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Proverbs: The Fear of the Lord and Wisdom

Volume 1

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

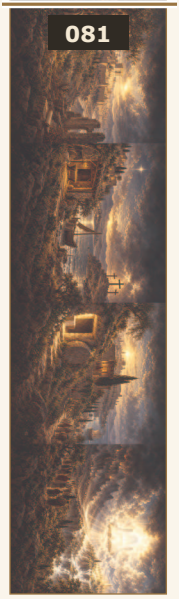
PSALM 119:105



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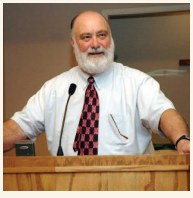
The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge.

PROVERBS 1:7, EXCERPT

John Weaver explores the fear of the Lord, discernment, integrity, and obedience through Proverbs and other biblical passages. These messages invite readers to measure their habits, counsel, and choices against the wisdom of Scripture. Volume 1 is one of two volumes; the complete chapter sequence is preserved across the set. This volume contains corrected chapters 1-24.

“But just because you know something does not mean that you have to repeat it.”

JOHN WEAVER



John Weaver

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

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WEAVER BOOKS

Proverbs: The Fear of the Lord and Wisdom

Volume 1

Corrected chapters 1-24

John Weaver

Weaver Bible College

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Proverbs: The Fear of the Lord and Wisdom

Volume 1

John Weaver

Weaver Books
Weaver Bible College

Edited from the sermon corpus of John Weaver.

Corrected review edition - October 4, 2026. Repeated full sermons have been consolidated; chapter numbers, contents, indexes, and study-guide reading ranges follow this corrected edition. Original transcript variants remain preserved in the editorial archive. Final editorial and publisher approval is still required. This is Volume 1 of two, covering corrected chapters 1-24. Both volumes use one matching study guide.

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CHAPTER 1

Abstinence - The Great Virtue

August 11, 2002

Introduction: The Call to Abstinence

In 1 Thessalonians 4:3, the Word of God says, “For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that you should abstain from fornication.” In 1 Thessalonians 5:22, we read, “Abstain from all appearance of evil.” And 1 Peter 2:11 says, “Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.” We will be dealing with each one of these verses. I think you will understand exactly what I am dealing with as we progress.

Today’s message is textual. In times past, I have told you the difference between an expository sermon and a textual sermon. I point this out for your edification and for your memory’s sake. A textual sermon takes three different texts, but, Lord willing, this message will be expository in the sense that I will be expounding those texts. We begin with 1 Thessalonians 4:3: “For this is the will of

God, even your sanctification, that you should abstain from fornication."

Abstain from All Actual Evil (1 Thessalonians 4:3)

The Word of God also says in 1 Peter 1:16, "Be ye holy, for I am holy." Holiness may be defined not only as that which is positively right and good, but also as the absence of that which is evil and wicked. Absence from that which is evil, in one sense of the word, precedes holiness, because you cannot be positively holy without being free from wickedness and ungodliness. It is impossible to be good unless you have ceased from evil.

Therefore, the Word of God commands us in Isaiah 1:16–17, "Cease to do evil, learn to do well." In other words, you cannot learn to do well until you have ceased from evil. In Amos 5:18, God says, "Hate the evil and love the good." So before you can love the good, you must also hate the evil. Then, in Psalm 37:8, God tells us, "Cease from anger and forsake wrath, fret not thyself in any wise to do evil." One description God gives of wicked men in 2 Peter 2:14 is this: "having eyes full of adultery that cannot cease from sin."

If you and I are to do well and to do good, we must learn to hate the evil and turn from evil. In reality, abstinence is a prerequisite for obedience. You cannot do that which is right until you cease doing that which is wrong. And, by the way, we cannot cease doing that which is wrong until we recognize that which is wrong.

Now, as you study the New Testament, there are at least three Greek words that demonstrate for us the essence of wickedness. The first one is phaulos. The word phaulos indicates that which is worthless, bad, and useless in and of itself. The word can have a good meaning or a bad meaning, but I could look at a farming implement and say that it is phaulos—that is, it is worthless, torn up, and useless. So the word phaulos means something that is good for nothing, something that is worthless, something that is bad.

Then you come to the second word, kakos, in the Greek. The word kakos indicates that which is bad. There is another word for good in the Bible: the Greek word agathos. So you have agathos on the one hand, and kakos on the other hand. Kakos, evil or bad, is therefore

the opposite of that which is good. The word kakos means that which is bad; it is the opposite of good.

Now there is a third word, poneros. Poneros indicates positive evil. It is that which is malignant, hateful, noisome, and noxious. Sometimes in the Greek New Testament, you will find the words kakos and poneros used interchangeably. Although they are sometimes used interchangeably, there is a difference and a distinction between those two words.

For instance, the kakos, or bad individual, is content to wallow in filth and sin. But the poneros individual is not only someone who wants the filth and sin; he is not content unless he is dragging someone else into that same filth and sin.

Let me give you an illustration. One of the names for Satan in the Bible is ho poneros, the wicked one, or the evil one. So the poneros man is not simply someone who does evil, wicked, malignant, hateful, sinful, and rebellious things. He is also someone who likes to drag other individuals into the same sin.

If you go through the New Testament and look at the word poneros and how it is used, you find this same word in the New Testament describing being evil in Matthew 7 and 11. It describes evil men in 2 Timothy 3 and verse 13; an evil work in 2 Timothy 4 and verse 18; an evil heart in Hebrews 3 and verse 12; an evil conscience in Hebrews 10 and verse 22; evil thoughts in James 2, verse 14; evil rejoicings in James 4, verse 16; evil days in Ephesians 5, verse 16; an evil time in Ephesians 6, verse 13; an evil fruit in Matthew 7; an evil treasure in Matthew 12; an evil generation in Matthew 12; an evil eye in Luke 11; evil deeds in John 3, verse 19; and evil spirits in Acts chapter 19.

The point is that this word evil speaks of that which is malignant and wicked and vile. We are talking primarily about the word poneros, and it is important to see how the word is used in these particular instances. Consider two passages in which the word poneros is used, Galatians 1 and 1 John 5.

In Galatians 1, look in verse 4, speaking of the Lord Jesus. The Bible says, "He gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world according to the will of God our Father."

Note that He might deliver us from this present evil world. The word evil there is the word poneros. It is that which is malignant. It is that which is hateful and noxious and noisome. It is the world system that is against Christ and against His law.

In 1 John 5, look at verse 19. John says that we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness. The interesting thing is this: in the Greek, the word wickedness is ho poneros. Literally, he says that we know that we are of God and the whole world lies in the wicked one or in the evil one.

That is not saying that Satan is in control. Certainly he is not. God and God alone is sovereign. But what God is pointing out is simply this: the world system without Christ, without God's law, is totally malignant, wicked, sinful, and ungodly. Why in the world would any child of God want to engage in anything that is satanic, devilish, malignant, wicked, and violative of the will of God?

There are three things to consider. The very first is this: as children of God, as Christians, we are to abstain from all actual evil. Everyone basically understands what the word abstain means. He said in 1 Thessalonians 4:3, “For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that you should abstain from fornication.” Verse 4 says, “That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honor.” I have dealt with 1 Thessalonians 4:1-9 in a series of eight messages entitled “Sanctification and Sexual Purity,” which I hope you will remember. It is not my intent to re-preach those messages at this time; however, it may be necessary in the future—I do not know. What is important today is for you to see and understand that fornication is indeed an evil.

Since it is an evil, it must be abstained from. Note once again how abstinence precedes holiness. Abstinence is a prerequisite for obedience. Verse 3 is, in one sense, the negative: that you abstain from fornication. He says, “For this is the will of God, even your sanctification.” Here is the negative, that you should abstain from fornication. Verse 4 is the positive: “That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel,” that is, his body, “in sanctification and honor.”

You cannot possess your body in sanctification and honor until you cease or abstain from that which is evil, wicked, and ungodly. Verse 3 is the negative, and verse 4 is the positive. We must abstain from fornication that we may know how to possess our vessel, that is, our body, in sanctification and honor. When you speak of sanctification, the word basically has two thrusts. First of all, there is what you and I would know as positional sanctification.

Now, positional sanctification is that which we have in Jesus Christ. It is that which cannot be changed. It is that which is absolutely perfect and complete. He is our sanctification. We are complete in Him. Let me give you two Scriptures concerning positional sanctification, that which we have in Jesus Christ. In Acts 26 and verse 18, the Apostle Paul says, "...to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith." And then he says, "that is in me." In other words, it is the same kind of faith that the Apostle Paul had. Now, was the Apostle Paul sanctified by faith in Christ? Yes. So we have a positional sanctification in Jesus Christ.

First Corinthians 1, verse 30, says, "But of him are you in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." So, just like we have a perfect righteousness in Christ, we have a perfect sanctification in Christ. Just like we have a perfect redemption in Christ, we have a perfect sanctification in Christ. Since you are in First Corinthians, turn to First Corinthians 6 and verse 11. He says, "...and such were some of you." He talks about their wickedness in times past. "But you are washed. But you are sanctified. But you are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of God."

So positional sanctification is that which we have in Jesus Christ. It cannot be changed because it is absolutely, totally perfect. Everything that Jesus Christ has, everything that Jesus Christ does, and everything that Jesus Christ has done is absolutely perfect.

There is not only a positional sanctification that is taught in Scripture. Secondly, there is a personal or a practical sanctification taught. Let me explain the difference. Positional sanctification is that which we have in Christ. A personal or practical sanctification is the

application of that in our daily lives. In other words, personal or practical sanctification is our becoming more and more holy by conforming our lives to the Word of God in our thoughts, in our words, and in our deeds. I can quote this for you; you do not have to turn there: John 17:17. Our Lord, in His high priestly prayer, said, "Sanctify them through thy truth. Thy Word is truth."

Are we perfect in Christ? Yes. We have a positional sanctification in Christ. Are we perfect on this earth? No. But what is our goal? Perfection. Are you and I to be working, struggling, praying, and obeying that we may be more and more holy on this earth? Practically speaking, yes. How do we do that? Through the Word of God. The holiness we possess positionally must be pursued practically through prayer and obedience.

Look in your Bibles to 1 Peter 1, beginning with verse 14. As obedient children—the opposite of disobedient children—we are not fashioning ourselves according to the former lusts of our ignorance. But as He who hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation, because it is written, Be ye holy, for I am holy. As obedient children, we are to become more and more holy. How? By obeying Him.

There is a practical, personal sanctification. Now, justification and positional sanctification, in one sense of the word, do not admit growth. Because we are justified and sanctified in Christ, that is perfect. But when you talk about personal or practical sanctification, there is growth. In fact, it is like Mark 4 and verse 28: "For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself, first the blade, then the ear, and after that, the full corn in the ear." So you have first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn. There is growth; there is maturation.

That is why in 1 John 2, John spoke of babes, or little children, young men, and then fathers. There is growth, not only physically, but spiritually as well. That is why in 2 Peter 3 and verse 18, Peter wrote, "But grow in grace, even in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." So when you talk about personal or practical sanctification, there is growth. And may I point this out? In our personal and practical sanctification, we may either progress or regress.

It always has room for change. We are not to be regressing, but progressing. We are to be going from faith to faith, and from obedience to obedience. The Word of God is telling us that we must abstain from actual sin. Do you realize that we cannot progress, grow, or conform to the Word of God while we are engaging in actual sin?

When we think of abstinence, we normally or usually think of sexual purity. But may I point out that sexual purity is just one aspect of biblical abstinence? If we are going to be holy, we must abstain from all actual evil, regardless of what it is.

