban made from Jacob’s labor during those fourteen years actually belonged to Leah and Rachel. Instead of saving it for his daughters, Laban converted it to his own use and spent it. It was theft: he took what did not belong to him and what had been entrusted to him for his daughters.

Matthew Henry described Laban closely: “Selfish men consider themselves robbed of all that goes past them, and covetousness will even swallow up natural affection. The error of overvaluing worldly wealth is the root of covetousness, envy, and all evil.” Covetousness will swallow up natural affection, and it did so in Laban. The truth is that we are talking about theft by conversion.

Do you realize that we have been legally plundered for years, not only by the bankers, but also by our own government? Consider this illustration from the author: “Technically, of course, the government has been defaulting on the debt since 1913 because anyone who lends money to the United States government is paid back in

devalued dollars. Whether you buy a savings bond, treasury bond, treasury bill, or treasury note, when you eventually redeem it, you are paid back in dollars worth less than when you loaned the cash. If you lend a friend $100, understanding that he will pay you back $110 in five years, you are not $10 ahead if government-caused price inflation means that $110 can purchase only what used to cost $95. Your friend pays you back $110, but if consumer prices have risen substantially since the loan originated, you are worse off." And that is true.

That is exactly what has been happening. There is a book, The Law, written by Frédéric Bastiat, a Frenchman. It is not large and is very easily read. In this book, he talks about legal plunder. We understand what illegal plunder is. If I pulled out a pistol, held it to James's head, and said, "James, give me your money or I'm going to kill you," obviously that would be illegal plunder. I could go to prison for it; and if James knew a few things, he could take the weapon away from me and even kill me. I would be the one suffering, but that is illegal plunder. Everybody understands it.

But if I do not want to go to jail or get hurt, we could get together and pass a law requiring people like James to give me 15 percent of everything he made. If he does not do it, he goes to jail. It is called legal plunder. Frédéric Bastiat said, "It is impossible to introduce into society a greater change and a greater evil than this: the conversion of the law into an instrument of plunder. What are the consequences of such a perversion? It would require volumes to describe them all. Thus, we must content ourselves with pointing out the most striking."

In the first place, it erases from everyone's conscience the distinction between justice and injustice. No society can exist unless the laws are respected to a certain degree. The safest way to make laws respected is to make them respectable. When law and morality contradict each other, the citizen has the cruel alternative of either losing his moral sense or losing his respect for the law. These two evils are of equal consequence.

It would be difficult for a person to choose between them. The nature of the law is to maintain justice. This is so much the case that, in the minds of the people, law and justice are one and the same

thing. There is in all of us a strong disposition to believe that anything that is lawful is legitimate. But just because something is lawful does not mean that it is legal or legitimate. It does not mean that it is in accord with God's Word or morally acceptable.

This belief is so widespread that many persons have erroneously held that things are just because the law makes them so. Thus, in order to make plunder appear just and sacred to many consciences, it is only necessary for the law to decree it and sanction it. Now, listen to his definition of legal plunder.

"But how is this legal plunder to be identified? Quite simply, see if the law takes from some persons what belongs to them, and gives it to other persons to whom it does not belong. See if the law benefits one citizen at the expense of another by doing what the citizen himself cannot do without committing a crime." I hope you're beginning to realize that's exactly where we are today.

Because our government is taking from this group and giving to that group. Taking the hard labor over here and converting it to this group over here who does not deserve anything. Now, listen carefully. He says, "The choice before us, the question of legal plunder must be settled once and for all. And there's only three ways to settle it." How do we settle it? Number one, the few plunder the many.

That's where we are right now. Number two, everybody plunder everybody. That's anarchy. And number three, nobody plunder anybody. Then he goes on to say this: "We must make our choice among limited plunder, universal plunder, or no plunder. The law can only follow one of these three." Now listen to this. This ought to really nail it down for you. He has limited legal plunder. "This system prevailed where the right to vote was restricted. One would turn back to this system to prevent the invasion of socialism." Now what in the world is limited legal plunder? Well, he says this system prevailed when the right to vote was restricted. Do you realize there was a time in this country that you could not vote unless you owned property? So I would have the right to say what happens to my own property. If you did not own property, you have no say so in how I handle property. Then he goes on to say this, universal legal plunder.

"We have been threatened with this system since the franchise or the voting was made universal.

“The newly enfranchised majority has decided to formulate law on the same legal-plunder principle their predecessors used when the vote was limited.” Everybody can vote, and the Democrats want all the illegal aliens to vote as well.

If you have no property, and you have nothing, and everything you have is given to you, and you vote, what are you going to vote for? More to be given to you. What frosts my cake is the property tax, especially when you find out that about 85% of it goes for the support of government schools. None of my children ever attended a government school.

Every time I have to pay those stupid taxes, I ask, why do I have to pay for somebody’s child to go to a public school when I disagree with what they are teaching? It is not my child; it is their responsibility to educate their children, not mine. This is universal legal plunder, and this is the way it works today. You have to pay for those who will not work, those who will not do anything, and those who will never own anything because they have no desire to.

All they want to do is sit home, watch TV, and take their food stamps and their welfare payments. The third principle is no legal plunder. This is the principle of justice, peace, and order, stability, harmony, and logic. We are given a choice: the few plunder the many, everybody plunder everybody, or nobody plunders anybody. That is how it should be—no one plunders anybody. Yet the truth of the matter is, we are having today universal legal plunder.

God's Judgment on Theft and Practical Applications

H.L. Mencken said this: "A government at bottom is nothing more than a gang of men, and as a practical matter, most of them are inferior men. Government is actually the worst failure of civilized man. There's never been a really good one, and even those that are most tolerable are arbitrary, cruel, grasping, and unintelligent. Indeed, it would not be far wrong to describe the best as the common enemy of all decent citizens."

What in the world are we to do except educate ourselves the best that we can and prepare the best we can to survive this universal plunder?

The truth of the matter is that theft violates God's law in every shape, form, fashion, and color; God will judge it sooner or later. In Genesis 31:38, Jacob says to Laban:

“These twenty years have I been with thee; thy ewes and thy she goats have not cast their young, and the rams of thy flock have I not eaten. That which was torn of beasts I brought not unto thee; I bare the loss of it; of my hand didst thou require it, whether stolen by day, or stolen by night. Thus I was; in the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep departed from mine eyes. Thus have I been twenty years in thy house; I served thee fourteen years for thy two daughters, and six years for thy cattle: and thou hast changed my wages ten times. Except the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely thou hadst sent me away now empty. God hath seen mine affliction and the labour of my hands, and rebuked thee yesternight.”

Jacob suffered the loss of what was stolen. And you know what God did?

God came to Laban and said, "You better not say anything good or bad to Jacob. You better not touch him." Let me put it to you like this. Sooner or later, God's hammer is going to fall. And it's going to fall with force upon the thieves. I do not care if you are a multi-multi-billionaire, if you've gotten it by theft, if you've gotten it by deception, if you've gotten it by change, if you've gotten it by conversion, if you've gotten it by fraud, the hammer's going to fall upon you. It's just that simple. It will fall upon you.

Now, I want you to think about some things in light of this. Theft, by any other name, is still theft. If you and I do not wish to be the victims of plunder, we must not plunder others. You remember the Bible teaches that we reap exactly that which we sow. We have to learn the biblical principles of wealth and then apply them to our lives. We cannot be dependent upon the government which cannot give to us except that which it takes from someone else. We must learn to be independent of others. We must learn to be self-sufficient

in and of ourselves with our complete and total dependence upon the Lord Jesus Christ.

It was Thomas Jefferson who said this: "If people let the government decide what foods they eat and what medicines they take, their bodies will soon be in as sorry a state as are the souls of those who live under tyranny." And that's the truth. And did you know, there's even a bill now trying to be introduced that would make it against the law for you to buy vitamin supplements without a prescription from a doctor.

Jefferson said, "I believe that the banking institutions are more dangerous than standing armies." He also said, "If the American people do not get back this power to control the money, we're going to wake up homeless on the very continent in which our forefathers suffered, bled, and died, and fought for us."

The truth of the matter is that we fail to heed these warnings. All you've got to do is look around, and you'll see the trouble that we're in. The present administration is intent on taking and stealing what little the American people have left.

The second application is this: We must learn to recognize theft in its many and varied forms. Theft takes upon itself many different colors and schemes, yet theft is a sin, and God will judge it. My counsel would be this: be prepared to live right, do right, and die right.

There's a sign that I have. It said, "Do not steal. The government does not like the competition." Well, that is certainly true. But I much prefer God's law that simply says, "Thou shalt not steal."

What you should get from this is that what we call money is not really money. Silver and gold are real money. They've always been valuable, and they will always be valuable, especially in comparison to paper. If gold went back down to 35 bucks an ounce, that is still 35 bucks an ounce when your paper is worth nothing other than to start fires or to wallpaper your house.

The point I'm trying to make is this. You need not only silver and gold, you need non-hybrid seeds. You need garden tools. You need farming tools. You need hunting tools. You need trapping tools. You need fixing tools. You need bartering tools. You need something that

is tangible, something that is usable, something that will last and will help you and your descendants, your children, your grandchildren, your great-grandchildren.

Adam Smith said it like this: "What can be added to the happiness of a man who is in health, out of debt, and has a clear conscience?" You know, the Apostle Paul said, "Herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men." So we need to understand that we are being stolen from, and we need to do everything that we can to preserve what little wealth that we have for our children, our grandchildren, and our great-grandchildren.

Closing Prayer

Theft, by any other name, is still theft. Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee this day. We thank You for Your Word. We thank You for Your truth, and Lord, help us to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves, help us to understand where we are, how we got here, and where we're going, and how we need to change, and how we need to apply truth.

Give us grace, give us mercy, give us wisdom, give us understanding. May we lean upon Thee and trust in Thee. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 20

There

In 1 Kings 17, verse 1, we read: “And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word. And the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan. And it shall be that thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there. So he went and did according unto the word of the Lord: for he went and dwelt by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan. And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening; and he drank of the brook.”

Introduction: The Significance of 'There'

Think about the word “there.” Have you ever considered the significance of that word? It is indeed a word that we use daily. We say, “Put it there,” “There it is,” or “There it lays.” And if you have children, then you know the proverbial question when you are traveling: “Are we there yet?”

The word “there” is an adverb, and it signifies place. We say, “I left the box over there,” or simply, “We are not going there.” It indicates not just a place, but usually a specific place. If something is there, it is not anywhere else. So anytime you see the word, even biblically speaking, there is a specificity attached to it.

For instance, in Genesis 2:8, the Bible says, “And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there He put the man whom He had formed.” It was a specific place. He put him in Eden. In Genesis 11:9, “Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the Lord scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth.” It was there that He confounded their language, so it was called Babel. In Genesis 13:4, “Unto the place of the altar, which he had made there at the first: and there Abram called upon the name of the Lord.” The “there” refers to that specific place where the altar was.

In Psalm 137, verse 1, it says, “By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion.” Then, in Luke 2:25, the Bible says, “Behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him.” Note the words, “Behold, there was a man in Jerusalem.” It was a specific man in a specific place. When you hear the word “there,” you have to understand that it does indeed refer to a certain specific place.

Oftentimes, I get amused when I am in a church and the song leader is leading the hymn “When the Roll Is Called Up Yonder.” Everybody knows that hymn. He will lead the singing, “When the roll is called up yonder,” and then, of course, the latter part goes down, “When the roll is called up yonder, I’ll be there.” As it drops, I say, “I don’t want to be where your hand is pointing. I want to be up there.” Of course, that is what the song means. I am simply saying that “there” refers to heaven and not the place of destruction.

That is for sure. So let me ask you a question: Are you there? You may respond, “I can’t answer that question because I don’t know the context, and I cannot truthfully or accurately answer it.” I am going to give you the context in just a little while. It is indeed a question

you not only need to ask but must ask, because it is going to have grave implications as well.

We are reading about Elijah the Tishbite. The New Testament gives a concise, divine commentary on 1 Kings 17 and 18. James 5:17–18 says, "Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit."

Elijah was a man like we are, subject to like passions. He had his faults, failings, and sins, but he was a man of God and a man of prayer. When someone can pray, and the Lord withholds rain and dew for three and a half years, then pray again so that the earth brings forth rain and fruit, that is indeed someone who has power with God.

The Context of Elijah and the Drought

Stop and think about this. God was going to send judgment upon Israel because of its sins and wickedness, and that judgment was a drought. Can you imagine no water for three and a half years—not even dew? Everything would be basically dried up. At this particular time in history, Ahab and Jezebel were on the throne in Israel. Ahab was the king, but Jezebel ran an awful lot of things. Since Ahab and Jezebel were there, everything was wicked and pagan, and God was sending judgment upon the land because of its wickedness. The drought lasted three and a half years.

It destroyed the crops, the grass, the animals, and undoubtedly people as well. Ahab was the typical tyrant and politician. He did not really care one thing about the people; he cared about himself and his power. First Kings 18:5–6 shows how bad the drought was: "And Ahab said unto Obadiah, Go into the land, unto all fountains of water, and unto all brooks: peradventure we may find grass to save the horses and mules alive, that we lose not all the beasts. So they divided the land between them to pass throughout it: Ahab went one way by himself, and Obadiah went another way by himself." Such was the dearth and drought that they were looking for just a little grass somewhere to save the horses and mules alive.

Everyone in this room knows that I love animals, and I certainly would not like to see any of them suffer, be in misery, or die. But as much as I love animals, when you read this passage, you have to wonder, what about the people? If the animals were suffering and starving, then obviously the people were as well. In chapter 17 and verse 7, even the brook where Elijah was staying dried up: “And it came to pass after a while, that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land.”

Of course, God moved him. But in 1 Kings 18 and verse 2, the Bible says, “And Elijah went to show himself unto Ahab. And there was a sore famine in Samaria.” Obviously, people were dying as well as the animals. Not only were the crops failing, but there was death everywhere. There was a need for food and water for the people, and Ahab was demonstrating that he cared more for the horses and mules than he did for his own people.

Ahab murdered Naboth and his sons just so he could have a garden of herbs close to his palace. That is how much he thought of the people. He thought more of a small garden of herbs than he did of the lives of his people.

In contrast to these wicked tyrants, God is totally different. The Bible teaches us that He cares for His own. Moreover, He cares for the widows, the children, and the orphans. In Deuteronomy chapter 10 and verse 18, the Bible says, “He doth execute the judgment of the fatherless and widow, and loveth the stranger, in giving him food and raiment.” God will execute judgment for the widow and the fatherless. He loves the stranger and gives him food and raiment. Psalm 68 in verse 5 describes God as “a father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation.” He takes care of the orphans and is a judge of the widows in His holy habitation. Thus, 1 Kings chapter 17 demonstrates that God indeed takes care of His own.

The truth of the matter is that the drought was just a physical picture of a spiritual reality. Just as there was a drought that caused famine and starvation, there was a drought of hearing the Word of God. God demonstrated this: after the brook dried up, He moved Elijah and hid him, so that there was no more truth being proclaimed or preached. We must understand that the hand of God

is behind all the physical phenomena we see. Many times we do not consider that when there is a drought, God's hand is behind it; when there is a flood, a tornado, or a hurricane, God's hand is behind those as well.

I remember years ago, Pastor McCurry and I were at a conference in Indianapolis, Indiana. There were probably a hundred preachers and several hundred more people present. The pastor asked a tall, slender, black pastor to open in prayer. We bowed our heads, but within a minute my head went up and my eyes opened. I looked to see Brother McCurry's reaction, and his head was up and his eyes were open too.

Afterward, I told everybody that old black preacher preached more in his prayer than most preachers did all day long. Hurricane Andrew had just come through Florida. He prayed, "Oh God, our heavenly Father, I know that Hurricane Andrew has followed the exact path that Thine hand has laid down before the world was ever formed." He continued, pointing out that God's hand was behind Hurricane Andrew, just as it is behind everything else. That is true. That is what the Bible teaches. When there are physical phenomena that most people do not understand, we need to look closely, study, and think; usually, the hand of God is behind them.

Here is my question in light of all this: Are you there? You may respond with a question: “Where is the there? I cannot answer it until I find out where the there is.” Look, if you would, in 1 Kings chapter 17 and verse 2: “And the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan.”

The “there” was first and foremost a place of obedience. God told Elijah, “Get thee to the brook Cherith, which is by Jordan.” It was an act of obedience on Elijah’s part that he obeyed God and did exactly as God commanded. I want you to know that Elijah went exactly and specifically to the place that God ordained.

First Point: 'There' as a Place of Obedience

Partial obedience is not obedience. Partial obedience is disobedience. God told him to get to the brook Cherith. Suppose

Elijah went halfway to the brook Cherith and said, “Well, this should do it.” Maybe he went three quarters of the way and said, “Well, I think this is sufficient. I do not have to go all the way to that brook.” Maybe he even went nine tenths of the way. Maybe he went just so close that he could see it, but he did not actually go there. Would that be counted as obedience?

The answer is no, because God specifically told him to go to that brook.

Most of the time our obedience is partial obedience, which is in reality disobedience. You remember in 1 Samuel chapter 15, Samuel came to King Saul and said, “Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I remember that which Amalek did to Israel as he came out of Egypt.” He said, “I want you to go and smite Amalek.” He wanted them smitten so thoroughly that neither man nor woman, child, ox, suckling, nor ass would remain. He wanted them all dead. And Saul began a riot.

He chose him an army, went up, and attacked the Amalekites. He destroyed everything that was vile, refuse, and useless, but spared Agag, the king of the Amalekites, the best of the sheep, the best of the oxen, and whatever else he wanted to spare. Of course, he pretended that he had obeyed God. Then Samuel said, "What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?" He said, "Saul, if you'd obeyed God, then everything would be dead." I would not be even hearing that.

Here is what God said in 1 Samuel chapter 15 and verse 19 through the prophet Samuel: "Wherefore then didst thou not obey the voice of the Lord, but didst fly upon the spoil, and didst evil in the sight of the Lord?" What could Saul say in response? "Well, I obeyed mostly. I got rid of all that was vile and worthless and refuse. I almost obeyed." But he did not obey. God counted that partial obedience as disobedience and added that it was positively evil. Consequently, Saul was rejected by God for his partial obedience.

There is another good illustration of partial obedience. You will find that in 1 Kings chapter 20. Because Jeroboam the son of Nebat had made the golden calves and the altars, God sent a man of God out of Judah to prophesy against Jeroboam, the altar, and the calves.

God told him not to eat or drink in that place. The man of God came while Jeroboam was offering on the altar and cried, "Thus saith the Lord of hosts." He said there would be a king named Josiah, who would defile the altar and burn men's bones upon it. To show that this would come to pass, the altar would rent, and it broke right in front of Jeroboam. Jeroboam stretched out his hand and said, "Get that man!" Then he could not pull his hand back. Realizing he was in trouble, he looked at the man of God and said, "Pray for me." And the man of

God prayed for him, and the Bible said his hand was restored whole. Then Jeroboam said to him, “Come home with me, and I’ll give you a reward, and you can eat and drink in my house.” The man of God said, “No, I’m not going to eat. I’m not going to drink. God told me not to. I’m leaving.” He turned around and left. There was another old prophet whose sons had seen everything and went and told him.

He asked, “Which way did he go?” When he was told, he saddled the ass, rode after the man of God from Judah, and said, “Stop and turn and come around to my house and eat and drink with me.” The man of God said, “I can’t do that.” The old prophet replied, “You don’t understand. I’m a prophet of God as well. An angel appeared with me and told me to come get you and bring you back so that you can eat and drink.” He went back with the old prophet, and after he ate and drank, the old prophet said, “You’ve disobeyed God, and God’s going to kill you.” When the man of God left the old prophet, a lion met him in the way and slew him.

The point is very simple. He took care of the most important part of his mission. He cried out against Jeroboam’s idolatry and against the altar. He prophesied, and the altar broke. He proved to Jeroboam that God, the one true and living God, the Lord of hosts, was the God of Israel. That was the most important. But the little, tiny, insignificant part—“Don’t eat and drink”—he disobeyed. It cost him his life. Partial obedience is disobedience.

Delayed obedience is disobedience. Hold 1 Kings 17, but look in your Bibles to Matthew 21, beginning with verse 28. Our Lord says, “But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard. And he answered

and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not. Whether of them twain did the will of his father?" They say unto him, "The first." Jesus saith unto them, "Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you."

In the parable, the father came to the first son and said, "Son, go work today in my vineyard." He answered, "I'm not going to do it," but afterward he repented and went. Likewise, the father said to the second son, "Go and work today in my vineyard." He answered, "I go, sir," very respectfully and very mannerly, but he went not.

Suppose the second son went to work in the vineyard the next day, or the day after, or the next week. Would that have been counted obedience? The answer is no. Why? The Father said, "Son, go work today in my vineyard." It is not only partial obedience that is disobedience; delayed obedience is also disobedience. Real, true, biblical obedience can neither be partial nor delayed to be counted as obedience.

Obedience indicates submission and recognition of authority. If there is real, genuine authority, there should be submission. If there is real, genuine submission, there should be obedience. One of the problems we have as Christians is that most Christians really and truly do not recognize the sovereign, total, absolute, and complete authority of God. God has the absolute right to command us, and if we recognize that authority, we should be instant not only in submission but in obedience. The first part of "Are you there?" is obedience.

Second Point: 'There' as a Place of Provision

Secondly, "there" is also a place of provision. Beginning there with verse 4, the Lord said, "And it shall be, that thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there. So he went and did according unto the word of the Lord: for he went and dwelt by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan. And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening; and he drank of the brook." The Bible says, "Then it

shall be, that thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there."

Suppose Elijah thought, "It's very uncomfortable by that brook. There are more comfortable places in Jerusalem or Jezreel. Why can't I go there?" Because God said, "I've commanded the ravens to feed thee there." Put these two things together: the place of obedience is the place of provision. Elijah went exactly where God commanded him, by the brook, and there God fed him.

God used an unclean bird to bring clean food to Elijah. I do not know whether you understood this, but ravens are considered unclean in Leviticus 11:13–15. The Bible says, “And these are they which ye shall have in abomination among the fowls; they shall not be eaten, they are an abomination: the eagle, and the ossifrage, and the osprey, and the vulture, and the kite after his kind; and every raven after his kind.” Deuteronomy 14:14 says the same thing: “And every raven after his kind.”

The ravens then brought Elijah food—meat and bread—every morning and every evening. Have you ever wondered where they got that meat and bread? Obviously, they do not cook or bake. Where in the world would they get the food to feed Elijah?

Ravens, crows, blackbirds, and camp robbers are notorious thieves. Some of us remember, from when we were young, Heckle and Jeckle, the two crows in the comic books. They were always stealing corn. There are also birds out west related to the blackbird. They are somewhat larger, black except for white spots on their wings, and known as camp robbers. Whatever you leave out, food or anything else, they steal. That is how they got their name.

Some time ago, I read about a man who had installed a self-automated car washer requiring coins to go through. He began losing money and called the company, saying, “You evidently have a dishonest employee because money is missing. It is being stolen, and your company and myself are the only ones who have the combination to get the money out. And I’m not doing it.”

They replied that their employee was honest and was not taking it either. So they installed a hidden camera to capture whoever was stealing. They were absolutely astounded to discover little birds, like

house wrens, going where the change came out, taking money, and flying back to the top of the building. On the roof they found more than three thousand dollars in quarters. The birds were stealing the money. Now remember that there was a famine in the land, and Jezebel was killing all of God's preachers.

In 1 Kings 18:13, Obadiah says to Elijah, "Was it not told my lord what I did when Jezebel slew the prophets of the Lord, how I hid an hundred men of the Lord's prophets by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water?"

Now look at what Elijah said to God in 1 Kings 19:10: "And he said, I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword. And I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away."

Isn't that interesting? Here we have the prophets of God being murdered or driven into hiding while Jezebel is feeding 400 prophets of Baal at her table. To me, this is absolutely a hilarious thought. It is not just that these ravens were stealing the bread and meat from the wicked. Would it not be absolutely wonderful if they were stealing that meat and bread from Jezebel's table, where she was feeding all those 400 prophets of Baal? God does have a sense of humor.

You remember the woman named Jochebed? She was the wife of Amram and the mother of Moses. She hid Moses until he was about three months old and could not hide him anymore. Then she made a little ark of bulrushes, daubed it with mud, put little baby Moses in it, and placed it in the river. Miriam, his older sister and only sister, watched to see what would happen.

Pharaoh's daughter and her maidens came down by the river, saw the ark, and sent a lady to get it. I guess God sent an angel at just the right time and pinched that baby, and Moses started crying. Pharaoh's daughter's heart was touched, and she said, "It's one of the Hebrews' babies." Miriam came and asked, "Shall I go and call on the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?" Pharaoh's daughter said, "Yes, go and call her and I will give her her wages."

Miriam went and called her mother. Jochebed, the mother of Moses, was paid by Pharaoh's daughter to nurse and raise her own child. It would be absolutely hilarious if God did allow these ravens to take food right off Jezebel's table and feed Elijah.

Here is an obvious truth that we must understand. Remember, there was a drought and a famine in the land. We need to consider that oftentimes, during a time of judgment, the righteous suffer with the wicked. Elijah was by the brook; he certainly did not starve. But he probably did without a lot of things. Without a direct miracle of God, it would be impossible for those ravens to bring him a bowl of beans, corn, asparagus, or broccoli. They certainly did not bring him cakes and pies.

He did not starve, but he did not have any chocolate cake, Steve. So he was suffering, that is for sure. Everybody suffers without chocolate. It is like the shirt my wife has that says, "Just give me the chocolate and nobody gets hurt."

He was doing that. He did not starve, obviously, but he had to do without. We have to learn, especially in times of judgment, to be content with the basics. In 1 Timothy 6:8, the Bible says, "And having food and raiment let us be therewith content." You may not have the latest fashions, but if you are able to be clothed, be content. You may not have a porterhouse steak, but if you are able to have a little bit of meat, be content.

Turn in your Bibles to the book of Zephaniah, chapter 2. Zephaniah is the fourth book from the end of the Old Testament. Go to Malachi, turn back to Zechariah and then to Haggai; the next book after that is Zephaniah. In Zephaniah 2, we are talking about judgment, being content, and the fact that oftentimes the righteous do indeed suffer with the wicked. I want us to read the first three verses.

Please note that the context is a time of judgment. God says, "Gather yourselves together, yea, gather together, O nation not desired." He is talking about Israel. "Before the decree bring forth, before the day pass as the chaff, before the fierce anger of the Lord come upon you, before the day of the Lord's anger come upon you." Now notice verse 3: "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."

I preached a message on this passage a few years back entitled, "How to Act in the Time of Judgment." Notice again: "Seek ye the Lord, all you 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." What did God do for Elijah? He hid him in the day of his anger.

Take note of the fact that obedience and provision go together. Are you there? Are you there in the place of obedience? Are you there in the place of provision? Here is a third truth back in 1 Kings 17: "There" is also a place of ministry to others. Look at what happens beginning with verse 8.

Third Point: 'There' as a Place of Ministry

"And the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee." Verse 10 says, "So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman was there gathering of sticks: and he called to her, and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink." God sent Elijah to Zarephath, to a widow woman.

Arthur W. Pink wrote of this passage: "But let us return to the outward circumstances which confronted Elijah upon his approach to Zarephath. When he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman was there gathering sticks. God had told his servant to go there, and had promised the widow should sustain him.

"But what her name was, where her house was, and how he was to distinguish her from others, he was not informed. He trusted God to give him further light when he arrived there, nor was he disappointed. He was speedily relieved of any suspense as to the identification of the person who was to befriend him. Apparently, this meeting was quite casual, for there was no appointment between them.

"Behold, ponder, and admire, the widow woman was there. See how the Lord in his providence overrules all events, so this particular woman should be at the gate at the very time the prophet arrived. Behold, here she comes forth as if on purpose to meet him, yet he did not know her, nor she him. It has all the appearance of being accidental, and yet it was decreed and arranged by God so as to make good His word to the prophet."

God told Elijah, "Go to Zarephath. I've appointed a widow woman to take care of you." He did not give her name, her address, where she lived, or any identifying marks—just, "Go there." That is where Elijah went, and God had her waiting.

This was a humbling experience for Elijah. Men usually take care of themselves, or at least that is what we like to think. But God said, "I've got a widow woman. She'll take care of you." It is important to note what this widow woman was doing when he came.

Look at verses 10 through 12: “So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman was there gathering of sticks: and he called to her, and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink.” This was not an unusual request. “And as she was going to fetch it, he called to her, and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand.” Bring me something to eat. “And she said, As the Lord thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die.”

“And Elijah said unto her, Fear not; go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son.” The dearth had affected everyone. There was drought and famine, and seemingly no hope or help for this widow and her son. They were facing imminent death by starvation. In light of those circumstances, Elijah’s request would appear selfish and cruel. She said, “I’m gathering a few sticks that I can cook this for me and my son, and then die.” He said, “Go ahead and cook it, but fix me a little cake first and bring it to me.” Modern-day leftist and politically correct people would have a

heyday with this: “While you’re taking food out of the mouth of a child, you’re depriving that child.”

But Elijah knew exactly what God was going to do. Look at verses 14 and 15: “For thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth. And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days.” The providence of God always provides for His own.

It was not a wealthy merchant, king, prince, or ruler who took care of Elijah. It was a widow. God had her in the right place, at the right time, and in the right condition, with a willing, gracious, and sacrificial heart even in the face of death. God used a widow woman to take care of His preacher.

I've preached for 57 years. Never in my 57 years of preaching has a millionaire or a multi-millionaire come up to me and say, "Preacher, here's $100,000 for the work of the ministry." Never! But innumerable widows, children, and everyday people give generously and sacrificially. That is why God used this widow woman to take care of Elijah. She was willing to share even in the face of imminent death.

The judgment of God upon a nation or a people does not nullify or destroy charity, sacrifice, and obedience. In fact, it should intensify those attributes. We must be willing to share and sacrifice with God's people, even in the face of death. A willing heart is always acceptable unto the Lord. Elijah ministered to that woman and her child, and that woman and her child ministered back to Elijah. Ministry is reciprocal. Not everybody can preach, and not everybody can teach, but everybody has a gift that God has given them.

I can't do what Steve does. I can't do what Gary does. I can't do what James does. I have a gift, and each of you has a gift. There is ministry. As I minister to you, you minister back to me. As you minister to someone else, they minister back to you. So, the "there" is not only a place of obedience and provision; it is also a place of ministry.

Fourth Point: 'There' as a Place of Protection

The "there" is also a place of protection. Look in verse 15 of 1 Kings chapter 17: "And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days." How long was Elijah living in the house of this widow with her son? The answer is many days. In verse 7, the brook that God initially sent Elijah to dried up. How long does it take for a brook to dry up? That depends upon the size of the brook. But if there is no rain, no dew, and the brook is not very large, I would imagine it will dry up in three or four months at the most. The drought lasted three and a half years. Elijah was probably at the widow woman's house for three years or better—for many days. It is a place of protection. God hid Elijah first by the brook.

Secondly, he hid him at the widow woman's house. When you go to 1 Kings chapter 18, beginning with verse 7, God sends Elijah back to meet Ahab, but he encounters Obadiah first. “And as Obadiah was in the way, behold, Elijah met him: and he knew him, and fell on his face, and said, Art thou that my lord Elijah?”

“And he answered, I am: go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here. And he said, What have I sinned, that thou wouldest deliver thy servant into the hand of Ahab, to slay me?”

“As the Lord thy God liveth, there is no nation or kingdom, whither my lord hath not sent to seek thee: and when they said, He is not there; he took an oath of the kingdom and nation, that they found thee not.”

What was Ahab doing while Elijah was at the widow woman's house? Seeking him. Why was he seeking him? So that he could kill him. As Elijah had said, “As the Lord thy God liveth, there shall not be rain nor dew these years, but according to my word.” Ahab was blaming everything on Elijah. If he could get his hands on him, he would kill him. He sent to every nation and kingdom, seeking Elijah, and when he could not find him, he took an oath of the rulers that he was not there.

Here is the mentality of a tyrant, and the mentality of a politician: “I'm living the good life. I've got plenty. I'm living in a palace. And here's my opposition. He is probably being sustained by some rich

man, some ruler, or some prince. He's living in luxury. He's not doing without. And I'm going to seek Him out of all these kingdoms, out of all these nations, and when I get my hands on Him…" All the while, He was at a little woman's house.

God has a sense of humor. Can you imagine living with a widow woman and her child, eating meal—little cakes of bread cooked in oil—for three years, and having nothing to do? Suppose Elijah had grown tired of being cooped up, eating bread, doing chores, and inaction against Ahab and Jezebel. Suppose he decided to take matters into his own hands and go to a larger city. Could God have protected him there? Of course, He could have.

But he would have been exposing himself, and the others might have told Ahab where he was. The point is this: God first told him to go to the brook, and second, to the widow's house. That is exactly where he went. There is a vast difference between faith and foolishness. It would have been foolish for Elijah to expose himself. He stayed where God told him to stay until God said, "Go, show thyself to Ahab." The safest place for a child of God is right in the middle of God's will.

Application: Are You There?

Are you there? Where is there? Are you in the place of obedience, provision, ministry, and protection? Are you where God has directed you to be? Are you in the will of God for your life, and is your family in the will of God? Whether it is permanent or temporary, you should know. Elijah's stay at the brook was temporary, as was his stay at the widow's house, but both were God's will for those temporary stays. The place of blessing is the place of obedience.

Do not despise small things. The question is asked in Zechariah 4:10, “Who hath despised the day of small things?” In 1 Kings 17, a raven is a small thing by comparison. A brook is a small thing. A cruse of oil is a small thing. Meal is a small thing. A widow's house is a small thing. Yet God uses small things. He used a widow to protect and support Elijah. When you bring all the small things together, you end up with great things. We have to learn to be content with small things. There is nothing wrong with smallness as long as it is in the will of God.

I would rather preach to ten people who really and truly want the Word of God than to ten thousand who could care less. There is nothing wrong with being small as long as it is in the will of God. Would I like to preach to ten thousand? Sure. Every preacher would like to preach to ten thousand people, but I am not interested in preaching to ten thousand merely to preach to ten thousand. If ten thousand people truly wanted the Word of God, I would want to preach to them. But if they do not, I would rather preach to the ten.

Remember John 6. Our Lord was teaching and said, “I'm not going to send these people away fasting.” They were in a desert place. Philip said, “There's a lad here, he's got a few loaves and two small fishes, but what are they among so many?” Our Lord said, “Bring them to me.” With those loaves and two fish, He fed five thousand men, not counting the women and children. Do not despise small things. There was a small boy and a small dinner, probably small loaves and small fish, but our Lord used it. As the old gospel tune says, “Little is much when God is in it.”

"Labor not for wealth or fame. There's a crown and you can win it if you go in Jesus' name. Little is much when God is in it." Smallness does not matter if it is in the will of God.

We are living in a day of judgment. It is bad now, but unless there is real repentance, it is going to get an awful lot worse. Read Amos chapter 4 and you can read about all these judgments. God says, "I've stretched forth my hand and you refused." Once that judgment does not work, God sends another, and every judgment increases in intensity and severity.

The point is this: the more we perceive the judgment of God and understand that His hand is against this land and this country, the more holy, godly, obedient, and righteous we should be. We have to come to the realization that obedience is primary. Let me again quote Zephaniah chapter 2 and verse 3: "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."

If we want to be hidden in the day of the Lord's anger, we need to be meek, humble, obedient, godly, and righteous. So the question is,

are you there? Are you there in the place where God can hide you, deliver you, protect you, and provide for you? Where you can minister to others?

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee this day. We thank You for Your Word and Your truth. Help us, Father, to be there: in the place of obedience, provision, ministry, and protection. Make us, Father, what we should be. Order our steps, direct our paths, lead us, guide us, and direct us. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray, Amen.

CHAPTER 21

How Good Are You At Receiving Evil?

Introduction: The Question of Receiving Evil

Job, and we're going to be reading chapter 2, verses 7 through 10. The title of the message is, "How Good Are You at Receiving Evil?" Notice in Job chapter 2, beginning there with verse 7, the Bible says, "So Satan went forth from the presence of the Lord, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown. And he took him a potsherd to scrape himself withal, and he sat down among the ashes. Then said his wife unto him, Dost thou still retain thine integrity? Curse God, and die! But he said unto her, Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips."

Have you ever stopped and thought about this question: How good are you at receiving evil? How would you answer such a question? I'm sure that you would answer it with another question: "What is meant by evil?" Normally, when you think of the word "evil," you're thinking of that which is sinful, wicked, wrong, a

transgression of God's law. We would certainly not want to receive that in any way.

Defining 'Evil' in Job's Context

It is only normal and natural that we hear the word "evil" and think of sin and wickedness. But the truth is, the word "evil" is not always used in that context. It does not always refer to that which violates God's law or is sinful in and of itself. In the context of Job's statement, in Job 2 and verse 10, evil is the opposite of good.

In our text, the English word "good" is from the Hebrew word "tov," which refers to that which is good, pleasant, agreeable, a benefit, blessing, and a bounty. The word "evil" is from the Hebrew word "ra'ah," which refers to that which is bad, sore, adversity, and that which is an affliction, disagreeable, displeasing, and ill-favored. The same word is used in verse 11: "Now when Job's three friends heard all this evil that was come upon him, they came every one from his own place, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite, for they had made an appointment together to come to mourn with him and to comfort him." It is evil in the sense that it is hurtful, distressful, and causes us misery.

Job's Calamities and His Response

When you read verse 11, “Now when the three friends of Job heard all this evil that was come upon him,” that refers you back to chapter 1. Job lost ten children and all his possessions in one day. The loss of all our children in one day would be sufficient, I am sure, to bring us to our knees; but the loss of our children and all our possessions in one day would certainly bring us to a full stop.

On top of that, Job had what I would simply identify as a nagging and disagreeable wife, who counseled him to curse God and die. Then Job was afflicted with a horrible disease or plague. Stop and think: having lost all his children and possessions, with his wife urging him to curse God and die, he was now taking a potsherd and scraping the pus and worms from his body. If that would not bring you to a full stop, I do not know what would.

When Job's wife saw the agony and suffering he was going through, she said, "Curse God and die." Job did not answer her in a rage. He was kind, patient, and loving, but he answered her with reason: "Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did Job not sin with his lips."

The interesting thing is that the word for "foolish" is "nabal." It literally means someone who is a fool, a vile person, or someone who is foolish, whether a man or a woman.

The Foolishness of Rejecting Evil from God

The same word is used in reference to a man's name in 1 Samuel chapter 25. You remember David was running from Saul and living in the wilderness, and he and his men had protected a man's shepherds and sheep. When David found out that the man was shearing his sheep and having a good feast, he sent his young men to him and asked for a blessing. But the man railed upon David's servants and sent them away.

The Bible says in 1 Samuel chapter 25 and verse 3, "Now the name of the man was Nabal, and the name of his wife Abigail. And she was a woman of good understanding, and of a beautiful countenance, but the man was churlish and evil in his doings, and he was of the house of Caleb." When you read that verse, you cannot help but think, how in the world could a wise, beautiful, good-looking woman fall for a man like that—one who was basically foolish, evil, wicked, selfish, unkind, and churlish?

When he railed upon David's men, they went back and told David, and David said, "Gird every man on his sword." He said, "I'm going to teach him a lesson." Of course, the servants then came and told Abigail. She took a blessing, figs, raisins, and meat, came to meet David, fell down, and said, "Let not, my lord, I pray thee, regard this man of Belial, even Nabal, for as his name is, so is he. Nabal is his name, and folly is with him, but I, thy handmaid, saw not the young men of my lord, whom thou didst send."

His name was Nabal, which means a fool. He was absolutely foolish. Abigail also called him a son of Belial. When Job said to his

wife, "Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh," he was saying, very lovingly and kindly, that those willing to receive good at the hand of God but not evil are very foolish. They are vile, demonstrating themselves to be a son of Belial, or the son of the devil.