Now, turn in your Bibles to 1 John 3 and verse 4. I know that you can quote this, but I want you to see it. I want to remind you of what sin really is. When I tell you that you are to abstain from actual evil, this is the actual evil that I am talking about. Here is what the Word of God tells us: “Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law. For sin is the transgression of the law.” What is sin?

Let me ask it another way: What is actual evil? It is anything contrary to the law of God, anything that God forbids or condemns. Actual evil is anything that is in violation of God's righteousness and God's holiness. Therefore, murder, profanity, theft, idolatry, dishonoring of parents, covetousness, lying, and false reports are just as evil as adultery and fornication are.

First Thessalonians 4:3 presents one particular instance of actual evil: “For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that you should abstain from fornication.” We could take out the word fornication and replace it with any of the Ten Commandments, and it would still be true. For instance, this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that you should abstain from idolatry. This is the will of God, even your sanctification, that you should abstain from profanity. This is the will of God, even your sanctification, that you should abstain from dishonoring the Lord's Day. This is the will of God, even your sanctification, that you should abstain from dishonoring your parents. This is the will of God that you should abstain from murder. This is the will of God that you should abstain from adultery and fornication.

This is the will of God that you should abstain from theft. This is the will of God that you should abstain from covetousness and false reports. Fornication is simply one aspect of actual evil. Whatever is contrary to the Word of God, whatever contradicts the law of God, we must not engage in. The command to abstain is therefore not limited to one particular sin; it reaches every action that stands contrary to God's Word and law.

John said it like this in 1 John 2:1: “My little children, these things I write unto you, that you sin not.” Then he went on to add, “But if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” John is saying, “I'm writing these truths to you. Why? That you might not sin.” The goal is to abstain from actual evil. Don't get involved in it.

If you are engaged in deeds that are actually evil, you must repent, turn from those acts, and obey God. Do you realize that repentance is the only avenue of hope for anyone engaged in actual sin? What does the Bible say in 2 Timothy 2:24–26? The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be apt to teach, gentle unto all men, teaching those that oppose themselves, if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth.

When do men acknowledge the truth? Only when God gives them repentance. Acts 5:30–31 speaks of Jesus Christ, whom God raised up and set at His own right hand, that He might give repentance and forgiveness of sins. Repentance is God's gift to give; it is God's grace. It is not ours to work up. If God does not give repentance, there is no escaping from our sins.

Everyone in this room, at one time or another, has engaged in actual sin. Everyone listening to my voice has engaged in actual sin. There is a verse in the Bible that says, “Be sure your sins will find you out.” When they do, you may find it embarrassing, humiliating, and hurtful. But when our sins are exposed, no matter how hurtful, embarrassing, or humiliating they are, that is an act of God's mercy. David, when he committed adultery with Bathsheba, did everything to cover it up.

David tried to get Uriah, her husband, to go into his wife and then make him think that the child was his. When that did not work,

David had him killed. But when you get to 2 Samuel 12 and verse 1, the Bible says, "And the Lord sent a prophet to David." The Lord had mercy on David. The prophet put his finger in David's face and said, "Thou art the man." You talk about embarrassed, humiliated, found out, discovered, and hurt! But it was still God's mercy. Do you realize the greatest mercy that God can have upon us is to expose our sins and give us repentance? If God wishes to destroy us, all He has to do is let us go on in our sins, and we will destroy ourselves.

So what does God tell us? We must abstain from actual sins. Abstain from fornication. Anything that is a violation of the law of God, abstain from it. Now, secondly, go in your Bibles to 1 Peter 2 and verse 11.

Abstain from All Activities Leading to Evil (1 Peter 2:11)

We are not only to abstain from actual sin; we are also to abstain from all activities to evil. We are to abstain from actual evil and all activities to evil. 1 Peter 2:11 says, "Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul." There is a difference between actual evil and activities that lead up to actual evil.

However, understand this: When God forbids one, He automatically forbids the other. When God forbids the actual evil, He also forbids everything else that will lead up to that actual evil. For instance, when God forbids fornication, He at the same time forbids lustfulness, covetousness, heavy petting, or anything that would lead up to fornication.

Would it be proper, right, moral, ethical, and scriptural for a married man or woman to engage in what we would call hanky-panky with someone other than his or her mate, and then, when discovered, piously say, "Well, at least we didn't commit adultery"? If God forbids adultery, He forbids the fooling around that would lead up to adultery. The adultery may be the actual sin, but those activities are sins in and of themselves, and they lead up to that actual sin as well. When God forbids stealing, at the same time He forbids covetousness. He forbids laziness.

Which would give us an easy way out and won't make us steal. He forbids greediness, selfishness, and anything else that would lead up to theft. It is nothing less than the utmost arrogant pride and stupidity that makes us think we can engage in all of these activities that lead up to actual sin and not be ensnared.

It is just like these people who start taking drugs: “I can stop anytime I want to.” Did you ever notice they never want to?

The Bible says in Proverbs 6:27, “Can a man take fire into his bosom and not be burned?” Let me ask you to take up a heaping armful of hot coals and hold them to your stomach. Do you think you are not going to be burned? When we play around with activities that lead up to sin, sooner or later we are going to be burned. It is just that simple.

I want you to note what he says in 1 Peter 2:11: “Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul.” The word war is from the Greek word strateia, which is from stratos, an army. Hence, these activities strategize, contend, fight, and marshal themselves against the soul. In other words, they are trying to destroy you.

He says, “Abstain from fleshly lusts.” The word fleshly is sarkikos, from sarx, meaning literally pertaining to the flesh, bodily, temporal, animal, or the unregenerate substance. Flesh is the principal part of the body, and fleshly lusts often refer to desires for sensual enjoyment, desires which obtain their gratification by means of bodily organs. But it also includes the passions and appetites of the flesh. “Abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul.”

Fleshly lusts are not always physical. Sometimes they are mental, emotional, or spiritual. In Galatians 5, verse 19, the works of the flesh are manifest: “adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness,” all that is physical. But then come “idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies,” which are mental, emotional, intellectual, and religious; “envying, murders, drunkenness, revelings, and such like.” Of these he says, “they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” All of these are works of the flesh.

These are all fleshly lusts which war against the soul. The word lust is an interesting word. Peter says, “Dearly beloved, as pilgrims and strangers you are to abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul.” Lusts, as used in the New Testament in the plural, comes every time from the Greek word epithumia. Epi is a preposition meaning upon, and thumos refers to passion or hard breathing. Do you realize that one's lust is whatever he sets his soul upon, whatever he sets his passion upon, whatever he sets his heart upon?

The word fleshly lust, then, refers to anything contrary to the Word of God. When he says, “Abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul,” he is saying that you are to abstain from activities that will enable the enemy to subjugate and destroy your own soul. These fleshly lusts use their own stratagems against us to destroy and subjugate us.

Have you ever thought how awful it must appear for the child of God, who is supposed to be like our Lord and separate from sin, to engage in fleshly lusts which war against the soul? There is a verse in Lamentations 4:5. You do not have to turn there; I will quote it for you. It is an apt description: “They that were brought up in scarlet embraced dunghills.” Being brought up in scarlet means that you were brought up rich, refined, cultured, and mannered. For someone to be raised like that and then embrace dunghills—what a picture! If we are children of Christ, what is it like to Him for you and me to hug to our bosoms dunghills, things that are absolutely worthless and that would ultimately destroy us?

Why would you heap to yourself that which would be full of disease? The problem is this: although we abhor the actual evil, somehow we think that we can engage in the activities that lead up to that actual evil and not be caught. Well, that is wrong. Fleshly activity always leads up to the actual sin itself, and it is sinful in and of itself. Let me give you an illustration.

Window shopping is a favorite pastime of many people. My wife will testify that I am not only not a great window shopper; I am not a great shopper at all. I do not even like to go to town unless I need something. If it happens to be an expensive item, usually before I buy it, I will call and try to find the best price. Once I get the best price, I will get what I need and come back home.

My philosophy on shopping is very simple. If you do not need it or want it, why look around? Why waste your time looking at things that you do not need or do not even want? Why look just to find something to spend money on? Why look at items which you know that you cannot afford and could never possess?

The reason I drove the truck today is that we are going to have to do something about a car. My transmission is messing up in my car, so last night I took Alice and we went and looked at a couple of used cars. Here was this Lincoln Navigator, a big SUV, sitting over there. I said, “Hmm, I wonder how much that thing is.” I looked at the windowsill: $55,000. It did not take me long to inspect that one. When I saw that, I turned around and walked away. Why in the world would anybody ever think about spending $55,000 on a car like that?

Now compare what I have just said with fleshly lust, which war against the soul. Why would I think about, lust after, covet, or desire those things that I know I could never lawfully or scripturally obtain? Think about that. Men, especially the older men, why would you waste your time oogling over beautiful young women when you cannot have one lawfully?

I'm happy and satisfied with my wife. Why would I try to stimulate desires that should never be aroused by looking at other women or pornography, or by going places I should never go? Is it not common sense, as well as scriptural sense, to stay home, be thankful for my wife, and be thankful for the wife God has given me? Doesn't that make sense? The same is true with material things.

I do not plan on going back and looking a second time at that Lincoln Navigator. Why would I waste my time looking at expensive automobiles and boats? First, I do not have the money to afford them. Secondly, if I had the money, I would not spend it on them. There are many other things I could do with the money rather than spend it on that. So what is the point of wasting my time engaging in those kinds of things when I neither need nor want them? Why would any child of God want to waste his time engaging in fleshly lusts, which war against his own soul, when all those things you are going to do are destroying.

Turn in your Bibles to two passages. The first is Ephesians 4, and the second is Galatians 5. Remember that the word evil, ho poneros, or the evil one, is a name used for Satan in the Bible. Look in Ephesians 4:27. The Bible says, “Neither give place to the devil.” Neither give place to the devil.

Let me ask you a question and set the stage for you. Let us go back to the Vietnam War era. Here you and I are in Vietnam, fighting the Viet Cong. It is Sunday afternoon, the fighting has lulled, and we take a little Sunday afternoon stroll. We begin talking and fellowshipping, not watching where we are going or what we are doing. The next thing we know, we have walked right into a Viet Cong camp. They jump up with all these weapons aimed directly at us.

We say, “We are so sorry. We did not mean to come here. This is not where we wanted to be. We were just talking and were negligent. If you would just put your guns down, we will turn around and go back home to our camp.” Do you think they are going to let us go back to our camp?

Now, let me show you. It does not matter if I got into their camp purposely and deliberately or unpurposely and undeliberately. I am there, and I am in their captivity and in their power. When you give place to the devil, he does not care whether you do it purposely or deliberately or are just playing around. When you give him place, he will take it.

Look at what the Bible says in Galatians 5, beginning with verse 16: “This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth, or fighteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary the one to the other, so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.”

Do you realize that every one of us has this same fleshly principle, and that every one of us wants by nature to do those things we know are wrong? And what does God say? God says we are to abstain from those fleshly lusts which are seeking to destroy us. To abstain from fleshly lusts, first of all, means to refrain from doing that which is forbidden and evil. Secondly, it means to refrain from all inordinate

and excessive desire—and I am going to add this—even in things that are lawful. Do you realize it is possible to use lawful things unlawfully?

Look in 1 Corinthians 6, verse 12. The Apostle Paul says, "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient." In other words, it is just not appropriate to do some things at certain times, although they are lawful. He says, "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any." Is it lawful to eat?

Well, of course it is. Yet I had a very dear friend who lost his foot, and then his leg, and then his life to diabetes. He would not eat properly. He literally killed himself. You may use lawful things unlawfully. The Apostle Paul says it again another way in 1 Corinthians 10:23: "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient. All things are lawful for me, but all things edify not."

So if we abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, we do not only abstain from doing that which is wicked and evil and forbidden; we also abstain from inordinate and excessive desires, and that is abusing and misusing lawful things.

Abstain from All Appearance of Evil (1 Thessalonians 5:22)

One last thing. So far, we are to abstain from all actual evil. Number two, we are to abstain from all activities of evil. And thirdly, we are to abstain from all appearance of evil. First Thessalonians 5:22 says, "Abstain from all appearance of evil." So we are not only to withdraw from actual evil and activities that lead to evil; we are also to abstain from all appearance of evil.

Now we have to ask the question, what in the world is the appearance of evil? First of all, let me go over these words and tell you what they mean. The word abstain is apechomai, which literally means to refrain, to abstain, to turn away from, or to hold oneself in check. It is made up of two Greek words: apo, which is a preposition meaning off or away, and echo, which means to hold. So actually the word means to hold off or to hold away. When you abstain from something, you are holding yourself off and holding yourself away

from it. The word appearance is eidos, which means an appearance, a form, a fashion, or a sight. And the word evil is poneros, which means that which is malignant, evil, wicked, vile, even in and of itself. So God says that we are not only to abstain from actual evil and activities that lead to evil; we are to abstain from all appearance of evil.

Now, there are at least two very important truths here. The first is this: evil comes in many different shapes, forms, fashions, and colors. It has many different appearances. It does not always present itself as positively evil. Have you ever seen a liquor company use for its advertisement a drunk lying in the gutter with his clothes ripped and vomit all down his chest? No. When they use an advertisement, it's the slick young thing to do. You can be popular, suave, and debonair if you just drink their brand of liquor. Witness all the soap operas, sitcoms, and television shows that present adultery, fornication, and sodomy as fun, fashionable, modern, and the in thing to do.

They never show the heartache, the disease, the broken homes, the ruined lives, nor the judgment of God against all who do such. Never.

Now, I want you to turn in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians chapter 11, because let me show you a very important point. Notice verse 13: "For such are false apostles," deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. "And no marvel, for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness, whose end shall be according to their works." What does Satan do? He transforms himself into an angel of light. What do his apostles do? What do his disciples do? The same thing.

Do you realize, and please listen carefully now, that I mainly dealt with moral evil today, but there is not only moral evil; there is doctrinal evil. When you err from the Word of God, it is a malignant, noxious, noisome evil. It is wickedness. There is doctrinal evil, economic evil, political evil, and ecclesiastical evil.

There is an evil in every sphere and every area of life, because in every sphere there are things contrary to the Word of God. How

many of us would sign on with the Federal Reserve System? I hope no one. That is an economic evil. How many would sign on with the Socialists, the Communists, or the One Worlders? I hope no one. That is a political evil. How many would sign on with churches that promote only a social gospel and never say anything about Christ, regeneration, or the Word of God? No one. That is an ecclesiastical evil.

If I am to abstain from evil, I must recognize that evil comes in many shapes, colors, forms, and fashions, and I must be able to recognize it as evil. Everything contrary to the Word of God, in every sphere of life, is evil. I do not care what it is. We are to abstain from all appearance of evil.

Secondly, if it appears to be evil, it is. You say, how can you say that? Romans 14:23 says, "Whatsoever is not of faith is what? Is sin." If you could not do something in good conscience, in faith, and with a clear conscience, it is sin. You have heard the old statement, if something is too good to be true, it probably is; that means it is probably false. Likewise, if anything is questionable, uncertain, or dubious, it is better to leave it alone and abstain from it.

I believe we ought to be willing, as Christians, to give God the benefit of the doubt. He said in 1 Samuel 2:30, "...them that honor Me will I honor," saith the Lord. If there is anything questionable, the wise thing to do is not to do it, not to get involved in it, but to abstain from it. If there is even a hint of evil, wickedness, or impropriety, we must turn away and abstain from it.

Now God's Word is extremely clear. We are not to engage in actual evil. We are not to excite our fleshly lust in the activities of evil, and we are to avoid even the appearance of evil.

Practical Applications

Let me make three practical applications. First of all, as Christians, you ought not to allow anything in your life that is questionable. Do not use Lot's excuse. You remember when Lot was fleeing from Sodom? He was asking for this city to be spared so that he could flee into it, and he said, "Is it not a little one?" You know, that's what we do. Our sins are not big sins; they're little ones. May I remind you

that the Bible says in the Song of Solomon, chapter 2, verse 15, "Little foxes spoil the vines." May I remind you that little poison is still poison. Many times we are unwilling to engage in the big sins, but we are willing to engage in the little ones. We do not understand that the little ones always lead up to the big ones.

Sometimes we are unwilling to commit the physical sins, but we are always willing to commit the spiritual sins. Look what God says. Second Corinthians 7:1 says, "...having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh..." and "...and of the spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." So it is not that we are merely to avoid committing adultery, stealing, and all this kind of stuff. Our attitude must be right as well. Our disposition must be right as well. We ought not to be people who are hateful, hating, angry, strifeful, vindictive, or bitter. That is just as much sin as adultery and fornication. As Christians, we ought not to allow anything in our lives that is questionable. When in doubt, don't; or when in doubt, stop.

The second application is this: when we engage in that which is evil, we are actually simply destroying ourselves. Remember now, Israel had gone into idolatry, fornication, and all kinds of wickedness. But God told Israel in Hosea chapter 13 and verse 9, "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself." That is exactly what we do. But listen, it is useless to blame our misery and our heartache upon others when we are the ones who have done it to ourselves. We are the ones who brought it on.

One of the principles of Scripture is this: he who sins must suffer. If we start trying to engage in this little activity and this little activity and this little activity, we should not be surprised that pretty soon we are involved in actual sin and have ended up destroying our own selves.

Thirdly, God is not giving good advice; He is issuing commandments. Do not engage in actual evil. Abstain from activities that war against the soul. Avoid all appearance of evil.

I want you to turn to 1 Peter 3. I can assure you that every one of us wants to live a healthy, happy, long, and useful life. God says, "He that will love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from

evil, and his lips that may speak no guile. Let him eschew evil and do good. Let him seek peace and ensue it. For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers. But the face of the Lord is against them that do evil."

Conclusion: The Path to a Good Life

If you want to love life and see good days, what do you do? You refrain your tongue from evil and your lips, that you speak no guile. Let him eschew evil. That means you spit evil out; you cannot stomach it. Let him do good and seek peace and ensue it, or pursue it. How do we do that? By abstaining from actual evil, abstaining from activities that lead to actual evil, and abstaining from all appearance of evil. When we give in and fail to abstain from the appearance of evil, the next thing we know, we are engaged in activities that lead up to evil. Finally, we are caught in the actual evil itself.

Be sure your sins will find you out. Let us pray. Father, we ask that You would speak to our hearts today. We are thankful for Your Word to us and for Your truth. We ask, Father, that You would make us holy, godly, and obedient. May we remember these three points; may they be burned into our souls: that we do not engage in actual evil, that we abstain from those activities that lead to it, and then, Father, avoid all appearance of evil, that we may be holy and blameless and serve Thee effectively with reverence and godly fear. In Thy name we pray, Amen.

CHAPTER 2

Objective Standard vs. a Subjective Standard

September 12, 2004

Objective Standard versus a Subjective Standard

SCRIPTURE READING - 1 Samuel 15:1-16 (KJV)

Introduction: Defining Objective and Subjective Standards

> Samuel also said unto Saul, The Lord sent me to anoint thee to be king over his people, over Israel. Now therefore, hearken thou to the voice of the words of the Lord. Thus saith the Lord of hosts, I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way when he came up from Egypt. Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.
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> And Saul gathered the people together and numbered them in Telaim, 200,000 footmen and 10,000 men of Judah. And Saul came to a city of Amalek and laid wait in the valley. And Saul

> said unto the Kenites, “Go, depart, get you down from among the Amalekites, lest I destroy you with them: for you showed kindness to all the children of Israel when they came up out of Egypt.” So the Kenites departed from among the Amalekites. And Saul smote the Amalekites from Havilah till thou comest to Shur, that is over against Egypt. And he took Agag, king of the Amalekites, alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword. But Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and of the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them: but everything that was vile and refuse, that they destroyed utterly. Then came the word of the Lord unto Samuel, saying, “It repenteth me that I set up Saul to be king: for he has turned back from following me, and hath not performed my commandments.”
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> And it grieved Samuel, and he cried unto the Lord all night. And when Samuel arose early to meet Saul in the morning, it was told Samuel, saying, “Saul came to Carmel, and, behold, he set him up a place, and is gone about, and passed on, and gone down to Gilgal.” And Samuel came to Saul, and Saul said unto him, “Blessed be thou of the Lord: I have performed the commandment of the Lord.” And Samuel said, “What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?” And Saul said, “They have brought them from the Amalekites: for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed.” Then Samuel said unto Saul, “Stay, and I will tell thee what the Lord hath said to me this night.”

He said unto him, "Say on." And Samuel said, "When thou wast little in thine own sight, wast thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel, and the Lord anointed thee king over Israel? And the Lord sent thee on a journey, and said, 'Go and utterly destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they be consumed.' Wherefore then didst thou not obey the voice of the Lord, but didst fly upon the spoil, and didst evil in the sight of the Lord?" And Saul said unto Samuel, "Yea, I have obeyed the voice of the Lord, and have gone the way which the Lord sent me, and have brought Agag

the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God in Gilgal." And Samuel said, "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king."

Most Christians have never thought of the importance of the word of God as an objective standard. The truth is, most Christians have never even consciously thought of their need of a standard, much less an objective one. When we talk about an objective standard, we're referring to a standard that is outside of oneself. An objective standard is one that is not influenced by the fall, not affected by the fall, and therefore, it is not influenced by sin, desires, lust, and evil propensities. A subjective standard, therefore, is one that is based upon one's own thoughts, rationalism, and desires, and is influenced and affected by many forces. It is impossible to be objective from a subjective basis.

It is impossible to be objective from a subjective basis. Everyone by nature believes himself to be the true source of right and wrong. In other words, many times we think we aren't objective and we think we have the truth when, in reality, we have nothing.

I can demonstrate what I've just said very easily. If I were to say, "Let's take some suggestions, let's take some ideas about a project that I have in mind," and everyone made a suggestion and everyone gave an idea, the truth is that you always like your idea and your suggestion better than anyone else's. That's human nature. We always like to think that we're right, that we have the truth, and that we have everything on our side.

The Foolishness of Subjective Standards

The Bible says in Proverbs 18 and verse 17, "He that is first in his own cause seemeth just; but his neighbor cometh and searcheth him out." We can very easily rationalize our needs, our desires, and our ways, and we rationalize them in such a way that they seem right and

just to us. But then our neighbor comes along, who sees things just a little differently and maybe is a little more objective, and he searches out the matter. Then we realize we thought we were right, but in reality we were wrong.

In Proverbs chapter 12 and verse 15, the Bible says, "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise." That's one of the marks of being a fool: he refuses to receive instruction. He believes he already knows everything. Therefore, he doesn't need to be taught anything. The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but he that hearkens to counsel is wise.

In Proverbs 21 and verse 2, the Lord goes further and tells us, "Every way of a man is right in his own eyes: but the Lord pondereth the heart." Our ways are not necessarily right just because they are our ways.

Look in your Bibles at Deuteronomy chapter 12 and verse 8: “Ye shall not do after all the things that we do here this day, every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes.” What is God saying? You are not to follow, nor are you to have, a subjective standard. You are not to do every man what is right in his own eyes.