I certainly do not want to be considered foolish, and I certainly do not want to be considered a son of the devil. The word "evil" here is used in opposition to that which is good. We must understand that in God's sovereign providence, He does indeed bring into each of our lives that which is good and that which is evil. He has the absolute right to do so, because He has the absolute right to try us, to test us, and He also has the right to chasten us when we are disobedient. God's providence is many times, and most of the time, very favorable. But sometimes it is not so favorable.

God's Purpose in Chastening

Here we are reading about God's hand of chastening: "And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children. My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him. For whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If you endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons. For what son is he whom the Father chasteneth not? For if you be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are you bastards and not sons. Furthermore, we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence." Here is the question: "Shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?"

The earthly fathers "verily for a few days chasten us after their own pleasure, but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous. Nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them that are exercised thereby."

Our Lord talks about chastening, and He also talks about the fact that our earthly fathers chastened us. I can truthfully say that when I was a young boy, I got my share of what we would call whippings, chastening, and none of them were enjoyable. I laugh because I have

heard my father say when I was a young child and he was about to whip me, "Now, son, this is going to hurt me worse than it does you."

As a child, I thought, “Oh, no, he’s lying, too.” I knew discipline would hurt me until I grew up and had to discipline my own children. Then I understood what my father meant. Of course, it grieved him to have to discipline me. But after I became mature, I was very thankful for my father’s chastening, because it pointed me in the right direction and made me stop and think: you do not sin and get by with it. It is just that simple. In light of this, we have to understand that God’s chastening upon us for our sins and disobedience is for our good.

Learning from Affliction: David's Testimony

He always does it for our profit, for our own holiness, and for our own benefit. Clearly, it always works.

David understood this and learned from the afflictions, chastisement, and evil that God brought upon him in his life. In Psalm 119, verse 67, David said, “Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now have I kept thy word.” Note that: before he was afflicted, he went astray. What brought David back in line? It was affliction, chastisement, or some type of evil that God brought into his life. He said, “Now, however, I have kept thy word.”

Then, in verse 71, he said, “It is good for me that I've been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes.” In affliction, God oftentimes teaches us His principles, His truths, and His word, so that we may apply them to our lives. In verse 75, David confessed, “I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hath afflicted me.” Notice that: “I know that thou in faithfulness hath afflicted me.” A faithful parent will not only commend and bless obedience, but will also condemn and punish disobedience. In His faithfulness to us, God oftentimes afflicts us in His providence, bringing upon us that which is distressful and miserable—something that you and I do not like and do not enjoy.

The Necessity and Benefits of Affliction

The Bible says concerning God, “He doth not afflict willingly.” Godly parents do not afflict willingly either. They are not waiting for their child to err merely so they can chasten him. Likewise, God is not some old meanie in heaven with a big whipping stick in His hand, waiting for you and me to mess up. “He doth not afflict willingly.”

Here is a fact that is well known: the Lord afflicts His children. Trouble never springs out of the dust, nor do afflictions come by chance. Every trial and affliction is sent from our Father’s throne, and its direction is written by our Father’s hand. He appoints the kind, the degree, and the direction of our afflictions. We are afflicted with disappointments, losses, and crosses. None are exempt; none can always escape, for the Lord tries the righteous, and many are the afflictions of the righteous.

He does not afflict willingly. He only grieves us from necessity. He has fixed His end: to make us holy and conform us to the image of His Son. From this He will not be diverted, but He shall surely accomplish it. In the afflictions He sends, God aims at our deeper sanctification, our greater usefulness, or simply His own glory, which is always linked with our good.

He therefore afflicts us to exercise our graces. Otherwise, they would lie dormant, become weak, fade, and wither. God afflicts His children to wean us from the world, to which we are too much attached and would be more so without trials, disappointments, and vexations. He afflicts us to embitter sin, the prolific root on which every pain, grief, and sorrow grows. He afflicts us to endear the Savior, who is our solace in sorrow and will be our glorious deliverer from it.

Never does Jesus appear so precious as in the hours of trouble and trial. God afflicts His children to prevent our falling into temptations, which we would do more frequently if we were not kept awake and watchful by our various sorrows. God afflicts His children to make us fit for usefulness, for as the land must be plowed, harrowed, and crushed if it is to be fruitful and supply our needs, just so must we be tempted, tried, and troubled if we're to be of much use to man or to bring much glory to God. God afflicts His

children to make us long for heaven, which we seldom do when all is pleasant, bright, and sunny below. So when we talk about afflictions, when we talk about that which is evil, just that one short article shows you that there are many uses for afflictions, and here's the truth.

The truth of the matter is, you and I are so accustomed to receiving good at the hand of God that when something bitter, something vile, something distasteful, something that causes us misery or a short bit of pain, we begin to wince and complain and bellyache, even when things do not go as we plan and as we desire. In other words, we forget one truth: God always sets the good and the evil together in order to teach us certain truths.

God Sets Good and Evil Together

In Ecclesiastes chapter 7, beginning with verse 13, the word of God says, “Consider the work of God, for who can make that straight, which he hath made crooked? In the day of prosperity, be joyful.” That's the good. “But in the day of adversity,” that's the evil. “But in the day of adversity, consider: God also hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him.”

In other words, God weans us from ourselves. He weans us from the world. He weans us from the fact that we're not going to be able to keep whatever He's given us forever and ever and ever and ever. No. We can't boast in our riches because we'll take none of them with us. We can't boast of our strength because we will die and lose all of our strength. In other words, God has set the good over against the evil to teach us that we must find in Him our all in all. Now, John Trapp, the old Puritan, said it like this: “Shall we receive good at the hands of God and not evil?”

"Shall we not eat the crust with the crumb? Drink the sour with the sweet? Bless God as well for taking away as forgiving. Accept the chastisement of our iniquity. Receive it patiently, thankfully, fruitfully. Shall we be all for comforts and nothing at all for crosses? Is it not equal that we should share in both, since it is the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed?" And that certainly is true.

Biblical Examples of Receiving Evil

Now, also in Lamentations 3 and verse 39, there is another verse that is equally applicable to the truth that God is teaching us, and that is this. Jeremiah wrote, "Wherefore doth the living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?" So if we do that which deserves chastisement, if we do that which deserves punishment, why in the world should we complain when God chastens us or when God punishes us?

In other words, we must recognize that as a faithful father, if we sin against Him, He will indeed chasten us. Now, there are many things in the Bible, there are many things in life that we understand and that we could label as an evil. If you ever stop to think about the loss of a child, or the loss of a spouse, that would certainly be an evil. It would be considered something that would be distressful.

One thing I mentioned about Ralph and Teresa and asking prayer for them. I almost laugh because Ralph, I don't know that he's more dependent upon Teresa, his wife, than I am upon Alice. But I usually tell people, if the Lord took her first, I'd have to marry forty to take her place. And Steve, the one reason I've never left her is I don't know where everything is. She knows. I only know where my books and my weapons are, and that's it. She keeps up with everything else.

Let me show you. Look in your Bibles, if you would, first of all, to Genesis chapter 44. Genesis 44. You remember Joseph now is second-in-command in Egypt, and his brethren have gone down to buy bread. Of course, Joseph knows who they are, and they do not know who he is, and he has accused them of being spies. He said, "You're not going to see my face unless you bring Benjamin, the younger son of Jacob." Of course, that was his full brother.

When they start to leave, Joseph is going to detain Benjamin because his cup was found in Benjamin's sack. Judah then begs to be the replacement for Benjamin because he knows what is going to happen when they go back and Benjamin is not there: his father will probably die.

In Genesis 44, beginning with verse 26, Judah says, “And we said, We cannot go down, if our youngest brother be with us. Then we will go down, for we may not see the man's face, except our youngest

brother be with us. And thy servant my father said unto us, You know that my wife bare me two sons, and the one went out from me, and I said, Surely he is torn in pieces, and I saw him not since." That would be Joseph.

"And if you take this also from me, and mischief befall him, you shall bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave. Now therefore, when I come to thy servant my father, and the lad be not with us, seeing that his life is bound up in the lad's life, it shall come to pass, when he seeth that the lad is not with us, that he will die. And thy servant shall bring down the gray hairs of thy servant our father with sorrow to the grave. For thy servant," that is Judah, "became surety for the lad unto my father, saying, If I bring him not unto thee, then I shall bear the blame to my father for ever. Now therefore, I pray thee, let thy servant abide instead of the lad a bondman to my lord, and let the lad go with his brethren."

Watch carefully: "For how shall I go up to my father, and the lad be not with me, lest peradventure I see the evil that shall come upon my father." The evil here is that which is distressful, that which we would call bad. It is not necessarily a violation against God's law, but something that causes us extreme misery.

In a similar vein, Elijah, when he discovered that the widow's son had died, spoke of it as an evil. In 1 Kings 17:17 we read, "And it came to pass after these things that the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, fell sick."

His sickness was so sore that there was no breath left in him. And she said unto Elijah, "What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? Art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?" And he said unto her, "Give me thy son." He took him out of her bosom, carried him up into a loft where he abode, and laid him upon his own bed. He cried unto the Lord, saying, "O Lord my God, hast thou also brought evil upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by slaying her son?" He stretched himself upon the child three times and cried unto the Lord, saying, "O Lord my God, I pray thee, let this child's soul come unto him again." The Lord heard the voice of Elijah, and the soul of the child came unto him again, and he revived.

Notice what Elijah said when he was praying to the Lord: "O Lord my God, hast thou also brought evil upon the widow?" Interestingly enough, the word "evil" in both 1 Kings 17 and Genesis 44 is the exact same Hebrew word found in Job 2:10, when Job asked, "Shall we receive good at the hand of God and not evil?" The word "evil" simply refers to that which is disagreeable to us, causing us distress and misery as well.

How good are you at receiving evil? Think about that question. There are many things that happen to us that we simply do not like. How would you like for someone to stand up in your face and, as we say in South Georgia, cuss you out? I mean, call you a low-down scumbag, or call you everything under the earth that is displeasing, distasteful, and despicable. How would you—what would you do? Let me show you what David did.

Turn in your Bibles to 2 Samuel chapter 16, beginning with verse 5. Here is a man by the name of Shimei, who was of the tribe of Benjamin. You remember that King Saul was a Benjamite. David had taken Saul's place as king, but David did not slay Saul or any of Saul's family. In fact, he spared Saul's family. He not only spared Mephibosheth, Jonathan's son, but restored to Mephibosheth everything that Saul had. David took nothing from Saul. Now, in 2 Samuel 16, Absalom has rebelled against David.

David has been run off the throne. David, his household, and those around him are fleeing Jerusalem, and here is what happens: "And when King David came to Bahurim, behold, thence came out a man of the family of the house of Saul, whose name was Shimei, the son of Gera. He came forth, and cursed still as he came. And he cast stones at David, and at all the servants of King David, and all the people, and all the mighty men were on the right hand and on the left."

This man was not very bright. If you know anything about Joab, Abishai, Asahel, and some of these men with David—no, no, no. He was not very bright, I can assure you. He may have been very upset, but he was not very bright. So look what he said: "And thus said Shimei when he cursed, Come out, come out, thou bloody man, thou man of Belial." He was calling David a murderer and a son of the devil.

He goes on: “The Lord hath returned upon thee all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose stead thou hast reigned. And the Lord hath delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom thy son. And behold, thou art taken in thy mischief, because thou art a bloody man.” Then Abishai said unto the king, “Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over, I pray thee, and take off his head.” He would have, had David said, “Go.”

“And the king said, What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah? So let him curse, because the Lord hath said unto him, Curse David. Who shall then say, Wherefore hast thou done so? And David said to Abishai and to all of his servants, Behold, my son, which came forth of mine own bowels, seeketh my life. How much more now may this Benjamite do it? Let him alone, and let him curse, for the Lord hath bidden him. It may be that the Lord will look on mine affliction, and that the Lord will requite me good for his cursing this day.” Shimei continued cursing, throwing stones and dust. David said, “Let him curse. It may be that the Lord will turn this into a blessing. If the Lord has bidden him to curse me, let him curse me.”

“It’s not going to bother me. I’ll just submit and keep going.” No matter what the test, trial, evil, or affliction, the easiest and quickest way out will be through obedience and submission. Some of us do not go through what others go through; some are spared, while others suffer more. God determines what evil befalls us, and He determines it for our good and for His glory.

Daniel was cast into the den of lions and stayed there overnight. The next morning, the king came early, saying, “O Daniel, is thy God whom thou servest able to deliver thee out of the mouths of lions?” Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were thrown into the burning fiery furnace. In all probability, Daniel was in the lions’ den longer than the three Hebrew children were in the fiery furnace. Job was probably afflicted much longer than Daniel was in the den of lions.

The way out is always through submission and obedience. The more stubborn we are, the more stiff-necked we are, the more hard-headed we are, and the more rebellious we are, the longer we are going to stay in the test, in the trial, in the affliction, and in that which is evil. It is just that simple.

God's Faithfulness in Temptation

You may not want to hear what I am about to say, but what I am about to say is absolutely true: if you are a child of God, whatever God puts upon you, you can take. Whatever God puts upon you, you can take. God, in His all-wise, holy, and righteous providence, knows exactly what we need. He knows exactly what it will take to break us and make us submissive. He knows exactly what it will take to make us obedient. He knows exactly what it will take to make us and to teach us to pray and to seek Him. He knows exactly what it will take to encourage us to exercise the graces and the gifts that He has given unto us. Whatever He sends our way is always for our good and for His glory. The reason I can tell you that whatever God places upon you, you can take is because of God's promise.

I want to show you that promise. Turn in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 10 and verse 13. I will quote it to you. You need to memorize this verse. This verse has helped me immeasurably over the years. God says, "There hath no temptation taken you, but such as is common to man."

There is no temptation, no test, no trial, no affliction, and no evil taken you, but such as is common to man. Whatever Steve goes through is common to Gary. Whatever Gary goes through is common to David. Whatever David goes through is common to me. In other words, God never puts anything superhuman or supernatural upon us. Whatever it is, it is common.

That obliterates the excuse most people give when they say, “But nobody’s ever gone through what I’m going through.” That’s hogwash. Everything is common to man. “There hath no temptation taken you, but such as is common to man. But God is faithful, who will not suffer or allow you to be tempted above that which ye are able.” Understand, God knows exactly what you can take and what you cannot take. He’s never going to overload you. There will never be the straw that breaks the camel’s back placed upon you. He “will with the temptation make a way of escape, that ye may be able to bear it.” In other words, every time we go through a test, trial, affliction, or evil, there is always a way of escape. Usually, that way of escape is through submission and obedience.

Paul's Thorn in the Flesh

We should be thankful that most of our tests, afflictions, trials, and evils are temporary. They're not permanent; they're temporary. I remember hearing about one old black preacher. Someone asked him what his favorite verse was in the Bible. He said, "Well, it's not just a verse. It occurs over and over in the Bible." He said, "Those four words." "What are they?" "Now it came to pass." He said, "Didn't come to stay. It came to pass." That was his philosophy, and it is true. It didn't come to stay, but sometimes we have to live with things.

Look in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians chapter 12, beginning with verse 7. In this passage, the Apostle Paul was given a thorn in the flesh: "And lest I should be exalted above measure, through the abundance of revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure." It was a thorn in the flesh, something that bothered him.

"For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore, I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong."

So the Apostle Paul had this thorn in the flesh. Three times he asked God to remove it. God said, "No, my grace is sufficient for thee. I'm going to let you keep this one." Paul therefore said he would glory in his infirmities, in his weaknesses, that he might trust Christ to bring him through. So what in the world was this thorn in the flesh?

I laughingly say, I know it was not his wife. As far as I know, he was not married, or at least, if he was, his wife must have died or something happened. At one point in the scripture, he said, "Have not I and Barnabas power to lead about a wife, a sister, as does Cephas," or as does Peter? Evidently Paul was not married. Some think he was married at one time because you had to be married to

be a member of the Sanhedrin. Whether he was or not, I do not know, but at one point he was not.

Many scholars think that this thorn in the flesh was a condition related to his eyes, ophthalmia. There is a reason for this. In Galatians chapter 4, beginning with verse 13, Paul writes to the Galatians: "You know how through infirmity of the flesh," see, there is that weakness in the flesh, whatever it was, "you know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first. And my temptation," there is my test, my trial, "which was in my flesh," he is mentioning it again.

"You despised not, nor rejected, but received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus. Where is then the blessedness you speak of? For I bear you record that if it had been possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and have given them to me." Many people take this passage and say it had to be related to his eyes. John Eadie wrote, "But some give the phrase a more literal significance, or rather suppose a more literal reason for the use of the figure. They suppose that the astheneia, that is weakness, was some kind of ophthalmic disorder. The meaning in that case is the Galatians would have parted with their eyes to him, could the gift have relieved the apostle." In other words, he said, "You would have given me your eyes since I'm having such problem with my eyes."

Whatever Paul's condition was, it made him repulsive in his face. In 2 Corinthians 10:1, he says, “Now I Paul myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, who in presence am base among you, but being absent am bold toward you.” Then, in verse 10: “For his letters, say they, are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech is contemptible.” It undoubtedly affected his face and perhaps his speech as well.

Galatians 6:11 provides another indication that Paul had very serious eye problems: “You see how large a letter I have written unto you with mine own hand.” The Greek word for “large” is pelikos, meaning “how great” or “how large,” or literally, “with what good or great text letters.”

It may surprise you to learn that Paul did not usually write his own epistles. He signed all of them, but usually had a secretary,

known as an amanuensis. Adam Clarke, in his commentary, said: “Some think that he refers to the length of the epistle, others to the largeness of the letters in which the epistle is written, others to the inadequacy of the apostle's writing,” which I really doubt. “It appears plain that most of his epistles were written by an amanuensis or a secretary and simply subscribed by himself. But the whole of the epistle to the Galatians is written with his own hands.”

Romans 16:22 says, “I, Tertius, who wrote this epistle, salute you in the Lord.” Paul had many secretaries who wrote for him, and he normally signed. “You see how large a letter” could refer to the length of the epistle; six chapters could have been a long letter for the apostle Paul. But it could also refer to the largeness of the letters, since someone with poor eyesight usually writes in much larger letters. Whatever Paul's thorn in the flesh was, he lived with it. He ministered with it.

Some of you may have seen a film that came out years ago about a Christian man who was in a plane—I think it was a private plane—that crashed. He was burned horribly; his face was totally and completely disfigured. Yet he continued to be a preacher and teacher of truth. When you stood and looked at him, you would want actually to turn your head away because his face was so absolutely disfigured by the fire.

Even through reconstruction, they could not do everything. And so the Apostle Paul, whatever it was, lived with that, preached through that, and ministered through that. Sometimes there are things that God allows to stay in our lives that we cannot get rid of because it is not His will. It is His will that we bear under and bear up by His grace and mercy.

Applications: Receiving Both Good and Evil

Look in your Bibles to Isaiah chapter 24, verses 14 and 15: "They shall lift up their voice, they shall sing for the majesty of the Lord, they shall cry aloud from the sea. Wherefore glorify ye the Lord in the fires, even the name of the Lord God of Israel in the isles of the sea." So we are called upon to glorify God in the fires.

The question has to be asked: How good are you at receiving evil? The truth is that we should become good at receiving whatever the Sovereign, Righteous, Holy Father sends to us, because He knows exactly what we need.

If we understood one simple truth, we would never murmur, bellyache, or complain at whatever God sends us: We do not deserve anything but justice. Anything God gives us that is not justice is mercy and grace. It is like Jacob said in Genesis 32:10: "I do not deserve the least of thy mercies, and of all the truth which thou hast shown unto me." So Job asked, "Shall we receive good at the hand of God and not receive evil?" We need to become good at receiving both good and evil. The first application is a very simple truth: We are told in Lamentations 3:33 that He, God, doth not afflict willingly.

How many of you parents have ever taken a switch, a belt, or a paddle to an obedient, loving child? None of us. You do not chastise a loving, obedient child. You chastise children who are disobedient, dishonorable, and disrespectful. God is not some old meanie in heaven with a huge stick in His hand, just waiting for us to mess up so He can whop us upside the head with it.

No, He does not afflict willingly. He is not waiting to discipline us. He wants us to be obedient and holy. As I pointed out when I read the article from Grace Gems, there are other reasons for afflictions and tests; it is not just disobedience. God may need to awaken some grace in us, make us pray more, seek Him more, love Him more, or long more for heaven. There are plenty of reasons.

But here is a truth I have enunciated over and over: blessings follow obedience, and curses follow disobedience. Look in your Bibles to Deuteronomy chapter 30, beginning with verse 15. Look what God says.

Deuteronomy 30 verse 15 says, "See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil. And I command thee this day to love the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments, that thou mayest live and multiply. And the Lord thy God shall bless thee in the land whither thou goest to possess it. But if thine heart turn away, so that thou wilt not hear, but shalt be drawn away, and

worship other gods, and serve them, I denounce unto you this day that ye shall surely perish, and that ye shall not prolong your days upon the land, whither thou passest over Jordan to go to possess it."

What did he say? "I've set before you life and good, death and evil. Choose life, choose good, choose obedience." You do not punish an obedient, loving child. It is just that simple. We need to learn that God doth not afflict us willingly. Here is the second point, and it should be an absolute comfort to each one of us: everything that God sends our way, both good and evil, works for our benefit and our good.

We know the verse, Romans 8:28: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." Whether it is good or evil, whether we like it or dislike it, all things work together for good. It is coming for our benefit, for our holiness, for our sanctification, for our good, and for God's glory.

We must also beware that we do not lose the benefits of affliction. David said, "Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now have I kept thy word." I learned from my afflictions. When I was a teenager, I talked back to my father one time. That was all it took for me to learn, because when he got through with me, I learned that you do not talk back to your father. We must learn through all of our afflictions.

Job said in Job 23:10, “But he knoweth the way that I take, and when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.” David said in Psalm 17:3, “Thou hast proved my heart, thou hast visited me in the night, thou hast tried me, and shalt find nothing. I have purposed that my mouth shall not transgress.” In other words, Job said, “Shall we not receive good at the hand of God and not receive evil?” And then, “In all this did not Job sin with his lips.”

He did not start crying, “Woe is me, why is me? Why is this happening to me? Lord, I don’t want to do this.” No. He just took it.

Now, turn to one last passage, 1 Peter chapter 1. Let us begin reading with verse 5 so we can see the context: “Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time. Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if

need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations," that is, variegated, many-colored temptations—different kinds of temptations—"that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls."

Isn't that interesting? When Peter talks about manifold temptations and the trial of your faith, he is talking about loving and rejoicing.

So Job asked, "Shall we receive good at the hand of God and not evil?" When you understand that everything God gives us is for our good and His glory, you can receive both as gifts from God. When Job's wife said, "Curse God and die," he said, "Thou speakest as one of the foolish women. You're a Nabal. Don't be so foolish."

So how good are you at receiving evil? The truth is, we usually do not like it, and consequently, we do not learn from it. But if God brings it our way, we can take it and learn from it by His grace and mercy.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, help us, teach us, build us up in the most holy faith, and make us thankful for both the good and the evil. We are told in the book of James, "You have heard of the patience of Job," and how the Lord rewarded Job for his patience and suffering. Help us understand that everything that happens to us comes from Thy hand, and that we are to bow to Thee and be thankful. Give us grace to serve Thee acceptably, with reverence and godly fear. In Thy name we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 22

Are You Awe Struck Yet?

Introduction: The Call to Praise and Awe

Psalm 33, verse 8 is the main passage we will consider, though we will look at several other verses in this Psalm. The Bible says in Psalm 33 and verse 8, "Let all the earth fear the Lord: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him."

Psalm 33 is a psalm of praise, and that is made clear in the very first three verses. The psalmist says, "Rejoice in the Lord, O ye righteous: for praise is comely for the upright. Praise the Lord with harp. Sing unto him with the psaltery and an instrument of ten strings. Sing unto him a new song; play skillfully with a loud noise."

The Word of God tells us that we must praise the Lord not only with our mouths, but with music as well, rejoicing in the Lord. The psalmist also gives us numerous reasons why we should praise the Lord. Verses 4 and 5 make that clear: "For the word of the Lord is right; and all his works are done in truth. He loveth righteousness and judgment: the earth is full of the goodness of the Lord. By the word of the Lord were the heavens made."

Notice verse 4, which I skipped: "For the word of the Lord is right; and all his works are done in truth. He loveth righteousness and judgment: the earth is full of the goodness of the Lord." Certainly, these passages tell us to praise our Lord for His greatness, His veracity, His judgment, and His truth. But there is one word that is especially important. He said in verse 5, "He loveth righteousness and judgment: the earth is full of the goodness of the Lord."

If you were simply to take the word "goodness" and run through the Bible, finding everything the Bible says about goodness, you would be absolutely impressed, I believe. This word needs to be meditated over. We need to consider His bountifulness, His graciousness, and, yes, His goodness that is given to us constantly.

Psalm 107 shows, in one psalm, how often a particular truth is given to us. Beginning with verse 8, it states, “Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!” After making that statement, verse 9 gives the reason: “For he satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness.”

The Goodness of God as a Reason for Praise

The psalm then speaks of those “which sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, being bound in affliction and iron,” and it goes on to tell how God brought them out of darkness—how God brought them out. In other words, if we would praise the Lord for His goodness, we would be consistently and constantly praising Him.

Return to verse 8. Here is why: “Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!” Then look at verse 15. The same truth appears again: “Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!” In verse 21, he says it again: “Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!” Finally, in verse 31: “Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!”

That verse is actually repeated four times in this particular psalm. When you look at the different sections in which this verse, or this

truth, occurs, you should be impressed by the goodness of God. My question would be something like this: Have you ever been satisfied with food? Have you ever been given a bountiful supply? Have you ever been given health? Have you ever been given life? Have you ever been sustained?

All of these are reasons to praise the Lord. Someone says, “Well, I’m sick.” Consider this, please. Number one, you have had more well days than you have sick days. Number two, the very fact that you are still alive means that you recovered from your sickness. These are still numerous reasons given to us as to why we should be praising the Lord.

None of us deserves any of God's mercies and goodness, nor can we ever earn them. God's goodness is shown to all. We have to learn to say with Jacob in Genesis 32:10, "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant." Certainly that is true.

Our text today is Psalm 33:8: "Let all the earth fear the Lord: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him." Awe is an absolutely wonderful word, and yet it is often misunderstood. Standing in awe is something that has happened to most of us at one time or another.

Defining Awe and Its Biblical Occurrences

There have been times when we recognized an old friend whom we had not seen in years, and we just stood there, almost saying, "I can't believe this is an individual." There are also individuals who have beloved celebrities, if you could call them that. When they happen to meet one on the street, they stand in awe with their mouths open because they cannot believe that this is real.

There are times when God has shown us truth and given us something exceedingly profound. All of a sudden, we realize, "Hey, I understand this. I now see this. This has just fallen into the right place for me." There are also incidents in our lives when something happens and there is a miraculous, marvelous escape. We can do nothing but stand there.

I watched a little clip on the Internet. A man was walking down a city sidewalk when a car came speeding down the street. The driver lost control and ran into another parked car. The car spun when it hit the other car and went up against the building on the sidewalk, missing the man by about six inches. The man just stood there amazed.

He could have been killed instantly. I would simply say he was awestruck because he hardly even moved; he suddenly realized how he had been delivered. Awe has been defined as a feeling of respect and reverence mixed with dread and wonder, often inspired by something majestic and powerful. Standing in awe refers to an overwhelming amount of respect, admiration, and wonder, to the point that oftentimes we are unable either to speak or to move.

There are three times in Scripture that we are told to stand in awe. The first is Psalm 4:4: "Stand in awe, and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still." Note that command: "Stand in awe, and sin not." The second time occurs in Psalm 33:8, our text: "Let all the earth fear the Lord: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him." The third occurs in Psalm 119:161, where David says, "Princes have persecuted me without a cause: but my heart standeth in awe of thy word."

There are wonderful truths connected with Psalm 4:4 and Psalm 119:161. In fact, truth is exceedingly plentiful in any verse of the Bible. But consider Psalm 33:8. Before we really get into this psalm, notice the words in this verse: "Let all the earth fear the Lord: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him." The word "fear" is the Hebrew word "yare," and it literally means to fear, to be afraid, to tremble, to reverence, to honor, and to cause to be astonished.

That is what it means when he says, "Let all the earth fear the Lord." Let them all tremble before Him. Let them all reverence and honor Him. Let them all be astonished at Him. Then he says, "Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him." This is the command given not merely to one person or one nation, but to all the earth and all the inhabitants of the world.

His Creation and His Coherence

First Reason for Awe: God's Creation and Coherence

The word “awe” is the Hebrew word “gur,” which means to dread. It means to fear, to be afraid, and to stand in awe. So all the world is to stand in awe in reference to God. Here is a good question: Why should all the earth fear the Lord, and why should all of the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him? I am sure that if I were to ask that question of many believers, everyone could give me an answer. There are numerous answers to that question in Scripture. However, I want to point out two truths from our text today that should have us standing in awe.

That is why I titled this message, “Are You Awestruck Yet?” Look at verses 6 and 7. The first reason we are to be awestruck is that we are to stand in awe at His creation and His coherence.

In verse 6, he says, “By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth.” “He gathereth the waters of the sea together as an heap: he layeth up the depth in storehouses.”

Go back to verse 6: “By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth.” That means that God made everything. The Bible tells us in the book of John, “without him was not any thing made that was made.” God is the creator of all things. He created, according to the Latin term, ex nihilo—that is, out of nothing. Everything that we see was made out of nothing. God called it into existence; God spoke it into existence.

There was not an eternity of matter, with matter always existing and God having something to work with. No. According to Genesis 1, matter came in when God spake the world into existence. We are therefore to stand in awe at His creation and His coherence.

I am certainly not an astronomer, but when I read verse 6, “By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth,” I searched for how many galaxies there are. One article stated, “The universe is considered by some to be infinite,” though I understand that only God is infinite. What they meant was that they cannot discern an end to the universe. It

continued: “While others find comfort in the fact that it may have an end, throughout the ages of space exploration, the only certain thing is maybe the fact that the universe will never be charted.”

The article then asked why this is so: because endless galaxies seem to appear, with varying sizes, distances, and other aspects. It stated that the observable universe—what can be seen—with a radius of 46.5 billion light-years, seems to contain at least two trillion galaxies. Our galaxy, the Milky Way, is only one of them and is not even considered a large galaxy. It stretches 105,700 light-years in diameter and may contain at least 100 billion planets and around 400 billion stars.

If we imagined how many planets and stars those two trillion galaxies might contain, we would probably have to throw out our calculators, especially since some galaxies are several times larger than the Milky Way. The largest galaxy discovered is the supergiant elliptical galaxy designated IC 1101. It contains well above 100 trillion stars, stretches over 5.5 million light-years across, and is around fifty times larger than the Milky Way. It lies approximately one billion light-years, or 320 megaparsecs, away. A megaparsec is an astronomical unit of distance equal to one million parsecs.

Think about this: the observable universe contains at least two trillion galaxies; our Milky Way contains at least 400 billion stars; and IC 1101 contains above 100 trillion stars. Who knows how many the other galaxies contain?

Look in your Bibles at Genesis, chapter 1, verse 16. It is an astounding statement: “And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day,” that would be the sun, “and the lesser light to rule the night,” that would be the moon. Then comes this little aside: “He made the stars also.” Yes, He did. He made the stars also. It is not just the sun and the moon, but the stars as well.

Now turn to Psalm 8, verse 3, another psalm that shows the magnificence and greatness of God’s creation. David says, “When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?”

Note that he said, “When I consider,” when I meditate and think about, “thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon, and the stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man?” Once you begin to really consider the universe, you begin to see how insignificant we are. That is exactly why I ask, when I see the greatness and vastness of Your creation, “What is man?”

Years ago, I had a shrimper friend who invited me to go out with him on his shrimp boat. I took another friend, and we went. It was a very large shrimp boat; in fact, it would sleep twelve people. On that voyage I learned that you shrimp at night. I did not know that. He let down the nets and shrimped at night. We were forty miles out in the Gulf. It was midnight, a full moon, and the ocean was as smooth as silk. I will never forget sitting on the bow of that boat, looking at the moon and stars, the glassy water and their reflection. There was no sound anywhere—nothing but the moon, the stars, and the water.

I began to realize how vast everything truly was. David said, “When I consider,” when I think about and meditate upon this, then I have to ask, “What is man that thou art mindful of him?” Now turn to Psalm 147 and get ready for this. I asked Ed Wolf a question this morning.

I said, “Ed, would you please stand up and tell me the birthdays of all your grandchildren?” Ed just shook his head. He could not do that. Alice and I have six grandchildren, five great-grands, and a sixth one on the way, but I have no idea what the birthdays of my grandchildren are. I can get close, probably, but I could not give you the exact date.

Really and truly, I have no need to remember those because she does. I tell people that I know for sure the birthday of our first child. The next three, I can get close—a day or two—but I may miss it every time. When I first went to the university, every semester we had to fill out papers asking, “What date were you married? What is your wife’s birthday? What are the children’s birthdays?” I never could remember whether we were married on the 13th, the 15th, or the 16th. It was the 13th, but the 16th was her birthday, and I got those things mixed up. I thought they probably believed I had no idea when I got married or what my children’s birthdays were.

I could remember it was either July 30th or 31st, and April the 12th was Becca's—but I did not remember. I put different dates down because there was no need for me to remember; she did. But I remember a lot of things that she does not. The reason I am showing you this is not just for fun.

Look in Psalm 147 and verse 4: "He telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names." God knows exactly how many stars He created, and He knows their names. If there are 400 billion stars in our Milky Way galaxy, He knows the names of every one of them. If there are over a hundred trillion in the giant galaxy, He knows the names of every one of them.

I am simply asking you: Are you standing in awe yet? Do you realize the greatness of God's creation, the greatness of God's power, and the greatness of God's knowledge?

Look back in Psalm 33, verse 9, and ask, "How did God do all of this?" The answer is very simple: "For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast." It was by His word, and it was done. He simply spoke the worlds into existence. He spoke the stars into existence. He spoke the sun and the moon into existence. Anything and everything that has been created, God created; He simply spoke it into existence.

If that does not impress you, consider verse 6: "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth." Perhaps verse 7 will impress you: "He gathereth the waters of the sea together as an heap: he layeth up the depth in storehouses."

Here is an interesting fact from the National Oceanic Service. About 97% of the Earth's water is in the ocean. It is hard to imagine, but about 97% of the Earth's water can be found in the ocean. Of the tiny percentage that is not in the ocean, about 2% is frozen in glaciers and ice caps. Less than 1% of all the water on Earth is fresh, and a tiny fraction exists as water vapor in our atmosphere. According to the United States Geological Survey, there are over 332,519,000 cubic miles of water on the planet. A cubic mile is a mile this way, this way, this way, and that way. It is the volume of a cube measuring one mile on each side.

Of this vast volume of water, the National Geophysical Data Center estimates that 321,003,271 cubic miles is in the ocean. That is enough water to fill so many gallon-sized milk containers. I could not even read that number: 352,670 followed by 15 zeros. The ocean has about 352 million trillion, or 352 quintillion, gallons of water in it. A quintillion is followed by 18 zeros. So, if the water in the ocean would fill 352 quintillion, 670 trillion, I do not know what all, gallon-sized milk containers—wow.

When you consider that the oceans cover approximately 73% of the earth, why do the oceans not flood and destroy the earth? Here is the answer: it is very simple. That is God's decree.

If you look at verse 9 again, "For he spake, and it was done." That is creation. "He commanded, and it stood fast." That is coherence. He holds everything together.

Jeremiah 5:22 asks, "Fear ye not me? saith the Lord." Remember our text in Psalm 33 and verse 8: all the earth is to stand in fear of the Lord, and all the world stand in awe of him. God asks, "Fear ye not me, saith the Lord. Will ye not tremble at my presence, which have placed the sand for the bound of the sea by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it: and though the waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail; though they roar, yet can they not pass over it?"

Are you standing in awe yet? Stop and think of the vastness of God's creation. God not only created it, but causes it to stand and stay in place. Remember that the oceans do not include all the visible lakes, rivers, and streams, or even what we would call the underground lakes.

What is holding everything together? Why do the stars not fall? Why does the sun not explode? Why does the moon not break in half? Why do the waters not cover the earth? The answer is God's decree. God created, and God makes everything cohere. It was the sovereign, omnipotent, eternal, almighty God who spoke the world into existence, and it is that same sovereign, eternal, omnipotent, majestic, and glorious God who holds everything together.

Colossians 1:16–17 says, "For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether

they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him. And he is before all things, and by him all things consist," or have their being, or are held together by him. That is coherence. Wow.

In Luke 19, beginning with verse 37, our Lord is being praised by His disciples: "And when he was come nigh, even now at the descent of the mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice." They praised Him "for all the mighty works that they had seen." Our Lord did many marvelous and mighty works, and they were praising God for those works.

Verse 38 says, "Saying, Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest. And some of the Pharisees from among the multitude said unto him, Master, rebuke thy disciples." "And he answered and said unto them, I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out."

If the disciples were silent, the stones would immediately cry out. I do not want the stones to do the praising for me. I do not want the sun and the moon and the stars to do the praising for me. I want to be able to do that. I want to stand in awe at His creation and His coherence. I want to say, "Lord, your creation and your coherence are absolutely wonderful."

If you are not willing to praise Him or acknowledge His greatness, look at Psalm 148:3: "Praise ye him, sun and moon: praise him, all ye stars of light." God's creation is going to praise Him. Quite frankly, I prefer to praise Him myself. The sun, moon, and stars will praise Him whether or not we do.

The greatness and vastness of God's creation leave sinners without excuse. There are places in this country and in this world that do not have the preaching of the Word of God, and yet they have God's visible expression in creation. They see what God has made, even where they have not heard the preaching of His Word. Romans 1:18 says, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness," actually, who press it down, who suppress the

truth. God's visible expression in creation leaves sinners without excuse.

Second Reason for Awe: God's Counsel and Control

It's not that they don't have it; they don't want it. Then he says in verse 19, "Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse." The greatness and vastness of God's creation and coherence leave men without excuse. I want you to look back to Psalm 33. The first reason we are to praise him is because of his creation and coherence. But here's a second reason: his counsel and his control. Verses 10 and 11: "The Lord bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought: he maketh the devices of the people of none effect. The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations."

Now stop and think about verse 10: “The Lord bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought: he maketh the devices of the people of none effect.” And then he says, “The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever.” In these two verses, you see God’s counsel and God’s control.

There are many today who fight against God. There are many who try to dethrone Him, overthrow Him, deny Him, denigrate Him, and destroy Him. There are many who devise advice and counsel against Him. Witness what is known today as the Great Reset. Think about the New World Order, the Illuminati, and the Bohemian Grove. How about the Davos crowd? How about the Bilderbergers, the United Nations, the Council on Foreign Relations, and the Trilateralists, for example?

There are multitudes fighting against God. Scripture tells us that these individuals are not only contrary to God; they are contrary to Scripture, contrary to man, and contrary to liberty and freedom. Here is the good news: their schemes, plans, counsel, and devices will be brought to nothing. They will absolutely fail.

We often use the word “nought” for zero or for nothing. The Hebrew word is “pur,” and it means to be nothing, to be broken, and to be crushed. The Lord brings the counsel of the heathen to nothing; it is crushed, worthless, and broken. Then He says, “He maketh the devices of the people of none effect.” The Hebrew word “nun” means to disallow, forbid, restrain, frustrate, hinder, and hold back. God is controlling even the heathen in this sense. All their counsel, schemes, and plans will ultimately fail and come to nought.

If you think somehow that the wicked are going to win, you are not only mistaken; you are greatly mistaken. God is not only omnipotent, which means all-powerful; He is omniscient, which means all-knowing. In the omniscience of God, He knows everything—past, present, and future. He knows everything possible. Scripture says He knows our thoughts, even before they enter into our minds.

You can't slip up on God's blind side because He doesn't have one. You can't make a plan against Him that He doesn't already know about. And not only is God omniscient, God is omnipotent; He's all-powerful. If the entire world and every demon in hell united in hands against God, it would occasion God no uneasiness. No, because He is the omnipotent God. And you know what God does? He laughs. He laughs at their ignorance, their stupidity, and their arrogance.