Remember the passage in Proverbs 3, verses 5–7: “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the Lord, and depart from evil.” Listen to what he says: “lean not to thine own understanding.” Do not have a subjective standard. “Be not wise in thine own eyes.” Do not have a subjective standard.

Why is this so important? An objective standard is that which is outside of us. A subjective standard is that which is on the inside of us, whether it is our desires, our lusts, our thoughts, or our understanding. It is still a subjective standard. In reality, what you have is a contest between God and man.

The Contest Between God's Wisdom and Man's Wisdom

You have a contest between the wisdom of God and the wisdom of man. In reality, it is not a contest, because God’s wisdom is infinite

and man is finite. But because of the fall and our fallen nature, in the mind of man we think that what we think and what we know is equal to what God knows and what God thinks; that our thoughts are just as valid as His, and that our standards are just as valid as His. In other words, by nature we believe that we know what is best for ourselves.

In essence, what a subjective standard does is this: It dethrones God and enthrones man. Look in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians chapter 10. Here is the passage I have quoted to you innumerable times since I have been preaching to you. Notice 2 Corinthians chapter 10 and verse 5. Once again, this shows us the absolute necessity of an objective standard, and it also shows us the rebellion of a subjective standard: "Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." Note the phrase, "casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God." It exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and every thought is to be brought into the obedience of Jesus Christ.

Once again, the Word of God demonstrates our absolute need for an objective standard. When we rely upon a subjective standard instead of God's objective standard, we exalt ourselves against God. We exalt our knowledge above God's knowledge. We deny God's standard that we might exalt our own standard.

Listen carefully to what I am about to say. The real reason—this is foundational—the real reason there is so much criticism, contempt, and hatred manifested toward God and His law is right here. If we confess that God is God, and His law, His Word, is truth, and it is to be our standard, we deny our own Godhood and our own selves. So, in order to manifest our Godhood, and that no right will curse and deny God and His law. At the very heart of every subjective standard is a denial of God and His law. We either must condemn God, or He condemns us. We have to deny God in order to establish our own deity and our own self as God.

False Justifications for Subjective Standards

How in the world do people justify such unbiblical and ungodly attitudes? One way is by comparing oneself with others. Since you are already there, look in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians 10 and verse 12: “For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.”

What is this talking about? It is talking about having a false measure. You are very easily deceived if you have a false measure, or very easily made confident if you have one. If you compare yourselves among other people, you have a very foolish standard.

Suppose I looked around this room and said, “I have news for you. I can whip Brother Ernie. I can whip him.” Well, I might could whip him if my back helped out. But just because I can whip him does not mean I can whip every man in this room. Therefore, I could say, “I am stronger than Brother Ernie. I am a better fighter than Brother Ernie.” What does that prove? Absolutely nothing, because Ernie is not my standard.

Let me show you why this is vitally important. I discovered this week that I can jump fifty feet high. You say, “Brother Weaver, you cannot do that.” Sure I can. If you let me define a foot, I can lift a thousand pounds. If you let me define a pound, then as long as I can make my own standard, I can do or be whatever I want to do or be. I can be just as holy, righteous, and godly as I want to be, as long as I am holy, righteous, and godly according to my standard. But when you measure yourself against an objective standard, you may not measure up. There is an objective standard, which is the Word of God.

Then there are all these subjective standards. Galatians 6:16 says, “And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy upon the Israel of God.”

When the Apostle Paul says, “as many as walk according to this rule,” the word “rule” is very important. It is the Greek word “kanon,” where we get our English word “canon.” We speak of the canon of Scripture, the Old Testament canon, the New Testament

canon, or canon law, the scriptural law. The word “canon” means a rule, a measuring rod, or a measuring stick. Paul said, “And as many as walk according to this rule,” that is, the Word of God, this measuring stick and measuring tape, “peace be upon them and upon the Israel of God.” God has His own standard, His own measuring stick, and His own measuring rod. As many as walk according to this rule, this measuring stick, peace be upon them and mercy upon the Israel of God.

One way we justify our subjective standard is by comparing ourselves with everyone else and building for ourselves a false standard. A second way that we foolishly justify unbiblical attitudes and actions is by believing the devil’s line in Genesis 3:5.

The serpent says to the woman, “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 word “knowing” in the Hebrew has the force of “determining.” Literally, he says, “For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, determining for yourself good and evil.”

In other words, you will have your own standard. You do not need God’s objective standard. You can determine for yourself right and wrong, good and evil. God came into the garden and gave Adam an objective standard. Then the serpent came with his temptation and said, “You don’t need God’s objective standard. You can have your own standard. You can determine for yourself what is right and what is wrong.”

Do you realize that most Christians actually believe the serpent’s lie? At least they act as if they believe it, because their lives are so unscriptural, unbiblical, ungodly, and unholy. We justify our unbiblical and ungodly actions either by comparing ourselves with someone else, which is a false standard, or by believing that we are a standard in and of ourselves.

The Consequences of Abandoning God's Standard

Look carefully with me at 1 Samuel, chapter 15. In 1 Samuel, chapter 15, you have a clear-cut illustration of man's wisdom pitted against God's wisdom. Listen carefully to what I'm about to say, and mark

this down one way or the other: wherever and whenever man's wisdom is allowed to triumph, the determination of good and evil, right and wrong, what's best and what is not best, is completely subjective.

Turn in your Bible to Psalm 82. Let me show you the devastation and destruction of a subjective standard. If I were to ask you, "Are we in a mess in this country?" what would you answer me? Yes. If I were to ask you, "Are we in a mess judicially in this country?" what would you answer? Yes. Economically? Yes. Governmentally? Yes. Watch this very carefully in Psalm 82. Psalm 82 is an entire psalm against the judicial system.

Look what he says: "God standeth in the congregation of the mighty; he judgeth among the gods." Now, the "gods" are the civil rulers. I am not going into the background to prove that, but I can do so. He is talking about the civil rulers, and he is singling out judges specifically: "How long will ye judge unjustly, and accept the persons of the wicked?" In other words, they're letting the wicked go for bribes or for whatever reason. God tells them in verse 3, "Defend the poor and fatherless. Do justice to the afflicted and needy. Deliver the poor and needy: rid them out of the hand of the wicked."

This is what God tells them, but He says, "They know not," that's the judges, "neither will they understand; they walk on in darkness: all the foundations of the earth are out of course."

What happens when a judicial system will not abide by an objective standard? God says it turns the world upside down: “All the foundations of the earth are out of course.” Do you know why things are being turned upside down in this country and in all the other countries? Because we have left the objective standard of the Word of God.

There was a time in our country when judges issued rulings based upon the Bible, and juries issued rulings based upon the Bible. When the judge walks in and the bailiff says, “All rise,” do you know how that began? The judges initially came into the courtroom carrying Bibles, and men rose out of respect for the Word of God. Now they kick out the Bible and want you to rise in respect for the man. What

has happened? The foundations of the world are out of course; everything is turned upside down.

Go back to 1 Samuel 15, because when men determine and act as they please, in contradiction to the Word of God, they are basically turning life upside down.

Exposition of 1 Samuel 15: Saul's Disobedience

In 1 Samuel 15, you will find three points. The first is a plain command, in the first three verses. First of all, in verse 1, there is a sober reminder: “Samuel also said unto Saul, The Lord sent me to anoint thee to be king over his people, over Israel.” “Now therefore, hearken thou unto the voice of the words of the Lord.”

Remember that Saul was anointed king. Samuel reminded him that God had anointed him and raised him up to do God's bidding, to be God's representative. He reminded Saul of this singular fact: “The Lord sent me to anoint thee to be king over Israel. Now therefore,” he says, “hearken thou unto the voice of the words of the Lord.” Listen to God.

All men have a responsibility to hearken to and obey the Word of God. Men in positions of trust and authority, however, have a greater responsibility to hearken to the Word of God. Our Lord said in Luke 12:48, “For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required.” If you have been given much, God says much more will be required of you.

If you have been given a position of power, authority, or trust, God is going to hold you more accountable. In James 3:1, James gives us the same truth in a different light: “My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.” Or, “Be not many teachers, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.”

If you were to wake up in the morning and read the newspaper headline, “Ed Wolf arrested robbing a bank,” that would be bad, wouldn’t it? Ed knows better. But what would be worse? To read, “Pastor John Weaver arrested robbing a bank.” Why? Because I am responsible to teach you what is right, and God has given me that position of trust. If I then turn around and abuse it, I am more

accountable and responsible. God says I will receive the greater condemnation.

So Samuel comes to Saul and says, “Saul, you better remember, God raised you up. God anointed you. Therefore, you hearken unto him.” Each of us is answerable and accountable unto God, but rulers are more accountable because they have received positions of trust and authority. Therefore, says God, they are going to receive the greater condemnation. In this plain command, he comes first of all with a sober reminder.

Notice, secondly, in verse 2, a solemn remembrance: “Thus saith the Lord of hosts, I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way when he came up from Egypt.” Sometimes some of the most comforting words of the Bible can also be among the most devastating and destructive. Three simple, beautiful, comforting words to the child of God can be full of consternation for the unbeliever: “And God remembered.” Genesis 8:1 says concerning Noah, Shem, Ham, Japheth, and their wives, “and God remembered.” Concerning Rachel, Genesis 30 says, “and God remembered Rachel.” Exodus 2:24 says, “and God remembered his covenant.” But now the Bible says, “Thus saith the Lord of hosts, I remember that which Amalek did to Israel.” God remembers his people for good; he remembers his enemies for destruction. God remembered what Amalek did to Israel.

Now it was time to reward Amalek for his wickedness. The amazing thing is that what Amalek did to Israel had occurred four hundred years earlier. Deuteronomy 25:17 says, “Remember what Amalek did unto thee by the way, when ye were come forth out of Egypt; how he met thee by the way, and smote the hindmost of thee, even all that were feeble behind thee, when thou wast faint and weary; and he feared not God.” Note that God remembered what Amalek did—four hundred years later.

God’s paydays are not always on Friday. Just because people are not smitten instantly does not mean that God is not going to smite them. God remembered what Amalek did, and now it was time to pay Amalek back.

In 1 Samuel 15:3, notice the serious requirement in the plain command: “Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.” In giving His plain command, God required Saul to utterly destroy the Amalekites—man, woman, children, ox, ass, camel, and sheep. Kill them all. Leave nothing breathing. Spare no one and spare nothing. God’s just wrath and vengeance was to be executed upon all. There were to be no exceptions.

How could such a plain command be misunderstood? It could not be. God said, “I want you to smite every one of them. Kill them all.”

Note, secondly, a proper consideration in verses 4 through 7. Saul gathered the people together and numbered them in Telaim: two hundred thousand footmen and ten thousand men of Judah. He came to a city of Amalek and laid wait in the valley. Saul said unto the Kenites, “Go, depart, get you down from among the Amalekites, lest I destroy you with them: for ye showed kindness to all the children of Israel, when they came up out of Egypt.” So the Kenites departed from among the Amalekites. Saul smote the Amalekites from Havilah until thou comest to Shur, that is over against Egypt.

In light of the plain command, Saul does three things that demonstrate a proper consideration of the order he had been given. First, he gathers his army in verse 4—two hundred and ten thousand footmen.

Now let me tell you, if you're going to exterminate an entire people, you need an army adequate to do the task. So he gathered an army of 210,000 footmen. The second thing he did was request that the Kenites, with whom he did not wish to fight, remove themselves from danger. He remembered that the Kenites had shown kindness to the children of Israel. Since the Kenites were not listed in God's command for extermination, it was only right that war not be made against them.