Look in your Bibles to Psalm 2. Here's a good question, and we can ask this in light of what I'm teaching. The psalmist begins, "Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?" A vain thing is something that is useless, worthless. It's of no good, no account. "The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us."

In other words, we don't like God's control. We don't like God's law. We don't like God's rule. We don't like God's reign. We'll break everything. We'll do as we please. Verse 4 says, "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure." Wow. God laughs at the plans and the schemes of the

wicked. The Bible tells you in the book of Job chapter 5 and verse 13, "He taketh the wise in their own craftiness." Job also says the deceived and the deceiver are his.

Since we're in the Psalms, look at Psalm 7, verses 15 and 16. We're talking about the wicked. Here's what the wicked does: "He made a pit, and digged it, and is fallen into the ditch which he made. His mischief shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing shall come down upon his own pate," that is, the top of his head. God said he's going to dig a ditch, and he's going to fall in it. Whatever mischief he plans, God said, "I'm going to bring it down upon the top of his own head."

"The Lord is known by the judgment which he executeth: the wicked is snared in the work of his own hands." God's going to take whatever the wicked does and turn it against them. Psalm 57:6 records David's words: "They have prepared a net for my steps; my soul is bowed down: they have digged a pit before me, into the midst whereof they are fallen themselves." So they dug a pit for David and they fell into the very pit that they dug.

I found this to be true over and over. Proverbs 19:21 says, "There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand." Many devices may be in a man's heart, but it is the counsel of the Lord that is going to stand. I love this passage.

Proverbs 28:10 says, "Whoso causeth the righteous to go astray in an evil way, he shall fall himself into his own pit: but the upright shall have good things in possession." The Scripture says that the person who causes the righteous to go astray in an evil way will fall himself into his own pit, while the upright shall have good things in possession.

Obadiah 1:15 says, "For the day of the Lord is near upon all the heathen. As thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee: thy reward shall return upon thine own head." As a person has done, so shall it be done unto him; his reward shall return upon his own head.

Isaiah 46:9-11 declares, "Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I

will do all my pleasure: calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executeth my counsel from a far country."

“Yea, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it.” It is the counsel of the Lord that stands forever. Man’s plans are going to be broken and crushed. They will come to absolute nought—zilch, nothing, zero. Their plans will be disappointed and devastated. Like Haman, they will be hanged on their own gallows. They will fall into the pit which they dug, be caught in the snare that they laid, and be entrapped in the net which they set. So stand in awe—not simply of God’s creation and coherence, but of His counsel and His control.

When you and I look around the world today, we see the wicked prospering. It looks as if they are on the cusp of success. May I remind you that we walk by faith and not by sight? If you tell me things are going wrong, I will tell you this: everything is going wrong just right. It is going wrong just the way that God has ordained it. Nothing can happen apart from God. If anything happens apart from God’s control, then that thing is God and not God. God has absolute and sovereign control even over the wicked.

Could God overthrow all of the wicked instantly? Yes. Could God prevent their wickedness? Yes. Could God stop them at any moment? Yes. Why, then, does God not stop them? He does not do so for His own honor and His own glory. How can the world’s sin and rebellion redound to God’s honor and glory? I will show you.

Turn in your Bibles to Psalm 76, verse 10: “Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.” Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee. Hang on: “The remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.” Actually, he says, “Surely the wrath of man shall keep a Sabbath unto thee.” It will praise thee. “The remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.”

You say, “How in the world can sin ever glorify God?” Have you ever stopped to think about this? If it was not for sin, we would know nothing of God’s absolute holiness, righteousness, justice, mercy, love, forgiveness, greatness, or compassions. Look in your Bibles at God’s men: Saul of Tarsus, who became the Apostle Paul, and the Apostle Peter. And think about Pharaoh. What did God say? “For

this very purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee."

On the one hand, you have men like Alexander the coppersmith and Pharaoh, emblems of God's justice because of their wickedness and rebellion. They are emblems of God's righteousness and wrath. Then you have Saul of Tarsus, the apostle Peter, and you and I, examples and emblems of God's mercy and grace. Clearly, the wrath of man shall praise the Lord; the remainder of wrath shall he restrain. Whatever will not ultimately redound to God's honor and glory, God will not allow to come to pass.

Let me give you an illustration. Look in your Bibles to Genesis chapter 20. Abraham is in Gerar. Concerning Sarah, his very beautiful wife, he has said, "She is my sister." She herself said, "He is my brother." Abimelech the king took her. I do not know why or how, but Abimelech had not come near her. Look at it: "And Abraham journeyed from thence toward the south country, and dwelled between Kadesh and Shur, and sojourned in Gerar. And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, She is my sister: and Abimelech king of Gerar sent, and took Sarah. But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, Behold, thou art but a dead man, for the woman which thou hast taken; for she is a man's wife. But Abimelech had not come near her."

"And he said, Lord, wilt thou slay also a righteous nation? Said he not unto me, She is my sister? and she, even she herself said, He is my brother: in the integrity of my heart and innocency of my hands have I done this. And God said unto him in a dream, Yea, I know that thou didst this in the integrity of thy heart; for I also withheld thee from sinning against me: therefore suffered I thee not to touch her. Now therefore restore the man his wife; for he is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live: and if thou restore her not, know thou that thou shalt surely die, thou, and all that are thine."

God said, "I know that you did this in the innocency of your heart and integrity of your hands. Therefore, I withheld thee from sinning against me." God restrained Abimelech from defiling the lineage of the Lord Jesus Christ.

You remember Jabez? I preached on him many years ago. The Bible says that Jabez was more honorable than all of his brethren. And he said, “Lord, I pray that thy hand would be with me, that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me, and that thou wouldest enlarge my coast.” And the next verse said, “And the Lord granted him his request.” That is a good prayer request: “Lord, keep me from evil. Keep me from sinning against thee.”

Certainly, God has the power to restrain. There will be just enough sin, just enough evil, just enough rebellion, just enough wickedness that will ultimately bring honor and glory to God. The Bible says in Psalm 46 and verse 6, “The heathen raged, the kingdoms were moved: he uttered his voice, the earth melted.” Have you ever stopped to think about this? All God has to do to destroy the wicked and stop the wicked is to speak. He uttered His voice, and the earth melted. What did He say in Psalm 2 and verse 5? “Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure.” God simply speaks, and it is over for the wicked. They cannot function. They are gone.

He has absolute and total control. It is His counsel that is going to stand. He controls the heathen; they can only do what He allows them to do. Ultimately, what they do will work out for His honor and His glory, because God cannot be thwarted, hindered, overthrown, or nullified. He is God, and He cannot be defeated. The Word of God says in Psalm 114 and verse 7, “Tremble, thou earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob.” Tremble, thou earth. This is exactly the truth of Psalm 33:8.

Applications: Trusting God's Protection and Praising Him

Since God is so absolutely powerful in creation and coherence, and so powerful in His counsel and control, why would anyone doubt His ability to protect His own? We may be in vast danger. That is true. But God does indeed protect His own. The Bible tells us in Romans 8, “What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?” And, “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 so loved us that He gave us His greatest gift, the Lord

Jesus Christ, how shall He not also with Him freely give us all things? Protection is one of those things. Preservation is one of those things. Provision is one of those things. God is so great and so vast that we should be praising Him.

We need to be awestruck at God's creation and coherence, at God's counsel and control, and at His person, position, power, and protection. As He said in Isaiah, "I am God, and beside me there is no other." He is God. Charles Haddon Spurgeon said, "There is an inferior kind of worship in the trembling which involuntarily admits the boundless power of a thundering God. A defiant blasphemer is out of place in a world covered with tokens of the divine power and Godhead."

The whole earth cannot afford a spot congenial for the erection of a synagogue of atheism, nor a man in whom it is becoming to profane the name of God. Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him. Let them forsake their idols and reverently regard the only living God. What is here placed as a wish may also be read as a prophecy: the adoration and praise of God shall ultimately be universal.

"Stand in awe, and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still." Have you ever just lain in bed and meditated and thought on God? Consider the greatness of God, the greatness of His creation, and the greatness of its coherence. I do not have to worry about the world coming to an end tomorrow, the stars falling out of the sky, or the earth breaking apart. It is by Him all things consist and have their being.

I can, along with Him, laugh at the wicked. I do not like what they are doing, and He does not like what they are doing, but they are fulfilling His plan and His Word, and ultimately will bring Him honor and glory. I can laugh at them and say, "You're mighty, mighty stupid, and you will find out one day who God really, truly is." In the name of Jesus Christ, every knee shall bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Are you awestruck? You should be when you consider such a great and wonderful God, His marvelous creation, His control, and His counsel.

Father, help us, we pray today. Teach us and build us up in the most holy faith. May we stand in awe of Thee, O Lord, and consider Thy greatness. As we do, we can ask with David, “What is man that Thou art mindful of him?” Give us, Lord, Your blessings, we pray in Christ’s name. Amen.

CHAPTER 23

Does God Use The Wicked And Sin?

Introduction: The Sovereignty of God Over the Wicked

Does God use the wicked and sin? Turn to Ezekiel chapter 29. The Word of God says, "Son of man"—talking to Ezekiel—"Son of man, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon caused his army to serve a great service against Tyrus. Every head was made bald, and every shoulder was peeled. Yet he had no wages for his army, for Tyrus, for the service that he had served against it. Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I will give the land of Egypt unto Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and he shall take her multitude, and take her spoil, and take her prey, and it shall be the wages for his army. I have given him the land of Egypt for his labor, wherewith he served against it, because they wrought for me, saith the Lord."

We will come back to that passage, but the title of this message poses a very interesting concept: the absolute sovereignty of God. It is true that the wicked hate God, disrespect God, dishonor God, despise God, refuse to worship Him, and rebel against His Word. So

can they escape His service? The answer, of course, is no. They will serve His purpose regardless of their hatred and unwillingness toward Him. Even the wicked are His creatures, and He may use them as He sees fit, even though they hate Him and do not wish to serve Him. Now I want to show you two passages, and then I'm going to quote some, but I want you to turn if

Revelation 4:11 says, “Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.” God has created everything. He has created all things. They were created for His pleasure, that is, also for His purpose. Proverbs 16:4 says, “The Lord hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil.” This is another very interesting verse, to say the least. Note that: God has made all things for Himself, yea, even the wicked for the day of evil.

Now, you must remember that the Bible tells us that God has an eternal purpose which He purposed in the Lord Jesus Christ. Ephesians 3:11 says, “according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.” So there is indeed an eternal purpose that God has purposed in Jesus Christ. Isaiah 46:10 says, “declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.” My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.

All things were created for Him and for His pleasure. The truth is this: even in the resistance and rebellion of the wicked to God, although they are working against Him and contrary to His Word, they are simply working for Him to accomplish His eternal purpose which He has purposed in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is impossible for the wicked to outthink God, outsmart God, outplan God, or outmaneuver God. God even uses their sin and their rebellion to accomplish His will.

Let me give you some illustrations. Let me ask some questions to begin with. You know the answer to each one of these, but here is the first one. Is it a sin to hate your brother? Is it a sin to lie and deceive? Is it a sin to kidnap? Is it a sin to sell an innocent human being into slavery? Is it a sin to lie to and to dishonor your father? Of course,

the answer to all those questions is yes. Each one of those is sin. It is wicked. It is vile. It is wrong.

Illustrations of God Using Sin: Joseph and Jesus

And yet, do you understand? All of those sins were exactly the sins that Joseph's brothers did to him and to his father. In Genesis 45, verses 4 and 5, when Joseph revealed himself to his brothers, he said, "Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life."

In other words, Joseph said, "Look, you sinned against me and you sinned against God. But God used your sin and God used your wickedness to work out His will, because He sent me here to preserve much people alive."

In Genesis 50, beginning with verse 18, after their father was dead, Joseph's brothers thought, "Now old Joseph is going to really take revenge upon us." The Bible says, "And his brethren also went and fell down before his face. And they said, Behold, we be thy servants. And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for am I in the place of God?"

Joseph continued, "But as for you, ye thought evil against me"—that is, you despised me, hated me, and sinned against me—"but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive. Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones." He comforted them and spoke kindly unto them. He said, "You were the ones who were wicked. You were the ones who were wrong. And all God did was use your rebellion and use your sin to accomplish His purpose." They were the ones who were wicked and wrong, but God used their rebellion and sin to accomplish His purpose. God does have an eternal purpose which He brings to pass in His divine providence when He uses the wicked actually to accomplish

His will. Now let me give you another clear illustration of this in the New Testament, and you cannot find a clearer illustration than that of the Lord Jesus Christ. Everything about the Lord Jesus Christ

was predetermined, predestinated, and ordained by God. There was absolutely nothing that happened by accident to Jesus Christ. There is nothing that happened that God did not foreordain.

In Acts chapter 2, verse 23, Peter says: "Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know, him, Jesus Christ, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." Verse 22 places Jesus Christ clearly in the context.

Note first of all the phrase, "Him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God." Everything about the life and the death of Jesus Christ was preordained, predetermined, and predestinated. He was the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world. Acts 4:26-28 says: "The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done."

Nothing was done to Jesus Christ except that which was determined beforehand. And yet, and yet, it was Peter who looked at those people and said, "Ye have taken by wicked hands and have crucified and slain."

When these people crucified the Lord Jesus Christ, they were not doing it out of obedience to God or thinking, “This is the will of God.” They acted out of hatred, despisement, wickedness, and vileness. God controlled their wickedness, sins, and rebellion and worked out His perfect eternal will. Peter said, “Ye have taken by wicked hands and have crucified.” They were working against God’s revealed will, but in doing so they worked out God’s secretive will. They acted because they hated the Lord Jesus Christ, not out of obedience. You and I can look around and see a world of sin and rebellion.

The Extent of Sin and God's Restraint

Here is a question that I have been asked innumerable times: How much sin and wickedness is God going to allow? It is almost funny when you hear people say, “Well, if I was God, I would not allow abortion. If I was God, I would not allow sodomy to take place. If I was God, I would not allow these wars to happen, these people to die.” But you are not God. You do not have God’s wisdom, you are not omniscient, and you do not understand the eternal purpose of God.

I can tell you exactly how much sin and wickedness is going to happen in this world. The answer is found in Psalm 76:10: “Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.” God is going to allow just enough sin and wickedness to ultimately redound to His honor and glory. What will not please, praise, or honor Him, He will restrain.

Someone says, “If I was God, I just would not even allow sin in the world to begin with.” But without sin, you would know nothing about the justice of God, the love of God, or the forgiveness and mercy of God. Without sin, you would know nothing about the wonderful reconciliation and atonement we have in the Lord Jesus Christ, or about God’s holiness and righteousness. “Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.”

Three Foundational Truths About God and Sin

Before getting started in the message, there are actually three truths that you need to grasp and really lay hold upon. The first is this: God is not the author of sin or the instigator of sin. I am going to show you Scripture momentarily.

Here is the second truth you need to lay hold of: God is not the infuser of sin. God does not make men wicked. God does not infuse evil and wickedness into men. Men sin because they are sinners. They are depraved, fallen, and possess a sinful nature. You never have to teach your child how to sin. Obviously and clearly, men sin because they are sinners.

Now, before I give you the third truth, turn in your Bibles to the book of James, chapter 1. You are going to see exactly where sin

comes from. Hebrews, James—James 1. Look at verse 13. James 1, verse 13: “Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.”

James says, “Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man.” I am going to explain that in just a moment, but look back at verse 12. Interestingly, he said, “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.” Then he says, “Let no man say when he is tempted.” He goes on to explain in verses 14 and 15: “Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished,”

“bringeth forth death.” The interesting thing is the word temptation. The noun is peirasmos; the Greek is peirazō. Peirasmos and peirazō have a double meaning. They are used in two different ways in the Bible: one in a good sense and the other in a bad sense.

In the good sense, the word temptation in verse 12 is peirasmos: “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life.” Here, the word temptation means to test, to try, or to prove for the purpose of ascertaining quality.

The second way it is used is in a bad sense, as in verse 13: “Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man.” In the evil sense, it means to seduce, trick, deceive, lead into sin, and solicit to sin. So he says in verse 12,

"Blessed is the man that endureth temptation." Here is the man who is tested and tried, and is approved; he is going to receive the crown of life. But James says, "Don't say at all that God can be tempted of evil. He cannot be, neither tempteth he any man." God does not try to draw men into sin. He is infinitely holy and therefore cannot be tempted with sin. God does not seduce men or lead them into sin and wickedness.

The first thing you need to understand is that God is not the author or the instigator of sin. The second thing is that God is not the infuser of sin. God does not put sin into anyone. The third thing you need to know is this: Although God is not the author or instigator of sin, and although God is not the infuser of sin, God is most definitely the controller of sin.

Stop and think about this. If anything can happen beyond the pale of God's sovereign authority and control, then God would not be God. That thing would be God, because God Himself could not control it. God, then, is the controller of everything, including the wicked and including sin.

That is why we rejoice when we read Romans 8:28: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." How do we know that all things work together for good? Because God is absolutely sovereign. He has control over everything. All our tests, trials, adversities, persecutions, incidents, accidents, sickness, adversaries—everything imaginable—God works for our good and for His glory, because He is in absolute control over everything. Absolutely. He is able to bring good out of that which we perceive as evil. God did not say that everything that happened to us we would consider good, but He said everything that happened to us is going to be for our good because He's going to

Work it for our good. So here is the question: Does God use the wicked? The answer is most definitely yes. Does God use sin? The answer is most definitely yes. I want to show you a truth, and I hope that you are thinking about the state of our nation.

In Psalm 17, David is praying against his enemies and makes a tremendous, clearly obvious statement. Beginning with verse 8, here is his prayer: "Keep me as the apple of the eye, hide me under the shadow of thy wings." That is a good prayer request. But here is why he wants to be hidden and kept: "From the wicked that oppress me, from my deadly enemies, who compass me about." His life is in danger.

People are trying to destroy him. He says, "They are enclosed in their own fat: with their mouth they speak proudly. They have now

compassed us in our steps: they have set their eyes bowing down to the earth; like as a lion that is greedy of his prey, and as it were a young lion lurking in secret places," waiting to pounce and kill. Now look at verse 13: "Arise, O Lord, disappoint him, cast him down. Deliver my soul from the wicked, which is thy sword: from men which are thy hand, O Lord, from men of the world, which have their portion in this life, and whose belly thou fillest with thy hid treasure: they are full of children, and leave the rest of their substance to their babes."

Look what he said: "Deliver my soul from the wicked." Then he describes them further: "They're men of thy hand." That is, God uses them. But they are men of the world who have their portion in this life. They know nothing about God, nothing about truth; they know only about this life.

God Uses the Wicked to Chastise and Correct the Righteous

God Uses the Wicked to Chastise the Righteous

The wicked are God's sword. Does God use them? The answer is yes. First of all, God uses the wicked to chastise and to correct the righteous.

Turn to the little book of Habakkuk, a minor prophet right before Zephaniah and after Nahum. Look at Habakkuk, beginning with verse 1, because I want you to see the problem Habakkuk faced—something that blew his understanding. Verse 1 says, "The burden which Habakkuk the prophet did see. O Lord, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear! even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save!" He said, "Lord, look around. I'm crying, Lord. We're in a desperate situation in this country. Violence is everywhere."

Watch verse 3: "Why dost thou shew me iniquity, and cause me to behold grievance? for spoiling and violence are before me: and there are that raise up strife and contention." We've got plenty of that. He says, "Therefore the law is slacked, and judgment doth never go forth." There's no judgment. There's no justice. "For the wicked doth compass about the righteous; therefore wrong judgment

proceedeth." How many are holding your breath until you see justice done in Washington? This is exactly the situation that he is in.

In verse 5, God says, "Behold ye among the heathen, and regard, and wonder marvelously: for I will work a work in your days—which ye will not believe, though it be told you." Now look what God says: "For, lo, I raise up the Chaldeans"—that is, the Babylonians—"that bitter and hasty nation, which shall march through the breadth of the land, to possess the dwellingplaces that are not theirs."

God is going to use the Chaldeans, the Babylonians, to conquer Judah and Jerusalem, the southern kingdom. "They are terrible and dreadful: their judgment and their dignity shall proceed of themselves. Their horses also are swifter than the leopards, and are more fierce than the evening wolves: and their horsemen shall spread themselves, and their horsemen shall come from far; they shall fly as the eagle that hasteth to eat. They shall come all for violence: their faces shall sup up as the east wind, and they shall gather the captivity as the sand." That is, they are going to conquer. "And they shall scoff at the kings, and the princes shall be a scorn unto them."

Nothing's going to stop them. "They shall deride every strong hold; for they shall heap dust, and take it." They will make mounts. "Then shall his mind change"—now we are talking about the wicked—"and he shall pass over, and offend, imputing this his power unto his god." He will give praise to his false god for the victory he has been given.

Now look at what Habakkuk says in verse 12: "Art thou not from everlasting, O Lord my God, mine Holy One? we shall not die. O Lord, thou hast ordained them for judgment; and, O mighty God, thou hast established them for correction." Then he says in verse 13: "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue, when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?"

Here was Habakkuk's problem. He knew that the southern kingdom was wicked and had violated God's law. He knew that God was going to use the Babylonians to chastise and correct the

southern kingdom. But how could God use someone more vile and wicked to chastise and correct those who were more righteous than they were? Habakkuk was saying, “I know that we are sinners. I know that we are wicked. I know we deserve judgment, correction, and chastisement. But God, the Babylonians are more wicked than we are. How can you use them against us?”

God did use Nebuchadnezzar. God used the Babylonians to chasten the southern kingdom. God sent Nebuchadnezzar; He not only sent him, but used him. He not only used him, but fought with him against His own people—at least, professing people.

Turn to Jeremiah, chapter 25. Look at verse 9 and what God says about Nebuchadnezzar: “Behold, I will send and take all the families of the north, saith the Lord, and Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and will bring

God said that He would bring them against this land, against its inhabitants, and against all the nations round about, utterly destroying them and making them an astonishment, a hissing, and perpetual desolations. Note what God said: “I’m going to take Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, my servant.” My servant.

Look in your Bibles at Jeremiah 27:6: “And now have I given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, my servant; and the beasts of the field have I given him also to serve him.”

Turn back to Jeremiah 21. There God says that He is actually going to fight with Nebuchadnezzar to destroy Judah and Jerusalem. Zedekiah was a wicked king. He sent word to Jeremiah, asking him to pray that perhaps Nebuchadnezzar might withdraw and leave Judah and Jerusalem alone. Verse 2 says: “Inquire, I pray thee, of the Lord for us; for Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon maketh war against us; if so be that the Lord will deal with us according to all his wondrous works, that he may go up from us.”

Then Jeremiah said to them: “Thus shall ye say to Zedekiah: Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Behold, I will turn back the weapons of war that are in your hands, wherewith ye fight against the king of Babylon, and against the Chaldeans, which besiege you without the walls, and I will assemble them into the midst of this city. And I

myself will fight against you with an outstretched hand and with a strong arm, even in anger, and in fury, and in great wrath. And I will smite the inhabitants of this city, both man and beast: they shall die of a great pestilence."

What did God say? "You won't never get an answer to go up from you. No, I'm going to help him. I'm going to fight with him. He's my servant. He's accomplishing what I've sent him to do. I have sent him to chastise and correct a people that are more righteous than he is."

In answering the question, "Does God use the wicked?" the answer is yes. In Isaiah 45, God is talking about Cyrus, a Medo-Persian. The Medes and Persians destroyed the Babylonian Empire, and Cyrus let the Jews go after the seventy years of captivity.

Look at what God says in verse 1: "Thus saith the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus." Isn't that amazing? God calls this heathen king His anointed: "whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him." God allowed him to conquer all these nations. He said, "I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates"—that would be in Babylon—"and the gates shall not be shut. I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron." God said, "I'm going to make sure that you're victorious."

Watch verse 3: "And I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I, the Lord, which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel." "For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me." You don't know who I am. You're not saved, but I know you. "I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me." Did God use Cyrus? Of course He used Cyrus. Cyrus was not a believer and had no idea. Now turn to Isaiah 10. Just as God used the Babylonians to defeat the Southern Kingdom,

He also used the Assyrians to defeat the Northern Kingdom. They fought against the Southern Kingdom as well, but God used them to

destroy the Northern Kingdom in 722 B.C.; the Babylonians took care of Judah and Jerusalem in 586–587 B.C.

Isaiah 10:5 says, “O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation. And I”—that is God—“will send him against an hypocritical nation. And against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets. Howbeit he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so; but it is in his heart to destroy and cut off nations not a few.”

God says the Assyrian is a rod of His anger, and the staff in his hand is His indignation. God said plainly, “I will send him against an hypocritical nation. I will give him a charge to take the spoil and to take the prey and to tread them down in the streets.” But verse 7 says, “Howbeit he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so; but it is in his heart to destroy and cut off nations not a few.” What does that mean?

It means that when God sent the Assyrians against the Northern Kingdom, and later even against some of the Southern Kingdom, they did not come saying, “We are coming because God is angry with you because of your sins. We are His servants, here to obey Him, do His will, worship Him, and honor Him.” No, they could care less about God. They did not know God. The only things they wanted to do were rape, rob, kill, murder, conquer, and exercise dominion. That was it.

Yet God called them His rod, and the staff in their hand was His indignation. The Assyrians did not mean to obey God. The Babylonians did not mean to obey God. They did not even know Him. But God used them as His sword to chastise and correct His people.

God Uses the Wicked to Judge the Wicked

Here is the second truth: God uses the wicked to judge the wicked. Return to the passage in Ezekiel chapter 29. I had to cover all this other material so that you could see this passage in its context. Look again at verse 18. God says, "Son of man, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon caused his army to serve a great service against

Tyrus"—that is, against Tyre. "Every head was made bald, and every shoulder was peeled: yet had he no wages, nor his army, for Tyrus, for the service that he had served against it. Therefore thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I will give the land of Egypt unto Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; and he shall take her multitude, and take her spoil, and take her prey; and it shall be the wages for his army. I have given him the land of Egypt for his labour wherewith he served against it, because they wrought for me, saith the Lord God."

“They wrought for me.” God was using the wicked to fight against the wicked and to destroy the wicked. God said very plainly in verse 20, “because they wrought for me, saith the Lord God.” If you go back and read Ezekiel chapters 27 and 28, you will find that Tyre was a wicked, wicked place. Its pride and wealth were great, and it dealt in all kinds of merchandise, including the souls of men. It was exceedingly wicked and vile. God sent Nebuchadnezzar, a wicked ruler, against Tyre, a wicked, wicked city.

Tyre was a seacoast city and also a great city. Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to it. Notice again that his army was said to “serve a great service.”

"Every head was made bald, and every shoulder was peeled." What does he mean by this? Every head was made bald because the soldiers had to wear helmets all the time, and the helmets caused them to lose their hair. Every shoulder was peeled because the soldiers carried huge rocks and baskets of earth. Tyre was out in the sea, and Nebuchadnezzar had to build a causeway to reach the city and attack it.

The siege lasted thirteen years. Every head was bald, and all the soldiers' shoulders were peeled because of the work that had to be accomplished. During this thirteen-year siege, Nebuchadnezzar's army was greatly fatigued, suffered much hardship, and was wearied by the various military work required to reach the city. Nebuchadnezzar went to great expense. Can you imagine feeding and paying an army for thirteen years without actually gaining anything? The capture of Tyre was certainly a tedious piece of work.

It cost Nebuchadnezzar a great deal in blood as well as treasure. It took thirteen years to reach the city so that they might destroy it. But

when the people of Tyre realized that the city would fall after thirteen years, they loaded most of their treasure and their imported men and sent them to Carthage. Remember, Nebuchadnezzar was building the causeway because Tyre sat on a huge rock out in the sea.

When Nebuchadnezzar entered the city, very little spoil or prey remained. So God said, "Since Nebuchadnezzar wrought for me, I am going to give him Egypt. I will give him an easy prey, a place where he can obtain much spoil. This will be his pay for his service, which he wrought for me against Tyre." Does God use the wicked? Yes.

This is not all funny, but it is funny. In Jeremiah 42 through 44, these people came to Jeremiah and wanted him to pray and seek God's will about whether they should stay in the land of Judah or go to Egypt. Nebuchadnezzar had taken some people captive and killed many of the others. Then he made Gedaliah governor over the few individuals who were left. Ishmael and some men came along, murdered Gedaliah, the governor, and murdered the Babylonian soldiers who were there. The people were greatly afraid because they knew the Babylonians would be angry. So they said, “Jeremiah, pray for us.”

Jeremiah said, “Okay, I will.” After he prayed, he said, “Here is what God said: Stay in the land. Do not go into Egypt. Stay in the land, and I will protect you from Nebuchadnezzar. Just stay in the land and do what you are supposed to do.” What did the people say? “God did not say that. Baruch has just set thee on against us. God did not say that. We are going into Egypt, where we will not see the sword, famine, or war.”

Guess what? God said, “I have given Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar.” The people who did not want the will of God and would not listen to the word of God ran right into the fiery furnace they were running from; they ran into Nebuchadnezzar.

Now let me make some applications. I want you to listen to what Matthew Henry said about God giving Egypt into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar: “The service done for him by worldly men with worldly designs shall be recompensed with a mere worldly reward, which his faithful servants that have a sincere regard for his will and

glory would not be put off with." In other words, a real Christian would not be satisfied with merely a worldly reward. "I'd rather have Jesus than silver or gold. I'd rather have Jesus than wealth untold. I'd rather have Jesus than more than anything." A worldly man with worldly designs, if God uses him, will receive a worldly profit, but that is all. Henry continues: "This accounts for the prosperity of the wicked men in the world." Stop and think about the wicked men in our world with all their money. Think about their wickedness. "This accounts for the prosperity of the wicked men in the world."

God is in it, paying them for some service or the other, in which He has made use of them. Verily, they have their reward. Let none envy it then. The conquest of Egypt is spoken of as Nebuchadnezzar's full reward, for that completed his dominion over the then known world in a manner; that was the last of the kingdoms he subdued. When he was master of that, he became the head of gold—that is in the book of Daniel—that fell over, and he was no more.

Human Responsibility and Divine Judgment

I want you to understand something: even great men, bad men, wicked and evil men, are tools that God uses and makes use of. They are His sword, and God makes use of them even when they are pursuing their own goals, their own desires, and their own ends. They have no thought of God, no desire to serve Him—in fact, they hate Him and rebel against Him—but it is God's sovereignty that turns all of their sin and all of their rebellion out for our good and for His glory.

God's sovereignty does not do away with human responsibility. It is a simple truth from Scripture: If you sin, you will suffer. It does not matter if God uses your sin for His greater glory and for the good of His people. If you sin, you will suffer. It does not matter if you are a man, a nation, or a corporation. If you sin against God, you cannot escape His judgment.

I smiled when I saw that Anheuser-Busch had already lost five billion dollars. Someone came up and said, "I talked to one of their reps because he was a friend, and he said they've now lost seven point five billion dollars for using the transvestite." I do not know if

you have seen one of the advertisements. It is absolutely sickening. This little skinny boy that looks like a girl, dresses like a girl, acts like a girl, blowing bubbles and holding up a can of beer. Absolutely sick.

They are using the same person—I saw another ad—to promote bras for women, Nike bras. And now many women are burning their Nike bras. Maybe Nike will go under as well. You just cannot sin against God and get by with it.

That's all there is to it. If you sin, you're going to suffer.

Did God use Babylon? Did God use the Chaldeans? Did God use Nebuchadnezzar? The answer is yes. Did Nebuchadnezzar, did Babylon get away with their destruction of Judah and Jerusalem? No, because God sent the Medes and the Persians to take care of the Babylonians.

God said about the Assyrians, “They were the rod of his anger, and the staff in their hand was his indignation.” Again he said, “O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation. And I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets. Howbeit he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so; but it is in his heart to destroy and cut off nations not a few.”

The Assyrians not only destroyed the northern kingdom, they also came against the southern kingdom later on. But note what God says about the Assyrians: “Wherefore it shall come to pass, that when the Lord hath performed his whole work upon mount Zion and on Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks.” Why is God going to punish them? Here’s why. He said, “For he saith”—that is, the king said—“By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom; for I am prudent: and I have removed the bounds of the people, and have robbed their treasures, and I have put down the inhabitants like a valiant

“And my hand hath found as a nest the riches of the people: and as one gathereth eggs that are left, have I gathered all the earth; and there was none that moved the wing, or opened the mouth, or peeped.” God asked, “Shall the axe boast itself against him that

heweth therewith? or shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it? as if the rod should shake itself against them that lift it up, or as if the staff should lift up itself, as if it were no wood. Therefore shall the Lord, the Lord of hosts, send among his fat ones leanness; and under his glory he shall kindle a burning like the burning of a fire. And the light of Israel shall be for a fire, and his Holy One for a flame: and it shall burn and devour his thorns and his briers in one day."

God said, "Yes, I sent them. Yes, I used them. But they did what they did out of wickedness and vileness. They had no regard for my honor and my glory. They did not do it in obedience to me. They did not do it in faith. They did it simply because they wanted to sin, rebel, and conquer." And God says, "Therefore I will judge them."

First, God permits or allows evil, but He does not cause it, as James 1:13–15 teaches. Second, God controls evil, but He does not condone it. That is why He said in Habakkuk 1:13, "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity." He cannot look upon it condoningly or approvingly. Third, God judges evil and does not excuse it. He judged Israel. He judged Babylon. He judged Judah. He is judging America.

Conclusion: Resting in God's Sovereignty

God is not going to excuse wickedness. Our responsibility is to obey the revealed will of God. Deuteronomy 29:29 says, "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." We have to live by the revealed will of God. We do not know God's secretive will; we can know it only when it comes to pass in His providence in time and history. So whenever you begin to think that the wicked are in control, that the wicked are in charge, and somehow that the wicked are going to succeed—

Whether it is the Great Reset or the New World Order, whenever you think they are in control, running things, and going to succeed, you have forgotten God's absolute sovereignty. God will use what they are doing for our good and His glory, and then judge and destroy them.

We get discouraged because we say, “Everything is going wrong.” We think, “If I could correct this, I would correct it. If I could do this, I would do that.” We need to add something: Yes, everything is going wrong—just right. It is working out God's eternal purpose, which He purposed in Jesus Christ our Lord. He will work it out for His glory and our good. God does use the wicked and sin, but only enough to redound for our good and His glory.

He said, “Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.” Our hope, comfort, and consolation are in God's absolute sovereignty. He is God and in absolute control; nothing can come to pass without Him.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee this day. We thank You for Your Word and truth. May we rest in Thee, be obedient, honor Thee, glorify Thee, worship Thee, and praise Thee. Lord, may we acknowledge that Thou dost rule over everything. Not a sparrow or a hair can fall apart from Thee. Thou art God, and we bow before Thee and worship Thee. In the name of Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray, amen.

CHAPTER 24

Have You Ever Wanted to be a Champion?

"Now the days of David drew nigh that he should die; and he charged Solomon his son, saying, I go the way of all the earth. Be thou strong therefore, and show thyself a man; and keep the charge of the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, that thou mayest prosper in all that thou doest, and whithersoever thou turnest thyself."

Introduction: The Universal Desire to Be a Champion

I have used the word "champion" for a reason, which you will discover shortly, I hope. The truth of the matter is, every child dreams of being a champion. It does not matter whether his dream is in martial arts, shooting, ball playing, rodeo riding, or any other activity. Every child wants to be a champion, and oftentimes grownups do as well. We picture ourselves in our daydreams, and sometimes in our nightdreams, as winners and champions. Have you ever noticed that in your daydreams and nightdreams?

If you are involved, usually whatever is happening, you are the one coming out on top. You are the winner—not always, but most of the time. I believe there is an inherent drive in anyone to be successful and to be a champion, so to speak, whether in your vocation or in any activity in which you happen to be engaged.

Biblical Caution About Dreams

I do not put much stock in dreams. Everyone dreams. The Bible tells us in Ecclesiastes chapter 5 and verse 3, "For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; and a fool's voice is known by a multitude of words." Dreams may also deceive. If you read Jeremiah chapter 23 and Jeremiah chapter 29, you will find that God speaks against those who dream dreams in order that they might deceive others. Then the Bible says in Ecclesiastes chapter 5 and verse 7, "For in the multitude of dreams and many words there are also divers vanities: but fear thou God." There are different idols, different images, and different things in a multitude of dreams and words, but we are to fear God. This message is not necessarily about dreams.

But I want to point out something. It is possible for you to cause yourself to dream certain dreams. In Jeremiah chapter 29 and verse 8, God says: "For thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Let not your prophets and your diviners, that be in the midst of you, deceive you, neither hearken to your dreams which ye cause to be dreamed."

Now, how in the world do you cause yourself to dream a dream? The answer is by keeping your thoughts on a particular subject, by considering, by studying, by longing for certain things, by desiring certain things, and by wanting certain things.

If you have all of this on your mind and in your heart, inevitably, you are going to end up dreaming about it. And a dream does not necessarily have to be true or accurate. But when you get to Jeremiah chapters 28 and 29, the truth of the matter is, if there is a market for your dream, you can cause those dreams to be dreamed. That is what these false prophets were doing. They were preaching to these people and getting all kinds of sacrifices and all kinds of money

because they were dreaming dreams that the people wanted to hear. And, of course, God is condemning those dreams.

Evil Champions: Goliath as an Example

Whenever we think of the word “champions,” we think of someone who is very, very good at something. But we also have to remember this: when you hear the word “champion,” you must consider that there are what you and I would call good champions, but there are also evil champions. They are champions on both sides of the battle—champions for good and champions for evil.

Let me give you a good illustration, first of all, of evil champions. In 1 Samuel chapter 17, David meets Goliath and, of course, slays him. But note what the Bible says about Goliath. In 1 Samuel chapter 17 and verse 4, the Bible says, “And there went out a champion out of the camp of the Philistines, named Goliath, of Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span.” The Bible said, “And there went out a champion.” Then, in verse 23: “And as he talked with them, behold, there came up the champion, the Philistine of Gath, Goliath by name, out of the armies of the Philistines, and spake according to the same words: and David heard them.”

Then, in verse 51: “Therefore David ran, and stood upon the Philistine, and took his sword, and drew it out of the sheath thereof, and slew him, and cut off his head therewith. And when the Philistines saw their champion was dead, they fled.” Three times in this passage, Goliath has been called a champion. The Hebrew word for champion is “ish.” It refers to a man in contrast to a woman, but it also refers to a great man, or champion. Goliath was a combatant, one who was unique and superb in the skill of fighting. However, he was an evil champion, in that he hated God and God's people. His intent was to conquer for his gods and for his people.

In verse 43 of 1 Samuel chapter 17: “And the Philistine said unto David, Am I a dog, that thou comest to me with staves? And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. And the Philistine said to David, Come to me, and I will give thy flesh unto the fowls of the air, and to the beasts of the field.” In other words, Goliath was against David, against Israel, and against Israel's God. Champions of evil are very prevalent in the Bible.

The Nephilim as Champions of Wickedness

Now, turn to an extremely controversial passage. It is controversial only because good men disagree on its interpretation. I will share my interpretation and show you why I believe it is correct. However, there are good men who disagree with me. Let us look at Genesis chapter 6 and read verses 1 through 5:

"And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose. 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. There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them, the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown. 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."

Some interpret this passage to mean that the sons of God were fallen angels, and that these fallen angels somehow had intercourse with women, producing a race of giants.

I personally do not agree with that interpretation for a number of reasons. There are men who hold it—good men, some of them my friends. I disagree with them, and I will tell you why. First of all, I believe that the sons of God are nothing more than sons of God. They were Christians, believers, godly men. The daughters of men would refer to those women who were unsaved and did not know anything concerning God.

Now, I know that angels are called the sons of God in the book of Job. I understand that. But here is why I do not believe that the sons of God in this passage were fallen angels. Number one, angels, fallen or unfallen, are spirit beings. That is what the Bible says: "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" The Bible says that his ministers, his angels, are spirits, ministers of fire. A spirit does not have a body. God is spirit. Whenever the Bible speaks of God's hand or arm, it is

speaking anthropomorphically, in man-form language that you and I can understand.

Moreover, when you talk about angels, whether fallen or unfallen, it does not matter: there was a certain created number of those angels, and no more are being created. Contrary to what many people think, when little babies die, they do not become angels. They do not become angels because angels are spirit beings.

Secondly, whenever an unfallen angel, that is, an angel of God, appeared to anyone in the Bible, he appeared as a man. Angels do not have wings. They do not need wings because they are spirit beings. God is spirit, and God does not have wings either.

Look in your Bibles to the book of Hebrews, chapter 13 and verse 2. Whenever an angel appears on earth that God sends, whether Gabriel, Michael, or whoever it is that God sends, he appears as a normal human being. The Bible says, “Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares,” that is, unknowingly.

Now, if I hear a knock on my door and open it, and there stands someone in a long, flowing white robe with big, fluffy wings sticking out of his back and his head shining, I am sorry, but he is not getting into my house—not if I can help it. That is not an angel of God. Every time an angel appeared in the Bible, he appeared as a man.

Nowhere in the Bible, as far as I have been able to tell in fifty-nine years of preaching, does the Bible state or even imply that angels have the power and ability to take upon themselves a human form whenever they please. It does not say that at all. Anytime God sends one—in fact, the Bible says in Psalm 103 that they are all ministering spirits waiting upon God, waiting upon His commandment. In other words, when God commands them, they go. If He does not command them, they stay. It is just that simple.

Clearly, then, an angel is a spirit being. Whenever angels appeared on earth, they appeared as men, but they do not have the power in themselves to change whenever they want to.

Thirdly, since we are in Genesis 6, look at what I will call the most conclusive proof that these cannot be fallen angels. Genesis 6:2 says that the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were fair,

and they took them wives of all which they chose. Is not a fallen angel an evil angel? The answer is yes. Why would an evil angel want a wife? If a fallen angel wanted intercourse with a woman, he would not marry her; he would simply ravish all the women he could possibly ravish. I am pointing out that these sons of God took unto themselves the wives of all that they chose. Remember, then, that a fallen angel is an evil spirit.

He doesn't have a body. Moreover, our Lord said this twice in the New Testament. Matthew 22:30: “For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven.” The angels of God do not marry; they do not procreate. He said it again in Mark 12:25: “For when they shall rise from the dead, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage; but are as the angels which are in heaven.” So angels do not marry, neither can they procreate. In light of these truths, the sons of God have to be what you and I would call believers intermarrying with unbelievers. Now, here’s the question.

If that is true, which I believe it is, how do we explain the giants? Look in verse 4: “There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them, the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown.” Notice first that giants, whatever they were, were already here before the sons of God went into the daughters of men. The verse says, “There were giants in the earth in those days, and also after that.” So the giants, whatever they were, are already there.

The word “giant” in the Hebrew is “Nephilim,” which we pronounce in English as Nephilim. Yes, I know that there were large men in the Bible. Look at Goliath and all of his brothers. I also know that large skeletons have been found by archaeologists. There are still large men today. The Watusi tribe, practically all of those men are over seven feet tall. There was a man called Andre the Giant; look him up on the internet. I forget how tall he was, but he was a huge man. I went to school with a man whose father was seven feet two inches tall. When you asked him how tall he was, he would say, “Six feet 14 inches.” He was obviously a tall man. But there are other

ways to understand the word “giant,” and I am going to explain that to you: you can be a giant in wickedness, you can be a giant

In tyranny, you can be a giant in evil as well. I believe our text shows this, because verse 4 says that they were mighty men and men of renown. The Bible says, “the same became mighty men.” The Hebrew word for “mighty” is “gibbor,” referring to a mighty man, a valiant man, a strong man, and a champion. It is not the same word as “ish,” but it does imply a champion as well.

Then he says they were men of renown. The phrase “men of renown” comes from the Hebrew word “shem,” meaning one who is famous or infamous, one who is of reputation or one who is of a name. The question must be asked: If these men were famous and had a reputation, for what were they famous? Of what did their reputation consist? The answer is that their reputation and infamousness consisted of rebellion against God and tyranny.

For instance, Genesis 10:8-9 says, “And Cush begat Nimrod. He began to be a mighty one in the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the Lord: wherefore it is said, Even as Nimrod the mighty hunter before the Lord. And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar.”

You will also find this in 1 Chronicles 1:10: “And Cush begat Nimrod: he began to be mighty upon the earth.” The word “mighty” in Genesis 10:8-9 and the word “mighty” in 1 Chronicles 1:10 are the exact same word used for “mighty” in Genesis 6:4. Moreover, the name Nimrod means rebellion, or one who is valiant in rebellion.

Nimrod was the son of Cush, who was the son of Ham, who was the son of Noah. Thus, Nimrod was a grandson, a great-grandson of Noah. The Bible calls him a mighty hunter before the Lord. The Hebrew word “before” means “in the face of,” “in the presence of,” or “against.” We use a similar expression when we say, “I’ll get right in his face and tell him this.” It means that we are not afraid or ashamed, but get right in front of him and say whatever we want to say.

These were mighty hunters against the Lord, before his face. They were disrespectful, disbelieving, dishonorable. Genesis 11, which follows Genesis 10, demonstrates this rebellion. God told them to be

scattered and to be fruitful and multiply, but in Genesis 11 they wanted to build a tower into the heavens, “lest we be scattered abroad.” In other words, “We’re not going to do what God says; we’re going to stay in this one place in the land of Shinar.” We can argue that giants are big and strong, which is proverbial when we hear the word “giants”: men of physique, stature, and muscle. But it is not just their physique or muscle. From Genesis 6 through 11, it is their rebellion, wickedness, evilness, and tyranny.

I want to give you a number of quotes to show that when I say the sons of God in Genesis chapter 6 were not fallen angels but godly men, historically, a vast number of scholars have held that position. I am not saying that makes me right, nor that they are right. I am saying they held the same position. Historically, the interpretation that they were fallen angels would be different.

John Trapp, one of the old Puritans, said: “There were giants, Gigantes, earth-born. They were of the earth, they spake of the earth, and the earth heard them. Heard them, I say, and fell before them, as the beasts of the field do before the roaring lion. Hence they are called in Hebrew Nephilim, such as being fallen from God fell upon man, and by fear and force made others fall before them. Thus they sought to be renowned, and to raise themselves by depressing others and doing violence.” When he says they were fallen from God, he meant that they were apostate, not fallen angels.

Here is Matthew Poole, another Puritan: “Giants, men so called partly from their high stature, but principally for their great strength and force, whereby they oppressed and tyrannized over others. For this is mentioned as another sin and cause of the flood. And therefore they seem to be here noted not for the height of their stature, which is no crime, but for their violence, which also is expressed beneath in Genesis 6:11-13.”

Matthew Henry says, "These made them the terror of the mighty in the land of the living. And thus armed, they daringly insulted the rights of all their neighbors and trampled upon all that is just and sacred. Note, those that have such power over others, and are able to oppress, they seldom have so much power over themselves as not to oppress."

"Great might is a very great snare to many. This degenerate race slighted the honor of their ancestors had obtained by virtue and religion, and made themselves a great name, which was the perpetual ruin of their good name." Once again, the sons of God were godly men who went into these daughters of men.

Keil and Delitzsch write, "Now, if according to the simple meaning of the passage, the Nephilim were in existence at the very time when the sons of God came into the daughters of men, the appearance of Nephilim cannot afford the slightest evidence that the sons of God were angels, by whom a family of monsters were begotten, whether demigods, demons, or angel-men." They say it is impossible.

Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown state, "The term in Hebrew implies not so much the idea of great stature as of reckless ferocity, impious and daring characters who spread devastation and carnage far and wide." They are giants in evil.

John Gill, the noted Baptist theologian, says, "The word Nephilim comes from a word which signifies to fall. And these might be so called either because they made their fear to fall upon men, or men through fear to fall before them because of their height and strength, or rather because they fell and rushed on men with great violence and oppressed them in a cruel and tyrannical manner, or some think because they fell off and were apostates from the true religion, which is much better than to understand them as apostate angels."

Adam Clarke, a Methodist, writes, "The Septuagint translate the original word, Gigantes, which literally signifies earth-born, and which we, following them, use the term giants, without having any reference to the meaning of the word, which we generally conceive to signify persons of enormous stature. But the word, when properly understood, makes a very just distinction between the sons of men and the sons of God. Those were the Nephilim, the fallen earth-born men, with the animal and devilish mind. These were the sons of God, who were born from above, children of the kingdom, because children of God."

Hence, we may suppose, originated the different names given to sinners and saints. The former term, gigantes, that is earth-born, and the latter, hagioi, that is saints, persons not of the earth, but

separated from the earth. Adam Clarke says it must be the sons of God—the Christians, the believers—versus the sons of men.

Albert Barnes describes two classes of men with strong hand and strong will: the giants, well-known men of great stature, physical force, and violent will, enabled by these qualities to claim and secure supremacy over their fellow men. Violence and rapine were becoming rampant in the land. After that, the progeny of mixed marriages formed the second class of leading men. The sons of God are here distinguished from the Nephilim, or giants, who appear therefore to have belonged to the Canaanites.

The offspring of these unhallowed unions were the heroes, the gallants, the mighty men, the men of renown. They were probably more refined in manners and exalted in thought than the predecessors of pure Canaanite descent—men of name, whose names were often in men's mouths because they either deserved or required frequent mention on account of their influential or representative character, being distinguished from the common herd by certain qualities.

When we talk about men of the name, consider Bill Gates, and you automatically think of a billionaire; you should also think of wickedness. George Soros and Hillary Clinton are names that carry recognition. Then consider John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, and George Whitefield. Each of these individuals may be called giants: some giants in wickedness and evil, and others giants in goodness and faith. Basically, these mighty men, these men of renown, according to Genesis 10 and Genesis 11, were men of rebellion and wickedness.

David's Charge to Solomon: Be a Champion for God

Men that tyrannized others—that is why Nimrod, the mighty hunter before the Lord, began this kingdom in the land of Shinar. These men were usually haters of God, and they were called champions, just like Goliath.

In 1 Kings 2, David gives Solomon this charge: “Now the days of David drew nigh that he should die; and he charged Solomon his son, saying, I go the way of all the earth: be thou strong therefore,

and show thyself a man; and keep the charge of the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, that thou mayest prosper in all that thou doest, and whithersoever thou turnest thyself."

In 1 Samuel 17, Goliath was called the champion three times. The Hebrew word was ish, and it literally meant a man, a man in contrast to a woman, a great man, and a champion. In verse 2, David says to Solomon, "I go the way of all the earth: be thou strong therefore, and show thyself an ish." Show thyself a man; show thyself a champion. That is exactly what he told him.

Notice that before he said, "Show thyself a champion," he said, "Be thou strong." When you stop and think about a champion, whether he is a martial artist, a man who can shoot, or an athlete in track and field, you find that a champion is someone who is strong, disciplined, and understands self-sacrifice. There is no such thing as a man being a weakling and being a champion, unless he is a champion in weakness.

To be a champion, there must be a work ethic and a schedule that you are forced to keep in order to become good at whatever you are striving to excel in. Therefore, David tells him, "Be thou strong." Champions are not weaklings. Champions have strength, and they use strength. One cannot be a champion while vacillating, being double-minded, remaining inconsistent, refusing to exercise, refusing to eat right, and refusing to do right. It is impossible to be a champion like that. So David tells him to be strong.

The Bible says in Ephesians 6:10, "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." If we are going to be champions of good, if we are going to be the Lord's champions, we must be strong in the power of His might and in His righteousness, because we have no strength in ourselves.

David said, "I go the way of all the earth: be thou strong therefore, and show thyself a champion." What was he to show himself a champion in? First of all, David says, "and keep the charge of the Lord thy God." He was to be a champion in keeping the charge of the Lord God. The word "charge" is the Hebrew word "mishmereth,"

referring to a charge, a watch, an office, or an obligation. Aaron and his sons were to keep the charge of the priesthood. The Levites were to keep the charge of Aaron and the priest; that is, they were to protect them. They were also to keep the charge of the tabernacle, protecting it and fulfilling their duties and responsibilities there.

The Charge Defined: Obedience to God's Word

They had an office. So here is what he is telling Solomon: You need to be strong. You need to show yourself a champion, and you need to show yourself a champion in keeping the charge of God. Now, of what does that charge consist? Look in verse 3: “And keep the charge of the Lord thy God.” Here is the charge: “To walk in his ways, to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, that thou mayest prosper in all that thou doest, and whithersoever thou turnest thyself.”

The Promise of Prosperity Through Obedience

In other words, his charge was to walk in the ways of the Lord, to keep God’s commandments, judgments, and testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses. That is basically the charge every real Christian has. There is a benefit and a blessing to keeping this charge. What is it? Look at the latter part of verse 3: “That thou mayest prosper in all that thou doest, and whithersoever thou turnest thyself.” God said, if you really want success and prosperity, then you need to obey. I can summarize everything David told Solomon in three words: submit and obey. It is just that simple. You are pleasing to the Lord; you do his word, his work, and his will. He said you are going to prosper in everything you do and everywhere you turn. You know, there are times that I think about the wicked. I look at how they

They struggle to conquer, the money they expend and throw away. All their lives they are working for this one goal and this one end, only to die and fail and then be judged by God. They lost everything. But God said, if we obey him, if we become a champion in submission and obedience, we are only going to prosper. We are going to prosper every which way we turn. Not amazing?

Look in your Bibles to the book of Joshua, chapter 1 and verse 7, because God gave this same promise to Joshua. God told Joshua, "Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest." Mr. Sutton wrote a book years ago. The title of it is "That Thou May Prosper," or "Thou Shalt Prosper." It is on obedience, keeping God's word, and keeping God's law.

God said, if you want prosperity, if you want success in whatever you are doing, then you need to be my champion. You need to observe my will, keep my law, keep my judgments, and act the way I want you to act. The benefits of being God's champion and receiving his blessings far outweigh the curses that he places upon those who disobey.

Applications: The Path to Being a Biblical Champion

Now there are two applications. The first one is very simple: it is very easy to be a champion in wickedness and evil. All you have to do is follow your flesh, your longings, the desire of your eyes, and the pride of your life. Learn to intimidate, seek to conquer and control others, put them down, stomp them, and destroy them any way that you can. Pretty soon you will be a champion in evil. It is just that simple.

But if you want to be a champion in godliness, then you will need the grace of God, the mercy of God, the power of God, and the strength of God, because in our flesh, our flesh is only weak. Our Lord stated in John 15:5, "without me ye can do nothing." The road to being a biblical champion is the road of submission, obedience, discipline, self-denial, self-sacrifice, and honoring God in every area. That is the way to become a biblical champion.

That is what David told Solomon. Look back, if you would, in First Kings, chapter 2 and verse 3, because here is the second application. He said, "and keep the charge of the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and his testimonies."

You cannot obey what you do not know. If we are to keep God's law and judgments and obey his word, we must know his word, what he requires, what he demands, how he wants us to act, and what pleases him. You cannot keep the charge if you do not know what is in the charge, what God demands of each of us.

Look once more at First Kings 2:2–3. David said to Solomon, "I go the way of all the earth: be strong therefore, and show thyself a champion, a valiant man, and keep the charge of the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, that thou mayest prosper in all that thou doest, and whithersoever thou turnest thyself."

We will either be a champion for God or a champion for evil. Every child of God has the potential to be a champion for God. If we learn to submit and obey, we can be men of the name. You remember the passage in Acts 11: "The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch." It should be a real honor and blessing for people to look at you and say, "He's a Christian. She's a Christian." That is true, men of the name.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to thee. Make us champions in faith, obedience, submission, keeping your will, your word, and your way, and obeying thee in every aspect and area of our lives. Make us strong. Give us faith, grace, mercy, power, and your Spirit. May we walk pleasing unto thee in everything we do and say. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 25

Pleasing God

Introduction and Scripture Reading

Open your Bibles to Hebrews, chapter 11, and verses 5 and 6. Most of you can quote verse 6, probably not verse 5, but I want you to look at it. Then we are going to look at some other passages in the Bible and, I hope, tie everything together for you.

Hebrews 11:5 says, “By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God. But without faith it is impossible to please him.” Verse 6 continues, “For he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”

Everyone desires to be pleased, regardless of one's state, whether one is saved or unsaved. Pleasure, of course, is important to each one. That which is pleasing is that which is agreeable—the words we like—what is happening to us and pleases us; and if we dislike it, then it is not pleasing at all. Oftentimes we use a phrase like, “This pleases me,” or, “This doesn't please me.” We could substitute the

word satisfy: “This satisfies me,” or, “It disagrees with me,” “doesn't satisfy me,” or “doesn't agree with me.”

Usually, if we are not pleased about something, we are pretty quick to let someone know that we are not pleased. We could do so in words, with a very sour disposition, or through facial expressions that let everyone know that, yes, we are very, very displeased.

The Unsaved Cannot Please God

Since the title of this message is “Pleasing God,” notice what the Bible says in Romans 8 and verse 8: “So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.” They that are in the flesh cannot please God. Before considering the meaning of the word please, look at a couple of passages. Turn first of all to the book of Galatians, because he talks about those that are in the flesh that cannot please God. In verse 19, God describes for us the works of the flesh. He says, “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.” I hope that you notice that every one of these fruits of the flesh happens to be contrary to God and contrary to His commandments. Another thing we need to notice is this: oftentimes we attribute many of these things to the work and temptation of Satan. But God says, no, no, these are all fruits of the flesh, which include idolatry, witchcraft, and hatred. All of these things are works of the flesh. They are not the temptations of Satan.

In Proverbs chapter 6 and verse 16, we read, “These six things doth the Lord hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: a proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood,” which is murder, “an heart that deviseth wicked imaginations,” which would include adultery, fornication, theft, and whatever else, “feet that be swift in running to mischief, a false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among the brethren.” Each of these things happens to be forbidden by the law of God as well. These would be

works of the flesh, although they are not necessarily mentioned as works of the flesh.

The Meaning of 'Cannot Please'

Now look at Romans 8:8: “So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.” First of all, consider the word “please.” The Greek word is areskō, and it literally means to please, to do those things that are agreeable, and to accommodate oneself to the desires of others. Think about this for a moment. It not only means to please, but to do those things that are agreeable and to accommodate oneself to the desires of others.

Notice again that there is a “cannot” before the word “please.” The Greek word “cannot” is made up of two Greek words. The first is ou, which means no or not. The second is dunamai, referring to strength or power. It means to have the ability or strength to do something in your own person, in your own ability, so to speak. The word dunamis comes from the root from which we get the word dynamite, referring to power and strength.

Deceived into Thinking They Please God

Those who are in the flesh do not have the ability, power, or strength in any way to please God. The natural man, the unsaved man, the man in the flesh, cannot please God in anything or in any way that he does.

One of the saddest states for many people is being so totally and absolutely deceived that, at the same time, they think they are pleasing God. Our Lord said it like this: "For the time will come that those who kill you will think that they do God's service." Here is someone so absolutely deceived that he thinks he is doing God's service by murdering. Look at the teaching of Islam. Anyone who is an infidel according to them deserves to be murdered, and they can do so with gusto, thinking that they are pleasing God.

In 1 Thessalonians chapter 2, beginning with verse 14, he says, "For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea"—that would be the southern kingdom—"are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as

they have of the Jews." What is this? "Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us"—that is, the apostles—"and they please not God, and are contrary to all men."

Notice what he says about the Jews, particularly since they refuse, repudiate, and reject the Lord Jesus Christ. They cannot and they do not please God. Moreover, he says they are contrary to all men. If you reject, repudiate, and refuse the Lord Jesus Christ, inevitably you will be contrary to all men. The word "contrary" there is "enantios," and it literally means to be opposed, to be opposite, to be an opponent, to be an adversary, and to be antagonistic. Anyone who refuses, rejects, and repudiates the Lord Jesus Christ actually becomes the enemy of Jesus Christ. But let this sink into your mind: they are not only the enemy of Jesus Christ; they happen to be our enemy as well, because they are contrary to all men. Think about that. You remember that passage in Luke chapter 18, where our Lord said, "Men ought always to pray, and not to faint."

He gives the illustration of the unjust judge: “There was in a city a certain judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man. And a certain widow woman came in, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And though he would not for a while, she continued coming. And finally he said to himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man, lest this woman continually come and weary me, I will avenge her.”

Notice that the judge was not interested in justice. He was only interested in himself. He said, “Though I fear not God, nor regard man.” So the man or woman who refuses the Lord Jesus Christ cannot please God in any way whatsoever. Consequently, they become the adversary and opponent of all men, especially anyone who is good and holy and wants to do that which is right. The unjust judge was not interested in justice; he was only interested in himself. It is only in regeneration and conversion that God enables us to have the ability to begin to please God.

Regeneration Enables Pleasing God

In other words, He gives us not only a new disposition and a new mind, but also the ability to please Him. Hebrews 10:15–17 says: “Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us: for after that he had

said before, This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more."

He says He is going to put His law in our hearts—that is, teach us to love and honor it. But He also says, "and in their minds will I write them." "Dianoia" happens to be the word for minds. In other words, He gives us the ability to comprehend and understand the laws He has written in our minds.

Enoch: A Life That Pleased God

Now, here's what I want you to note. Since you're in Hebrews, look in chapter 11 verse 5 again, because here's what he said concerning Enoch: "By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony"—look at this testimony—"that he pleased God." Now we know that Enoch walked with God, and we know that Enoch pleased God. If you would turn in your Bibles to the book of Genesis chapter 5, you will see beginning there verse 21 what is said concerning Enoch. I want you to look at this. Genesis chapter 5 verse 21: "And Enoch lived sixty and five years, and begat Methuselah: and Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah three hundred years, and begat sons and daughters: and all the days of Enoch were three hundred sixty and five years: and Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him." Notice, "and Enoch walked with God, and he was not; for God took him." Now, undoubtedly, Enoch walked with God prior to the birth of Methuselah.

But after the birth of Methuselah, the walk with God was far closer, more dedicated, and more devoted. Let me give you a quick quote from Matthew Poole. Matthew Poole says it like this concerning Enoch: "He lived as one whose eye was continually upon God, whose care and constant course and business it was to please God and to imitate Him, and to maintain acquaintance and communion with him, as one devoted to God's service, wholly governed by his will."

"He walked not with the men of that wicked age, or as they walked, but being a prophet and a preacher, as may be gathered from Jude, with great zeal and courage he protested and preached against their evil practices and boldly owned God in his ways in the midst of them." Now, if you would hold Genesis 5, also Hebrews 11, but I want you to turn to the book of Jude, which is right before the book of Revelation, and you will find in verses 14 and 15, Enoch is mentioned with his preaching and prophesying. So notice if you would, Jude verse 14: "And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all." Now remember, Enoch lived before the flood. "To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him." Wow. So Enoch then was an individual who undoubtedly preached and prayed.

Consider the extreme wickedness in which Enoch lived and preached against. Genesis 6:5 says, “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. And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. And the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them.”

There are five observations from this text concerning Enoch walking with God. This is the first and foremost observation concerning Enoch’s walking with God in that generation. God always has His preachers, even in the most dangerous, perilous, wicked, and difficult times. God is not going to leave Himself without witness. There were godly men during this particular time: Seth, Methuselah, Jared, Enoch, and Noah.

Regardless of how dangerous or wicked things become, God is always going to have a preacher. He will always have men who stand up for Him, teach that which is right, and speak against that which is

wrong. Enoch lived in this exceedingly wicked time, when God was ready to wipe everybody off the face of the earth.

Observations from Enoch's Walk

The second thing that we should observe here is this: this truth verifies that God's grace was prevalent and sufficient even in the darkest of times. These men that I just mentioned were saved by grace, not by works. One of the most dangerous heresies ever taught—and I heard it all my life as a child—is that those in the Old Testament were saved by works, while those in the New Testament were saved by grace. But that is certainly a flat-out lie. No one in either Testament was ever saved by works.

It is absolutely heretical to say that. The reason we know it is that Romans 8:7 and 8 says: "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God."

Now look back in your Bibles to Hebrews chapter 11. This chapter gives us a large number of Old Testament saints, and because it is the great chapter on faith, it is obviously not the great chapter on works. Look at verse 40. What is said of all these Old Testament saints? In fact, let us read verse 39: "And these all"—that is, all of those mentioned in Hebrews 11—"and these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise"—that is, the fulfillment of the promise. Then he says this: "God having provided some better thing for

"That they without us should not be made perfect." So here is what I want you to see: we are joining them; they are not joining us. In other words, all of those in the Old Testament were saved by grace through faith, just as we are in the New Testament.

Here is the third observation. We are talking about the fact that Enoch walked with God. Neither marriage nor a family is a hindrance to walking with God and pleasing Him. Although work and provision are necessary, and although the time required for that work is consuming, having a wife and children is no deterrent from walking with the Lord and pleasing Him. In fact, the emphasis in this passage shows that having a wife and children intensifies the

motivation to walk with God and to please Him. There is a positive influence: Enoch walked with God, and after he begat Methuselah, he walked with God even more closely.

The fourth observation is this: we are taught by Enoch the absolute necessity of consistency in our lives. Enoch lived sixty-five years and begat Methuselah. Three hundred years after that, he walked with God. Undoubtedly, he walked with God before the birth of Methuselah. But can you imagine being faithful, consistent, and constant for 365 years? He was faithful with God until God took him. One of our greatest weaknesses and failures as Christians is our inconsistency. One of our greatest failures is our unfaithfulness. Old Dr. Bob Jones, Sr., used to say, "The greatest ability is dependability." That is a fact.

Let me show you how inconsistent we really are. Think about church, the public worship of God, and the public preaching of the Word of God. It is absolutely astounding how easily most professing Christians are willing to lay out of church. "I can't go today because I stumped my big toe yesterday, and it still hurts." I have often wanted to do this: just not go to church on Sunday morning. Just not show up. Everyone else is at church, and they call me: "I'm sorry, I just couldn't make it today because company came in yesterday, and I have to take care of my company." That is what people do. I have had company as well, and I give them a choice: "You may go to church with me, or you may stay home by yourself." It is just that simple.

We get busy, and so we do not read our Bible. We do not study; it simply falls by the wayside. We might read our Bible for two or three days straight and then miss it for a week or two. Look how inconsistent we are in our prayer life. By the way, you can have a prayer life all day long. You can pray all day long. You do not have to be on your knees twenty-four hours a day. You can pray in your mind, you can pray as you drive, and you can pray as you do many things. I am simply pointing out the fact that one of our greatest failures is our inconsistency and our unfaithfulness.

First Corinthians, chapter 4, verses 1 and 2, gives us an astounding truth: "Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of God, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful." Every one of us, each one of

us, is a steward. We are stewards of whatever God has given us—not just physically, not just economically, but concerning truth, concerning His grace, and concerning His mercy. It is required that a man be found faithful.

If you listen to the world define success, it will tell you that success is greatness. Success is having the biggest church in the country or the biggest church in your state, the most people in attendance, the largest bank account, or the biggest following. No. According to God, success is faithfulness. Look at the people who are in Hebrews chapter 11. Noah is there. Noah preached for 120 years and never had a convert.

Jeremiah is there, and Isaiah is there. Those men were totally, absolutely ignored. I am simply pointing out the fact that success, according to the Word of God, is faithfulness. It is not greatness. What we see in the life of Enoch is absolute faithfulness exhibited for 365 years.

The fifth thing, based upon Genesis 5 and Hebrews 11:5, is that our Heavenly Father loves fellowship and communion. He loves fellowship and communion. Years ago, I preached a message titled "Giving God Pleasure," and I asked in that message this question: Have you ever considered what gives God pleasure? Let me put it to you like this: What gives you pleasure?

We have pleasure in our children and grandchildren. As you age and get older, you think back on all the good times that you had with your children or with your grandchildren. I could sit here for hours telling you things about my grandchildren and my children. In fact, I usually tell people, you love your children, but grandchildren are special. I have said before, if you hurt one of my girls, I could hurt you very badly. But if you mess with my grandchildren, I could chew you up and spit you out and smile while I did it. I love them, and I love fellowship with them.

I remember calling one of my daughters, one of the twins, and asking, "When are y'all coming over?" She said, "Well, Daddy, we just can't right now. We've got this and we've got that. This is planned, and that is planned, and we just can't come right now." I said, "Sweetheart, let's just cut to the chase. I don't care whether you

come or not. Just send the grandkids." She said, "Daddy!" Well, let's be honest: grandchildren are special. I understand that, and I love to be with them and love to be around them.

God loves His children, and He loves the fellowship and communion with His children. Look in Psalm 147 and notice verses 10 and 11. Psalm 147:10-11 says: "He"—and the "he" here refers to God. Verse 1 says, "Praise ye the Lord: for it is good to sing praises unto our God." Verse 2 says, "The Lord doth build up Jerusalem." The "he" all the way down is talking about God. So he says in verse 10, "He"—that is God—"delighteth not in the strength of the horse: he taketh not pleasure in the legs of a man. The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy." God takes pleasure in those that fear Him, that is His

In Psalm 149:4 we read, "For the Lord taketh pleasure in his people: he will beautify the meek with salvation." The Lord taketh pleasure in His people.

Now here is an interesting thing. We read in Genesis chapter 5, "And Enoch walked with God." What is it to walk with God? We cannot knock on the door and say, "Lord, I'm fixing to walk around the block. Would You like to walk with me?" So what is it to walk with the Lord? When you get to Hebrews 11, it says that he pleased God. Walking with God and pleasing God happen to be synonymous. They are the same things, because if you are walking with God, you are pleasing God. If you are pleasing God, you are walking with God, because you are doing that which is agreeable unto Him.

Walking with God is Pleasing God

In 1 Thessalonians 4:1, the apostle Paul states, "Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more." He combines walking and pleasing. They are synonymous: if you are walking with God, you are pleasing God; if you are pleasing God, you are walking with Him.

In Colossians 1:10, Paul says, "That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God." How are you walking worthy of

the Lord? Unto all pleasing. You please Him by walking worthily—that is, walking obediently, walking with Him, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God.

Colossians 2:6 says, “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him.” How did you receive Him? You received Him in faith, willingly, gladly, and obediently. In other words, just the way you received Him, He said, so walk ye in Him.

Walking with God Pleases God

In 1 John 1:6-7 we read: "If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin."

For someone who tells me that he is in fellowship with God, yet is disobedient, rebellious, recalcitrant, and will not listen, God says that individual is walking in darkness and has no fellowship with Him. But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

First John 2:6 says, "He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked." If we claim to be Christians and to be abiding in Jesus Christ, we should walk even as He walked. We should walk in obedience. We should walk in faith. We should walk for the honor and glory of our Heavenly Father. In other words, if we are in Him, we should walk even as He walked.

Second John, verse 6, says: "And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it." What is love? What is walking in the light? It is walking after His commandments. That is the way that we should walk.

It is pleasing to God to walk after His law, to obey His commandments, and to submit to His truth. It is pleasing to God that you obey Him in all His statutes and all His commandments, because all these things are agreeable to Him and therefore please Him. Walking with God is synonymous with pleasing God. Here is the sixth thing.

Enoch's Advantage and Our Greater Privilege

This is astounding to me. Enoch attained this state of spiritual excellence in a time when, comparatively speaking, there were very few helps and no written revelation. He was the seventh from Adam! I hope you cannot help but see and admire the grace of God given to these individuals, and especially to Enoch, which allowed him to walk with God and please God in an age that was absolutely, totally, completely corrupt, with no spiritual help, so to speak—no church, no Bible studies, no recordings, nothing, and no written revelation. Think about that.

If anyone could walk with God in the worst of times, without spiritual helps or a written revelation, why in the world can we not walk with God? Why can we not please Him when we have millions of times over that which Enoch had? Let me show you. Look back in your Bibles to Hebrews chapter 1, beginning with verse 1: "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners"—that is, different ways—"spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets." He did use dreams, trances, and a number of things in the Old Testament. However, verse 2 says, "Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high."

Now we have the fullness and the finality of God's divine revelation in Jesus Christ. They knew about the prophesied coming of Christ in the Old Testament, but they did not have Him. We have Him.

Consider 2 Timothy chapter 3, verses 16 and 17: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect"—that is, mature and complete—"throughly furnished unto all good works." Now we have the fullness and finality of Jesus Christ, and we have the fullness and finality of the Word of God.

So let me ask this question again. Why is it that we cannot walk with God and be pleasing to Him in all that we have today, and Enoch had none of these things? And I'll tell you why. Because we put all of our emphasis upon that which is temporal, that which is material, and we are so inconsistent in our lives and so unfaithful in our things that pertain unto God that there's seemingly no pleasing Him in our lives because we're not really thinking about that. You said, "But I've got to work. I've got to make a living." So did Enoch. "But I've got a family and I've got a wife and children." Please. So did Enoch. In fact, if Enoch did not work and take care of his wife and children, he could not have been pleasing unto God. Wow. Now I want you to look back, look back in Hebrews 11 in verse 5. Look at this again. I want you to see this. The Bible says, "By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death.

The Translation of Enoch and Its Implications

and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God."

Now, I want to emphasize this again. There's one little word in verse 5 that is very, very important. Here it is: "By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God." And in the words, he was consistent. He was constant. He was continual. Now, when you look back in Genesis 5 and verse 24, the Bible says that God took him. The Hebrew word "took" is the word "laqach," and it means to take, to receive, listen, to take by the hand and carry along. I want you to remember that. It means to take by the hand and to carry along. Now, in Hebrews 11 and verse 5, the Bible tells us that God translated him.

So Enoch was not raptured, and his taking was not even a type or a symbol of rapture. The Greek word for "translated" here is the word "metatithēmi." And it means to transpose two things. That's like if you have a hundred and five bucks in your bank account and you look at it and you transpose it and you think you've got five hundred and one. You just swap places. It's what you've just done. You've transposed those numbers. Well, it means to transpose two

things. It means to put one thing in the place of another. It means transfer and to pass over. So Enoch then was translated. He was just simply taken from earth to heaven. In other words, he swapped places.

I suppose we could use a modern term and say Enoch was teleported. He was on earth, and now he happens to be in heaven. He was translated, for before this translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God. Remember, the Word says God took him. It means to take by the hand and carry along.

Can you imagine this in your mind: Enoch and the Lord are walking along? He walked with God. I realize it was not literally a physical walk, but picture Enoch and God walking side-by-side, just communing, fellowshipping, and talking, having a grand time. All of a sudden Enoch says, "Lord, it's getting late. I didn't realize it was so late. I've got to get home." And the Lord says, "Enoch, we're closer to my home than we are to yours. Why don't you just come spend a few days with me?" And Enoch says, "Yes, I'd like that, Lord."

Now you have to remember, there was no written revelation at that time, so Enoch did not know 2 Peter 3:8: "One day with the Lord is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." Enoch has almost been visiting a week with the Lord now. Stop and think about that. Wow. Isn't that absolutely astounding? We smile at such a thought, but have you ever really thought about this?

In eternity, there are no alarm clocks. There are no schedules. There are no deadlines to meet. There is no time, no hurry. Have you ever stopped to think about that? Think about our loved ones and friends who have gone on. We are talking about something entirely new before us, totally and completely enjoyable: no rushing, just living our lives with our Heavenly Father. If you do not wish to be behind in eternity, now is the time to begin walking with God, pleasing God, being pleasing unto Him, fellowshipping and communing with Him, because that is basically what eternity will be like. Now is the time to practice up. Now is the time to learn everything that we could learn.

Applications and Challenge

The first application is this: the truth that Enoch was translated from earth to heaven proves one glorious truth: death does not end it all. Death is not an end for the child of God; death is the beginning. There is life after death—real life, eternal life. What did our Lord say in John chapter 10? He said, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one." He gives them eternal life, and they shall never, ever perish. In Enoch, then, we see the immortality of the soul. He was on earth and was also translated into heaven in the very presence of God.

The second application is this: if it was possible for Enoch to walk with God and please God in such a horrendous, dangerous, catastrophic, and wicked time, when he did not have the written revelation of God as we do, why do we not walk with God when we have everything at our disposal? I know our times are bad, but they are not nearly as wicked as the time in which Enoch lived. We have the promises, and we have seen the fulfillment of many of them. We have the Passover Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Consider how Enoch evidently, genuinely pleased God. Abraham was called the friend of God, but he was not translated. David was a man after God's own heart, but he was not translated. Josiah, Hezekiah, and all the godly kings and men in Scripture were not translated. Enoch was the one man who was translated, and the emphasis was that he pleased God. He pleased Him in submission, obedience, fellowship, and communion.

I do not believe it is possible to live a sinless life on this earth. We are sinners. But while it is not possible to live a sinless life, it is possible to live a life without continually sinning. First John 2:1 says, “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not.” We do not have to sin. We do sin. We lose our temper and our patience. We are not running around murdering and committing adultery and fornication, but there are many things we do that we do not have to do.

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 bodies, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.” He did not say, “Let not sin therefore be in your mortal bodies.” He said, “Let it not reign.” Sin does not reign in us; Jesus Christ is to reign in us. When sin comes our way, we can say, “No, thank you. Rather bow to the Lord Jesus Christ. You’re not my lord.”

While it is not possible to live a perfectly sinless life on this earth, it is possible to live a life with a lot less sin if we will simply be obedient to the Word of God. Colossians 3 says, “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.”

Enoch was translated, but before his translation he had this testimony: he pleased God. In 1 Corinthians 16:15, Paul writes, “I beseech you, brethren, (ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints.)” I have threatened for the longest to preach a message on Christian addictions.

They have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints. What does that mean? The word for “addicted” is the Greek word “tassō.” It means to put in order, to station, to place in a certain order, to arrange, to assign a place, and to appoint. Look at verse 15: “For they have arranged, they have assigned, they have appointed a station to the ministry of the saints.” I am going to use another word, one that you and I will recognize: “I beseech you, brethren, ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have prioritized themselves to the ministry of the saints.” In other words, nothing was going to get in the way of ministering to the saints. They were going to do that. It would be done. Nothing was going to get in their way. Ministering to the saints was first in their lives, and they made sure that it was first.

We have to do the same thing if we are going to walk pleasing to the Lord. We have to have a heavenly addiction: we must prioritize our lives around honoring, worshiping, communing, and

fellowshipping with God, even while we are working or doing other things. We can think, pray, beseech our Lord, and worship while we are driving, washing dishes, or doing anything else. Our minds are to be stayed upon Him. Whatever we are doing, we can ask the Lord's blessing upon it, His help in it, and His direction. We can become addicted to fellowshipping and communing with Him. We have the Lord Jesus Christ, the written Word of God, and the Holy Spirit of God. There is no reason for you and me not to walk pleasing unto Him.

Except for our own unfaithfulness and inconsistencies, we concern ourselves more with temporary and material things than with spiritual and eternal things. If Enoch could walk with God in the wicked, ungodly world in which he lived, it should be a piece of cake for us. I challenge you to become addicted to walking with God and pleasing Him. Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him. Before his translation, he had this testimony: he pleased God. Would that not be a testimony worthy of each one of us—that we pleased God?

Closing Prayer

Father, thank You again for the Lord Jesus Christ. Help us to see how desperately we need You, how much we are destroying our lives by failing to commune and fellowship with You, how much we are missing, and how much we may be displeasing You. Help us to be pleasing and to walk with You: humbly, obediently and submissively, believingly, and honoring You. Enable us to bring our lives into greater conformity to Your Word. May we say, as the Lord Jesus Christ said in John 8:29, "The Father is with me, he hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him." May we do those things which please You.

Give us Your grace and mercy. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 26

Are You Just Like Him?

Introduction: The Question of Resemblance

Genesis 5:1 says, “This is the book of the generations of Adam. In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made he him; male and female created he them; and blessed them, and called their name Adam, in the day when they were created. And Adam lived a hundred and thirty years, and begat a son in his own likeness, and after his image; and called his name Seth.”