He asked them to get out of the way. Here is a principle, and I believe this principle is exceedingly clear: You do not make war upon the innocent or upon those who are not involved in the conflict. You make war only upon the enemies, upon the soldiers. You do not

make war upon innocent people. The Kenites had done nothing wrong; they were not under God's judgment. So, rightly, he told them to get out of the way.

Saul's proper consideration was this: He began by obeying God. Look at verse 7: “And Saul smote the Amalekites from Havilah until thou comest to Shur, that is over against Egypt.” He actually began by obeying God; he began smiting the Amalekites. But read the entire story with me. One is reminded of what Paul asked those Galatians in Galatians 5 and verse 7: “Ye did run well.”

“Who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?” That is what Paul told the Galatians: You started out good, but why did you stop? Saul started out by obeying God, but he stopped. It is not enough to begin well; we must also finish well.

Isn't it amazing that we start so many things and never finish them? We even do that in our own Christian life. It is not enough to start well; we must finish well. It is not sufficient to run well at the beginning of the race. We must run well throughout the race and to the end of the race.

If we are going to run the race at all, we must run according to its rules. It is like saying we are going to have a foot race around ten blocks. Everyone in the congregation begins racing, but I get one block up, cut across, and come around to be first at the finish line. Did I win the race? I got there before anyone else, but no, I did not win because I cheated. I never followed the course of the race.

The Bible says in 2 Timothy 2:5, “And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully.” If you and I are going to fight, obey, or do anything that is biblical and right, we must follow the rules God has laid down for us.

God said, “Saul, here’s a simple thing for you to do. You go kill all the Amalekites.” Saul actually started out by obeying God. He smote those Amalekites from Havilah until thou comest to Shur. But here is the third thing, and then I am going to tie it together for you: I want you to see a personal catastrophe. In verses 8 through 23, something went seriously wrong. Saul began well, but he finished miserably. Instead of obedience to the plain command and in light of the proper consideration, he fell into a personal catastrophe. Why? Why did

Saul fail? Why did Saul disobey? Why did Saul deviate from the plain command that he had been given? Here is the answer to that question.

The Root of Saul's Failure: Subjective Standard

Because he left God's objective standard and followed his own subjective standard. Look what happened. Verse 8 says, "And he took Agag the king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword. But Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them: but every thing that was vile and refuse, that they destroyed utterly."

Saul did not see anything wrong with sparing Agag the king. After all, he was royalty. Saul did not see anything wrong with sparing the best of the sheep, the best of the oxen, and the best of the fat lambs. Anything that was vile and refuse, yes, they would destroy. Why would God want him to destroy a perfectly good sheep? After all, it was a valuable animal. If one sheep was valuable, how about a thousand good sheep? If one cow was good, how about ten thousand good cows? God must have made a mistake. Surely He would not want Saul to eradicate all this good stuff.

In whose eyes was it good? Saul's and the people's—not good in God's eyes, but good in their eyes.

Inevitably, someone will object: "But now, Pastor, the people also spared those animals. Saul may have spared the king, and yes, Saul may have spared some of those animals, but the Bible does say the people spared some of those things."

Yes, it does. But remember that Saul was the leader. Saul was the king. If you go back to chapter 15 and verse 1, the word of the Lord came specifically to Saul. The people may have wondered, had to guess, or thought, but Saul knew. He knew exactly what God had said. It was his responsibility to tell the people. Saul did not have to guess, question, or think, and neither did the people. All Saul and the people had to do was simply obey.

Why did Saul fail? The answer is very simple. He left the objective standard of God's Word and followed his own subjective standard. He was going to determine good and evil, right and wrong, pure and impure. What was Saul doing? He was playing God. You remember Genesis 3:5: "For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, ye shall be as gods, knowing," that is, determining, "good and evil" for yourselves. And what Saul did was this.

You've got to have made a mistake. There's nothing wrong with these sheep. There's nothing wrong with Agag. You know what the Bible says in Isaiah 42, verse 8? God says, "I am the Lord: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images." "I am the Lord: that is my name." "My glory will I not give to another." When you challenge God, you always lose.

When you want to pit your puny, subjective standard against God's holy, righteous, infinite, objective standard, you're going to lose every time.

Applications and Warnings

Now, let me make some applications. I want to show you where we are individually, familially, ecclesiastically, and nationally. Saul incurred the fierce anger and wrath of God. First Samuel 15, verses 10 and 11, says: "Then came the word of the Lord unto Samuel, saying, It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king: for he is turned back from following me, and hath not performed my commandments. And it grieved Samuel; and he cried unto the Lord all night." What did Saul incur by turning from God's objective standard to his own subjective standard? He incurred the fierce anger and wrath of God. Are you willing, individually, familially, ecclesiastically—that is, as a church—and nationally, to face the fierce anger of God? The provocation of God's anger is an outright denial of God's sovereignty.

I was talking to a friend this week, and he mentioned Hurricane Ivan, which was coming up on Florida. I said, "Do you think God's trying to say something to those Floridians down there?" I said, "And then some of the other—I mean, this is three in a row." It never dawns on most people. I still get aggravated whenever I hear weathermen talking about Mother Nature. It's not Mother Nature;

it's Father God. Whenever we leave God's objective standard and turn to our subjective standard, we incur the fierce anger and wrath of God, because we are denying His standard. We're saying that we're God, and God has said, "My glory I'll not share with another." So you're in trouble.

Saul not only lost his kingdom; he lost his life. Look in 1 Samuel 15, beginning in verse 26: “And Samuel said unto Saul, I will not return with thee: for thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord hath rejected thee from being king over Israel. And as Samuel turned about to go away, he laid hold upon the skirt of his mantle, and it rent. And Samuel said unto him, The Lord hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbor of thine, that is better than thou.”

Look specifically at verse 26: “And Samuel said unto Saul, I will not return with thee: for thou hast rejected the word of the Lord.” You have rejected God’s objective standard; therefore, the Lord hath rejected thee from being king over Israel. Isn’t that amazing? He lost his kingdom because he thought his ways, desires, plans, and thoughts were wiser and better than God’s.

That is not all. Look in your Bibles to 2 Samuel 1. You are talking about justice. Verse 2 says: “It came even to pass on the third day, that, behold, a man came out of the camp from Saul with his clothes rent, and earth upon his head: and so it was, when he came to David, that he fell to the earth, and did obeisance. And David said unto him, From whence comest thou? And he said unto him, Out of the camp of Israel am I escaped. And David said unto him, How went the matter? I pray thee, tell me. And he answered, That the people are fled from the battle, and many of the people also are fallen and dead; and Saul and Jonathan his son are dead also. And David said unto the young man that told him, How knowest thou that Saul and Jonathan his son be dead? And the young man that told him said, As I happened by chance upon mount Gilboa, behold, Saul leaned upon his spear; and, lo, the chariots and horsemen followed hard after him. And when he looked behind him, he saw me, and called unto me. And I answered, Here am I. And he said unto me, Who art thou? And I answered him, I am an Amalekite. He said unto me again, Stand, I pray thee, upon me, and slay me: for anguish is come upon

me, because my life is yet whole in me. So I stood upon him, and slew him, because I was sure that he could not live after that he was fallen."

"And I took the crown that was upon his head, and the bracelet that was on his arm, and have brought them hither unto my lord." Saul spared the best, and the best slew Saul. He took the crown off his head and the bracelet off his arm. When we turn from God's objective standard, we are in far more danger individually, familially, ecclesiastically, and nationally than we can imagine. Saul lost his kingdom, and he lost his life. Why? Because he would not do what he thought was best, instead of bowing to the totality of God's Word.

Thirdly, every disobedience involves elements of pride, lust, and covetousness. Go back to verse 16, 1 Samuel 15: "Then Samuel said unto Saul, Stay, and I will tell thee what the Lord hath said to me this night. And he said unto him, Say on. And Samuel said, When thou wast little in thine own sight, wast thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel, and the Lord anointed thee king over Israel? And the Lord sent thee on a journey, and said, Go and utterly destroy the sinners the Amalekites, and fight against them until they be consumed. Wherefore then didst thou not obey the voice of the Lord, but didst fly upon the spoil, and didst evil in the sight of the Lord?"

Samuel said, "Saul, I have something to say to you." Saul said, "Just say on." Samuel said, "When you were little, God made you king. God elevated you. God promoted you. Now you have become arrogant and proud, and you think you know more than God. You have decided to disobey God and obey your own whims. Moreover, when you saw the spoil, you flew upon it. You are nothing but a covetous, greedy, selfish, wicked man." That was said to the king. In every disobedience, whatever the disobedience, there are always elements of pride, lust, and covetousness. Why did Saul leave God's objective standard? Because of his pride, arrogance, and covetousness. He wanted what God had condemned.

Fourthly, listen carefully: subjectivism is not simply disobedience. It is a form of idolatry. Skip down to verses 22 and 23. After Saul said, "Well, we have spared all these sheep and all these oxen that we may sacrifice them unto the Lord," verse 22 says: "And Samuel said,

Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.

"For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king." Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft. What was the penalty for witchcraft? Death. Stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. What was the penalty for idolatry? Death.

Subjectivism is not simply disobedience; it is a form of idolatry. When we turn from God's objective standard, it is so that we may elevate our own personal standard. In doing so, we are claiming to be God ourselves.

Conclusion: The Bible as Sole Authority

The Bible is our sole authority for faith and practice. Whatever you do, or whatever you shall do, that is contrary to the Word of God is wrong. I do not care how it makes you feel, what your experience is, or how you rejoice in it. If it is contrary to the Word of God, it is wrong.

We must never allow our experiences to interpret the Bible. We must always use the Bible to interpret our experiences. The Bible is our sole authority for faith and practice.

You say, "Brother Weaver, does your church have a constitution?" It sure does. What is it? The Bible. "Does your church have a covenant?" It sure does. What is it? The Bible. "Does your church have standards of conduct?" We surely do. What is it? The Bible. The Bible is our sole authority for faith and practice. When we leave that objective standard, the only thing left in our lives is subjectivism.

I'd rather have God's infinite wisdom than my finite wisdom. His Word is truth. Father, we bow before Thee this day. We acknowledge Your infinite mercy and grace to us, and we're so thankful for Your objective standard, the Word of God. We do not have to guess or question; we simply need to learn, apply, and obey. Give us grace to serve Thee acceptably with reverence and godly fear. In Thy name we pray, Amen.

CHAPTER 3

Doing Evil Again

December 18, 2005

Introduction: The Phrase 'Did Evil Again'

While I was preaching in Texas, I heard a pastor read a verse from Judges 13. Although he was preaching on the life of Samson, he never dealt with this verse. But there was a phrase in it that caught my eye. I looked back at a friend of mine, Brother Eric, and it caught his eye as well. As I thought about it, I wanted to bring a message on it.

Judges 13:1 says, “And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord. And the Lord delivered them into the hand of the Philistines forty years.” Look at that verse very closely: “And the children of Israel did evil”—what? “Again in the sight of the Lord.” And He delivered them into the hands of the Philistines for forty years.

The Nature of a Fool

Our text tells us that the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord. Committing evil, even once, is bad enough in and of

itself. But when you commit evil again and again, it expresses great wickedness and great rebellion. Moreover, it evidences great stubbornness and great foolishness.

When we talk about a fool, understand that a fool in Scripture is not a mentally deficient person. A fool in Scripture is someone who will not listen, hear, heed, or follow instruction. Proverbs 12:15 says, “The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise.” Note that verse: “The way of a fool is right in his own eyes.” In other words, he does not need counsel and does not need to listen to anyone. He is just going to do what he thinks is right in and of himself. So the Bible says, “The way of a fool is right in his own eyes.”