So here are two questions: Who do you resemble? And who are you like? Each one of us has seen children who looked exactly like their father or exactly like their mother. Sometimes we see children who resemble both father and mother in different ways. We use expressions especially regarding a son: he is “a spitting image of his father” or “a chip off the old block.” Usually, for a young girl, we would say she is the twin of her mother or something like that.

Interestingly enough, I have been to a lot of churches in America and preached in plenty of them. When I am preaching, especially in a new church where I do not know the people, I sit on the platform with the pastor before the introduction and preliminaries, and I play

a mental game. I look at men and women, boys and girls—sometimes they are not sitting together—and try to say, "Well, that woman belongs to that man, and those kids belong to that husband and wife over there." Before the week is over and I get to know most of the people, I am probably about 95 percent correct. The reason is that as husbands and wives grow older, they become more and more alike. Sometimes they even begin to look alike. But if Alice starts growing a beard, I am going to be concerned.

They do look alike, and the children look like the parents. It is easy sometimes to put them together. I like to joke with new parents, especially when they have a little boy or even a little girl. I will look at the child and say, "Wow, that child got his good looks from his father." I wait for the father to smile, and then say, "I know he got his good looks from the father, because the mother still has hers." But the children resemble the parents, and we resemble our parents as well. Now, I want you to look in verse one again.

The Two Likenesses in Genesis 5

I gave you that introduction for a reason. "This is the book of the generations of Adam. In the day that God created man"—look at this—"in the likeness of God made he him." Now when you look in verse 3, after the fall, after Adam was driven from the garden, "And Adam lived 130 years, and begat a son in his own likeness, after his image; and called his name Seth."

So I want you to note that. This question again: Who are you like? And whose likeness and whose image do you resemble? Do you resemble more the sovereign majesty of God as God created man in the beginning? Or do you resemble Adam more after he was driven from the garden and was now a fallen creature?

As I read through the book of Genesis sometime back again, I was intrigued with these words, "likeness" and "image." I tried to look at them as they are used in the Bible. Have you ever wondered why we were given these two truths side by side in Genesis chapter 5, verse 1, how that God created man in the likeness of God made he him? And then verse 3, after Adam sinned, he begat a son in his own likeness after his own image.

So when you look at verse 1, he says, “This is the book of the generations of Adam. In the day that God created man”—that refers you back to Genesis 1 and verse 26: “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.”

Man as God's Masterpiece

John Trapp, an old Puritan, said, “Man is the masterpiece of God's handiwork. Sun, moon, and stars are but the work of his fingers, but man is the work of his hands. He is made of divine nature, made by counsel at first, ‘Let us make,’ and his body, which is but soul's sheath.”

You do not have a soul. You are a soul. Your body is just the covering of your soul. That is why Trapp said the body is a sheath, a covering for the soul. He continues, “And his body, which is but the soul's sheath, is still curiously wrought in the lower parts of the earth”—that is, in the womb—“as curious workmen, when they have some choice piece in their hand, they perfect it in private and then bring it forth to the light for all men to gaze at.”

“‘And Thine hands have made me, and fashioned me,’ said Job. ‘Thou hast formed me by thy book,’ said David. Yea, embroidered me with nerves, veins, and variety of limbs. Miracles enough, saith one, between head and foot to fill a volume.”

Galen was one of the early physicians, born in 129 AD. Trapp quotes him: “In the body of man, he says there are 600 muscles and every one fitted for 10 uses. So for bones, nerves, arteries and veins, whosoever observeth their use, situation and correspondency of them cannot but fall into admiration of the wisdom of the Maker who has thus exactly framed all things at first out of nothing and still out of the froth of the blood.”

The Image of God and the God-Man

When you look at Genesis 1:26 and Genesis 5, you have to ask this question: What was it like to be made in the image and likeness of

God? And what is it like to be made in the likeness and image of Adam? How was man made in the image of God? Obviously, it does not refer to a physical image, because we are told in John 4:24 that God is spirit. Moreover, the divine being is infinite; man is finite. But God is not limited by parts nor definable by passions. Therefore, He has no corporeal body. Obviously, then, when we are made like unto God, it is not that we are made in a physical image of God Himself.

Now, when you look in Genesis 1:26 again, "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness"—that is plural. So now we have reference to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Let me make a suggestion. There may be a possibility, in one sense of the word, that, yes, we were made after our physical likeness of God. Let me explain it.

In Proverbs 8, you have wisdom speaking. In this passage you also have wisdom personified, and this is why wisdom is speaking like wisdom is an individual. In verse 1, "Doth not wisdom cry? and understanding put forth her voice?" Note what she does. She stands at the top of high places, by the way, in the places of the paths. Verse 3 says, "She crieth at the gates." Wisdom is speaking, and wisdom is personified.

Now may I remind you that in 1 Corinthians 1, the Bible tells us that Jesus Christ is made unto us wisdom. So Jesus Christ is wisdom personified. In Proverbs 8:22, "The LORD possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old." Verse 23 says, "I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was." We are talking about Jesus Christ the mediator, Jesus Christ the God-man. He was set up to be the mediator, to be the Messiah, and to be the God-man from the beginning, or ever the earth was.

We know that is the truth because of Hebrews 13:20–21, where we read of the eternal covenant made between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

Now look in verse 24. He says, “When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth: while as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world.” Now think about this: What is

the highest part of the dust of the world? I was teaching a Bible class in a junior Christian school, junior high, and asked, “What is the highest part of the dust of the world?” Some child raised his hand and said, “Mount Everest.” No. What are you and I made out of? Dust. So we are the highest part of the dust of the world. He is talking about the time before we were made.

Now watch this, verse 27: “When he prepared the heavens, I was there: when he set a compass upon the face of the depth: when he established the clouds above: when he strengthened the fountains of the deep: when he gave to the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment: when he appointed the foundations of the earth.”

Look what the Messiah says: “Then I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him.” Then, “Rejoicing in the habitable part of the earth”—but remember, this is before the earth was ever made—“and my delights were with the sons of men.”

If all of this is set up and Jesus Christ is being set up before the world ever began, how could His delights be with the sons of men? In order to answer that, turn to Hebrews chapter 2. If Jesus Christ is wisdom personified and was set up before the world ever began as the God-man and as a mediator, could it be possible that we were made after His likeness?

Hebrews chapter 2, beginning in verse 10: “For it became him”—we are talking about Jesus Christ—“for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren.”

Hebrews says, "In the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee. And again, I will put my trust in him. And again, Behold I and the children which God hath given me." When were we given to Jesus Christ? Ephesians 1 tells us it was before the foundation of the world. Therefore, He was rejoicing in us before the foundation of the world. Hebrews continues: "Forasmuch then as the children are

partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil." The God-man, the mediator, was set up before the foundation of the world. We were given to Him before the foundation of the world, and He took part of our nature, flesh and blood, because we were flesh and blood.

But were we created in His image in that sense? The Hebrew word for "likeness" is damah, meaning to be like and to resemble. Thus, it is possible that we were made in the image of the God-man, the mediator. Clearly, however, "likeness" must also refer to purity, moral excellence, and intelligence. How was Adam created? He was created with original righteousness, original holiness, and knowledge. We know this because Adam walked and talked with God; one must be righteous, holy, and knowledgeable to do that. Moreover, the Bible tells us that Adam named all the animals.

Original Righteousness, Holiness, and Knowledge

Now let me explain that. The Hebrew word is the word shem, but Adam didn't look around and see this cow with horns pushing another cow around and say, "Ah, I'll name her Old Bossy. She likes to have her way." And, "Oh, there's a big bull, I'll name him Hampton." No, that's not what Adam was doing. When Adam was naming the animals, basically, he was scientifically classifying those animals. And he was looking at that animal and reading out of that animal the purpose for which God created that animal. In other words, he was actually reading out of that animal everything that God had created in that animal and for that purpose. And then thirdly, the reason we know this is because the Bible tells us this specifically. Now I want you to go back to Genesis chapter 9. You remember the fall. You remember the fact that Adam was driven out of the garden. Man became totally, absolutely depraved. But look at what the Bible says in Genesis 9 and verse 6. This is after the fall. Look at this. This is even after the flood. God says in verse 6, "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man."

So even though man is sinful, and even though man is fallen, in some degree, in some way, he still retains the image of God. So let

me explain this in another way. Murder is not just an attack upon man; it's an attack upon God himself. So if I were to turn around and murder Clay, it's not just that I hate Clay. I hate God who made Clay. In other words, you can't murder a man without hating him in the strictest sense of the word. You may not think that you hate him, but you do, or you will not take his life. But it's not just an attack and a hatred of that man. It is an attack and a hatred of God himself. And of course, Genesis 9:6 totally verifies this point. Now we are made in the likeness of God originally, and Adam in our sin.

Two Men: Adam and Christ

Martin Luther, the reformer, said, "There are only two men in the world and everyone else hangs from their girdle." Those two men would be Adam and Christ. What he is saying is that you are either in Adam or in Christ. You either resemble and are like the image and likeness of Adam, or you resemble and are like the image that is in Jesus Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 15, beginning with verse 44 and talking about the resurrection body, Paul says, "It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body." Each of us sitting here today is in a natural body. We will receive a glorified spiritual body when we see the Lord. Now watch verse 45: "And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul."

"The last Adam"—that is Jesus Christ—"was made a quickening spirit. Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual."

In verse 47, Paul says: "The first man"—that is Adam—"is of the earth, earthy: and the second man is the Lord from heaven." Then he says, "As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly." And in verse 49: "And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly."

We are going to have someone's image or someone's likeness. We will either be like Adam or we will be like Christ. The passage sets before us these two men and the likeness associated with each one. Colossians 1:14-15 says, "In whom we have redemption through his

blood, even the forgiveness of sins: who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature." Here we are talking about Jesus Christ. The word "image" here is the Greek word eikon. It refers to an image, a figure, a likeness, and a moral likeness, and it refers both to fallen man and to Jesus Christ.

Christ as the Express Image of God

In verse 15, Jesus Christ is the eikon, that is, He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature. We could say it like this, and not be irreverent: Jesus Christ is the spitting image of God, because Jesus Christ is God. In other words, this word is used not only to designate our Lord's divinity but also its moral excellence as well.

John 1:1-3 says, "In the beginning was the Word"—Logos, which is talking about Jesus Christ—"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made." Jesus Christ is called the Word: "In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

Verse 14 says, "And the Word became 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." The Word is made flesh, and it is the glory of God.

In 1 Timothy 3:16, "And without controversy"—no arguing about this—"without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, seen of angels, preached on in the world, believed on by the Gentiles, and received up into glory."

So we have that Jesus Christ is the image of God. Hebrews 1:2-3 says that God "hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person."

"And upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high." In this passage, Jesus Christ is called the express image of God. He is God in the flesh exactly. If you want to see God,

look at Jesus Christ. The Greek word translated "express image" is charakter, from which we get our English word "character." It means an exact expression, a precise reproduction in every area. Jesus Christ, then, is God in the flesh.

Now go back to the book of John, chapter 14. You have to see first the question of Thomas and then the request of Philip. Our Lord says, "And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know." Thomas saith unto him, "Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?" Jesus saith unto him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him." Philip saith unto him, "Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us." Jesus saith unto him, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?"

Jesus Christ is saying, "I am God in the flesh." That is why He could say in John 10:30, "I and my Father are one." Jesus Christ is the expressed image of God, the character of God. He is therefore God in the flesh. According to the Bible, those who deny that Jesus Christ is God, and those who deny that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, are antichrists and are not saved. If you turn to 1 John, chapter 2, verses 22 and 23, it is said specifically: 1 John

“Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ?”—the Messiah, the mediator, the God-man. “He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son. Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: but he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also.” If you deny that Jesus Christ is the Son, the Messiah, you are an antichrist and you have not the Father.

Who are you like? What image is predominant and prevalent in your life? Who do you more resemble? Do you resemble Adam in his image and his likeness after the fall, or do you resemble the Lord Jesus Christ in his image and his likeness? Both Adam and Jesus Christ have an image and a likeness. The Word of God tells us that Adam is of the earth, earthy. Christ is of heaven, and therefore He is heavenly.

The truth is that each of us happens to be born with the image and likeness of Adam. We resemble him by nature—not only in our thoughts, but in our conduct and actions. Adam and his progeny are depraved. They are natural, earthly, fleshly, carnal, and rebellious. They are lovers of the world and haters of God. They despise God and God's law, and they want to be a law unto themselves.

Our Natural State in Adam

Ephesians chapter 2, verses 1 through 3, says, “And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in times past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: among whom also we all had our conversation in times past.” This is rebellion, lust, and wickedness. We all did that in time past.

That is what we are by nature. Romans chapter 8 says, “If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die.” It tells us why: “For the carnal mind”—the fleshly mind—“is enmity against God: and it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.” “So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.”

First Corinthians 2:14 says, “But the natural man”—the unsaved man, the man by nature—“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.”

The truth of the matter is that each of us was born physically in the image and likeness of Adam. That is, we are—or were—totally depraved, totally lost, and unable to please God in any manner. By nature, we are just like Adam; we resemble him.

How do we get the image and likeness of Jesus Christ? That is answered for us in Romans chapter 8, verses 29 and 30: “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. 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.”

How We Receive Christ's Image

How do we get the image of Jesus Christ? Look back at verse 29. “Foreknow,” or choose, is followed by this: “he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son.” So, how do we get the image and likeness of Christ? The first answer is by God’s sovereign act of predestination. Secondly, it is by God’s calling us to himself. In verse 30, he says, “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.”

We must understand that when the Bible talks about justification, in this section it is a broad term. It includes adoption; it includes regeneration; it includes conversion; and it includes all the acts of mercy that God does for us and gives us. It is God, then, who changes us and works in us His good pleasure, for our good and for His glory.

We had everything in Adam, and we lost it. Now God has brought forth the last Adam, the second man. Jesus Christ is called the last Adam and the second man. Why is He called the second man? We know that He was before the foundation of the world, but He is the second man chronologically in time and history to sustain a federal headship and representation of a people. Adam was the first man. Whatever Adam did, we did. When Adam sinned, we sinned; when Adam fell, we fell.

Someone says, "Well, I don't like it because if I had been there, I would not have done what Adam did." Yes, you would have. But if you don't like the very fact of representation—that we were in Adam, sinned in him, and fell in him—then you won't like salvation, because that's how salvation is. We're in Jesus Christ. He is our representative and our head. What He did, we did. When He died, we died; when He arose from the dead, we arose from the dead. We ascended, and when He sat down on the right hand of God the Father, we sat down with Him. In other words, He is our head.

He's called the last Adam because there's never ever going to be any other way of salvation, nor another individual who will be the federal head and representative of a people. It is impossible for you and me to save ourselves. We're either in Adam or we are in Christ.

When Adam came forth from the hand of God, God had created him with original righteousness, knowledge, and holiness. What God created Adam, He created him mutable, and that means he was changeable. Only God is immutable. He created Adam with perfect righteousness, holiness, and knowledge, but put him on a mutable footing. Adam could change, and he did change. He sinned against God.

The Impossibility of Self-Change and the New Creation

We now have more in Jesus Christ than we ever lost in Adam. We got back everything that we lost in Adam in Jesus Christ, plus.

Jeremiah 13:23 shows why it is impossible for men to change themselves. God asks a question and then makes a statement: "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?" Then He says, "Then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil." Is it possible for an Ethiopian to willingly change the color of his skin? The answer is no. Is it possible for a leopard to change his spots? The answer is no. God says that if that is impossible, then likewise it is impossible for you to do good when you are accustomed to do evil, when you have evil as a habitual manner in thought and conduct. It is impossible.

Now, that means this. You say, "Can man change?" Yes, in one sense of the word, but he cannot change his status before God. He could change his looks. He could grow a beard or shave his beard. He could gain weight or lose weight. He could have plastic surgery and change some things. He might even change his attitude. But that's not pleasing God. That's not acceptable to God. Scripture is speaking of man's inability to change himself and make himself pleasing and acceptable unto God.

However, thankfully, thankfully, God is sovereign and omnipotent. He has all power, and God is able to change us. Listen to this: He is able to make us a new creature in Jesus Christ. Second Corinthians chapter 5, verse 17 says, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." Now here's the interesting thing. The word

"creature" is actually "creation." Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation.

"Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." So when God, in His grace and mercy, makes us a new creature in Jesus Christ, the first thing He does is restore to us everything we lost in Adam.

Ephesians 4:20 says, "But ye have not so learned Christ; if so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus." Verse 22 says that we are to "put off concerning the former conversation"—or conduct—"the old man"—that is, the man in Adam—"which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts." Then verse 23 says, "And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." What did Adam have at the beginning? He had righteousness and holiness.

Transformation and Maturity

Note the word "renewed" in verse 23: "And be renewed in the spirit of your mind." The Greek word is ananeoo, made up of two words: the preposition ana and the root word neos. Ana means "in the midst," "among," or "between," while neos means "recently born, youthful, young, and new." So we are to be youthful, young, and new in our minds. What does this tell us? When God saves us, He gives us a new mind, one that can now understand the thoughts of God and the will of God. It is a new mind, a mind that is not corrupted by nature.

A good illustration is found in children when they are born. They have a new mind. They have not seen and heard everything that you and I, as adults, have seen and heard. Their mind is fresh; their mind is new. That is exactly what this word means. When God saves us, He gives us a new mind. He gives us a clean mind. Yes, we still have the old mind, but He gives us a new one.

Verse 24 says, "And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." The word "created" is ktizo, meaning to make habitable, to create. It means to completely change and transform. God says that we are to put on this new man,

which is completely transformed and remade in true righteousness and holiness.

Romans 12, verses 1 and 2, says, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God. 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.”

First of all, he says we are not to be conformed to this world, and that means to be pressed into the mold of the world. When you look around and examine government education and public education, what are they trying to do? They are trying to make everybody into one mold—to think alike, act alike, and live alike. What is propaganda all about? The same thing: to control us, to press us into a mold.

He says, “Be not conformed to this world,” or be pressed into the mold of the world, “but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind.” The interesting thing is the word “transformed.” The Greek word is metamorphoo, from which we get our English word metamorphosis. A butterfly starts out as a caterpillar and then develops into a butterfly. It goes through stages.

This word “transformed” is also used in Matthew 17:2 and Mark 9:2, when Jesus went up into a mount and was transfigured before them. He was transformed. He went up, and all they could see was a man; but when He was transformed, or transfigured, His glory as God shone through.

So this is what He is saying: We are not to be pressed into the mold of the world, but we are to be transformed by the renewing of our mind. The word “renew” actually means a renewal, a renovation, a complete change for the better. You have been going through a renovation, have you not? And it will be a complete change.

If I had a room in which the floor was sagging and the wall was creaking and cracking a little, I might have someone undergird the foundation, replace the floor, replace the wall, and redo it. In other words, it would now be something totally transformed, something totally different from what it was before. It is a renewal; it is a

renovation. The root word for this, kainos, means something new, recently made, fresh, unused, unworn, or new of a kind.

According to Scripture, when God saves us, He gives us back what we lost in Adam. He gives us back true righteousness and holiness. Look in your Bibles to the book of Colossians, chapter 3 and verse 10. In fact, let us read verse 9, so you can see this: "Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him."

The word "renewed" here is similar to a word in Ephesians 4. It means to cause to grow up, to make new, or to be changed into a new kind of life as compared to the former corrupt state. Look at verse 10 again: "And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him." Let me tell you about the word "knowledge." The noun is the Greek word gnosis. The Gnostics were people who believed in salvation through knowledge. They believed that you could only be saved if you had their knowledge. The verb is ginosko, which means, "I know."

When you put an alpha, or an "a," in front of a Greek word, it negates it. Thus agnosco means, "I don't know." That is where we get our word "agnostic." An agnostic is someone who does not know whether he knows anything or not. But the word used here for "knowledge" is not gnosis; it is epignosis. The difference is this: gnosis would simply be knowledge. I might know that a motor runs, that it has spark plugs and cylinders, and that it has this or that, yet I cannot fix it. I do not know anything about it. But since Steve is a mechanic, he has precise knowledge.

He knows how to take it apart. He knows how to put it back together. The word epignosis here means that when God regenerated and converted us, He gave us a mind that we may have precise knowledge concerning Him. In other words, it is a theological knowledge. We do not know everything about God. You would have to be God to know everything about God. But it does mean this: what He shows us from His word is very, very precise, and we can be genuine theologians. And the word theology means the knowledge of God.

Although Psalm 69 was written by David, it is a reference to the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, especially verse 4. “They that hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of mine head: they that would destroy me, being mine enemies wrongfully, are mighty: then I restored that which I took not away.” When Scripture says, “They that hate me without a cause,” Jesus Christ says specifically in John 15:25, “They hated me without a cause.” So this verse is applied directly to Jesus Christ in the New Testament. But look at the last part: “Then I restored that which I took not away.” What did Jesus Christ restore?

Righteousness, holiness, knowledge. He did not take them away, but He restored them. When God created Adam with original righteousness, holiness, and knowledge, He created Adam on a mutable footing. Adam could fall. Adam could sin and would lose everything that God gave him, and he did. But in Jesus Christ, we are on an immutable footing. We cannot lose the person and work of Jesus Christ, because Jesus Christ is God in the flesh. He has redeemed us. He has reconciled us. His work is absolutely perfect.

Nothing can be added to it and nothing can be taken from it. This, again, tells you about the work of Jesus Christ. Look at 1 Peter, chapter 3 and verse 18: “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.” Note this phrase: “that he might bring us to God.” When Adam and Eve sinned, what did they do after they sinned? They ran from God and hid. In Adam, in his likeness and in his image, we run from God. In Jesus Christ, in His likeness and His image, we run to God. He died, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us back to God. And the Bible tells you in Ephesians 2:18 that the way we pray is to the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit.

Of course, our Lord said in John 14, “No man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” So Jesus Christ died to bring us back to the Father. He is the one way by which we come to the Father, and He brings us back to God.

Now turn to Matthew 5. Our Lord has been teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. He says in verse 44, “But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate

you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust."

"For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so?" Verse 48 says, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." He said in verse 45, "that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven," and then, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." So how many perfect people do we have in this room right now? And the answer would be none.

The word "perfect" here does not mean sinless. We tend to think of being perfect as being sinless, and it is true that in eternity, in glory, we will be sinless. But "perfect," when He says "be perfect," is the Greek word teleios, which means brought to its end, finished, wanting nothing necessary to completeness; what we would call consummate human integrity and virtue—being full-grown, adult, and mature. We are not to be children tossed to and fro. We are to be mature in Him as He is mature.

We are not to have a childish nature. Take a three- or four-year-old child and tell him that the moon is made of green cheese; he will believe you. Tell an adult that, and he will say you are out of your mind. God has given us everything we need to be like Him. That is what Romans 8 is all about, and what 2 Peter 1:3 is about. The Bible says He has given us everything we need for holiness and to do His will. Therefore, if we are to be perfect, even as our Father in heaven is perfect, we have to be mature: mature in righteousness, holiness, knowledge, conduct, and our entire life. Since God has given us everything we need—Christ, His Word, and His Spirit—there are basically no excuses.

Conclusion: Whose Likeness Do You Demonstrate?

The question has to be asked again: Whose likeness do you demonstrate? Whose image do you demonstrate? Is it Adam, or is it Christ? The Bible says in Ephesians 4 that we might grow up in Him.

You are to be mature and complete in Christ, an adult in Christ, and to have the precise knowledge of God that He has revealed to us in His Word. We do not know everything we want to know about God, but we know this: “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 them.” We can have the precise knowledge of God in His Word by His Spirit, and we can be mature and express His likeness in our lives. Here is a prayer request: “Lord, allow me to recognize and to live in Your presence.”

"And Father, be pleased to live in me so others may see Your presence in me." And so the question is, whose likeness are you demonstrating? Whose image are you manifesting? The image of fallen Adam or the image of Jesus Christ? Father, in the name of Jesus, we ask Your grace and Your mercy in our lives. Help us, Lord, to bear the image of Jesus Christ, be conformed to His image. Make us holy, make us godly, make us more obedient, more submissive, more humble, more loving, more kind, more Christian in every aspect of our lives. Give us Your grace and mercy, we pray in Christ Jesus, amen.

CHAPTER 27

The Name of the Lord

Introduction: The Names of God Reveal His Attributes

While the title of this message is “The Name of the Lord,” its impact, or at least its end, is to clarify what it really means to call upon the name of the Lord. It is not my intent to go through the Bible and consider every name of God revealed to us in the Word of God. But let me simply point out that each name of God specifies one of His attributes or some outstanding characteristic concerning God. There are a few names of God that I will cover to show you a little sense of this and how each name reveals something of God’s character and His attributes.

The very first is known as Jehovah Nissi, which you will find in Exodus chapter 17, and it simply means “the Lord our banner.” In Exodus chapter 17, Moses, after his battle with the Amalekites and after his victory over them, built an altar unto the Lord and called it Jehovah Nissi, which means “the Lord my banner,” or “the Lord our banner,” because they had fought the Amalekites under the banner of God. Through His power and by His grace and mercy, God had given them the victory.

Selected Names of God and Their Meanings

The second name I want to mention is Jehovah-Ra'ah, which means "the Lord my shepherd." You will find that in Psalm 23: "The Lord is my shepherd." I never will forget reading about the little girl who was going to quote Psalm 23:1, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." She misquoted it and said, "The Lord is my shepherd, and that's all I want." And that's sufficient, I can assure you. Jehovah-Ra'ah means "the Lord my shepherd." Then there is Jehovah-Rapha, which is "the Lord that heals." You will find that in Exodus chapter 15 and verse 26.

"And said, If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I brought upon the Egyptians. For I am the Lord that healeth thee." So Jehovah-Rapha means, "I am the Lord that healeth thee."

Then there is Jehovah-Shammah, which means "the Lord is there." You will find that in Ezekiel chapter 48 and verse 35, where we are reading about the temple. The Word of God says it was round about 18,000 measures, and the name of the city from that day shall be "the Lord is there." This specifies the presence of God always with His people, especially throughout eternity.

One more name is Jehovah Tsidkenu, "the Lord our righteousness." It is a declaration of God's righteousness in salvation. You will find that in Jeremiah chapter 23 and verse 6. It is also in Jeremiah chapter 26, where the Word of God says, "In his days, Judah shall be saved and Israel shall dwell safely. And this is his name whereby he shall be called, The Lord our righteousness," which means, basically, that we stand in His righteousness alone. We have no righteousness in and of ourselves. Anything that we have is by the grace and mercy of God and the righteousness which we have in Jesus Christ.

Why So Many Names? God Is Indefinable

If you were to go through the Bible, you would find that there are a multitude of names in which God has revealed Himself. That does

not count names like “He is the faithful God” or “He is the just God.” Elohim is one. Adonai is another. El Elyon is another name for God.

So you might ask this question: Why are there so many different names of God in the Bible? The answer I would give, and I believe this is one of the main answers, is because names define. God is indefinable. God is infinite. There is no one name that can identify or define God because He is eternal, majestic, sovereign, and unique.

My first name happens to be John. If you were to find me in a large audience and hollered my name, John, you would get my attention, because that name defines me. You might also get the attention of other men called John, because that name would define them as well.

But God is indefinable, because God is infinite. He cannot be limited, and there is not one name that could describe Him or limit Him in any way. The most prominent name of God in the Bible is Yahweh, or Jehovah, or Yahweh as some would pronounce it. That name occurs in our Bibles 6,510 times. If you add the variance of that name, it is found 6,519 times.

The word actually means “the existing one.” The name Yahweh, or Jehovah, is also found in Genesis 2:4, where it is translated as “Lord.” When you find it there, it is capital L, capital O, capital R, and capital D. Anytime you see the word “LORD” in all capitals, it refers to Yahweh or Jehovah.

The Revelation of the Name Yahweh in Exodus 3

However, the name Jehovah, or Yahweh, was only fully revealed in Exodus chapter 3. There we see the self-existing One. The Bible says, “Now Moses kept the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. And he led the flock to the back side of the desert and came to the mountain of God, even to Horeb. And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush, and he looked, and behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed. And Moses said, I will now turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt. And when the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush and said, Moses, Moses.”

And he said, “Here am I.” I suppose that would be rather a shock—to see a burning bush and hear your name called out of that burning bush. And Moses said, “Here am I.” And he said, “Draw not nigh hither, put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground. And moreover, he said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob.” And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God.

And the Lord said, "I've surely seen the affliction of my people, which were in Egypt and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows. And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land into a good land and a large, unto a land that is flowing with milk and honey, unto the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites."

"Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel is coming to me. Now I've also seen the oppression where the Egyptians oppressed them. Come now, therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt." And Moses said unto God, "Who am I that I should go unto Pharaoh and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?" And he said, "Certainly I will be with thee, and this shall be a token of thee that I have sent thee. When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God upon this mountain."

And Moses said unto God, "Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel and shall say to them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you. They shall say to me, What is his name? And what shall I say unto them?" And God said unto Moses, "I am that I am." And he said, "Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I am hath sent me unto you."

"And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob hath sent me unto you. This is my name forever, Yahweh, Jehovah. And this is my memorial unto all generations."

In our Bibles, this name is given to us as Jehovah or Yahweh. But the name Yahweh comes from four letters, Y-H-W-H. The vowel points are included to make it pronounceable. To be absolutely honest, I don't think we know exactly how the name is pronounced, only because in the third century, the people ceased using this name, out of fear of violating the commandment, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain." Sometimes you will find the word Adonai used then for Yahweh. The word Adonai just simply means "Lord" as well.

In our Bibles, it is translated as “Jehovah” several different times because the Geneva Bible and the King James Bible translated it that way. You will find it in Exodus 6:3, Psalm 83:18, Isaiah 12:2, and Isaiah 26:4. You will also find the word “Jah,” spelled J-A-H, in Psalm 68:4. Thus, it is translated as “Jehovah” four times and simply as “Jah” a fifth time.

The letters YHWH are known as the Tetragrammaton. “Tetra” means four, and “grammaton” means that which is written. Therefore, YHWH stands for the four written letters.

Now look back in your Bibles to Genesis 4:26. “And to Seth, to him also there was born a son, and he called his name Enosh. Then began men to call upon the name of the LORD.” Notice that “LORD” is in all caps. This indicates that it was then that men began to call upon Yahweh. You must ask yourself, “What in the world does it mean to call upon the name of the Lord?”

The True Seed of Abraham Is Spiritual, Not Physical

Before coming to the main part of the message, notice several significant truths. Seth was the son of Adam; therefore, Enosh, as I will explain later, was Adam’s grandson. Eve states plainly that Seth was given as another seed. Genesis 4:25 says, “And Adam knew his wife again, and she bare a son, and called his name Seth. For God, said she, hath appointed me another seed, singular, instead of Abel, whom Cain slew.” Seth had taken the place of Abel. The word “seed” is singular, indicating a particular seed. Abel was the righteous one, while Cain was the wicked one who murdered him. Eve was therefore saying, “God has given me another seed, a particular seed, a singular seed”—and that seed was Seth.

In other words, the godly line was to be carried on through Seth, since Abel now has been murdered. This term “seed” is used by the Apostle Paul in the New Testament to prove particularly who the true seed of Abraham really is. I want to show you that. Hold Genesis forward; we are coming back there. But first, let us turn in our Bibles to the book of John, chapter 8. We will look at a number of passages before we try to expound Genesis 4 and verse 26. Let us begin with verse 31 and read through verse 44.

“Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If you continue in my word, then are you my disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” They answered him, “We be Abraham’s seed, and were never in bondage to any man.” Really? What about the Egyptian captivity? What about the Babylonian captivity? What about the Assyrian captivity? How about all the times they were defeated in the book of Judges? Anyhow, they say, “We were never in bondage to any man. How says thou? You shall be free.”

Jesus answered them, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, whosoever committed sin is a servant of sin. And the servant abideth not in the house forever, but the son abideth forever. If the son, therefore, shall make you free, you shall be free indeed.” Now look what our Lord says in verse 37: “I know that you’re Abraham’s seed,” which would be his physical seed, “but you seek to kill me because my word has no place in you.”

“I speak that which I’ve seen with my father. And you do that which you have seen with your father.” They answered and said unto him, “Abraham is our father.” Jesus said unto them, “If you were Abraham’s children, you would do the works of Abraham. But now you seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God. This did not Abraham. You do the deeds of your father.” Then they said unto him, “We be not born of fornication,” referring to Jesus as being born of fornication. “We have one father, even God.” Jesus said unto them, “If God were your father, you would love me. For I proceeded forth and came from God. Neither came I of myself, but he sent me.”

"Why do you not understand my speech? Even because you cannot hear my word. Here it is. You are of your father, the devil,

and the lust of your father you will do. He was a murderer from the beginning and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own, for he is a liar, and the father of it."

In verse 37, Jesus Christ acknowledges that they are the physical seed of Abraham, but then, in verse 39, He says, "You may be the physical seed, but you are not the children of Abraham." He proceeds in verse 44 to tell them that they are of their father the devil.

This is very important, because it will impact Genesis chapter 4 momentarily. Turn to Romans chapter 9, beginning with verse 6, and notice what the Apostle Paul says. Remember, Paul himself was an Israelite of the tribe of Benjamin. He says, "Not as though the word of God had taken none effect, for they are not all Israel which are Israel."

Stop and think about that: "For they are not all Israel which are of Israel." There is an election within an election. There was the elect nation, but not everybody in that nation was saved. They are not all Israel who are of Israel. Just because you are a physical Israelite does not mean that you are saved. Paul states it plainly: "For they're not all Israel which are of Israel."

If you do not understand verse 6, Paul goes a little further in verse 7: "Neither because they are the seed of Abraham are they all children, but in Isaac shall thy seed be called." If you could provide your lineage and trace it all the way back to Abraham, it would not mean anything: "For in Isaac shall thy seed be called." Verse 8 explains it even further: "That is, they which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted for the seed." Just because someone is of the flesh from Abraham does not mean that he is a child of God whatsoever.

May I remind you that Isaac was the son of Abraham? Isaac had two sons, Jacob and Esau. Moreover, they were twins. Esau was just as much the child of Abraham, or the grandchild of Abraham, as Jacob was. And yet the Scripture says, "Jacob have I loved, and Esau have I hated."

Notice verse 9: "For this is the word of promise. At this time I will come, and Sarah shall have a son. And not only this, but when Rebekah also had conceived by one, even by her father Isaac, for the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God, according to election, might stand not of works, but him that calleth, it was said unto her, the elder shall serve the younger, as it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated."

In other words, both were the grandsons of Abraham. But Esau was rejected, and Jacob was chosen. Isaac was the promised seed to Abraham by God, and it is only through Isaac that we have the promised seed. Ishmael was just as much a child of Abraham as Isaac was.

If you'll turn back in your Bibles and look, if you would, at Genesis chapter 21, Genesis 21, and notice, if you would please, verses 12 and 13. Genesis 21, verses 12 and 13. God has just told Abraham that Isaac is going to be the one that he's chosen. Sarah is casting out Hagar and Ishmael. And so look what he says in Genesis chapter 21. And God said in verse 12, "And God said unto Abraham, Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, the Ishmael, and because of the bondwoman, that be Hagar, and all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice. For in Isaac shall thy seed, singular, be called. And also of the son of the bondwoman I will make a nation, because he is thy seed," that is thy physical seed. So God said, "I'll make a great nation of Ishmael as well. He's your physical seed. But in Isaac shall thy seed be called." I want you to hold Genesis, we're coming right back there, but I want you to turn in your Bibles to the book of Romans chapter 4.

Since our Lord said to those Jews in John chapter 8, "You are not the children of Abraham." What in the world did he mean by that? Well, if you look in your Bibles to the book of Romans chapter 4, and let's begin reading there with verse 11. Romans 4 verse 11. Here's what the Bible says. And this is what it means. Romans 4, verse 11. We're talking about Abraham.

"And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had, yet being uncircumcised." Now look at this. "That he might be the father of all them that

believe." Hmm. Who are his children? "The father of all them that believe. Though they be not circumcised, that righteousness might be imputed unto them also." Now watch verse 12. "And the father of circumcision of them, who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised." So the children of Abraham are those who have the faith of Abraham and those who walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham.

Now, I pointed out that the word "seed" is singular. The Apostle Paul makes that a very important issue, but I want you to look back in your Bibles to the book of Genesis chapter 25, because when you think about Abraham and his seed, physical seed, we normally think of Isaac and we think of Ishmael. What many people do not understand is that Abraham, after Sarah died, remarried.

Abraham married a woman named Keturah. They had children, and Abraham also had children by concubines. Genesis 25:1 records, "Then again, Abraham took a wife, and her name was Keturah. And she bare him Zimran, and Jokshan, and Medan, and Midian, and Ishbak, and Shuah. And Jokshan begat Sheba, and Dedan, and the sons of Dedan, and Asshurim, and Letushim, and Leummim, and the sons of Midian, Ephah, and Epher, and Hanoch, and Abida, and Eldaah. All these were the children of Keturah. And Abraham gave all that he had unto Isaac, but unto the sons of the concubines, which Abraham had. Abraham gave gifts and sent them away from Isaac his son, while he yet lived eastward into the east country." Abraham therefore had many physical seeds, but it was only in Isaac that his seed was to be called.

Now consider Paul's argument in Galatians 3:16: "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not unto seeds as of many, but as of one, and to thy seed which is Christ." Who is the true seed of Abraham? Jesus Christ. To whom were the promises made? To His true seed, Jesus Christ. That is why the Bible says in 2 Corinthians that all the promises of God in Him, that is, in Jesus Christ, are yea and amen to the glory of God the Father.

Galatians 3:29 makes the matter plain: "And if you be Christ's, then are you Abraham's seed, singular, and heirs according to the promise." If you are in Jesus Christ, then you are Abraham's seed

because you are a child of promise, and you are an heir according to the promise. Everything God promised Abraham in Jesus Christ, the true seed, we now inherit. That is why Romans 8 tells us that we are joint heirs with Jesus Christ. Everything God gave Jesus Christ, He gives to us as well. Now, that means this.

Matthew 1:1, the very first verse in the New Testament, says, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." Jesus Christ is the true Son of David. Solomon was only a type; Jesus Christ is to sit on the throne of His father David. Jesus Christ is the true seed of Abraham.

If the children of Abraham are those of faith, those who walk in the steps of Abraham's faith, then those who reject, hate, and despise Jesus Christ are not His children. They are not God's chosen; they are not God's elect. The elect and the chosen are the true seed of Abraham, found only in Jesus Christ. Paul said in Romans 9:8, "They which are the children of flesh, these are not the children of God." Just because someone can say, "My ancestor was Abraham," does not mean one thing. All the promises God gave to Abraham, and the true seed of Abraham, are found in Jesus Christ alone. It is a spiritual seed.

Genesis 4:26: The Birth of Enosh and Calling on the Lord

Now you have to ask yourself this question: What does all of this have to do with calling upon the name of the Lord? Go back to Genesis chapter 4 and look at verse 26: "And to Seth, to him also there was born a son, and he called his name Enosh. Then began men to call upon the name of the Lord."

Before I show you that latter phrase, understand this: only those who are truly saved and of the true seed of Jesus Christ will call upon the name of the Lord. There are people who call upon God out of desperation, agitation, and self-preservation, but they are not calling upon Him in the way the Bible tells us these people began to call upon the name of the Lord.

Every unsaved man, if he is facing death, some horrible sickness, or a car wreck, is immediately going to say, "Lord, help me. Lord,

save me." He realizes imminent death. But that is not necessarily calling upon the name of the Lord, at least not in the sense of Genesis chapter 4 and verse 26. They may call upon a god, but it is not necessarily the God of Scripture. In truth, it would not be the one true, living God, and they would not be calling upon Him from a theological or biblical standpoint or foundation. They would simply be calling.

It is only those who will call who understand their weakness, helplessness, frailty, and depravity. Our Lord ate with publicans and sinners; He ate with harlots. In Matthew chapter 9, the Pharisees asked His disciples, "Why does your Master eat with these publicans and these harlots?" Our Lord answered, "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick."

"Go ye and learn what that meaneth. I will have mercy, not sacrifice. For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

No one is going to go to a doctor unless there is a real, genuine need. So Jesus Christ is saying, "Unless you see yourself lost, helpless, frail, and a sinner, you're never going to come to me." If you think you are self-righteous, if you think you can do without Him, He did not come to call you. He came to call sinners to repentance.

It is truly only those who recognize their own sinfulness, depravity, and helplessness who are going to end up calling. Look back at verse 26: "And to Seth, and to him also, there was born a son, and he called his name Enosh." Seth named his son Enosh. The Hebrew word is actually Enosh, or Enosheh, and it means "mortal, weak, helpless." In naming his son Enosh, Seth defined man: man fallen, man by nature, weak, frail, helpless, and mortal. Now I want to give you a short quote from Keil and Delitzsch in their commentary on the name Enosh.

"Enosh means to be weak, faint, frail, and designates man in his frail and mortal condition. In this name, therefore, the feeling and knowledge of human weakness and frailty were expressed, the opposite of the pride and arrogance displayed by the Canaanite family. This feeling led to God, to that invocation of the name of Jehovah, which commenced under Enosh. Here is a question."

What happened in Genesis chapter 4? Why are we told in verse 26 that it was only after Enosh was born that men began to call upon the name of the Lord? Does this simply mean that people began to pray, praise the Lord, or worship? Certainly, that would probably be included. But what does it mean to call upon the name of the Lord? Let us look at the context.

You remember that Cain murdered Abel. God put a mark upon Cain and sent him away. Genesis 4:16 says, "And Cain went out from the presence of the LORD, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden. And Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bare Enoch. And he built a city, and called the name of the city after the name of his son Enoch. And unto Enoch was born Irad. And Irad begat Mehujael, and Mehujael begat Methusael, and Methusael begat Lamech."

"And Lamech took unto him two wives, the name of the one was Adah and the name of the other Zillah. And Adah bare Jabal, and he was the father of such as dwell in tents and of such as have cattle. And his brother's name was Jubal. He was the father of all such as handle the harp and the organ. And Zillah, she also bare Tubalcain, an instructor of every artificer in brass and iron. And the sister of Tubalcain was Naamah. And Lamech said unto his wives, Adah and Zillah, Hear my voice, ye wives of Lamech, hearken unto my speech, for I have slain a man to my wounding, and a young man to my hurt."

He got into a fight; some man hurt him, and he killed the young man. Then he says, "If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy and sevenfold." In other words, he thought he was worth more than Cain.

"And Adam knew his wife again, and she bare a son, and called his name Seth. For God said, she hath appointed me another seed instead of Abel, whom Cain slew. And to Seth, to him also, there was born a son, and he called his name Enosh. Then began men to call upon the name of the Lord."

So look at what is happening. On the one hand, the Canaanites are now building a city. Through the Canaanites, you have the culture of agriculture, music, and being an artificer in brass and working in

metal. In other words, what you have in the Canaanites is what you and I would call a secular world. When it says in verse 26, "And after Enosh was born, then began men to call upon the name of the Lord," they begin now to build the kingdom of God.

There is a separation here. On the one hand, you have the unsaved and worldly building their world system; on the other hand, you have the godly building their world and their worldview in light of God. The whole difference between the saved and the unsaved is very simple: the unsaved have a worldview that leaves God out. They are totally for themselves and totally for materialism. The saved, on the other hand, view everything from a theological aspect; they view everything through the spectacles of Scripture.

What It Means to Call Upon the Name of the Lord

You remember that passage in 1 John chapter 2: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world is the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. And these things pass away. But he that doeth the will of God abideth forever." When he said, "Love not the world," he was not talking about God's creation. He was talking about the world system designed to contradict everything that God has said. Do not be like the world. Do not love this world system or that which is contrary to God. Now, there certainly is a biblical aspect to culture.

Everyone benefits from culture. Even the godly have benefited from music, which evidently Tubalcain and some of these others came up with; and we use music as well. But we do not use music the way they use music. There is a difference. We do not use the world the same way they use the world. In fact, the apostles said in 1 Corinthians 7 that we should use this world as not abusing it.

Look around, and you will see how the unsaved are willing to abuse everything in God's creation. The godly do not, because they recognize it is God's creation and recognize that we are responsible to be good stewards of it under God. It is only through the Sethites and Enosh that the godly began to build what you and I would refer to as the kingdom of God.

This was in distinction from what the Canaanites were doing. Then began men to call upon the name of the Lord. Listen to this quotation from Oehler, a scholar of the Old Testament and a wonderful theologian: “The name of God signifies in general the whole nature of God by which he attests his personal presence in the relation into which he is entered with man. The divine self-manifestation or the whole of that revealed side of the divine nature which is turned towards man.”

When you and I understand what it means to call upon the name of the Lord, we are calling upon Him in everything that God has revealed about Himself. There are reasons for all these many names of God. It is not simply because God is indefinable. He is indefinable, unlimited, and infinite, that is for sure. But many times we are in need, and we speak of the faithfulness of God. God is called the faithful God. Sometimes we are wronged and want justice; God is the just God. Sometimes we are sick and need healing, and He says, “I am the God that healeth thee.” At times we need everything these names reveal about God. Thus, when we call upon Him, we are calling upon God in the totality of His revelation of Himself, unless there is a specific need. This includes prayer, worship, praise, and everything taught in calling upon the name of the Lord.

We are calling upon how He has revealed Himself in His Word, and specifically how He has revealed Himself in the Lord Jesus Christ. Our Lord said, “No man hath seen the Father at any time, but I.” He said, “If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father,” because He is God in the flesh.

Now consider the opposite view. In Exodus chapter 5 and verse 1, Moses comes to Pharaoh and says, “Thus saith the LORD, thus saith Yahweh, thus saith Jehovah, Let my people go, that they may serve me.” Here is Pharaoh’s answer: “Who is the LORD?” Capital L, capital O, capital R, capital D. “Who is Yahweh? Who is Jehovah?”

Pharaoh said, “I know not the LORD. I don’t recognize Him. Neither will I let Israel go.” In other words, “I don’t know that name. I don’t know that God. I don’t recognize it, and I’m certainly not going to obey it.” Pharaoh was not only demonstrating his ignorance, but also his rebellion against the revelation of God.

This is why those who hate Him, despise Him, and reject Him are certainly not going to call upon His name. They will not seek to enlarge or extend His kingdom by any stretch of the imagination. But if you know who God is, and if you know how God has revealed Himself in Scripture, you will call upon Him. You will worship Him, pray, seek His face, and do whatever you can to extend His kingdom. What did our Lord say? "When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."

Unless we learn this glorious God who has revealed Himself in Scripture, we may be like those people of whom God spoke in Isaiah 64:7: "There is none that calleth upon my name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee." In other words, there is none that really recognizes Him and the totality of His being, and therefore none stirs himself up to take hold upon Him.

If you do not know who God is, you are not going to call upon Him. May I remind you of another Scripture? Our Lord said in John 17:3, "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." Eternal life is knowing God. This is why God has revealed Himself all through the Scriptures.

Calling upon the name of the Lord is calling upon Him as He revealed Himself in His Word. Let me make a couple of applications. There is a marginal reading to Genesis 4:26, and I think that marginal reading applies to the truth I have just mentioned. It would be this: "Then began men to call themselves by the name of the Lord." They were not only calling upon the name of the Lord; they called themselves by the name of the Lord. In the time of Enosh, men began to distinguish themselves from others: "We are not the Canaanites. We are the Sethites. We are from Enosh. We are followers of the one true and living God." In other words, there is a separation beginning to appear in Genesis chapter 4.

Applications: Separation, Worship, and Blessing

The Bible tells us that we are to be a separate people. We are a peculiar people. We are different. I never will forget what one preacher, a wonderful preacher and good friend of mine, said to a

man in his church who belonged to a club called the Oddfellows. The man came up to him and said, “Pastor, you would make a good Oddfellow.” He replied, “Some folks think I already am.”

We should be odd. We should be peculiar. We should be different. That is a fact. Here we are separating ourselves to follow God. You remember what the Apostle Paul said about himself in Romans chapter 1, I think it is verse 1, though he said it several times: “Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God.”

If you are separated unto something, that means you are also separated from something. He was separated unto the gospel, but separated from sin, the world, wickedness, and anything that opposed that gospel. That is what you are seeing here in Genesis chapter 4: a separation. The Canaanites are going one way, while the Sethites, Enosh, and his people are going a totally different way.

The name of God was not only called upon them; they began calling themselves by the name of God. They were identified with Him, and in doing so incurred the wrath of the unsaved. Nothing provokes the world like divine favor. Nothing provokes the world like divine favor.

Here is the second application: we see the importance of worshiping God in the way that He has designated. We see the importance of following His worship. We cannot worship God according to our feelings. We cannot worship God according to our thoughts. We cannot worship God according to our emotions. We cannot worship God according to our sentiments. He has told us what it is to worship Him and how we are to worship Him.

I have asked many people through the years why they go to a certain church. They answer, “I feel so good when I get out of there.” Really. Did you know that worship is not to make you feel good? Worship is for God. Others say, “The music is great.” I love music too, but you do not go to church just to hear music. You are supposed to go to worship God. Others say, “They have such a tremendous children’s ministry.” Yet it is interesting how God said, “Gather the men, women, and children together that they may hear My Word.” Really? Someone says, “Children can’t understand

preaching like adults." Adults cannot understand it either apart from the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit can open a child's mind and a child's heart just as He can open an adult's mind and an adult's heart.

But all I'm trying to point out is this. Very few people come to a church because of truth. There have you come to worship God in spirit and in truth. We have so many churches today that are, quote-unquote, providing a worship service completely contrary to Scripture, contrary to the demands of God and the desires of God. Worship is for God; it is not for us.

Now, let me give you one more. I want you to think about this. He said, "And to Seth and to him also there was born a son, and he called his name Enosh. Then began men to call upon the name of the Lord." How important is the name of the Lord, practically speaking? May I tell you that the name of the Lord is associated with all blessings?

In Numbers chapter 6, beginning with verse 22, notice this phrase, "the name of the Lord": "And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto Aaron and to his sons, saying, On this wise you shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them, The Lord bless thee and keep thee. The Lord make his face shine upon thee and be gracious unto thee. The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee and give thee peace. And they shall put my name upon the children of Israel, and I will bless them." Here's how you bless the children of Israel.

I want my name to be God's name. I want His name upon me. I want His blessings upon me. But whether He blesses me or not, I still want His name upon me. So He says, "You bless My people, saying, The Lord bless thee and keep thee, The Lord make His face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee. The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace. And they shall put my name upon the children of Israel, and I will bless them." So we want to call upon the name of the Lord, and we want to be called by the name of the Lord.

We want to be His people. Let us pray.

Father, we are thankful for the Lord Jesus Christ and for His grace and mercy to us. We are thankful that, in the time of Seth and

Enosh, men began to call upon the Lord—to build Thy kingdom, recognize Thy sovereignty, and recognize, Lord, Thy majesty. They began to be called by Thy name, the sons of God. Help us, Lord, to live before Thee and be Thy children, the children of Abraham, which is, Lord, in Jesus Christ, the true seed of Abraham. May we be found as the true seed of David, which is in Jesus Christ. Help us, Lord, to be found in Him, not having a righteousness of our own, but the righteousness of God by faith, which is in Jesus Christ our Lord. Give us Thy grace and Thy mercy, we pray in Christ's name. Amen.

CHAPTER 28

God's Special Manifest Mercy

Introduction: Orthodoxy vs. Orthopraxy

Our conference theme is making the tough decisions. In this first general session, I want to talk about some tough decisions we need to make now so that decisions we make later will actually be easier.

As a church body, we have been discussing what happens in difficult times when people come to you wanting what you have. Perhaps they will try to take what you have labored to acquire and put away. Do we have a biblical basis for turning people away? In other words, do we have a biblical position on refusing food to those who ask it of us?

Our technical terms are that orthopraxy should meet our orthodoxy. Orthodoxy is the sound doctrine we hold: Jesus Christ is Lord, Jesus Christ was born of a virgin, and He rose again the third day. When we sing or recite the Apostles' Creed, this is our orthodoxy. Many Christians in the corporate church world have pretty good orthodoxy; by and large, their teaching is sound.

We have little differences within Christianity, and we understand those differences. But orthopraxy is how we practice what we

believe. What you are doing by coming to this conference is putting feet to your orthopraxy. You have a belief in God, and I am speaking to Christians here today. We are proceeding on the bedrock that the Word of God is our rule for faith and practice.

So when we want to know whether we can turn away people who ask us for food, or whether there is a biblical position for doing so, the Word of God is our rule of faith and practice. Our orthopraxy must show how we practice what we believe. We have a smaller conference this year because, when the rubber tends to meet the road, Christians' practice does not meet their doctrinal stance.

Let me give you an example. We produced a DVD here a few years ago called "To Teach Them War." Many of you have seen it. Brother Weaver is in it, and we present historical and biblical evidence why Christians should train militarily and militantly. The average common man who has seen it really enjoys and appreciates it. But the theologians, or the preachers to whom we have sent it, tend to avoid it and run from it like a scalded dog. I sent it to preachers who basically would agree theologically with all the premises in that little DVD. But if they recommend that DVD or try to give it to someone, their practice would have to match their confessional statement, and that is where we have a problem.

Some of you know that you are training this weekend with firearms. Your practice is matching your confession. Do you follow that? That is an important aspect of what we are doing this weekend: our practice should match our confession. Too often in the church world, especially within Reformed Patriot circles, it is Second Amendment, rah, rah, rah. But how many times do they actually get out and do something about preserving those liberties and rights? That is where their orthodoxy does not match their orthopraxy.

Noah: Preparing an Ark for Your Family

Hebrews chapter 11 is our rule of faith and practice. We are talking about making tough decisions, and we are going to use the Bible in doing so. Hebrews 11, beginning in verse 7: "By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith."

Noah was moved by fear—the fear of God, who had called him to preach for a hundred years and prepare this giant ark for the saving of his family. Anybody else who would accept the message had an opportunity. That is why he is known as the preacher of righteousness, right? Peter tells us Noah was the preacher of righteousness. For a hundred years he preached, trying to get people to come aboard and find the ark of safety, but they rejected it. Then there came a point when God shut the door, and no matter how much the people cried and whimpered, or the woman said, "Save my child, save my baby."

The day of salvation was there; it was extended. God's mercy was extended for a hundred years while Noah preached to those people. But he prepared an ark for the saving of his family. I'm making the assumption that the people I'm speaking to today are preppers. You're preparing an ark for the saving of your family. You're already about doing that, and that's why you're here—or you're here because you want to begin the process of preparing an ark, something for the saving and protection of your family.

1 Timothy 5:8 tells us that "if any man provide not for his own house, he's worse than an infidel, and he's denied the faith." Those are powerful words from Paul to Timothy.

Now, we're going to assume that the day of calamity has come, and people are asking—nay, they're pleading—for help. Can you scripturally turn someone away? That's a hard question, and I hope that I will lay a scriptural foundation today. Ministers of God—John Weaver preaches all across the country—have been preaching and teaching, "Flee the wrath to come, prepare for the wrath to come." Now people have come to you pleading, "Help me, help me, help me."

What about Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5:42, which says, "Give to them that ask of thee"? We've got to make Scripture dovetail together here. Jesus said, "Give to them that asketh of thee, and from him that would borrow, turn thou not away." As Christians, it is our desire to give in the name of the Lord. As a born-again Christian, you have a desire to minister, reach out in the name of the Lord, and give.

Most of you should be tithing, giving offerings, and giving alms. That's part of Christian obedience and giving. We are to have willing, generous hearts, but we're also to be discerning in our giving. Open your Bibles to Psalm 112 and verse 5. Note what the Word of God says there.

"A good man showeth favor and lendeth: he will guide his affairs with discretion." Our giving and lending should be with discretion, with the mind of the Lord behind us in these things. We do not give willy-nilly to anyone and everyone.

Up in Fresno, the city nearby us, there was a mother and a son with a sign: "Mother and son needs help." I try to be led in my giving. I do not particularly care for panhandlers, but from time to time I give to one. I do not give to everyone who goes by, but sometimes I do give. This was a new one for me: a mother and son in hard times, needing help.

They had their basket. I was at the stoplight, and I watched them. First of all, when a panhandler comes, I want to find out whether they are smoking. If they are smoking, I am not going to give to them. They can quit that nasty habit, as far as I am concerned, and then save some money, especially when packs are $4 or whatever they are. That is a good way of saving some money real quick. So if they are smoking, I am not likely to share a blessing with them.

But then I watched this mother and son in action. They were physically doing things that—and this was on the street, so it was nothing inappropriate—but mothers and sons do not act that way. Basically, there was an older cougar woman and a young man, and they were going under the facade of a mother and son because it touches our heartstrings.

My heartstring was touched: "Oh, mother and son, maybe I want to help them." Because it was a long stoplight, I had the opportunity to watch them, and then the burden on my heart was lifted. It was not a mother and son, because mothers and sons do not do that.

We do not have to give to everyone who asks. If Jesus meant that in every single instance, no matter what, we must give to everyone who asks, none of us could ever watch Christian television or listen to Christian radio, because all they do is ask. Every time you turned

on Christian television, you would have to give to obey Jesus. Every time you listened to Christian radio, you would have to give. We need discretion and discernment even in our giving.

The Wise and Foolish Virgins: Discretion in Giving

In Matthew chapter 25, we have the parable of the virgins. Certainly, we have generous hearts and hearts that want to give in the name of the Lord. Most of you know that you give to the Church at Cahuilla, but we as a family have missionaries that we help support. You probably have missionaries that you help support. In the various almsgiving and offerings that you do, we have generous hearts, but we want to be discerning in that which we do.

In verse 1, Jesus says, "Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish." We've got a lot of foolish people in America today. We've got some that are wise, praise God. I trust that some of you are among them. "They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them." No extra oil on the shelf, right? No stockpiling. "But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps."

Note that. Here are preppers; they are stockpilers. The foolish virgins had lamps too, with oil in them. But the preppers took an extra cruse of oil with them, carrying it in their pack or in their arms, whatever the brides did, not knowing what circumstances might meet them in the future. "So the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps, while the bridegroom tarried."

"They all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out."

Now note this: Jesus is teaching. What do the five wise virgins say? Verse 9: "But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you." The five wise virgins turn away and say to the five foolish, "If we give you what we have, there won't be enough for us either." Isn't that interesting, that Jesus would teach this? "But go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves."

Here is one thing we can do: go to those that sell and buy for yourselves.

"I don't have for you." Your day of mercy in that area—people reached out. How many of you have friends to whom you've reached out? You've tried. You give them an article here and an article there; you give them a CD here and a tape there. They say, "We don't want any of that fanaticism," or whatever the case may be. God's mercy has been reaching them.

It's like the old joke. Some guy is on a rooftop, praying for the Lord to save him in a great flood. A man comes in a boat, but he says, "I'm not going with you; I'm waiting for the Lord to save me." Then somebody else comes, and three different people come, but he keeps saying, "I'm waiting for God to save me." So he drowns. He gets to heaven and says, "God, why didn't you save me?" God says, "I sent three people right by you, and you didn't take the help." He was waiting for some great divine intervention. So what we tell them is, "I don't have for you."

“I only have for my family and for those that are in my association.” We will talk about that in just a minute. “Go to the city and get it.” Now open your Bibles to Genesis chapter 47.

Joseph in Egypt: Avoiding the City and Government Dole

This is the story of how Pharaoh took Joseph under his arm, and Joseph prepared for the seven years of famine. Everybody knows the story well. I want to share a little tidbit here that I think is fascinating. Joseph is a good man. They had stockpiled grain in all the treasure cities; they had all these granaries.

This is what we give. Right now, we have fifty of these printed up for when somebody comes in the day of calamity. They will not be allowed to come onto this property, these premises, but we can give one to them. It has a gospel tract, a wire, a Vienna sausage, some aspirin, sinkers and hooks, and anything else we could think of.

By the way, this is how you make a martini. We could get these for a dollar at the dollar store, so we bought all fifty. Our heart is a heart to give. If we had the money, I would have bought 250 of these and

stockpiled them. In the church, we all got together for a big hands-on day and filled them. So I have fifty to pass out to those who ask. When they run out, I have to say, “Go to them in the city that have, and buy from them.”

“We do not have any more for you.” So, in Genesis 47, there they are: the wieners, the Vienna sausages, are in there. Some have them, and some do not. We do whatever we can to help someone. Your heart as a Christian is a heart that wants to help. We cannot help it if people in Christianity have hard, implacable hearts out there. I just cannot help that.

That is why we are looking at the Scriptures. Joseph had prepared. The people came, and now they were starving. It is interesting: Joseph had all these granaries, but why were the people not preparing while they were being built around them? Everybody knew there would be seven years of plenty and seven years of famine. What about those homeowners who should have been preparing right along with Joseph? Business was good, granaries were being built, and everybody was employed.

They had money for a change. Even the poor people had money, because all these things were being built and commerce was going on during the seven years of plenty. So when we get to verse 18 of chapter 47, it says, "And when the year was ended, they came unto him the second year, and said unto him, We will not hide it from my lord, how that our money is spent; my lord also hath herds of cattle; there is not aught left in the sight of my lord, but our bodies and our lands."

"Wherefore shall we die before thine eyes, both we and our land? Buy us and our land for bread, and we and our land will be servants unto Pharaoh: and give us seed, that we may live, and not die, that the land be not desolate." They were selling everything they could. They had already lost all their gold, buying food with it. Now they sold their land and animals for food. "And Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh; for the Egyptians sold every man his field, because the famine prevailed over them: so the land became Pharaoh's."

By the way, you should have some precious metals. It may be that even in the state of California, with prices as crazy as they are here, a few pieces of gold could purchase a nice piece of land. Just keep that in mind. You may be a little bit like Joseph did.

Look at verse 21: "As for the people, he removed them to the cities from one end of the borders of Egypt even to the other end thereof." What did he do? He brought them to the city.

Joseph was not a bad guy; he was a great man. It is easier to take care of people in the cities. It is easier to get the bread lines going. You are not going to have a bread line up in Three Rivers. You have to go to Visalia if you want your bread. They moved the people into the cities, where it was easy to stand in line, get bread, and receive some grain. But precisely what Joseph did here, in a good way, is exactly what, for me and my house, we want to avoid. I do not want to go to the cities and stand in line and beg for bread. I do not want to take my five-year-old son and have to play along with the federal, county, or state government game in order to get food, and then educate my son in their humanistic ways. You see that?

If we do not prepare for the day of calamity, we will end up like the five foolish virgins, admonished, “Go into the city and buy from them,” standing in line for what we need. That is why I wanted to share this message with you: do your preparations now. We may have to tell people to go to the cities and wait for the civil government to feed them, but as for me and my house, this is precisely what we try to avoid—going into the city and standing in line for government dole.

What control will that give me over my wife and children? No, thank you. While you have been doing your best to make a living for your family and not rely upon civil government, have others been relying upon it for twenty or thirty years, feasting from the big teat of the pig of civil government, the federal government?

We have become religio-statists in America—that is, state worshipers. We do not have that confession; we return to our orthodoxy, our sound doctrine: Jesus Christ is Lord. He will protect us. He will provide for us. But our orthopraxy, our practice, is that as soon as we have a problem, we go to the feds for extra money or to

bail us out. If we have a flood, we seek government loans. Too often, our practice does not match what we preach as Christians. Prepare, yes. Otherwise, we may have to tell people to go to the cities and wait for the civil government to feed them.

Remember, this was a choice they made a long time ago. You have to be blind not to see what is happening to our economy in America. Pastor Tom McConnell does a great job teaching that we need to repent in America for an economic system contrary to the Word of God. More Christians need to understand that our fiat currency is an abomination in the sight of God. We use unjust weights and measures in America, and that is an abomination. As Christians, we need to repent of it.

This is an aspect that is out there. We have things we want to give in the name of the Lord. Open your Bibles to Luke chapter 16. We have prepared a paper at the church at Cahuilla for when people come and ask; I will return to that in just a minute.

The Unjust Steward: Planning for the Future

This is the parable of the unjust steward. “And Jesus said unto his disciples, There was a certain rich man, which was a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods.” This man was not a good steward in helping the rich man take care of his possessions. “And he called him and said unto him, How is it I hear this of thee? Give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer a steward.” He had been siphoning off some of his master’s money and was not investing it wisely.

The master said, “I need to talk to you about this. You’re going to have to give an account because I found out you’ve been chiseling on me.” “Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? For my lord taketh away from me the stewardship.” He said, “I cannot dig.” He dealt with money; he was not going out with a shovel. “And to beg,” he said, “I’m ashamed.” He would not go out begging for his food. “I am resolved what to do, that when I am put out of the stewardship”—he knew he had been a bad egg and would lose his job—“they may receive me into their houses.”

This is the key to understanding why Jesus would commend an unjust steward in this particular case: he was thinking about his future. He knew he was going to lose his job, and he was preparing for what lay ahead. “So he called every man of his lord’s debtors,” verse 5, “unto him and said, Unto the first, How much owest thou my lord?” “And he said, An hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, sit down quickly and write fifty.” In effect, he said, “This is your lucky day. Give me fifty measures of oil; we’ll call the whole thing even.” The man agreed, glad that instead of paying a hundred, he could give fifty.

“And he said to another, And how much owest thou? And he said, An hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill and write fourscore.” He is thinking about these men. When he loses his job, he will go back to them and say, “Didn’t I treat you right? Didn’t I make your bill and work it out for you? I need some help here.”

Verse 8 says, “And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.” Don’t we see that all around us in some cases? The children of this world are wiser than the children of light. I think of the verse where the prophet laments and says, “Who is so blind as my servant Jacob?” Doesn’t it make us tremble sometimes that our Christian brothers and sisters are so blind? Yet you see the heart of God going out in that. The heart of God was there until the door of the ark was shut.

Then, all of a sudden, things changed. They could not get in when that door was shut. No matter how much the ladies screamed, and no matter how much Noah heard the cries of the children—“Help us, help us, we’re drowning”—the door was shut. The day of opportunity had ended. Mercy had been extended. Mercy is extended to America every day. The mercy of God is reaching out to a gainsaying people.

The unjust steward was commended because he thought about and made plans for his future. In the primary context, Jesus is teaching that we had better make plans for our eternal future. I am speaking to Christians today, and I trust that you have made your future plans in eternity to be with the Lord Jesus Christ and enjoy Him forevermore. That is primary.

But Jesus is also teaching a secondary application. We need to be aware of future events, because Paul says parents are to lay up for the children in 1 Corinthians, not children for the parents. Inheritances and laying up for children are scriptural things we can do. Preparing and laying up in store are also scriptural things in which we should participate. We need to make plans. If you have not made plans, make plans. If you have already made plans, make more plans.

The stock market began to crash about a month or a month and a half ago. You might remember when it dropped like 500 points in a couple of days. I sat down with my mom and Jill, and we talked about what we needed and whether there was something else we needed to get. So we went and did a few more things.

We made plans for our future, so we do not have to go beg the civil government for what we might need.

Ezra: Ashamed to Ask the King for Help

At the rebuilding of Jerusalem, King Artaxerxes's heart had been touched by the Lord, as Cyrus's had been, to rebuild the house of God. God had put it on their heart. King Artaxerxes loved Ezra, who was well-respected, and said, "Ezra, you take whatever you need." Basically, Ezra had carte blanche to help in the rebuilding of Jerusalem. Whatever needed to be done had the king's backing. Here was the head of the then-known world saying to Ezra, "Whatever you need for Jerusalem." He had the total blessing of King Artaxerxes.

Now Ezra was leaving with a whole big group of people—women, children, and a giant caravan—to go to Jerusalem, take the post of danger, and begin to rebuild the walls and so forth. He had a whole bunch of people with him. It was a big crowd, a huge crowd with women and children, but it was not big enough to be a military force. Yet it was big enough that they would be a major target for the brigands in the area and the Midianites running around. They were prey.

He knew that he could ask King Artaxerxes—within reason, whatever was needed—"Could I have a couple of legions, or could I

have a couple hundred troops, or whatever to help us?" He knew he could get that. He had the total blessing of King Artaxerxes. But look what he says. Verse 21: "Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance."

That is a great prayer to pray. Pray for your little ones and for our substance, that God would lead us in what we are to do and in the way that we should go. Now, I love this.

Underline this, because this is not normal Christianity in twenty-first-century America. Would to God the pastors of America knew this verse. Verse 22: "For I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way." Ezra was ashamed to ask the king, the civil magistrate, for help because he had witnessed that those who put their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, He takes care of them and watches over them. He says, "because I've witnessed to him that the hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him."

"But his power and his wrath is against all them that forsake him. So we fasted and besought our God for this: and he was entreated of us." He heard them and answered their prayer. They went on this arduous journey through the desert to Jerusalem and made it safely.

Haven't we proclaimed the kingship of Jesus Christ? Don't we echo the words of David? "I was young, and for some of us, now I'm old, but I've never seen the righteous forsaken or his seed begging bread." What have I need of the big teat of civil government in my life? Jesus Christ will supply my need. It is the ABCs of Christianity. But how many do not get it anymore in America?

When George Bush had his religious thing, the faith-based initiatives, the pastors lined up to the syllabus: "Give me, give me, give me of this money, the faith-based initiatives, so we can build a new gymnasium for our youth group, so we can do this and that." I do not want to be in that position. My hope is in the Lord Jesus Christ. "Some trust in chariots, some in horses: but we will remember the name of the Lord our God."

He really is our source of supply, and He has given us the opportunity to be preparers and preppers right now. This is the day

of mercy. We can do this. Most Christians who will come to you shortly if things go down further support seeker-friendly, name-it-and-claim-it, blab-it-and-grab-it churches, or churches that are simply irrelevant to society. All their tithes and offerings are going to churches that do not matter a hill of beans in society.

They are not reaching their community. They are not standing up, setting their voices as a trumpet, and calling out to the civil magistrate when they get out of line. We have people who go to the local meetings here every month. I am the only pastor who ever goes. Why? Because when I take a stand in a local town hall meeting, I may get on the wrong side of someone. They are not going to give me five dollars; they are going to quit the church, and they are not going to put something on the offering plate. Pastors do not get involved because it costs them in the pew. That is why they do not get involved.

Now these Christians are going to come to you, and their needs are genuine and heartfelt. You will look at them and think, "Their children are hungry!" Yet they supported seeker-friendly, name-it-and-claim-it, or simply society-wise irrelevant churches all these years, and they knew better.

Mark Twain said, "A patriot is a scarce man and scorned. But when his cause succeeds, then the timid join, because then it costs nothing to be a patriot." You who are patriots today know how the church world—and even some worldly people—think of you as an idiot. Right now it costs you. They think you are a nut and a fanatic.

It costs to live for the Lord Jesus Christ today and to prepare against the rainy day, the evil day approaching, the day of calamity. As a side note, I am a post-millennial theonomist. I see the Kingdom of God advancing through time and eternity. We are not in retreat, merely sitting out until Jesus Christ returns tomorrow at twelve o'clock. Not at all. If we make a withdrawal, it is a strategic withdrawal, so that we can be stronger later to press the crown rights of King Jesus into every area of life God calls us into.

This is not a message on retreatism. It is a message about being strong so that we can press the crown rights of King Jesus. When we give out food, or whatever else we are doing, we give a gospel tract.

We continue to minister. How do you prepare? This is the wisdom of God's Word. We explain to people, especially the unsaved, what we have done. So many of us are making real sacrifices to have extra oil for our lamps, warning people, "Get extra oil for your lamps." If they are foolish, they do not do it, and they do not go to the marriage feast.

Community and the Law of the Gates

Let me say a word about the lone-wolf survivalist. You are kidding yourself if you think that, as an individual, you can take care of your land by yourself, whether you are in the city or the country, and not be harmed. You cannot stay awake twenty-four hours a day. It will take a minimum of four families, so we encourage you to get together.

They call it doubling up. Read the book Patriots, highly recommended by Pastor Weaver and me. You are not going to make it out there by yourself. You should have at least three, four, five, or six families together to pull through and pool your resources. Why do we not really do this? Because Christianity today is so self-centered that we cannot live together with other people.

When my father passed away three years ago, we moved up to my parents' house, and now we live with my mom. It is a four-bedroom house. It would be foolish to pay two electric bills for two houses or heat two houses with two fireplaces and all the wood that entails. Now we pool our resources. It is not always easy; my mom is back there right now. We have invaded her home with our little five-year-old boy running around everywhere, and she is up in years. But it is the right thing to do. John and Alice have been taking care of people for a long time.

For years at this church, I would see a widow woman come, and we would try to help take care of her. There were half a dozen widows through the years. We would say, "Why don't you two sisters pool your resources together? You can watch out for one another and take each other to the doctor." "Oh no, we would never do that." That is selfish Christianity: not wanting to be bothered. Begin the concept of doubling up, pooling resources, and being close to families, because we need the body of Christ. If you do not think so, you may

think so six months from now—and then it will be tough to find someone.

So I encourage you to seek out and do that. Prior to Y2K, people would ask me, very practically, "Are you really going to shoot me or stop me from taking some of your food?" We were known as a survivalist church ten or fifteen years ago. They would say, "You're not going to shoot me. You've known me for years in the community." I would answer that it would be difficult simply because they were taking food intended for my family. But the decision would not be mine alone; it would be the law of the community. We had already established law and preparation so that, if someone violated the sanctity of the property, the community—not merely I—had made the decision about whether trespassers would be shot. That relieves the individual, because he is linked with others, and what you have is biblical law in the city gates, just as in Old Testament times, being executed. For many reasons, everyone should be linked with three or four families at a minimum, so that difficult decisions can be made.

In the multitude of counselors, there is safety. In the city gates, when four or five families are together, the brothers and sisters work out the law of the community: "This is how we operate under the laws of God. If somebody violates those laws, this is how we will deal with it." Then you do not have to make the decision alone when you catch someone stealing from your larder.

For example, at church at Cahuilla, I will not be monitoring the gates at the road. I know too many people, and I am too much of a softy. I may be preaching a little hard here this morning, but those who know me know I am a little too soft. Others will be there. Whom would we let in? Those who have financially been helping us. One family here has been helping us for fifteen years, and a couple of other men have joined in the last year, sharing a little. They would certainly be welcome because they shared in the reproach and shared in the blessings. I am not trying to ask anybody for money; I am simply giving you an example.

Those who have supported us might be let in: RNs, registered nurses, doctors, and machinists. If you are a machinist in a hard time, you can probably write your own ticket: "I'm a journeyman

welder and blah, blah, blah." "Oh, come on in, brother. We can use you." That is just being practical.

Now, let me close with a couple more thoughts. In Luke chapter 16, this is the story of the rich man and Lazarus. I will assume here that you already know that story. The rich man is in hell and he is suffering. But notice here in verse 25: "But Abraham said, Remember that thou in thy lifetime receivest thy good things."

The Rich Man and Lazarus: Reversal of Roles

"You had it made, buddy. You were rich. And likewise, Lazarus' evil things." Remember, Lazarus was the beggar with all these sores at the rich man's gate day by day, hoping to get crumbs from his table. "But now, watch it: now he is comforted and you are tormented." There could be a reversal of roles here pretty quick in America. I don't know, but it could be. Those who have prepared and are learning to live off the land may be comforted, while those who invested all their money in the latest plasma screen TV and wave runner, but did not get some things and obtain their heirloom seeds, may be tormented.

It is a reversal of roles. Abraham simply says, "You had your good things. Now, Lazarus is comforted." We may experience comfort, knowing that we have prepared and have these things to make life a little easier, while those who had all their great things and everything they did are now being tormented. It is sometimes just the way life is.

We need to be aware of these verses when people come to us, so that we have a biblical reason why we may say, "I'm sorry, I don't have anything for you." Or, "Here, this is what I have. Please go and don't come back. If you do, you'll be considered a trespasser, and you don't want to go there." Whatever the case, what about those who come to you—especially some of you in the church world who have been in church a long time—and say, "Hey, I helped you years ago. You remember me, Pastor Warnmark? I came to your conference back in 1997. I'm at the gate. I need help. I came to your conference in '98. Do you remember me? I helped you years ago"?

Answering Those Who Once Ran Well

They try to put a guilt trip on you. Maybe they were a prepper with you ten years ago, but after Y2K they said, “It’s a bunch of nonsense. Don’t worry about it,” and sold all their generators and everything. Now they come and say, “Remember me ten years ago, Y2K? We worked together.”

Open your Bibles to Galatians chapter 5. This is the Scripture answer, because that puts a real guilt trip on you: “Didn’t we do this five years ago? Didn’t we work together?” “Yeah, yeah, you were a good man.” Galatians 5 and verse 7: Paul says to the Galatians, “You did run well. You did start out good. We were linked up years ago. You did run well. Who did hinder you?”

"That you should not obey the truth." The primary context is that they had gone back into Judaism and legalism. They started out in the kingdom of God in faith, but now their walk was one of works and not faith. He says, "You started out well in the liberty that we have in Christ Jesus. Who did hinder you? Why did you turn away?" I would ask the same question of the person who came to me and said, "Remember, Pastor Mark, we used to go to your church back in the 90s. We used to come to your dad's church back in the 80s." I would answer, "Oh yes, you did. Why did you quit? What was it about Dad's message in the 80s that turned you away? Who did hinder you? It wasn't Dad, and it wasn't me, that you should turn away."

Now you are asking for help. Some may say, "This message is too hard. I don't want to think about it." Making the decision about who in your family eats or does not eat because you did not prepare will be much harder. We are going through hard decisions. This is our orthopraxy—the practice of how we believe and act upon what we believe. These are tough decisions. I am not kidding. I can talk tough because I am preaching to the choir here today from the pulpit, but certainly they are tough, gut-wrenching decisions. If you have a group of people with whom you are in a nucleus, those decisions will be easier because you are not making them alone. Those who did not prepare will face really tough decisions about who in their family eats or does not eat.

The Vilna Ghetto: A Son's Agonizing Decision

Let me close this illustration with the Vilna Ghetto. Everybody has heard of the Warsaw Ghetto. I did not realize until recently that there were ghettos all over the big cities. There is a documentary about the Vilna Ghetto, up there above the Belarus region, from where you saw that movie. The Jews in World War II always had a tough time. I do not know why.

This whole book is a book of theology of resistance. Of course, they do not really reject the teachings of Jesus, and so they have the Old Testament. Why they did not fight more just blows my mind when they had all the stories of David and Goliath, Ehud, and the great prophets who led them in battle. So they had to build this big ghetto. After a while, the Jews said, "You know what?"

“We’re tired of being systematically picked out one by one, here or there. Some of us are going to fight.” But the leaders said, “Oh, no, no, no, don’t do that. It’s going to get us all in trouble.” So some said, “We’re going over here, and we’re going to fight. We’re not going to lay and play dead and be cowards any longer.” They could not take it. They took one section of the city, the ghetto, and called it a resistance: partisan warfare.

We may talk about this more tomorrow. Those of you in groups too small to be a full-fledged or official militia, DJ and I hope to produce a new video of the church here on partisan warfare. That will change the complexion a little, so you need to understand partisan warfare. There is tremendous history on partisan warfare.

In the Vilna Ghetto, some of the Jews and the smaller said, “We’re going to fight.” One man watched the gate. This is a true story from a documentary, and you can see his heart when he tells it: “One day my mother came to me and said, ‘Son, what can I do? What should I do?’” She had not decided to go in with the resistors. She was starving and needed help. Her son, with a broken heart, said, “Mom, I can’t let you in. I have other mothers to protect.” Watch the documentary, Vilna Ghetto. Can you imagine that? His old mom would not be a pacifist: “No, no, we’ll just wait it out.” She would not go; she would not be the scorned patriot or put her life on the front lines with the other families.

Now he had a different mother to protect. How about that? He had other mothers. Praise God. Do you understand the power of that? Not just bloodline—I always say, "Blood is thicker than water." But in the Kingdom of God, it should not be so. Your brothers and sisters, if your parents do not know the Lord, should have a strong tie to you because they are your brother or sister, or mother of Israel. Deborah was called a mother in Israel—the old term, mother of Israel. So he said to his own mother, "No, you can't come in now because I have other mothers to protect." These are the tough decisions.