Proverbs 15:5 says, “A fool despises his father's instruction, but he that regardeth reproof is prudent.” Remember, a fool is not a mentally deficient person. He is someone who is stubborn and will not listen. A fool is someone who despises his father's instruction. He is the opposite of the prudent person in this verse who regards reproof.

Proverbs 17:10 shows the hardness and stubbornness of a fool: “A reproof entereth more into a wise man than a hundred stripes into a fool.” A wise man will listen, but God says you can beat a fool with a hundred stripes and he still will not listen. Proverbs 23:9 says, “Speak not in the ears of a fool, for he will despise the wisdom of thy words.”

Once again, a fool is someone who refuses to listen, hear, and heed instruction. Is it any wonder, therefore, that God referred to the children of Israel in the Old Testament as stiff-necked? In Exodus 32:9-10, God told Moses, “And the Lord said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people. Now therefore let me alone that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them, and I will make of thee a great nation.”

Israel as Stiff-Necked

God said that Israel was a stiff-necked people, and Israel was charged with being stiff-necked many times in the Old Testament. When you get to the New Testament, Stephen, in giving his defense

in Acts 7:51, said this to Israel: “Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost. As your fathers did, so do ye.” What did he call Israel? Stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart.

What does a stiff neck denote? All of us have had stiff necks at some time—not only spiritually, but physically. When you have a stiff neck, you cannot turn it; it hurts even to look. A stiff neck indicates hardness, stubbornness, and the inability to be turned from one's ways. To call someone stiff-necked is to say not only that he is stubborn and hard-headed, but that he is unable to be turned.

I never will forget this excellent illustration. We had a mule named Krip because every now and then she would stumble along. So we called her old Krip. A cousin of mine came up from Miami, Florida, saw the mule, and wanted to ride the horse. I told him, "Larry, that's a mule. That's not a horse." But he said, "I want to ride her." So I put the bridle on the old mule, jumped up on her bare back, and helped Larry up. Everybody knows the stubbornness of a mule. The mule started walking straight toward a low-hanging pecan limb.

This is no lie and no exaggeration. I pulled on that rein to turn the mule, but she would not turn. She just kept walking straight. I took both hands and pulled as hard as I could. I had the mule's head turned sideways, and she kept walking straight. When I saw that I could not turn her and saw the limb coming, I said, "Duck, Larry." I laid down and grabbed the mule's neck.

My city cousin looked up in the sky and said, "Where?" About that time, the limb caught him across the chest, and he hit the ground. He never forgave me. He always said I did that on purpose. But I never did. The truth is, I tried my best to turn that mule, and she would not turn. Why? She had a stiff neck. She was just stiff-necked.

That's exactly what God says about Israel in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. We're stiff-necked people. As I read the Old Testament, I'm not only amazed but amused at the same time, because it seems those people never, ever learned. Over and over, judgment befell them because of their wickedness and rebellion. God

would mercifully and graciously deliver them, and just as soon as he did, they would turn around and sin again.

Escalating Judgments in Judges

Do you realize it's really no different today? Times have changed, but we have not. It seems we no sooner get out of one problem than once again we turn and are doing evil again—not only individually, but ecclesiastically, in the family, and especially nationally. Doing evil merits judgment and punishment, but doing evil again and again merits greater judgment and greater punishment.

Judges 13:1 says, “And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord delivered them into the hand of the Philistines.” How long? Forty years. God did not begin by punishing Israel for forty years. They worked up to this punishment; they merited it, earned it, and deserved it.

The Scripture says that Israel “did evil again.” In Judges 3:7–8 we read, “And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord and forgot the Lord their God and served Baalim and the groves. Therefore the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel and he sold them into the hand of Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia and the children of Israel served Cushan-rishathaim eight years.” Initially, Israel sinned and rebelled, so God sent judgment and punished them eight years at the hand of a foreign king.

Judges 3:11–12 says, “And the land had rest forty years, and Othniel the son of Kenaz died. And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord.” Notice how that phrase occurs over and over: “And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord. And the Lord strengthened Eglon, the king of Moab, against Israel, because they had done evil in the sight of the Lord. And he gathered unto him the children of Ammon and Amalek, and went and smote Israel, and possessed the city of the palm trees. So the children of Israel served Eglon, the king of Moab, eighteen years.”

What initially was an eight-year judgment became greater after they turned from that judgment and did evil again. God increased their punishment by ten years, so they went to eighteen years.

Judges 4:1–3 says, “And the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord when Ehud was dead. And the Lord sold them into the hand of Jabin, king of Canaan, that reigned in Hazor, the captain of whose host was Sisera, who dwelt in Harosheth of the Gentiles. And the children of Israel cried unto the Lord, for he had nine hundred chariots of iron and twenty years he mightily oppressed the children of Israel.”

Are you beginning to see a principle? It was eight years, it was eighteen years, and now it is twenty years.

Although God initially delivered them into the hand of foreign kings, not only are foreign kings judging them, but now you are seeing phrases like “mightily oppressed.” Judges 6:1 says, “And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord and the Lord delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years.”

You might say, “Wait a minute, Brother Weaver. It went from eight to eighteen to twenty. Now it is down to seven years. Why? This is a lighter punishment.” Oh no. It is a shorter period of time, but notice what happens: “And the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel, and because of the Midianites, the children of Israel made them the dens which are in the mountains and the caves and the strongholds. And so it was when Israel had sown, that the Midianites came up, and the Amalekites, and the children of the east, even they came up against them. And they encamped against them, and destroyed the increase of the earth, till thou comest to Gaza, and left no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass. For they came up with their cattle and their tents, and they came up as grasshoppers for multitude. For both they and their camels were without number, and they entered into the land to destroy it.”

Here was only a seven-year judgment, but it was far more severe than even the twenty-year judgment. Now they had nothing, and the enemy was coming up and destroying everything they had. The people were so frightened that they fled to the mountains, making dens and caves. The Midianites did enter the land to destroy it.

In Judges 9, there was a three-year judgment under Abimelech. Abimelech was Gideon’s son by a concubine. Gideon had seventy sons plus Abimelech, but Abimelech turned around and murdered

sixty-nine of his brothers. Only Jotham escaped. In this judgment, it was not an outsider coming in; it was an insider killing those who were inside. Basically, what you have is a civil war: neighbor fighting against neighbor.

There was no need for an outside adversary, for every man was his neighbor's adversary. Proverbs 16:7 says, "When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him." When a man's ways please the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.

The opposite is also true. When a man's ways displease the Lord, God raises up enemies against him. All you have to do is read 1 Kings 2, where the Lord raised up an adversary to Solomon. Over and over, you read that in Scripture. Our Lord said in Matthew 10:36, "A man's enemies shall be they of his own household." God is capable of raising up enemies inside as well as outside.

Now look in Judges chapter 10. Here is another judgment, but now it is back up to eighteen years. Judges 10:6 says: "And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord, and served Baalim and Ashtoreth, and the gods of Syria, and the gods of Zidon, and the gods of Moab, and the gods of the children of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines, and forsook the Lord and served him not. And the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and he sold them into the hands of the Philistines and into the hands of the children of Ammon. And that year they vexed and oppressed the children of Israel eighteen years. All the children of Israel were on the other side of Jordan in the land of the Amorites, which is Gilead. Moreover, the children of Ammon passed over Jordan to fight also against Judah and against Benjamin and against the house of Ephraim. So that Israel was sore distressed."

Here now is an eighteen-year judgment, and in this judgment you find the phrase "sore distressed." There were a few other minor judges between Judges 10 and Judges 13, including Jephthah. But when you come to Judges chapter 13, you have the judgeship of Samson. Notice verse 1 again: "And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord delivered them into the hand of the Philistines for forty years." Israel worked up to the forty-year judgment. God had judged them eight years, then

eighteen years, then twenty years, then seven years, and then eighteen years again. In other words, every judgment either increased in length or increased in intensity and severity.

The Principle of Culpability

The principle I want you to see is the principle of culpability. Culpability means that someone is deserving of blame or censure. The individual or individuals who have greater blessings and greater privileges also deserve greater censure and greater punishment. It would be bad if you read in the paper that Ed Wolfe had been captured robbing the bank downtown. Everybody would say, "He is a Christian. He ought to know, Thou shalt not steal." That would be bad. But what would be worse is if the paper said, "Pastor John Weaver arrested robbing the bank." Not only do I know better; I teach better. The greater the responsibility and the greater the privileges, the greater the censure. The greater the culpability, therefore, the greater the judgment and the more intense and the more severe the judgment.

Doing evil one time is bad enough in and of itself. But when you continue to do evil over and over, performing continuous acts of rebellion, it merits and deserves greater and more severe judgment.

Amos 4: Escalating Judgments on Unrepentant Israel

Let me show you how these principles are clearly enunciated. Turn your Bibles to Amos chapter 4. Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos. Begin reading with verse 6. God says to Israel, "And I have also given you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and want of bread in all your places. Yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord."

Why did God judge them with famine? Because they were doing evil again. He says, "Yet have ye not returned unto me." He sent famine, so they had nothing to eat. "Cleanness of teeth" means their teeth had not become dirty through eating; they had not been eating for a while. When the famine did not cause them to repent and turn to God, He withheld the rain.

"I also withholden the rain from you, when there was yet three months to the harvest, and I caused it to rain upon one city and

caused it not to rain upon another city. One piece was rained upon, and the piece whereupon it rained not withered. So two or three cities wandered into one city to drink water, but they were not satisfied. Yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord."

God said, "I sent the famine to you. And you wouldn't listen, you wouldn't repent, you wouldn't return. Now I sent a drought to you." What does a drought do on top of a famine? It increases the severity of the famine. Nothing is growing or producing, and God has cut off their rain three months before the harvest. Their fields are not producing. Here is an increase in the severity of the judgment and punishment because they would not listen.

They continued to do evil again and again. God said, "I have smitten you with blasting and mildew. When your gardens and your vineyards and your fig trees and your olive trees increased, the palmerworm devoured them, yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord."

Some fruit trees and vines may have escaped the droughts of the field because they were close to the house; if there was any water at all, they could be watered a little. But God said, "Look, I'm taking care of that. I'm going to send mildew to you. I'm going to send plant diseases. I'm going to send worms. They're going to even devour your fruit trees and those that you've tried to guard and take care of."

If God sent a famine, then a drought on top of the famine, and then mildew and worms to destroy anything that was green, how much would be left? Nothing. Alice and I were traveling in New Jersey years ago when I was going there to preach. I noticed limbs on the trees, cracked and dead, everywhere. When I arrived, I asked the pastor, "What in the world happened to these limbs on these trees? They're just dead." "Locusts," he said. They come out every seven years. They ate and killed everything. There was hardly a tree without a dead limb or two, and some trees were totally dead. God said, "I've sent the famine, I've sent the drought, I've sent the mildew, the worms."

And yet, what does He say in verse nine? "Yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord." What are they doing? They are doing evil again—doing evil continually.

Look at verse ten. God said, “I’ve sent among you the pestilence after the manner of Egypt. Your young men have I slain with a sword and have taken away your horses. And I’ve made the stink of your camps to come up into your nostrils. Yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord.” On top of all that, God sends pestilence, diseases, and war. Their young men were killed with the sword, and the stink of their camps, after hundreds and thousands had been slain, came up into their nostrils. Yet they had not returned unto the Lord. They continued in evil, and as they continued, the judgments increased in intensity and severity.