People have made agonizing decisions in the past because doing so was right and charitable. If you have questions about today's message, ask me about it. May God have mercy on us all. I do not want to be cocky or arrogant, but we must sometimes make difficult decisions, and they may face us very shortly.

Father in Heaven, we thank You for these folks who listened so intently. I did my best to share Your word and the fact that we can biblically turn people away. May these things sink deep down into our ears. Thank You for Your blessings thus far in the conference. Continue, God; we need an outpouring of Your Spirit. Give these folks a restful lunch, Lord. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHAPTER 29

Statism

Introduction: Nimrod as the First Statist

Genesis chapter 10 begins with Nimrod: “And Cush begat Nimrod. He began to be a mighty one in the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the Lord, wherefore it is said, even as Nimrod the mighty hunter before the Lord. And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar.”

Note that the Bible says he was a mighty hunter before the Lord, wherefore it is said, even as Nimrod the mighty hunter before the Lord. Think for a moment of the name Nimrod. The first thing that you can say is, What a name; and secondly, What a legacy.

The word Nimrod comes from the Hebrew word “Marad,” which literally means “he rebelled,” or “rebellion,” or “one who is valiant in rebellion.” The Bible tells us that Nimrod was a descendant of Cush, the son of Ham. He was the first to be called a mighty one in the earth. Babel was the beginning of his kingdom.

In Micah 5:6, the Word of God refers to the land of Nimrod. The land of Nimrod, then, is a designation for Assyria or Shinar, which was a part of his dominion.

The Bible tells us that Nimrod began to be a mighty one in the earth. That is, he was the first one who formed a plan of government and brought men into subjection unto it. He began to be mighty in sin and to rebel before the Lord in the earth.

In his civil character, he was a ruler and a governor. Nimrod was the first to reduce people under one form of government from various cities, and literally he became the head of this government. He either did so by force or usurpation, or with the consent of the people through his persuasion and through his deception. The Bible specifically says in Genesis 10:9 that Nimrod was a mighty hunter, "before the Lord."

The word "before" is a very interesting word. It not only refers to "in the presence of," but it also means "against." Nimrod was not only doing what he did in the presence of the Lord God, with God looking on; he did what he did against the Lord. In other words, Nimrod was not only defiant, but also presumptuous. He openly challenged God.

When the Bible tells us that Nimrod was the first one who set up this kingdom, we must understand that he set it up first and foremost by idolatry, the way Jeroboam did for the confirming of his usurped dominion. He did so that he might set up a new government, establishing his government and his religion. Thus, Nimrod basically became the first in idolatry and the first in tyranny.

Nimrod's Character: Hunter vs. Shepherd

The Bible teaches us that Babylon was indeed the mother of harlots. This verse also refers to the fact that Nimrod carried on oppression and violence in defiance of God himself. Here was his attitude: "I will do what I want to do, and God—I could care less what God thinks. It doesn't matter. I am in control."

Historical Interpretation of Nimrod

John Calvin, commenting on Genesis 10:9 and Nimrod's becoming a mighty hunter before the Lord, wrote: "The ambition of Nimrod disturbed and broke through the boundaries of this reverence. Moreover, since it sufficiently appears that in this sentence of Moses,

the tyrant is branded with an eternal mark of infamy, we may hence conclude how highly pleasing to God is a mild administration of affairs among men. And truly, whosoever remembers that he is a man will gladly cultivate the society of others. With respect to the meaning of the Hebrew terms, it properly signifies hunting. But whether Moses says that he was robust in hunting or in violently seizing upon prey, he metaphorically intimates that he was a furious man and approximated to beasts rather than to men. The expression 'before the Lord' seems to me to declare that Nimrod attempted to raise himself above the order of men, just as proud men become transported by a vain self-confidence that they may look down as from the clouds upon others."

Calvin is saying essentially the same thing I have just given you: Nimrod was a man who lifted himself up against God and his fellow men. He usurped power, stole authority, thought himself above others, and believed he was to be the ruler rather than the ruled. As you study Scripture, you often find that earthly power first appears among those under the curse and those who are wicked, as here under the auspices of Nimrod. Things usually develop far more quickly under the wicked than under the righteous. Nimrod was the man who took control.

There is a reason for that. Godly people want to do things rightly, wait upon the Lord, and make sure they act according to His Word. The ungodly are not concerned with the truth of the Word of God or with God Himself. Nimrod was a mighty rebel. His name means "rebel" or "rebellion," and his character before God was that of a hunter. God took notice of his character. A hunter is exactly the opposite of a shepherd: a hunter always gratifies himself at the expense of his victim, but a shepherd extends and expends himself for the good of the subject under his care.

God's ideal of a king, His ideal of a civil ruler, is a shepherd. Where was David when God called him? He was keeping his father's sheep. Where was Moses when God called him? He was in the desert of Midian, keeping his father-in-law's sheep. He was a shepherd. The Lord loves a shepherd because a shepherd gathers, protects, and feeds the flock.

That is the opposite of a hunter. Nimrod was a rebel toward God and a hunter toward men. So are all who follow in his footsteps. Here we see the beginning: it is the character in which earthly imperial power appears on the scene of Scripture. Note two things: corruption and violence are the two principles of Babylon and Nineveh. Babylon is always marked by corruption and violence. There is a vain glory in Babylon, the scene of man’s glory and the most corrupting influence imaginable. Assyria has always been the enemy of God’s people.

Matthew Poole, commenting on Genesis 10:9, writes: "'Before the Lord'—an aggravation of his crime that it was done in the end of God's presence impudently and in contempt both of God, who had so lately manifested his detestation of sin by the destruction of the world amongst other sins for this very sin of violence, Genesis 6, verse 13. And of his great-grandfather Noah, then living and preaching, who probably did admonish him of the wickedness and danger of this practice. Thus he showed that he neither feared God nor reverenced man, if they withstood him in his usurpation of dominion. It became a proverb when any man was haughty and cruel and tyrannical and then joined with impudence and obstinacy that he was another Nimrod."

What is Matthew Poole saying? Nimrod was the first, and all who follow him in their obstinacy, cruelty, haughtiness, and tyranny are nothing more than another Nimrod.

We live in a Nimrod society. A Nimrod society is a statist society. In a statist society, everything must be for the state and nothing against the state. An excellent illustration is President George Bush's statement concerning his war on terrorism: "You're either for us or against us." He was plagiarizing the words of Jesus Christ. That is indeed the attitude of a statist government in every sphere, not merely in the war on terrorism.

A statist religion exists in America, and many times it parades under the umbrella of Christianity. Our greatest problem in this country is that we have so forgotten, neglected, and turned from the Word of God that we do not recognize or know what biblical Christianity really is.

Modern Statism and the Mark of the Beast

We have been so brainwashed and propagandized that the average American, and even the average American Christian, is nothing less than a good little statist—and we do not even realize it. We profess to be Christians and express a desire to act like Christians, but our attitudes and actions betray our profession. We say one thing and live another. We profess the truth, but we live a lie.

Consider this illustration. Countless Christians have said to me, "Well, Brother Weaver, one thing for sure, I'll never take the mark of the beast."

We read about the mark of the beast in the book of Revelation. Do you remember that mark was supposedly to be put either on the forehead or in the hand? Do you realize that you really do not have to have a literal mark to have a mark? The forehead always speaks of the thoughts. The hand always speaks of the actions. Many Christians already think and act like good little statists. They do not need a literal mark. Their thoughts are unbiblical and unscriptural. Their actions are unbiblical and unscriptural. In this country, Christians have literally made government a god. It is a false god.

Still, we give government the worship, the honor, the praise, and the homage—and I might add the money—that belong only to the one true and the living God. The truth is, we already have a mark. We do not even realize it. Anytime you think unbiblically, you are thinking like an antichrist. Anytime you act unbiblically, you are acting like an antichrist.

Let me demonstrate how we got in the mess that we are in. There has been a shift in power in this country, done imperceptibly, all through the years. Originally, in the beginning of Scripture, power was centered in the individual.

The Shift of Power Through History

Because of that, the first, most basic form of government is self-government. If you are not going to do what is right, if you are not going to govern yourself, there is always going to be an outside power that is going to govern you for your own good. So the very first

and most basic form of government is self-government. What is it that has been destroyed primarily in this country? Self-government.

Alice heard on the news today—I did not hear it, but she was telling me—that they started a camp just for atheists. You can go there as an atheist and learn how to live responsibly and morally as an atheist. How in the world can you live responsibly and morally as an atheist? If there is no one or nothing to whom you must ultimately give an account, why should you be responsible? And why should you be accountable? It is ridiculous. What we have lost in this country is self-responsibility. We have lost self-government.

In the Old Testament, power went from the individual to what we would call the patriarch. Thus, the Old Testament had patriarchy: the rule of the family and extended family by one head of the clan.

Do you remember Genesis 39? Jacob gave Joseph a coat of many colors. When the Bible says that he gave him that coat, his brethren hated him and could not speak peaceably with him. They were not angry with Joseph merely because he received a new coat, or because it was a pretty coat. What upset them was the implication of that coat.

Those boys had planned some crime and sin against their father. I do not know what it was; perhaps they intended to steal some of the sheep. The Bible does not say. But when Joseph found out about their scheme, he came and told his father.

Joseph was not being a tattletale. His attitude was, “My brothers are doing what is wrong and wicked and contrary to the Word of God. I am not going to put up with it or allow it. I will not have my father and my family defrauded.” When Joseph reported to his father, his father said, “Here is someone who is trustworthy,” and gave him the coat. That coat meant Joseph would be the next head of the family—not the firstborn.

Not Reuben, who defiled his father's bed. Joseph will be the executor of the estate, the administrator, and the next head. As that next head, Joseph not only receives a double portion of the goods and becomes the head of the family, but is also given the lineage of Jesus Christ. Thus, in the Old Testament, patriarchy is passed down

from one family member to another. Patriarchy, however, soon passed off the scene.

We no longer live like that. But where did the power go? It went to the churches, primarily to the pastors, especially those pastors who understood their position and responsibility under God. Who were the leaders of the American Revolution? The pastors. They wore long, flowing black robes, and the British so hated these pastors that they gave them a name: the Black Robe Regiment. Those pastors preached, taught, and fought.

Why did they wear those robes? Not because they wanted to be pretty or thought the robes were nice and fancy, but because the robe expressed power and authority. That is why Joseph was given his robe. The robe expressed power and authority. Now that power and authority was passed, not from the head of one particular family, but to a pastor who was the head of a number of families in a local congregation. It was the same concept, applied a little differently.

What happened? The pastors began to throw away their power, authority, and responsibility. They wanted to be sweet, effeminate individuals who simply got along with everybody. The power then passed to the universities—or, actually, to the universities first, before it reached the pastors.

That is why Martin Luther— it was the universities. They had robes and fancy regalia at graduation because, at one time, the universities were responsible for conveying truth. You do not get any scriptural truth now in the universities. Consider Yale and Princeton, which began as divinity schools. The robes, then, have gone from the individual to the head of a family, to a university, and then to a pastor.

But now pastors have denied Him. Who wears the robes today? The government, especially the judiciary and the Supreme Court justices. They have stolen and usurped authority that God never gave them. They do have authority in a certain area, but consider how our country was first founded, when judges walked into the courtroom carrying an open Bible and men stood out of respect for the Word of God. Now they kick the Bible out and want you to stand out of

respect for the man. According to their own interpretation, their robes speak not only of power, but of absolute power.

So the judge is not really interested in doing what is right, honest, and just. His attitude is this: “If you don't like my ruling, appeal it. It doesn't matter. I can do what I want to do. I am a judge.”

The Nature and Powers of the State

The point I am trying to make is very simple: Power never, ever operates in a vacuum. If you and I do not use the power and authority God has given us, it will always pass to someone else who will use it. Thus we have statism.

Statism views the state as the source of authority, morality, law, and dominion. In statism, religion becomes a department of the state, and the state becomes the total institution comprehending the life and property of man. Under statism, the state must regulate and control everything for the benefit of the state. The state has three great powers: first, coercion; secondly, conscription; and thirdly, confiscation.

Coercion comes to its power of intimidation and enforcement. Although you are not criminals and have no desire to become criminals, how many of you love going through a roadblock? We are intimidated. Why? They have weapons, and we do not. Although we are doing nothing wrong, the average individual fears being suspected of doing something wrong. That is intimidation.

Conscription comes to its ability to draft for the military, an emergency, or even economic matters. Confiscation is accomplished through taxation and eminent domain. One author stated this very succinctly: “What is considered theft in the private sector is taxation when done by the state. What is kidnapping in the private sector is selective service in the public sector.”

"What is counterfeiting when done in the private sector is monetary policy when done by the public sector. What is mass murder in the private sector is foreign policy in the public sector." The state, quote-unquote, does things that the private individual cannot do. Thus, one is left with coercion, conscription, and confiscation.

Confiscation or taxation is no longer used merely to support our government; it has also become a means of leveling and equalitarian concepts. Taxation has become not merely the redistribution of wealth, but also a means of restructuring society according to the desires of the state. Taxation is now more a means of social and economic change. Through taxation, the state secures its own existence and perpetuity.

Thomas Paine, whom I do not necessarily recommend that you read, was one of the men around during the founding of our country. In his book The Rights of Man, he affirmed the principle of the nation-state. Listen to what Thomas Paine said: "The nation is essentially the source of all sovereignty, nor can any individual or any body of men be entitled to any authority which is not expressly derived from it." Paine said that the state, or the nation, is the source of all sovereignty, and that no individual or body of men can have authority except what is given them by the state. That is statism. The humanistic view of the state allows it to regard itself as the source of all law and authority. According to statism, neither law nor authority originates or flows from God, the true sovereign; it all flows from the state.

Consequently, the government fights against all rival forms of government: individual government, familial government, ecclesiastical government, societal government, and theological government. In statism, the state claims to be the government, period—a humanistic premise and concept.

Under statism, Christianity increasingly becomes a hindrance and an embarrassment to the powers that be. Consequently, the government seeks to distance itself from Christianity. That explains the many anti-God, anti-Christian, and anti-Bible laws, rules, and regulations being enacted in our land.

It was once firmly held and believed, not only by this country but by other countries as well, that Christians make the best citizens, and therefore Christians were absolutely necessary for a good society. But statism believes and teaches that a good, moral society can be achieved without Christians, especially without reference to God or the Bible. Thus, statism denies the need for biblical regeneration and conversion. Under statism, salvation is not of God; it is of the state.

Christians are no longer needed, and churches are no longer needed. The state has achieved a monopoly on power, and it now seeks to free men from the bondage of Christian culture, Christian law, and Christian responsibility. Is that not apparent in our country? Have we not been alienated as Christians in our own country?

You must ask yourself a simple question: Is salvation a work of God or a work of government? To put it another way: Is the answer to the sin problem resolved by God or by the government? Stop and think about how the government tries to resolve everything unbiblically, and even anti-biblically. If a biblical principle is pointed out, it certainly is not accepted—not even considered plausible.

The State as a Rival God

Let me give you a quotation from R. J. Rushdoony. He wrote a book years ago entitled Politics of Guilt and Pity. I would encourage you to read it. It is not necessarily an easy read, but it is a wonderful read. If you read that book and understand how our society has been manipulated through guilt and pity, it will open your eyes.

Think about slavery. You hear today about reparations for slavery. I am not responsible for what someone did two hundred years ago. But if I can make you guilty over that, then I can control you. If I can make you guilty over anything, or if I can get your empathy over anything, I can manipulate and control you any way I want to.

That is what this book deals with: the politics of guilt and pity. Whenever you put someone on a guilt trip, you are attempting to manipulate and control them. “Every other mom and dad let their kids do it; why don’t you let me?” What is that? That is manipulation. “You ought to feel guilty because everybody else gets to do it, but I don’t get to do it.” It is the same principle.

Rushdoony said: "The modern state has made salvation its function. Man is to be saved from poverty, sickness, death, ignorance, sin, war, superstition, and all things else by the saving state, which works steadily to create its divine order, the saving society. Every area the state wishes to invade and possess in the name of the welfare of man becomes its legitimate jurisdiction. A total sovereignty is asserted in the name of man. The state steadily

denies the need of a Christian theological order as it claims jurisdiction over every area in terms of its royal divinity. Thus, the expansive state has become a competitor to Christianity."

It has become an idol before which men prostrate themselves. This is an ancient form of idolatry. For example, the imperial Roman coinage used during Christ's earthly ministry made it plain that the civil authority was to be treated as a god. On the denarius handed to Jesus in Matthew 22:19 was the image of Caesar with this inscription: "Tiberius Caesar, Augustus, son of the divine Augustus." The other side lauded Caesar as a high priest. Though we may not have this explicit claim to an alternative religious authority printed on our coinage, we can increasingly observe some of the earmarks of religious homage paid to the state.

There is extensive regulation of what was hitherto the domain of the individual, family, or church. Our taxes, while not the highest in the world, have been on an upward trend for a century, showing an increasing financial commitment to the state as opposed to other institutions. Is the state really concerned about the church? No. Is it really concerned about the family? No. Is it really concerned about the individual? And the answer is no.

Plato was one of the earlier statists. He was a Greek philosopher who wrote a book entitled The Republic. In his treatise, he envisioned the world controlled by an elite group of philosopher kings. These philosopher kings were all-wise and all-knowing. The rulers are not accountable to the public, and they require absolute individual devotion and submission for the good of the state. In Plato's Republic, only philosophers can have access to objective knowledge. Philosophers, as he put it, are "people who are capable of apprehending what is eternal and unchanging."

He is not referring to the Bible, but to individuals who can sit down in a quiet place and think clearly. Everyone else, which would include the rest of us—“those who are incapable of this and lose themselves and wander amid the multiplicities of multifarious things”—must be included among us. What is he saying? There are only a few chosen people who have the knowledge to rule in a state or in a nation. They are the elite, unaccountable to anyone, and

everyone else must give them their undying devotion, loyalty, and submission because it is for their own good.

Do you recognize that attitude? The modern state is anti-God, anti-Bible, and anti-Christ. Why? Because it neither recognizes a power higher than itself nor will it allow itself to be corrected or reformed by any power.

God created only three institutions: the family, which is a ministry of education; the church, which is a ministry of grace; and the state, or civil government, which is a ministry of justice. God not only created these institutions; He laid down the qualifications in them. He did so in the family. He did so in the church. He does so in the state. God also gives us the limitations of these institutions. The state does have authority under God in its own proper and limited sphere. But when an institution will not recognize anything higher than itself, nor be reformed by anything outside of itself, it is claiming godhood, no matter how you cut it.

It is claiming to be supreme and sovereign. Only God is absolute, supreme, and sovereign. Why must the state, why must the nation, steal the attributes of God? The answer is because the Marxist Hegel said it very bluntly: "The state is God walking on earth." Now, if the state is God, then Jesus Christ is not God. Have you ever wondered why the state is so nosy and desires to know everything about you?

Look at some of the census forms that have been sent out. You are foolish if you fill all that stuff out. You say, "How can you say that? You've got to fill it out according to the law." No. The Constitution of the United States, which is the supreme law of the land, says Congress shall have the power to enumerate the people. The word "enumerate" means to count. The only thing you owe them is how many people are in that house. They do not need to know how many bathrooms you have, how often you go to the bathroom, or how far you drive to work. That is none of their business. But why do they want to know everything about you?

One of the attributes of God is omniscience. God is all-knowing; God knows everything. If the government claims to be God, it too must exercise the attributes of God. The state does not have the right to total knowledge over its citizens or to transgress their privacy.

When it does so, it is attempting to be omniscient and thus make itself a rival to the one true and living God. Only God knows everything thoroughly, totally, and completely.

The state does not have the right to do with its citizens as it wills. The only thing a citizen owes his government is obedience to its laws. That obedience is limited by the Word of God and by the various constitutions of the state. No citizen owes any government unlimited obedience. Unlimited obedience is reserved for God alone.

That is why Peter and the rest of the apostles said in Acts 5:29, "We ought to obey God rather than men." I've often heard people say, "Well, you must understand the government is just looking out for our best interest."

The State's Self-Interest and Tyranny

If you really think that the government is genuinely interested in its citizens, consider this quotation by Murray N. Rothbard:

“We may test the hypothesis that the state is largely interested in protecting itself rather than its subjects by asking, which category of crimes does the state pursue and punish most intensely? Those against private citizens or those against itself? The greatest crimes in the state's lexicon are almost invariably not invasions of private property, or private persons, but dangers to its own contentment. For example, treason, desertion of a soldier to the enemy, failure to register for the draft, subversion and subversive conspiracy, assassination of rulers, and such economic crimes against the state as counterfeiting its money or evasion of its income tax.

“Or compare the degree of zeal devoted to pursuing the man who assaults a policeman with the attention that the state pays to the assault of an ordinary citizen. Yet, curiously, the state's openly assigned priority to its own defense against the public strikes very few people as inconsistent with its very reason for being.”

If a man shot at me today and missed me, and I reported it to the police, while someone shot at the governor and missed him, who do you think they would track down first—the man who shot at him or the man who shot at me? Which crimes does the state persecute more quickly and more intensely: those against the citizens or those

against itself? The answer is, those against itself. It is not primarily interested in the citizens; it is interested in itself.

H. L. Mencken said in 1926:

"It, the state, has taken on a vast mass of new duties and responsibilities. It has spread out its powers until they penetrate to every active citizen, however secret, and has begun to throw around its operations the high dignity and impeccability of a state religion. Its agents become a separate and superior caste with authority to bind and loose, and their thumbs in every pot.

"But it still remains, as it was in the beginning, the common enemy of all well-disposed, industrious, and decent men."

There is absolutely no tax that I despise more than the property tax. The property tax is the most unbiblical tax there is, because the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof. I get frustrated when property taxes continue to increase and discover that ninety percent of those taxes support the government schools.

Why should I be forced to pay for the education of someone else's children? It is not my responsibility to educate your child; that is your responsibility. It is not my responsibility to pay for your child's education. And if you do not own property, if you simply rent, you do not pay property taxes, which means everyone who rents gets a free ride. Only those who are industrious, work, and save are penalized.

That is exactly what H. L. Mencken was saying. Albert Nock wrote a book entitled Our Enemy, The State. How accurate is that title? There are plenty of Nockian societies around today. Government without God is an age-old heresy and an age-old idolatry. It is when the state claims godhood, claiming to dictate its own law and control its own destiny. Was that not exactly the temptation in the Garden of Eden, in Genesis chapter 3, when Adam and Eve could make their own law, be their own God, and do their own thing?

Applications and the Only Solution

As humanistic control and humanistic philosophy progress, the state will become more apostate and more openly rebellious against the one true and living God. To elevate itself to true godhood, it must necessarily deny the one true and living God and His law. Statism is

idolatry. Statism is Nimrodism. The ultimate result is totalitarianism and tyranny.

The most potent weapon the state has in its religion, philosophy, and edicts upon man is force. Government is force. George Washington said, "Government is not reason, it is not eloquence, it is force. Like fire, it is a dangerous servant and a fearful master." As long as fire remains in the fireplace, it is a dangerous servant; but if it escapes the fireplace, it becomes a fearful master.

We must remember this simple principle: Might does not make right. Just because you are bigger, stronger, or have more weapons does not mean that you are right. We must stand for truth, even if everyone else stands against it. Benjamin Franklin said, "Those who give up essential liberties for temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety." Yet we are told to give up our liberties so that we can be protected from terrorists. No, the reason we must give up our liberties is to make statist and totalitarian control more easily accomplished.

Secondly, we must learn to hold government accountable. You know, one distinct advantage that government has is that it always exempts itself from the very laws that it expects everyone else to obey. I like George Orwell's Animal Farm. If you've never read it, I encourage you to read it. It is really an ideal little booklet, and it shows tyranny and statism and totalitarianism. You see, Napoleon and Snowball were two pigs.

They organized all the farm animals against the farmer, because the farmer is the old, dirty owner, sovereign, and head. And boy, they post the rules. The very first rule that Napoleon and Snowball have is this: "All animals are equal." But after the farmer is disposed of, Napoleon and Snowball move into his house, while all the other animals are left in the barn. They begin scratching their heads and saying, "Something's wrong." Then they go back and look at the rules, and it says, number one, "All animals are equal, but some are more equal than others."

Do you realize that government is to be a servant? If you really want to make a bureaucrat or government employee angry, call him a public servant. They do not believe they are a servant; they believe

they are a master. As long as we allow government to go unchecked, unhindered, and unrestrained, we will continue down the same path until we are totally enslaved. We must use every lawful means available to us to call government into account.

Here is the third and most important application. Listen carefully. I hear people say all the time, "Brother John, I want solutions. I know what the problem is. I want solutions to the problem." Let me tell you, solutions are not always easy. But I can assure you that God's Word has the solution to every problem. Many will not abide by it, many will not follow it, and many will not allow it, but it is still the solution. The only escape that you and I have from statism, the only escape that anyone has from statism, is through obedience to God and His Word.

Now, write this statement down. Mark it in your heart, mark it in your mind, and put it in your Bibles. I do not care where you put it, but write it down: We will never put government in its place until we put God in His place, and that is upon His throne.

There can only be one sovereign. There can only be one ultimate. There can only be one absolute. And that one ultimate as sovereign and absolute is not government. It is the one true and the living God who has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ.

Most people never recognize tyranny because they do not know who God is. They do not know that God is sovereign. How can you recognize government as a thief and a usurper if you do not know its limitations and if you do not know who God is? No man will ever recognize tyranny who does not recognize the sovereignty of God.

So you want a solution? Here it is. Let us learn to put God in His rightful place and obey Him. Let us put God on the throne. When we put God on the throne and obey Him and Him alone, everything else will fall into its rightful, legitimate place.

The truth is simple. We will either obey God as sovereign or we will obey government as sovereign. We must choose between God and Caesar. We must, of necessity, obey one or the other. And as Joshua said in Joshua 24, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

I confess and I acknowledge that Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone is the one true and the living God. He is the one sovereign, the one Savior, the one ultimate, to whom belongs all honor, glory, worship, and praise.

Father, we thank You for all of Your love and all of Your grace. We thank You, Father, that Your Word has the answer. Your Word is to be our guide and our standard for our faith and our actions. Give us, Lord, grace to serve Thee, courage to obey Thee, and give us wisdom, Lord, to know how to accomplish it. We ask, Father, that You would be pleased to open the eyes and the understanding of Christians across this nation, that we would see what is happening in our country, that we might once again repent of our sins and turn to the one true and living God and worship Him alone. In the name of Jesus Christ we ask and pray, Amen.

CHAPTER 30

What Do You Have in Your Heart?

In 1 Chronicles 29, beginning with verse 17, David is praying:

"I know also, my God, that Thou triest the heart, and hast pleasure in uprightness. As for me in the uprightness of mine heart, I have willingly offered all these things, and now have I seen with joy thy people which are present here to offer willingly unto thee. O Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, our fathers, keep this forever in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of thy people, and prepare their heart unto thee. And give unto Solomon my son a perfect heart, to keep thy commandments, thy testimonies, and thy statutes, and to do all these things, and to build the palace, for the which I have made provision."

And David said to all the congregation, "Now bless the Lord your God." And all the congregation blessed the Lord God of their fathers, bowed down their heads, and worshipped the Lord and the king.

Introduction: The Heart as the Fountain of Life

There have been numerous television commercials in times past. Some were produced by a leading credit card company, and they always ended with the question, "What do you have in your wallet?" Most people are interested in what they have in their wallet. But the more important question, based upon the Scriptures, is, What do you have in your heart? Our hearts are the most important part of our beings.

I have preached many messages over the years, and I have often been asked which one, among those I have preached during the last fifty-two years, I would say is one of the most important for Christians. My answer would be the message titled "Keeping the Heart," from Proverbs 4:23. I have preached that message all over this country.

I think it is absolutely fundamental and necessary. Not only that, I usually preach that message to myself every day. Proverbs 4:23 says, "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." It is not my intent today to re-preach that message. However, if you have not heard it, I encourage you to listen to it. If it has been a long time since you heard it, listen to it again—probably several times, to make sure the principles are down in your mind and in your heart. I have also preached a number of messages on heart preparation.

The Heart Defined and Its Centrality

I believe those are important as well. But the truth is today, we have to understand that everything basically begins in our hearts.

According to the Scripture, your heart is basically your mind. It is your understanding. The word heart is used sometimes to convey our affections. That is true. But when you look in the Scripture, usually it refers to the mind and the understanding. For instance, when you look in 1 Chronicles 29 verses 17 through 20, you are going to find the word heart occurring several times. Each time that word heart occurs, it refers, once again, to the mind and to the understanding. One of the leading Hebrew words is the word Leb, and it is translated in our Bibles over and over as mind and understanding as well.

In reference then to our lives, the Bible teaches us in Proverbs chapter 23 and verse 7, “As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.” So the passage there is simply telling us that everything basically flows out of the heart. The heart is the fountain from which everything pours. Our actions, our conduct, our behavior, everything just flows right out of the heart.

This truth is enunciated also in the New Testament. In Luke chapter 6, verse 45, our Lord says, “A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.” Obviously, our Lord is teaching that a good man is going to bring out good things because good things are in his heart. An evil man is going to bring forth evil things because evil things are in his heart. Then He makes this statement: “for of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.” Inevitably, invariably, whatever is in your heart is ultimately going to come out. So if you look back at Matthew 15, our Lord is talking to His disciples.

In Matthew 15, beginning in verse 15, Peter asked Jesus, "Declare unto us this parable"—in other words, teach us exactly what You are saying. Jesus answered, "Are ye also yet without understanding? Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man."

Our Lord then said, "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man."

There are two statements here to which we should pay very close attention. First, "those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart." The heart is the fountain out of which everything pours. Everything comes from the heart. Second, notice the very first thing named in verse 19: "For out of the heart proceed"—evil thoughts. Then Jesus adds murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, and blasphemies.

You cannot commit an evil act without first having an evil thought. Everything begins with a thought. Thus, when our Lord speaks of the heart, He is speaking of the mind, where thinking and understanding take place. It is out of the heart that these evil thoughts come to pass. Our Lord is establishing once again that our behavior, actions, and conduct are the result of whatever is in our heart.

In 1 Chronicles 29, especially verses 17 and 18, we must understand the context in which those verses occur. David and the people had made preparation to build the temple. A great deal of the money for the building came from the heathen nations David had conquered. Out of the spoils of battle, they dedicated wealth to maintain the house of the Lord. First Chronicles 26:27 states it clearly: “Out of the spoils won in battles did they dedicate to maintain the house of the Lord.” Much of the booty and loot acquired in battle was set aside to build the temple.

Context: David's Offering and Prayer for the Temple

Most people have no idea how wealthy David really was, or how wealthy many of the Israelites were. First Chronicles 29, beginning with verse 2, shows us particularly how wealthy David was. David says:

“Now I have prepared with all my might for the house of my God the gold for things to be made of gold, and the silver for things of silver, and the brass for things of brass, the iron for things of iron, and wood for things of wood; onyx stones, and stones to be set, glistering stones, and of divers colours, and all manner of precious stones, and marble stones in abundance. Moreover, because I have set my affection to the house of my God, I have of mine own proper good, of gold and silver, which I have given to the house of my God, over and above all that I have prepared for the holy house, even three thousand talents of gold, of the gold of Ophir, which was the finest gold, by the way, three thousand talents, he said, and seven thousand talents of refined silver, to overlay the walls of the houses withal: The gold for things of gold, and the silver for things of silver, and for all manner of work to be made by the hands of artificers. And who then is willing to consecrate his service this day unto the Lord?”

Thus, over and above everything he conquered in battle, David gave this tremendous amount to the house of God.

Beginning in verse 6, the chief rulers, princes, and the people also gave very willingly and graciously: "Then the chief of the fathers and princes of the tribes of Israel, and the captains of thousands and of hundreds, with the rulers of the king's work, offered willingly, and gave for the service of the house of God of gold five thousand talents and ten thousand drams, and of silver ten thousand talents, and of brass eighteen thousand talents, and one hundred thousand talents of iron. And they with whom precious stones were found gave them to the treasure of the house of the Lord, by the hand of Jehiel the Gershonite. Then the people rejoiced, for that they offered willingly, because with perfect heart they offered willingly to the Lord: and David the king also rejoiced with great joy."

David gave a tremendous amount of money personally, and the princes joined in and gave as well. In verses 10 through 16, David gave praise and worship to God for all that had been given to the house of God. He also offered a prayer, saying in verse 16, "O Lord our God, all this store that we have prepared to build thee an house for thine holy name cometh of thine hand, and is all thine own."

In other words, David was saying, We really have not given You anything, because everything we have, You gave us; we are simply giving back to You. Our text comes in this prayer, praise, and worship that David was offering.

In verse 18 he says, "O Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, our fathers, keep this for ever in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of thy people, and prepare their heart unto thee."

One thing that caught my eye as I was reading through 1 Chronicles recently was this verse. David prayed, "keep this for ever in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of thy people." When I read that, my mind could not help but go to another verse of Scripture. Hold 1 Chronicles 29 and look back in your Bibles to Genesis 6 and verse 5.

Contrast: Depravity vs. Grace in the Heart

Here you see that same phrase again, only in a different context. Genesis 6 and verse 5 says, "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." Isn't that amazing? God saw every imagination of the thoughts of the heart of man in Genesis 6:5, and it was evil. When you come to 1 Chronicles 29, verse 18, David says, "keep this for ever in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of thy people."

Consider the comparison and contrast. Genesis 6 and verse 5 is what man is by nature; 1 Chronicles 29, verse 18 is what man is by grace. Genesis 6:5 is the work of man; 1 Chronicles 29:18 is the work of God. Genesis 6:5 is the work of man's depravity; 1 Chronicles 29:18 is the product of God's saving grace.

The question I have to ask in light of this is, what is in your heart? Comparing these two passages, you are only going to have depravity or grace. The question is very legitimate: What do you have in your heart?

Stop and think about this. If a person has his heart filled with the depravity of darkness, his actions, conduct, and behavior are going to be contrary to God, contrary to His law, and wicked and wrong. If, on the other hand, grace fills the heart of man, his actions, conduct, and behavior are going to be marked by obedience, submission to God, and trying to honor and glorify God. The question has to be asked: What is in your heart? The answer comes back: Your life is really and truly going to evidence what is in your heart.

Look at what David asks in verse 18: "...O Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, our fathers, keep this for ever in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of thy people, and prepare their heart unto thee." What was David asking God to keep in the hearts of His people? Basically, it was all of the good dispositions God had worked in them: their willingness to sacrifice, to cooperate, and to work together. David understood that all of this was from God's grace. He was asking God to fix in them a holy temper, a holy disposition, or a holy attitude. They had acted this way, and David prayed that God

would continue to have this in their hearts so they would continue to act this way.

God's Preparation of the Heart and Human Responsibility

David said, “O Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, our fathers, keep this for ever in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of thy people,” and then asked, “and prepare their heart unto thee.” Thus David recognized that the great spirit of giving, graciousness, and cooperation was the result of God preparing their hearts.

Proverbs 16, verse 1, says, “The preparations of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, is from the Lord.” The preparations of the heart in man are from the Lord. If our hearts are ever prepared to pray, God prepared them. If they are prepared to study, God prepared them. If they are prepared to witness, God prepared them. If a sinner is ever prepared in his heart to come savingly to Jesus Christ, God prepared his heart.

In John 6:37, our Lord said, “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.” But in John 6:44, He says, “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.” Sinners may come, but they come because God prepared their hearts. “Can” is a term of ability: no man can come except the Father who sent Him draw him.

Scripture reveals that although the ability is God's in preparing our hearts, the responsibility is ours to seek Him to prepare our hearts. Consider the contrast in 2 Chronicles 12:14 concerning Rehoboam, the son of Solomon and grandson of David. One author said, "Solomon only had one son, and he was a fool." That is true. Solomon and all of his wives had only one son, Rehoboam, and he turned out to be a fool. Here is why. The Bible says, "So king Rehoboam..." and then, in verse 14, "And he did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek the Lord." Why did Rehoboam do evil? He prepared not his heart to seek the Lord. His failure was not merely that he did evil; the stated reason was that he had not prepared his heart to seek the Lord.

It is true that God must prepare our hearts. But we have a duty, an obligation, and a responsibility to seek Him to prepare our hearts. The ability is God's, but seeking Him is our responsibility.

Now consider King Jotham in 2 Chronicles 27:6. The Bible says, "So Jotham became mighty, because he prepared his ways before the Lord his God." You cannot prepare your ways unless your heart is prepared. Rehoboam did not prepare his heart. Jotham did, and consequently he prepared his ways as well. Rehoboam's unprepared heart led to evil, while Jotham's prepared heart was followed by prepared ways and strength before the Lord his God.

Here are two men: one prepared his heart, and one did not prepare his heart. Let me give you a couple of illustrations.

Ezra was a scribe, and he understood his responsibility quite well. You can read about Ezra in the book of Ezra. In Ezra 7:10, the Scripture says, "For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments." Ezra prepared his heart to seek the law of God and then to teach the law of God. Obviously, he did have that duty and responsibility.

Our part—and I am using that phrase very generally—our duty, our responsibility, in seeking God and preparing our heart, is to rid ourselves of anything contrary to God. In 1 Samuel 7:3, the Israelites were fearful because of the Philistines. Samuel spoke unto all the house of Israel, saying, "If ye do return unto the Lord with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the Lord, and serve him only: and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines."

If you are really going to turn to the Lord, what should you do? Put away your strange gods. Put away Ashtaroth, the false god, and serve Him only. In other words, you have a duty, an obligation, and a responsibility to obey Him. Do it. That is what he said. The ability is God's; the responsibility is ours.

Our Lord said basically the same exact thing in Luke 12:47, making an application to the parable He was teaching: "And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes."

Here was a servant who knew his Lord's will but did not prepare himself to do that will. He ignored the will of his master.

Our part in preparation is to seek God first and foremost, to prepare our heart, and then to turn from all that is contrary to God. It is like the man who says, "Well, I'm going to live a life of sobriety from here forward." If he is going to live a life of sobriety from here forward, he had better stay away from the bars and the liquor stores. In other words, he has to prepare himself to live a life of sobriety.

That is exactly what the Scripture is teaching us. We must be prepared to do this. We have the responsibility to seek the Lord, prepare our hearts, and turn from everything contrary to God.

Go back to verse 18 of 1 Chronicles 29: “O Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, our fathers, keep this for ever in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of thy people, and prepare their hearts unto thee.” David said, Lord, there are some things You need to keep in the hearts of Your people, and the people need to keep in their hearts. You must prepare their heart; that is true. But what is David requesting God to keep in the hearts of His people? He says, “keep this for ever in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of our people.” This what?

First Truth to Keep: God Tries the Heart

It is not merely a spirit of willingness to sacrifice or a spirit of cooperation, though certainly that would be included. There is something more specific. In verse 17 David said, “I know also, my God, that thou triest the heart, and hast pleasure in uprightness. As for me, in the uprightness of mine heart I have willingly offered all these things: and now have I seen with joy thy people, which are present here, to offer willingly unto thee.”

There are two things he tells us we must keep in our hearts. The first is that God tries the heart. The word “tries” is the Hebrew word bakad, which means to examine: to try, to prove, to scrutinize, and to test. God not only scrutinizes our hearts; He will test them. He examines our hearts in order to reveal them to us and to others as well. God does not need this knowledge for Himself, because He is omniscient and knows everything, but we do not.

Genesis 22:1 says, “And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am.” The word “tempt” there literally means to test or to try. God was not tempting Abraham to sin. He was testing him and examining him.

Oftentimes our faith is tested and tried. Peter gives a very general illustration of this in 1 Peter 1, beginning with verse 6: “Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations,” or manifold trials, or manifold tests. Verse 7 says, “That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.” So he talks again here about the trial and the testing of our faith.

The interesting thing is this: as you read through the Bible, you will find that God often tests us and tries us. The examination is so thorough that we do not necessarily understand it when we simply glance at the Bible. There are a number of verses where you will find a little word, “reins,” R-E-I-N-S. Each time you see it, it is usually in the context of being scrutinized or examined.