Watch verse eleven: “I have overthrown some of you as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and ye were as a firebrand plucked out of the burning. Yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord.” On top of the famine, drought, mildew, worms, pestilence, and war, God sent supernatural judgments against them, like fire falling from the sky, as He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. Yet they would not return to Him. They would not listen.

You were doing evil again and again. You were continuing in your rebellion against me. What is the answer? Here it is in verse 12: “Therefore, thus will I do unto thee, O Israel. And because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.” When he says, “Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel,” that is not saying, “Child, I’m bringing you home.” That is not what he is saying. Verse 12 continues: “Therefore, thus will I do unto thee, O Israel, and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel, for, lo, he that formeth the mountains, and createth the wind, and declareth unto man what is his thought, and that maketh the morning darkness, and treadeth upon the high places of the earth, the Lord, the God of hosts, is his name.”

Here is what God is going to do: “Hear ye this word which I take up against you, even a lamentation, O house of Israel. The virgin of Israel is fallen. She shall no more rise. She is forsaken upon her land. There is none to raise her up.” What is God saying? God is saying, “I’m going to take you and destroy you as a nation.” That is why verse 3 says, “For thus saith the Lord God, The city that went out by a thousand shall leave a hundred, and that which went forth by a

hundred shall leave ten to the house of Israel." God said, "I will just literally wipe you out."

Amos 9 makes this plain. Remember, he is speaking to the children of Israel: "Are ye not as the children of the Ethiopians unto me, O children of Israel, saith the Lord? Have not I brought up Israel out of the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor, and the Syrians from Kir?" Then he says, "Behold, the eyes of the Lord God are upon the sinful kingdom. I will destroy it from the face of the earth, saving that I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob, saith the Lord." God said, "I'm going to take you out as a nation. I'm going to save some of you alive, but I'm going to destroy you as a nation."

Do you see the increase in the severity and intensity of the judgment as people continued to do evil again and again? The principle of doing evil over and over brings immediate and intense punishment, and that truth is repeated many times in Scripture. One of those passages is Proverbs 29:1. Here is a verse that it would do you well to memorize. Listen carefully.

Proverbs 29:1 and Lamentations 4:6

"He that being often reproved"—that is, often rebuked, often warned, often admonished—"and hardeneth his neck"—that is, he becomes stiff-necked and will not listen—"shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." Isn't that amazing? God says that the person who is often reproved, often warned, and often admonished, yet still continues to harden or stiffen his neck, will not listen and will not receive rebuke. He shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.

In other words, there will be no correcting it. There will be no changing it. Do you realize—and this is a very important point to understand—that Proverbs 29:1 is true individually, familially, ecclesiastically, and nationally? What did God do to Israel? He destroyed her as a nation. What has God done to plenty of other peoples? He has destroyed them as nations. They are no more. No one, no group, no state, and no nation can continually do evil and escape the judgment of God.

Turn in your Bibles to the book of Lamentations, written by Jeremiah. In chapter 4, Jeremiah describes the fall of Jerusalem. Samaria was the capital of the northern kingdom, and Jerusalem the capital of the southern kingdom. Jeremiah was known as the weeping prophet. He preached and prophesied to these people, but they would not listen, hear, or hearken. They refused both the message and the messenger.

As Jeremiah watched the destruction of Jerusalem, he wrote in Lamentations 4:6: "For the punishment of the iniquity of the daughter of my people is greater than the punishment of the sin of Sodom that was overthrown as in a moment and no hands stayed on her." The daughter of his people refers to Jerusalem. Jeremiah is saying that the sack and destruction of Jerusalem was greater punishment than the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. How could that be?

He explains it partly. In verse 6, he says that Sodom that was overthrown as in a moment had no hand stayed on her. When God sent fire and brimstone from heaven to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, to put it bluntly, they never knew what hit them. They were wiped out instantly. They were killed. They were dead as a doornail. God sent it, and it was over with. But when God sent Nebuchadnezzar against Jerusalem, according to Jeremiah 52, the siege, sack, and destruction of Jerusalem lasted almost two years. So hands stayed upon Jerusalem—wicked, heathen hands. The rape, the robbing, the murder, the famine, the killing.

Let me show you how bad it was. In Lamentations 4:6, Jeremiah says, "For the punishment of the iniquity of the daughter of my people is greater than the punishment of the sin of Sodom that was overthrown as in a moment, and no hand stayed on her." That is, very quickly.

Now he shows what happened in Jerusalem. Verse 7: "Her Nazarites"—those who had taken a Nazarite vow—"were purer than snow. They were whiter than milk. They were more ruddy in body than rubies. Their polishing was of sapphire." That's what they were. But now he says, "Their visage is blacker than a coal." Notice the past tense: that is what they were. That is the contrast.

"They are not known in the streets." No one can recognize them. "Their skin cleaveth to their bones. It is withered. It has become like a stick." They were starving to death in Jerusalem. You could not go out without being killed, and if you stayed inside, you were starving to death. He said in verse 9, "They that be slain with the sword are better than they that be slain with hunger. For these pine away, stricken through for want of the fruits of the field." If you are killed by the sword, it is quick; it is over with. If you starve to death, it is days and months.

"The hands of the pitiful women have soddened their own children. They were their meat in the destruction of the daughter of my people." Women killed, cooked, and ate their own children. That is why he said in verse 11, "The Lord hath accomplished his fury, he hath poured out his fierce anger, and he hath kindled a fire in Zion, and hath devoured the foundations thereof." Do you see this principle?

When you do evil again and again, God continues to judge you, but he always increases the severity and intensity of that judgment. To those who have greater privileges and greater blessings, there is greater culpability, which merits greater punishment. It is one thing to sin; it is quite another thing to continue to sin over and over again. It is one thing to fail, make mistakes, fall short, and even sin. But it is quite another thing never to learn from your fall, your mistakes, or your sin, and still continue headstrong in your sins. When you continue headstrong in your sins, you are demonstrating obstinacy, stubbornness, and contumacy, and laying up for yourselves wrath against the day of wrath. That is what the Apostle Paul said in Romans 2, verses 3 through 6. Those who were not thankful and did not appreciate the goodness and mercy of God laid up for themselves wrath against the day of wrath. Here is the principle: When you do evil again and again, God judges. But with each act, the judgment increases in severity and intensity.

Application 1: Evidence of Conversion

Now let me make some applications. Turn in your Bibles to 1 John 3. One of the greatest evidences that we are genuinely converted is that we are not continually sinning. I did not say that we were perfect or

that we never sinned. Yes, we do sin; yes, we are imperfect. But we do not consistently and constantly

Those who continually sin violate the law of God. Now look at what he says in 1 John 3, beginning with verse 7: “Little children, let no man deceive you. He that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous.”

Every one of these verbs is a present active indicative. It refers to constancy and continuance. “He that is continually doing righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. He that is continually committing sin is of the devil. For the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.”

“Whosoever is born of God,” or has been begotten of God, “is not continually committing sin.” Why? “For his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot continually sin, because he is born of God. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil.” How do we know the difference? “Whosoever is not continually doing righteousness is not of God, neither he that is not continually loving his brother.”

The way that you can tell that you are genuinely converted, one of the ways, is that you are not continually sinning over and over. You are not continually doing evil.

David is known in Scripture as a man after God’s own heart. Did David sin? Yes, he did. He sinned mightily and grievously, but the general tenor of David’s life was that he was a man after God’s own heart. Do you remember the children of Israel whom God brought out of Egypt? We have been reading about how they did evil again and again and again.

The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 10:5, in reference to the children of Israel, “But with many of them God was not well pleased.” I almost laugh every time I read that verse: “But with many of them God was not well pleased.” How many of the original people whom God brought out of Egypt got into the promised land? Two: Joshua and Caleb. What did God do to the rest of them? He killed them. When you get to Hebrews 4, the Bible says concerning these people,

"So then they could not enter into the promised land." Why? Because of their unbelief. What do unsaved people do?

Sin over and over again does not bother them. How are the children of God manifested? How are they different from the children of the devil? We do not continually sin over and over. Yes, we are sinners. Yes, we sin. But we do not go out deliberately, purposely, premeditatedly, and plan on sinning on a constant, continual basis. I do not do it. So the very truth of the matter is this: the very fact that you are not doing evil over and over again is evidence of your conversion. How does God describe the ungodly? Let me tell you.

In 2 Peter 2, verse 14, He says, "They have eyes full of adultery that cannot cease from sin. And a heart they have exercised with covetous practices." They have eyes that cannot cease from sin. They cannot stop sinning, not for a day, not for a minute. They have a heart that is exercised, gymnasticized, to evil and to covetousness.

One of the big differences between the children of God and the children of the evil one is that the children of the evil one constantly and continually do evil over and over. We who are saved do not sin like that. Yes, we sin. Yes, we are imperfect. But we do not premeditatedly and constantly and continually sin.

Application 2: The Believer's Misery in Sin

When a real, genuine Christian sins, he is miserable until he repents and makes things right. William Secker, an old Puritan, said this. I love this; I wrote it down in my Bible. It is such a blessing just to read it over and over: "A saint is not free from sin. That is his burden. A saint is not free to sin, that is his blessing. Sin is in him, that is his lamentation. His soul is not in his sin, that is his consolation." Isn't that beautiful? A saint is not free from sin; that is our burden.

We are not free to sin. That is our blessing. Sin is in us. That is our lamentation. But our heart and our soul is not in our sin. That is our consolation. You let a hog fall down in a mud hole and he will lie there and enjoy it. You let a sheep fall in the mud hole and the sheep is going to get up and get out as quickly as he can.

Romans chapter 6 teaches us that we have been freed from the dominion of sin. “But God be thanked that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine”—that is, the gospel—“which was delivered unto you, being then made free from sin”—that is, free from the dominion of sin. You became the servants of righteousness.

“I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh. For as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity, even so now yield your members servants to righteousness and to holiness.” “For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness.” What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death.

How many of you really like to rejoice in and talk about the sins that you committed in the old days? I do not. I am ashamed of mine. “What fruit had ye then in those things when ye were the servants of sin? Now ye are ashamed of those things. Why? For the end of those things is death.”

“But now being made free from sin”—that is, free from the dominion of sin—“and become the servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness and the end everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” The difference is this: when you are the servant of sin, you sin and commit wickedness and ungodliness; but when you are the servant of Jesus Christ and are freed from the dominion of sin, yes, sin is in you, but you are no longer obeying sin as a master. You are now free to obey the Lord Jesus Christ unto holiness and righteousness.

Application 3: God Chastens His Own

So we, who have been converted, no longer love sin and its fruits. We love righteousness. And when we do sin, we're grieved and it hurts us.

Thirdly, God will never allow His people, either individually or nationally, to sin and get by with it. Hebrews 12, beginning with verse 5, says: “And ye 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. Watch, for whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." How many get away with it? None. "If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons. For what son is he whom the Father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards and not sons."

Now, God says, if you can sin constantly and continually and get by with it, never being whipped, judged, or chastised in this life, what does that mean? It means you don't belong to Him. You know what a bastard is? A bastard is someone who has been produced by a man but didn't have a father. The father doesn't love him, own him, or discipline him. If you're mine—individually, familially, ecclesiastically, nationally—and you do wrong, I'm going to whip the living daylights out of you. But if you can sin and not be whipped, though sinners are going to be judged, and not be chastised, you're not mine.