Psalm 7:9 is one of my favorite verses, especially the first part: “Oh let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end; but establish the just:” And then he says, “for the righteous God trieth the hearts and reins.” Now, are the reins different from the heart? Why would he say that he trieth the hearts and the reins?

David is praying again in Psalm 26:2, and he asks the Lord, “Examine me, O Lord, and prove me; try my reins and my heart.” What is he talking about when he says, “Try my reins and my heart”? In Psalm 73:21, Asaph says, “Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins.” Psalm 139:13 is a tremendous verse in a tremendous psalm. We will come back to it later, but look what David says.

Psalm 139, verse 13, says to the Lord, “For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb.” Turn to

Jeremiah chapter 17. I want you to see a smattering of these verses, because every time you read the Bible and see the word reins, you should know exactly what it means. In Jeremiah 17:10, the Lord says, "I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings." God says, "I search the heart, and I try the reins."

This word is not used only in the Old Testament; it is also used in the New Testament. In Revelation 2:23, God says, "And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works." This is essentially the same thing He said in Jeremiah 17:10.

What does it mean when Scripture says that God tries the reins and the heart? In all the Old Testament verses, the Hebrew word is keliah, which literally means kidneys or reins. God searches the kidneys. When the word is translated as reins in the Bible, it means that God searches the innermost recesses of the heart. Nothing escapes His knowledge or His notice. In the New Testament, the Greek word is nephros, referring to kidneys, loins, or the inmost feelings or faults.

I took Greek for three years, and one of my favorite words was splognenzomai. I had several favorite words. The word for wife is goonie; sometimes I would call Alice my goonie. But splognenzomai—splognidzomite—refers to your bowels. It speaks of loving with all your heart, or, as the ancients understood it, loving with all your bowels, the inside of man. I would sometimes tell Alice, "I love you with all my bowels." She would say that was not as romantic as "I love you with all my heart," but it is the same principle.

It is the same with the word reins. God searches the reins of the hearts. He is not merely searching the heart generally speaking, nor the organ per se; He is searching the mind, the understanding, and all the recesses found there.

Here is the first truth that should never leave your mind, the first truth established in your understanding: God will scrutinize and examine every area of your thought, every motive, every desire, and

every intent. You will answer and give an account to Him in the day of judgment. Romans 2:16 says, “In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel.” God will judge the secrets of men.

Proverbs 17:3 says, “The fining pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold: but the Lord trieth the hearts.” The Lord tests, examines, and scrutinizes the heart. This should always remain in our minds: God is examining our thoughts. There is a passage, I think in Ezekiel, where God said, “I know your thoughts, every one of them, before they come into your mind.” God knows what you will think before you think it. Nothing can be hidden from the Lord. He is omniscient—all-knowing. Everything is revealed to Him.

Now, if you will look back in your Bibles to 1 Chronicles 29 and verse 17, here is the second thing that David is praying for in verse 18, that will be maintained in your understanding, in your mind, and in your heart. He says in verse 17, "I know also, my God, that thou triest the heart, and hast pleasure in uprightness. As for me in the uprightness of mine heart I have willingly offered all these things: and now have I seen with joy thy people, which are present here, to offer willingly unto thee." The second thing that we must keep in our mind is that God has pleasure in uprightness.

Second Truth to Keep: God Has Pleasure in Uprightness

So let me ask you a question. Obviously, we are a pleasure-oriented people. We normally do that which pleases us. But has it ever entered into your mind that there are some things that please the Lord? Have you ever consciously asked the Lord, "Help me to do that today that is pleasing in thy sight"? Have you ever set your heart, your mind, or your understanding to do that which you knew was pleasing unto Him?

The word pleasure, when he said in verse 17, "thou hast pleasure in uprightness," is the Hebrew word ratzah, which literally means that which is acceptable, pleasing, delightful, enjoyable, favorable, and approvable. God has pleasure in that which favors Him and that which He approves, that which is delightful to Him.

Now, let me show you. Turn to two passages, both of them in Colossians. The first one is Colossians chapter 1. I want you to see, first of all, the prayer that the Apostle Paul is making for these Colossian Christians. Look in Colossians 1, verse 10. He said in verse 9, "We... cease not to pray for you," and then he tells them some of the things for which he prays and asks on their behalf.

Verse 10: "That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God." Notice, "that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing." In other words, the Apostle Paul is praying that you might walk in such a way that delights and pleases our Heavenly Father, that you would walk in such a way that is acceptable and favorable unto Him.

How do we do that? Look in Colossians 3 and verse 20. Here is a very interesting passage. Most of the time we quote it: “Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord.” This is well pleasing unto the Lord. Now, wait a minute. The Lord hath pleasure in uprightness. The word for uprightness is Yosher, which means that which is straight, upright, right, and due. What is God’s right? What is God’s due? I can show you Scriptures where the Bible says, “give unto God the glory that is due unto his holy name.” There are things that we owe God; it is His due. Look back at verse 20: “Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord.”

If God looks at earthly parents and their earthly children and says to those children, “I want you to obey your earthly parents. As long as you obey them, that is well pleasing in My eyes. That is My delight, favorable and acceptable unto Me. I want it. That is My due from you as children: that you obey your parents,” then how much more is He well pleased when His spiritual children obey their Heavenly Father? Do you follow me? If God is well pleased with physical children obeying their physical parents, then obviously He is well pleased when we obey Him as His children.

Now go back to Colossians chapter 1. Look at verse 10: “that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing.” How do you walk worthy of the Lord? He explains: “being fruitful in every good work.” How are you fruitful in every good work? The answer is, by being

obedient. Then he adds, “and increasing in the knowledge of God.” How do you increase in the knowledge of God? The answer is, by being obedient. Our Lord is telling us very plainly that it is obedience that pleases Him.

I cannot please Him without walking worthily. I cannot please Him without obedience. I cannot please Him without studying and increasing in the knowledge of God.

Now, go back in your Bibles to 1 Chronicles 29 and look at verse 17. David said, “I know also, my God, that thou triest the heart.” That is one truth. “And hast pleasure in uprightness.” That is the second truth.

Remember, David has just given all of this money for the building of the temple. He says, “As for me, in the uprightness of mine heart,” that is, in the straightness of my heart, “I have willingly offered all these things: and now have I seen with joy thy people, which are present here, to offer willingly unto thee.” David is saying that God tries the heart and has pleasure in uprightness.

David's Example and Prayer for Self-Examination

Then he said, “As for me,” in other words, God, You are the sovereign God of heaven and earth, the omniscient God. Under the scrutiny of Your eye and the examination that You give, as for me, I have given all of this in uprightness. I have done this for Your pleasure, Your honor, and Your glory.

That is a tremendous undertaking. When you can ask God to search your heart and truthfully say before the omniscient God of heaven and earth, “I’ve done this in uprightness according to Your word, for Your honor and Your glory; You can search me,” that is a tremendous thing.

I have preached for over 52 years. There have been times when I genuinely thought I was serving the Lord, and the Lord opened my eyes and showed me I was serving myself. I thought I was doing something for God’s honor and glory, but then I understood I was doing it out of the pride of my own heart, or for the praise and recognition of man, and not for God at all.

God can indeed slap us down and humble us. When He opens our eyes and lets us see how miserable we really are, even as Christians, wow—it is an eye opener. So David is praying in verse 18, "Lord, You keep these things in the hearts of Your people. You keep them mindful that You are the God that tries the heart and that You have pleasure in uprightness."

David asked God to search him thoroughly. In Psalm 139:23-24, he prayed, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." David was asking God to search him, test him, try him, and reveal any wicked way in him so that he might turn from it and repent. Then God would lead him in the way everlasting.

I often tell people there are two prayer requests that we need to pray, and we need to pray them one after the other. The first is, "Lord, show me myself." If God only showed us ourselves—our pride, arrogance, sin, rebellion, wickedness, and disobedience, even as believers—if He really showed us that, He would slap us down to the ground so quickly and make our heads swim.

We cannot know our hearts the way God does. Jeremiah 17 says, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." The second prayer is, "Lord, show me Thyself." Once God shows us ourselves and then reveals Himself, we know that all the answers to our problems are in Him. We see His holiness, purity, grace, mercy, goodness, kindness, and love. We should pray, "Lord, show us ourselves," but also, "Lord, show us Thyself."

David said in Psalm 51:6, in the passage where he was confessing his sin, "Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom." God desires truth in the inward parts, so we need to be truthful with Him. We are not accurate with God, because He already knows. People say, "Sometimes I get so aggravated, sometimes I get so angry, sometimes I get so mad, and I just do not even want to pray." I tell them, "You know what you should do?" They ask, "What?" I say, "Go ahead and pray and tell God about your frustration and anger, because He already knows it. Just be honest with Him and ask Him to help you deal with it." It is just that simple.

Look in Isaiah 33, beginning with verse 14: “The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites.” Then he asks these questions: “Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?”

Then he begins to talk about the obedient life: “He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly; he that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil; He shall dwell on high: his place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks: bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure. Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty: they shall behold the land that is very far off.”

When you examine verse fifteen, that verse simply deals with straight-out obedience in every area of life. God says you want your munitions to be sure, your bread to be sure, your water to be sure, and to behold the king in all of his beauty. Obedience is the answer.

Application: Comfort for the Godly, Terror for the Wicked

The first application is this: It is indeed a great satisfaction and comfort to a godly man to know that God examines the heart and the reins, and that God knows the motives, desires, and intents of the heart. How can I say that? There have been times in my life when I have really wanted to help people, and times when I have really tried to do certain things for the benefit of others. And guess what?

It blew up in my face. It turned out wrong. I did not intend or desire for it to turn out wrong, but it did. It was beyond my control and out of my hands. All I can do is sit back and say, "Lord, you do know my heart. You do know my intent. You do know my motives and my desire. You know everything."

That is the only consolation you have. I tell people the two hardest truths I ever learned in my life in the ministry. Number one, you cannot help everybody. Number two, sometimes those you can help are your own family and your own friends. You try, but it does not work out. Yet God knows your heart, and God knows the motives.

It is just like Peter. Peter denied the Lord three times. When you get to John 21, three times our Lord asks Peter, "Lovest thou me more than these?" Finally, the third time, Peter, being grieved, said, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee." What was he doing? He was appealing to our Lord's omniscience. He was saying, "Yes, Lord, I stumbled. I failed. I denied You three times. I know that was wicked, wrong, and disobedient, but You know that I love You."

It was Peter's pride and arrogance that said, "though all men forsake thee and deny thee, yet will not I." Our Lord said, "Before the cock crows twice, you'll deny me three times." Peter had to come back and say, "Lord, I was wrong. You were right. But Lord, I love you, and you know that I love you."

This truth terrifies the wicked. When they stop and entertain the thought that God is going to hold them accountable, not just for their actions, conduct, and behavior, but for their wrong motives, wrong desires, and wrong intents—and He knows every one of them—what is comfort and consolation to the child of God is consternation and terror to the enemies of God. We know that God tries the heart and has pleasure in uprightness.

If we desire to please God, then we must learn to walk in uprightness. We must consciously say, "Lord, I know You are examining my heart. I know You are trying my heart. I know You are scrutinizing my heart. And Lord, to the best of my ability and knowledge, by Your infinite grace and mercy, I want to please Thee. I want to honor Thee. I want to obey Thee. I want to worship Thee."

Grace in my heart, and not depravity. Your actions will always reveal what is in your heart. Always. So the question is not what is in your wallet; it is what is in your heart. For out of the heart the mouth speaketh, and out of the heart are the issues of life. Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank You for Your Word and Your truth. We thank You, Father, that You are indeed the God who tries our hearts, tests us, examines us, and scrutinizes us. We thank You, Father, that You have pleasure in uprightness, and we ask that You would help us to walk uprightly

and to please Thee. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 31

What Do You Have In Your Heart

Introduction: The Importance of the Heart

I appreciate those girls singing. I'm like Brother Crispin; I cannot sing. I said to one lady, "I can't carry a tune in a bucket." She said, "Oh, that's not true, you can carry it, you just can't dump it." Well, whatever it is, I surely can't, but I'm thankful to be able to at least make a noise every now and then.

I want you to open your Bibles, please, to 1 Chronicles, chapter 29. We are going to be reading verses 17 through 20. The title of the message is, "What Do You Have in Your Heart?" 1 Chronicles 29, verse 17, the Word of God says this: "I know also, my God, that Thou triest the heart, and hast pleasure in uprightness. As for me, in the uprightness of mine heart I have willingly offered all these things. And now have I seen with joy Thy people which are present here, to offer willingly unto Thee. O Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, our fathers, keep this forever in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of Thy people, and prepare their heart unto Thee; and give unto Solomon my son a perfect heart to keep Thy

commandments, Thy testimonies, Thy statutes, and to do all these things, and to build the palace for which I have made provision."

And David said unto all the congregation, "Now bless the Lord your God." And all the congregation blessed the Lord God of their fathers, and bowed down their heads and worshipped the Lord and the King.

Years ago, there was a leading credit card company that had some very interesting commercials on TV. Every time the commercial ended, it ended with this question: "What do you have in your wallet?" A lot of people are really concerned about what they have or do not have in their wallets, that is for sure. But the truth of the matter is, the more important question is, What do you have in your heart?

Our hearts are really and truly the most important parts of our being. I have preached for 52 years, and in fact, I was just asked this question this past week: Out of all the messages that you have preached over all these years, which do you think would be the one that you would nominate as number one, the one that would be best for Christians to hear?

The message that I believe would be number one is the message that I preach from Proverbs 4:23, keeping the heart. The Bible says, "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." I have preached that message all over the country, but more importantly, I preach that message to myself practically every day. We are commanded in the Bible to keep our hearts with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life. It is not my intent to re-preach that message tonight.

The Heart as the Fountain of Life

However, if you have not heard it, I would encourage you to hear it. If you have heard it one time, I would encourage you to hear it several more times. I think it is that important. I also have a series on heart preparation, which I would encourage you to hear as well.

We must understand that everything begins in our hearts. Without going into great detail, which I did in the message "Keeping the Heart," let me simply say this: your heart is your mind. It is your

understanding. It is your thoughts, your life, and that upon which you set your affection. In fact, every time the word "heart" is used in the text we just read from 1 Chronicles 29:17–20, it is the word which means mind, understanding, heart.

When God said in Proverbs 4:23, "Keep thy heart with all diligence," the word "heart" there is the Hebrew word "leb," and it is translated "mind" or "understanding" twenty-something times in our Bible. So your heart is basically your mind and your understanding, and you have to realize that our actions, conduct, and behavior all come from our heart. You remember Proverbs 23:7, where the Bible says, "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." In other words, everything that you do comes out of the heart.

Our Lord sets this up for us to understand. In Luke chapter 6, verse 45, our Lord makes this very clear: “A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.” Our Lord is simply saying that the heart is the fountain from which everything pours. Everything comes from the heart. A good man brings out good treasure from his heart; an evil man brings out evil treasure from his heart. Everything comes from the heart.

In Matthew chapter 15, our Lord says, “...thefts, false witness, blasphemies: these are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man.” There are two statements here to which we should pay exceedingly close attention. First of all, our Lord says, “Those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart.” Whatever you say, however you act, is a revelation of what is in your heart. Your heart can be understood. Your heart can be seen by others because your mouth expresses basically what is in your heart, and your life acts it out. Your heart is the fountain from which everything else pours.

Proverbs 4:23 says, “Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.” Everything is the outgoing of the life, and it comes from the heart. The second thing to notice is what our Lord said in Matthew chapter 15, verse 19: “For out of the heart proceed

evil thoughts." Note that He put evil thoughts first. Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts.

He mentions murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, and blasphemies. You cannot commit an evil act without first having an evil thought. You always think about things before you do them. Our Lord is saying that everything proceeds out of the heart.

When you look back in your Bibles to 1 Chronicles chapter 29, you will see that the context of David's prayer is found in the dedication of the wealth for the building of the temple. The temple was to be a most magnificent building, built for God's honor and glory. The truth of the matter is that a great deal of the wealth used to build the temple came from the spoils of war. In 1 Chronicles 26:27, the Bible says, "Out of the spoils won in battles did they dedicate to maintain the house of the Lord."

Context of David's Prayer in 1 Chronicles 29

David acquired a great deal of wealth from his enemies, but much of that money was given to the Lord and dedicated to building and maintaining the temple. The interesting thing is that in 1 Chronicles 29, David gave over and above, out of his own goods, to build the temple of the Lord.

We have no idea, and cannot conceive in our minds, how wealthy King David truly was. We could probably never imagine how wealthy King Solomon really was. But David gives us a good indication of his wealth. He gave from his own personal wealth, over and above what he had acquired in battle. He says, "Moreover, because I have set my affection to the house of my God, I have of mine own proper good, of gold and silver, which I have given to the house of my God, over and above all that I have prepared for the holy house."

"Even three thousand talents of gold, of the gold of Ophir, and seven thousand talents of refined silver, to overlay the walls of the houses withal: the gold for things of gold, and the silver for things of silver, and for all manner of work to be made by the hands of artificers. And who then is willing to consecrate his service this day unto the Lord?"

What most people do not understand is this: when David said, “I have given over and above, over and above what I had acquired in battle, of my own proper good, I've given to the house of my God 3,000 talents of gold,” he was describing an immense gift. A little research in a Bible encyclopedia, or online, will show that a biblical talent weighed approximately 75 pounds.

If you took the monetary value of gold today, let's just say $1,200 an ounce, at 16 ounces, a pound of gold would be worth $19,200. Multiplied by 75 and then by 3,000, that comes to 225,000 pounds of gold. At today's price, the gold alone would be worth $4,320,000,000. And that did not count the silver or anything else he gave.

I realize that would be today's money, but the point is this: when David gave, he gave. Notice something else. David was not the only one. The chief of the fathers and princes of the tribes of Israel, the captains of thousands and of hundreds, and the rulers of the king's work “offered willingly, and gave for the service of the house of God of gold five thousand talents, and ten thousand drams, and of silver ten thousand talents, and of brass eighteen thousand talents, and one hundred thousand talents of iron. And they with whom precious stones were found gave them to the treasure of the house of the Lord, by the hand of Jehiel the Gershonite.”

David was giving tremendously and very generously to the building of the house of God. Remember, everything was overlaid with gold, even the walls. The princes and the rulers gave willingly as well. Thus, in verses 10 through 16, David is praying, but he is also praising and worshiping the Lord because they were able to give to God.

Here is what David said in his prayer: "O Lord our God, all this store that we have prepared to build Thee an house for Thine holy name cometh of Thine own hand, and is all Thine own." David is saying, "Lord, we can't give You anything because You gave all of this to us originally, initially, and all we're doing is giving back what You gave us. It was already Yours." In this prayer, David gives a very specific request. He says in verse 18, "Keep this forever in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of Thy people."

When I was reading through 1 Chronicles recently, I read this passage, and a certain phrase in verse 18 caught my eye and immediately brought another passage of Scripture to my mind. I remembered seeing that phrase previously in the Bible. The phrase was, "the imagination of the thoughts of the heart." That wording caused me to consider the contrast between these two passages and what they reveal about the human heart.

Contrasting Depravity and Grace in the Heart

Genesis chapter 6 and verse 5 speaks concerning the wickedness and depravity of man: "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." Isn't that amazing? Genesis 6:5 speaks of the imagination of the thoughts of the heart, and 1 Chronicles 29:18 speaks of the imagination of the thoughts of the heart as well. Genesis 6:5 is what man is by nature; 1 Chronicles 29:18 is what man is by grace. Genesis 6:5 is the work of man; 1 Chronicles 29:18 is indeed the work of God. Genesis 6:5 is the product of man's depravity; 1 Chronicles 29:18 is the product of God's saving grace. Thus we understand that, on the one hand, you have depravity, and on the other hand, you have grace.

So the question automatically arises: What do you have in your heart? You are either going to have depravity or grace. Even as a Christian, if you answer, “I have grace in my heart,” you must remember that we are sinners. Even as Christians, we can still have some depravity in our thoughts, just as we can have grace in our thoughts as well.

Look back at verse 18 of 1 Chronicles chapter 29, because David is giving this specific prayer request: “O Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, our fathers, keep this forever in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of Thy people, and prepare their hearts unto Thee.” What is David asking for? Generally, he is asking God to keep all of those good dispositions being revealed at that particular time in the hearts of his people: the spirit of generosity, unselfishness, cooperation, willingness to worship, and prayer. David is asking God to fix in their lives and hearts a holy disposition, a holy attitude, so that they will continually and consistently worship Him and Him

alone. Interestingly, he ends verse 18 with these words: “and prepare their heart unto Thee.”

God Must Prepare the Heart

Has it ever dawned upon you that God has to prepare our hearts? The Bible says in Proverbs 16:1, “The preparations of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, is from the Lord.” The preparation of the heart in man and the answer of the tongue is from the Lord. It is absolutely true that God must prepare our hearts.

Let me say it plainly. If your heart is ever prepared to pray, God prepared it. If your heart is ever prepared to study, God prepared it. If your heart is ever prepared to witness, God prepared it. If your heart is ever prepared to repent, God prepared it. If your heart is ever prepared to come savingly to Jesus Christ, God prepared it.

The Bible does tell us in John chapter 6 and verse 37, our Lord said, “All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me; and him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out.” Yes, the Bible does say that. But the same Lord that said that in John 6:37 also said in John 6:44, “No man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.” What did He say? Yes, if you come, I will not cast you out, because the only way you can come is if the Father draws you, because you have no ability on your own.

So if our hearts are prepared to come savingly to Christ, then He prepared them. The interesting thing is this: We have a duty, an obligation, and a responsibility to seek Christ and prepare our hearts. His is the ability; ours is the responsibility.

I want to show you a contrast in two passages, first in 2 Chronicles chapter 12 and then in chapter 27. In 2 Chronicles chapter 12 and verse 14, you will read about Rehoboam. Rehoboam was the son of Solomon, who was the son of David. So Rehoboam was David’s grandson. Rehoboam was a fool. He was a tyrant. Look at 2 Chronicles chapter 12, verse 14. In fact, if you look at verse 13, you can see that Rehoboam is in the context: “So King Rehoboam”—that is who we are talking about.

Rehoboam did evil because he prepared not his heart to seek the Lord. In other words, he did not ask God for faith or repentance or anything. He was simply living his life, totally ignoring God and doing his own thing.

In 2 Chronicles 27:6, we read of another king, Jotham: “So Jotham became mighty, because he prepared his ways before the Lord his God.” The Bible says he prepared his ways, but you cannot prepare your ways before the Lord unless you have prepared your heart before the Lord. Unless your heart is prepared, you will never have your ways prepared. It is just that simple. Rehoboam did not prepare his heart; Jotham did.

You may say, “I thought the preparations of the heart in man are from the Lord.” That is true. But Jotham was the man who besought God to order his steps, direct his ways, and keep his heart.

Consider Ezra in Ezra 7:10: “For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.” Ezra prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord. How did he do that? He put aside everything else and said, “God, You have to give me understanding. You have to give me light.” He sat down to study, trusting that by God’s grace he would be able to teach His law.

Paul told Timothy, in 2 Timothy 2:7, “Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things.” Understanding is God’s gift, but God does not give that gift willy-nilly. You do not go to bed dumb and wake up smart, or go to bed ignorant and wake up suddenly knowing the Word of God. You must consider what He said. As you consider, study, and meditate, ask God to open your understanding, give you insight and illumination, and give you truth.

That's how Ezra prepared his heart. You remember the passage in 1 Samuel chapter 7. Samuel was talking to Israel because the Israelites were fearful of the Philistines, and Samuel said this: "And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, If ye do return unto the Lord with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the Lord, and serve Him only: and He will deliver you out of the hand of

the Philistines." Now, how were they to prepare their hearts if the preparations of the heart in man are from the Lord?

The answer is very simple. They had to put away their false gods. If they did not put away their false gods, it was very obvious that they did not want God, nor did they want Him to prepare their hearts to serve and worship Him alone. So we have to come to the Lord and say, "Lord, I know only You can prepare my heart, but Lord, I have a duty. I have a responsibility to come to You and ask You to prepare my heart." That is our obligation. God is not going to study for us. He is not going to turn from sin for us. He is not going to do that which He has commanded us to do.

First Request: Keep in Mind that God Tries the Heart

Now, David, in 1 Chronicles chapter 29, undoubtedly was asking God in this passage to confirm their hearts, establish their hearts, and keep these people in constant faith and obedience. There can be no doubt of these desires. But I want you to watch verse 18 again, and then I want to show you what I have in mind. He says, "O Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, our fathers, keep this forever in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of Thy people, and prepare their heart unto Thee."

So what is he asking when he says, "Keep this forever in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of Thy people"? To understand what David is asking God to keep in the hearts of the people, you have to go back to verse 17. David said, "I know also, my God, that Thou triest the heart, and hast pleasure in uprightness. As for me, in the uprightness of mine heart I have willingly offered all these things."

"And now have I seen with joy Thy people which are present here to offer willingly unto Thee." Here are two things that David is specifically asking God to keep in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of these people. First, in verse 17, he said, "I know also, my God, that Thou triest the heart." In other words, we need to remember that God tries the heart. The Hebrew word for "triest" is "bachan," which literally means to examine, to try, to prove, to scrutinize, and to test. Has it ever dawned upon you that God scrutinizes your mind? He scrutinizes your understanding, and He

will test that. He will examine it and prove what is in your mind and in your heart.

Not just for His knowledge; He already knows. He is omniscient. He knows everything. But you and I do not know what is in our minds sometimes. We think we do. We do not know what we will do under pressure. We do not know whether we will cave or stand. Other people may not know, but God will test us, try us, and prove us to reveal to ourselves and to others what we are made of. Just read the book of Job. What did God say to Satan? "Hast thou considered My servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth? A man that is upright and escheweth evil."

Do you remember Genesis chapter 22 and verse 1? "And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am." Notice that the Bible says God did tempt Abraham. The word "tempt" there does not mean to entice or seduce into evil. God does not do that. James chapter 1 says, "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."

God does not tempt anyone to do that which is wicked and wrong. The word "tempt" there literally means to test. If you would hold 1 Chronicles 29, look in your Bibles to 1 Peter chapter 1, beginning at verse 6. All through the Bible, we read about the trials and the testing of our faith.

This is a very general passage, but the truth is here. In 1 Peter 1:6, he says, “Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations,” or tests, or trials, “that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.” So he is talking about the trial of your faith. That is the testing of your faith.

God did test Abraham, and God tests us. He tests all of His people. In fact, you are going to read about this testing over and over in Scripture. This is the trying of the heart. There is another word connected with the heart that you may not be familiar with. Hold 1 Chronicles 29, and go over in your Bibles to the book of Psalms. We will look at several passages, because I want you to see a word that you may not understand, what it really means.

In Psalm 7:9, David prays, "Oh let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end; but establish the just: for the righteous God trieth the hearts and reins." What in the world are the reins? And why are the reins always connected with the heart?

In Psalm 26:2, David is praying and asks God to examine him: "Examine me, O Lord, and prove me; try my reins and my heart." In Psalm 73:21, Asaph says, "Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins." These are only a few passages; there are plenty more.

"My heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins." What are your reins? Psalm 139:13 says, "Thou hast possessed my reins: Thou hast covered me in my mother's womb." Whatever the reins are, you had them ever since you were conceived, before you were even born.

Jeremiah 17:10 says, "I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings." You had better think about this: "I, the Lord, search the heart. I try the reins." Why will God test you, prove you, and scrutinize you? "To give to every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings."

This word is used in the New Testament as a Greek word in Revelation 2:23: "I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am He which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works." It is the same truth. God searches the hearts and the reins, that He might give to everyone according to their works.

Every time you see the word "reins," R-E-I-N-S, in the Old Testament, it comes from the same Hebrew word, "kilyah." It is literally translated "reins," but it means kidneys. Sometimes the

word refers to the actual organ, a kidney, but most of the time it expresses the innermost feelings, thoughts, and being of man.

We do things differently than they did in Bible times, and we think differently. One of my favorite Greek words is “splagchna,” usually “splagchnizomai” when it is used. “Splagchna” means bowels. The Orientals always believed that the innermost being of man was in the bowels. For some reason, Alice does not think it is romantic when I tell her I love her with all my bowels. She prefers the word “heart.” But the Orientals use the word “bowels,” and you will find it translated that way in the Bible.

And so when God says He searches the hearts and the reins, He is simply saying that everything that is in you, He searches, scrutinizes, and tries. Now, let me tell you something, folks. If you want something that will change your life and will change your life on a daily basis, keep in the imagination of the thoughts of your heart this truth: every time a thought enters into your mind, God is scrutinizing my thoughts. He understands my thoughts. In fact, in the book of Ezekiel, God says this: “I know your thoughts, every one of them, even before they enter your mind.” God knows what you are going to think before you ever think it, and He knows every thought that comes into your mind.

If this truth never leaves you, it is going to change the way you live. It is going to change the way you think. In fact, you will understand what the Apostle Paul meant in Romans chapter 2 and verse 16 when he says, “In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel.” He says the secrets are going to be judged. Those secret thoughts that no one else knows that we have, God knows them. He knows every one of them. Every thought. He knows when you entertain evil and wicked thoughts. He knows when you fight against evil and wicked thoughts. He knows when you turn from evil and wicked thoughts. He knows when you desire evil and wicked thoughts.

The Bible says in Proverbs 17, verse 3, “The fining pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold: but the Lord trieth the hearts.” The Lord tests, scrutinizes, proves, and examines the heart. David said, “O Lord, keep this in the understanding and the thoughts of the heart of Your people. You keep it in mind, let them keep in their minds that

You search their hearts." I never will forget a story I read years ago about Mel Trotter. Mel Trotter was a drunk.

Second Request: Keep in Mind that God Has Pleasure in Uprightness

He had slipped into where his baby was sleeping, stolen the shoes off his baby, and was taking them downtown to trade them for a drink of whiskey. He passed a mission where people were singing, and the singing caught his attention. It was cold, so he went in, sat down, and listened. Then the preacher preached, and God opened his eyes and opened his heart and saved Mel Trotter.

Mel Trotter began a rescue mission for folks like him. But he got under conviction about a bunch of folks who were using an area for Lover's Lane. He would go down there at night, start preaching, bang on car doors and windshields, and tell people, "You're sinning against God; you're doing that which is wicked and wrong." Some would laugh, some would pay him attention, some would leave, and most wouldn't. So Mel Trotter had a neon sign posted in that area. All it was was an eyeball that blinked. Every time it blinked, the words came up, "Thou God seest me. Thou God seest me." Within a week, Lover's Lane was empty.

You keep it in your mind that God knows everything, even that what you do secretly. It'll change the way you live. If you look back in 1 Chronicles 29, here's the second thing. This is what he wants kept in the people's mind. In verse 17 he said, "I know also, my God, that Thou triest the heart and hast pleasure in uprightness." God has pleasure in uprightness.

Let me tell you something. We are a pleasure-oriented people. We do what we do because it pleases us, satisfies us, and makes us happy. But have you ever purposely, deliberately, and willingly acted in such a way as to do something you knew would please your Heavenly Father? Have you ever stopped to think that there are certain things that please God?

When the Bible says in verse 17 that God has pleasure in uprightness, the word "pleasure" there is "ratzah." It means that which is acceptable, pleasing, delightful, favorable, and approvable.

There are things God approves of, things that delight God, and things that are very favorable to God. Let me show you.

Paul is praying for these Colossian Christians, and here is just one of his prayer requests: "That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God" (Colossians 1:10). Now, wait a minute. "That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing." Have you ever really thought about pleasing the Lord? Have you ever really thought about giving Him pleasure? Have you ever thought about delighting His heart? Have you ever thought about rejoicing Him? Have you ever thought about doing something that you knew would please God, and doing it just to please Him? He said, "That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God."

Think with me now. We are talking about God having pleasure in uprightness. Colossians 3:20 says, "Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord." Wait a minute. Did you read what that says? "Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord." In other words, God has extreme delight when children are obedient to their parents.

Now, let me ask you a question. The Bible says that the Lord has pleasure in uprightness. What is uprightness? The Hebrew word is "yosher," and it literally means that which is straight, that which is upright, that which is right, and that which is His due. Stop and think about this, please. If walking in uprightness pleases the Lord, how do we walk in uprightness? The answer should be absolutely obvious.

We owe Him obedience and honor. It is His due. The Bible says, "Give unto the Lord the glory due unto His name." In other words, you have an obligation, a duty, and a privilege to honor and glorify God. We owe Him obedience. We owe Him submission. How much do we owe Him?

"Children, obey your parents in some things." No. "Children, obey your parents every now and then." No. "Children, obey your parents when you feel like it." No. "Children, obey your parents in all things." Why? "For this is well pleasing unto the Lord."

Let me ask you a question. If it is well pleasing unto the Lord if our physical children obey us in all things, how much more well pleasing is it to the Lord when His spiritual children obey Him in all things? If fleshly, earthly children owe obedience to their parents, how much more do we owe obedience to our Heavenly Father? And if earthly obedience to parents pleases Him, well pleases Him, how much more should our obedience to His Word and to His law please Him as well?

Look back at verse 10 in Colossians chapter 1. Look what he said: "That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing." Being fruitful in every good work requires obedience. How can you be fruitful in every good work without obedience? And then he says, "and increasing in the knowledge of God." How can you increase in the knowledge of God without obedience? The truth is, you cannot. You cannot.

Now go back to 1 Chronicles 29 and look at verse 17. I want to tie this together for you. Here is what David is saying: "I know also, my Lord, that Thou triest the heart." You scrutinize, test, and examine it. "And I want that kept in the imagination and thoughts of the heart of Thy people." He says that he wants this kept in the thoughts, imagination, and heart of God's people, because God has pleasure in uprightness.

Then David makes this statement: "As for me, in the uprightness of mine heart I have willingly offered all these things." What did he just say? He is saying, "Lord, You examine the heart. You scrutinize the heart. You test it; You know everything. Therefore, I can stand before You and honestly and truthfully say that, in the uprightness of my heart, I have done this for Your pleasure, for Your honor, and Your glory."

He continues, "And now I have seen with joy Thy people who are present here to offer willingly unto Thee." In other words, they were doing exactly the same things. That is why he said in verse 18, "O Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, our fathers, keep this, this truth that You try the heart, that You have pleasure in righteousness and uprightness, keep this in the imagination of the thoughts of their heart forever." Have you ever done what David did?

Application: Praying for Self-Examination and Walking Uprightly

Or have you done what David did? He evidently did it more than once. In Psalm 139, beginning at verse 23, look what David prays: "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." Now, here is the question: When is the last time you have prayed this prayer?

Have you ever asked God to search your heart? Have you ever asked God to show you what is in your heart? I usually tell people there are two prayer requests you should always make, and you should never make one without the other. The first is this. You could pray, "Lord, show me myself."

I want to tell you something, folks. If God ever opens your eyes to your sinfulness, your disobedience, your wickedness, your depravity, if God ever allows you to see what you are in and of yourself, it would be enough to drive you absolutely insane.

Do you remember what Isaiah said? Isaiah chapter 6: “In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple.” The seraphim had six wings: “With twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory.” In verse 5, Isaiah said, “Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.” If you ever see yourself, you will say, “Woe is me.” The second thing you need to see and pray is, “Lord, show me Thyself.”

When you see His beauty, His grace, His mercy, and that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin, you are no longer in despair. You know that He is your hope, your only hope. David said, “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts.” So many times we think we are really serving God and doing His business, but God opens our eyes and shows us that we are serving ourselves. We think we are doing something for His honor

and glory, and then God opens our eyes: we are doing it for the praise and recognition of man, not for God.

Remember what the Bible says in Jeremiah 17: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins.” Lord, show me myself. Lord, show me Thyself. David said in Psalm 51:6, while confessing his sin, “Behold, Thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part Thou shalt make me to know wisdom.” People have told me, “Brother Weaver, there are times I just don’t feel like praying. There are times I don’t feel like studying.” They go by their feelings. I tell them, “You might as well pray and tell God about your feelings, your reticence, your coldness, and your hardness, because He already knows them. You might as well be honest.”

"Thou desirest truth in the inward parts." Certainly one would desire truth and uprightness in his heart and mind if he understood that God searches the reins and the hearts. God is searching you tonight. He never ceases. He is omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, infinite, immutable, and eternal. He is the sovereign God of heaven and earth. You cannot escape Him.

David said, "Whither shall I go from Thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, Thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me." You cannot escape God or His searching eye.

If you want to be blessed of the Lord, you had better remember that God searches your heart and mind. You had better remember that God has pleasure in uprightness, and order your life accordingly. Isaiah 33:14 says, "The sinners in Zion are afraid," and they should be if they understand that God searches the hearts and has pleasure in uprightness. "Fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites. Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?" Those are good questions.

Notice verses 15 and 16: "He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly; he that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that

shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil; he," that man who is obedient, that man who obeys God, "he shall dwell on high: his place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks: bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure. Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty: they shall behold the land that is very far off." The only way you are really going to obey verses 15 and 16 is to remember that God searches your heart and that God has pleasure in uprightness.

"Of defense shall be the munitions of the rock, bread shall be given to him, his water shall be sure, thine eyes shall see the king and his beauty, and they shall behold the land that is far off." The only way you are really going to obey verses 15 and 16 is to remember that God searches your heart and that God has pleasure in uprightness.

It is a great satisfaction to a godly man to know that God scrutinizes and examines his desires and motives. There have been a number of times in my life when I fell back upon the omniscience of God. I have tried to help people, and it blew up in my face. I have tried to do what was right, and it turned out wrong.

What I have to do is come to the Lord and say, "Lord, I'm so sorry. I didn't mean it to happen like this. I didn't mean it to turn out like this. It was not my desire. Lord, You know my heart. You know my motives. You know my desires. I would not have had that happen for the world." I had no control over it. I tried to do what was right, but it turned out wrong.

You cannot live for everybody else, and you cannot make anyone do that which is right. You just cannot. You can try to do what is right, but if they want to do what is wrong, it is going to backfire. That is all there is to it.

Peter understood this. Peter denied the Lord three times. When you get to John chapter 21, three times our Lord asked Peter, "Peter, lovest thou Me more than these?" "Yea, Lord." The third time, Jesus Christ said, "Peter, lovest thou Me more than these?" The Bible says that Peter, being grieved, said, "Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee." There is the omniscience of God: "Lord,

You have examined, You have tried, You have scrutinized my heart. You know that I love You."

This truth absolutely terrifies the wicked. When a wicked man perceives that God scrutinizes him, knows his every desire and motive, and will hold him accountable and answerable in the day of judgment, it will terrify him. This truth is a comfort and consolation to the people of God, and a consternation to the enemies of God. Here is a second application: If we desire to please God,

We must learn to walk uprightly in our lives. We have to do what is right. If everybody else does wrong, it does not matter. The Lord has pleasure in uprightness. So let me ask you a question: What is in your heart—depravity or grace? You say, "I'm a Christian. Grace is in my heart." Do you ever see Him? Do you ever have an evil thought? Do you ever have an unbiblical motive or desire? Oh, yes. So you have to ask yourself, whenever any thought comes into your mind or any subject comes up, What is in my mind?

Is it something humanistic, wicked, and depraved, or is it something biblical, scriptural, and righteous? You cannot think about more than one thought at a time. You have to find out whether that one thought is biblical or unbiblical. You can deal with yourself one thought at a time. I have dreamed things that were not right. I would wake up in the middle of the night and say, "Oh Lord, I don't know why I dreamed that. I don't want that. I refuse that. I will not think about that. Lord, control my mind even while I sleep. Do not let those thoughts come into my mind." You can only think of one thought at a time.

So you have to determine: Is it depravity or is it grace? What is in your heart? What is in your heart is more important than what is in your wallet.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow before Thee. We thank You for Your Word. We thank You for Your truth. O Lord, help us to remember that You search our hearts, You scrutinize us, and that You have pleasure in uprightness. Lord, keep this in the thoughts and the imagination of the hearts of this Thy people, that they may walk uprightly and fear Thee and honor Thee and glorify

Thee and worship Thee in spirit and in truth. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

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