The Bible says in Micah, chapter 6 and verse 9, "Hear ye the rod and him who hath appointed it." Nationally, ecclesiastically, familially, and individually, we may either hear God's Word and obey it, or hear His rod. We're going to hear it one way or the other. I find it much easier just to obey to begin with. It sure saves a lot on the bridges, I can assure you. This brings me to the fourth and final application.

Application 4: National Judgment and Preparation

We should be wise as to where our nation is heading, and prepare ourselves every way possible for that which we know is going to befall us nationally. I don't care if we escape Y2K. I don't care if we escape any other scenario. You cannot murder thousands of babies a day and escape the judgment of God. You cannot have a false, fraudulent economy and escape the judgment of God. You cannot promote sodomy and Marxism and communism and escape the judgment of God.

We need to be wise and prepare ourselves spiritually, physically, mentally, emotionally, financially, any way we can for what we know

is going to come down the pike sooner or later. No one can sin against God and escape His judgment.

Let's pray. Father, we're so thankful for the salvation that we find in Jesus Christ. We're thankful, Lord, that we have been delivered from sin, from the dominion of sin. And we're thankful one day by Your infinite power and grace we'll be even delivered not just from the penalty of sin, but from the presence of sin. And Lord, we do pray that You would make us wise in Your Word.

Conclusion and Prayer

Help us to honor Thee. Help us to determine in our souls that we will not do evil, certainly not do evil again. But we want fruit of righteousness and holiness. Make us, Father, holy as Thou art holy. For Thou hast said, "Be ye holy, for I am holy, saith the Lord." May Your will be done in our lives. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 4

David's Dominion

March 2, 2008

Introduction and Review

Psalm 18, verse 37:

David said, “I pursued mine enemies, and overtaken them: neither did I turn again till they were consumed. I wounded them that they were not able to rise: they are fallen under my feet. For thou hast girded me with strength unto the battle: thou hast subdued under me those that rose up against me. Thou hast also given me the necks of mine enemies, that I might destroy them that hate me. They cried, but there was none to save them, even unto the Lord, but he answered them not. Then did I beat them small as the dust before the wind: I did cast them out as the dirt in the streets.

“Thou hast delivered me from the strivings of the people; and thou hast made me the head of the heathen: a people whom I have not known shall serve me. As soon as they hear of me, they shall obey me: the strangers shall submit themselves unto me. The strangers shall fade away, and be afraid out of their close places.

“The Lord liveth; and blessed be my rock; and let the God of my salvation be exalted. It is God that avengeth me, and subdueth the people under me. He delivereth me from mine enemies: yea, thou liftest me up above those that rise up against me: thou hast delivered me from the violent man. Therefore will I give thanks unto thee, O Lord, among the heathen, and sing praises unto thy name. Great deliverance giveth he to his king, and sheweth mercy to his anointed, to David, and to his seed for ever.”

We have looked at this psalm from its beginning. In verses 1 and 2, we saw David’s determination: “I will love thee, O Lord.” Biblical love consists of a biblical attitude, biblical affection, and biblical actions. David also gave his reasons for loving the Lord. The Lord was his strength, his rock, his fortress, his God, his trust, his high tower, his buckler, and the horn of his salvation—all of these wonderful reasons.

Then, in verses 3 through 6, we looked at David’s distress. He said, “In my distress I called upon the Lord.” Oftentimes God puts our backs against the wall when we forget Him, enabling us to remember Him and cry out unto Him. Distress sometimes is indeed an incentive to cry out to the Lord.

David's Dominion

Then we looked at David's deliverer in verses 7 through 19. We saw how God delivered him and how David now pictures God under all of these wonderful metaphors. In verses 20 through 28, we saw David's deportment—how to act if we want to be delivered. Then we saw David's defense in verses 29 through 33, David's discipline in verse 34, where he said, "The Lord God teaches me to fight," and David's designation in verses 35 and 36. Now we come to the final point, David's dominion in verses 37 through 50.

Three Preparatory Principles

Last week I tried to give you three principles to prepare you for these verses. These principles are hardly ever grasped even by those who profess to believe the Bible and to be Christians. Nevertheless, they are biblical principles and pertinent to us today.

First, we must understand that there is a time for mercy and a time to show no mercy. Generally speaking, we are to be merciful people. But there are times when we are not to have mercy, and times when God forbids us to be merciful to certain individuals and certain people. For instance, a convicted murderer: God said, "Thine eyes shall not pity him." "If any will not work, neither should he eat." In other words, we are to have no sympathy for individuals who fight against God and violate his law.

Secondly, there are times when total warfare—that is, the complete annihilation of one's enemies—is lawful and right. Generally speaking, we are not to harm civilians or individuals who are not involved in the battle. But there were times when God sent his people in and said, "Slay them all, man, woman, child, ox, suckling, ass, kill them all." That is total warfare.

Defeat

Psalm 18 is directly applied to Jesus Christ in the New Testament. Thus, when Jesus Christ returns, He will show no mercy to His enemies and will wage total warfare against them. That is why, in 2 Thessalonians 1:7, the Apostle Paul wrote, "And you who are troubled, rest with us, when our Lord shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on those who know not God and obey not the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ." It will indeed be total warfare. When we grasp these principles, we can understand what David is saying in verses 37 through 50, a passage demonstrating not only David's dominion over his enemies, but inevitably the dominion of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Defeat of Enemies (vv. 37–40)

We will look at verses 37 through 50 under four simple headings: defeat, desolation, destruction, and dominion. Defeat concerns the defeat of our enemies and David's enemies. Notice verse 37: "I pursued my enemies and overtaken them. Neither did I turn again till they were consumed. I have wounded them that were not able to rise. They're fallen under my feet. For thou hast girded me with strength unto battle, thou hast subdued unto me those that rose up

against me, thou hast also given me the necks of mine enemies, that I might destroy them that hate me."

David gives us graphic details concerning the defeat of his enemies. As we look at these verses, we must keep in mind that we are not simply talking about the victories of David, but the victories of the greater David, the Lord Jesus Christ. David, in this passage, prefigures Christ. This passage is directly applied to Jesus Christ in the New Testament. In actual conflict with God's aid, the defeat of David's enemies is absolutely certain.

Scripture here tells us that present and continued success is expressed—not just for David, but also for those who stand with David and with David's God. Thomas Adams, an old author, said, "By the way, before I give you the quote, remember the Lex Talionis of Scripture?" Lex Talionis is Latin for the law of retribution.

You reap what you sow. With what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again. God always makes the punishment fit the crime. Thomas Adams said on these verses, “Though passion possess our bodies, let patience possess our souls.” The law of our profession binds us to a warfare. Our trouble shall end. Our victory is eternal. Here is David’s triumph: “I have wounded them that they were not able to rise. They are fallen under my feet. Thou hast subdued under me those that rose up against me. Thou hast given me the necks of mine enemies, etc.”

“They have wounds for their wounds, and the treaders down of the poor are trodden down by the poor. The Lord will subdue those to us that would have subdued us to themselves. And though for a short time they rode over our heads, yet now at last we shall everlastingly tread upon their necks. Lo, then, the reward of the humble patience and confident hope.”

It does not matter if the enemies supposedly ride over our heads for a brief period of time. Those who tread us down shall be trodden down. Those who rode over us shall be ridden over themselves. It is the lex talionis.

Notice the progression in these verses. David pursued his enemies, overtook them, consumed them, wounded them, and destroyed them so that they were unable to rise again. David was not

politically correct; he could not have functioned in today's society. He did not save his enemies for a future economic benefit, use them to increase tax revenue or governmental control, or fight a continual war on terror. David ended the war by defeating and destroying his enemies to the extent that they were not able to rise up again. Isn't that interesting?

Have you ever seen a leader in recent years who was literally interested in just getting rid of the enemy and letting us get on with our lives? Not interested in increasing tax revenues, destroying our constitutional and biblical liberties, or controlling the people? Let us just get rid of the enemies and live our lives. David certainly could not have functioned in this politically correct climate today.

It did not matter who David was fighting—whether the Amalekites, the Jebusites, the Philistines, or the Moabites. Whoever David fought, the principle was the same: David was out to win. He did not look for a stalemate, a compromise, a truce, or an honorable withdrawal. What David looked for was victory, and he meant to have that victory by defeating and destroying his enemies.

That is a lesson we need to learn again. MacArthur would have taken care of the Communists in Korea had he been allowed to do so. Our men could have won in Vietnam if they had been allowed to do so. Wars are not usually fought for defeating an enemy. They are fought either for economic gain, political control, or mass manipulation in today's society. David fought to win.

In verse 37, he says, "I have pursued my enemies and overtaken them, neither did I turn again till they were consumed." The word "consumed" is the Hebrew word kalah, which means literally to consume, to end, to finish, to accomplish an end, to complete, and to vanquish. David said it was God who enabled him to do that. In verse 39 he said, "For thou," referring to God, "hast girded me with strength unto the battle, thou hast subdued unto me those that rose up against me." Who enabled David to consume his enemies? It was God.

John Calvin wrote: "The point in which David insists so much is that of showing from the effect of the issue that all of his victories were to be traced to the favor of God, and from this it follows that his

cause was good and just. We're apt to think that David here speaks too much after the manner of a soldier."

It might be said that David had forgotten the gentleness and meekness which ought to shine in all true believers, and in which they should resemble their heavenly Father. But as he attempted nothing without the command of God, and as his affections were governed and regulated by the Holy Spirit, we may be assured that these are not the words of a cruel man who took pleasure in shedding blood, but of one who faithfully executed the judgment of God committed to him. Indeed, he was so distinguished for gentleness of disposition as to abhor the shedding of even a single drop of blood, except insofar as duty and the necessity of his office required.

We must therefore take into consideration David's vocation and also his pure zeal. Moreover, it should be particularly attended to that the psalmist here calls those his enemies whose indomitable and infatuated obstinacy merited and called forth such vengeance from God. Further, under this type there is shouted forth the invincible character and condition of the kingdom of Christ. Trusting to and sustained by the power of God, Christ overthrows and destroys all his enemies, in every encounter uniformly comes off victorious, and continues King despite all the resistance which the world makes to his authority and power. Christ can only obtain a tranquil kingdom by fighting, by making war; He destroys His enemies.

Look at verse 40. Here is a very interesting verse. In defeating his enemies, David says, "Thou hast also given me the necks of my enemies, that I might destroy them that hate me." What does David mean when he says that God has given him the necks of his enemies? Hold Psalm 18, but go back in your Bibles to Joshua chapter 10. Joshua has led the people into the land of Canaan, and God has given them victories. Several kings had been hiding in a cave, with a stone rolled around it until they could get back to them. Joshua now tells them to move the stone. Look in Joshua 10, beginning with verse 22: "Then said Joshua, Open the mouth of the cave, and bring out those five kings unto me out of the cave."

"And they did so, and brought forth those five kings unto him out of the cave, the king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of

Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, and the king of Eglon. And it came to pass, when they brought out those kings unto Joshua, that Joshua called for all the men of Israel, and said unto the captains of the men of war which went with him, Come near, and put your feet upon the necks of these kings. And they came near, and put their feet upon the necks of them. And Joshua said unto them, Fear not, nor be dismayed. Be strong and of good courage. Now look, for thus shall the Lord do to all your enemies against whom you fight."

What is the significance of putting your feet upon the necks of your enemies? If your foot is upon the neck of your enemy, number one, he is down. He is defeated. Secondly, a neck is very easily broken. You can break a man's neck with just one swift kick, and that is it. When David says that God has given him the necks of his enemies, David is saying, "Lord, you have defeated them. You have brought them down under me. They are under my subjugation. I am in control, not my enemies. Their lives and their livelihoods are at my disposal." Joshua said, "Don't fear, because this is what God is going to do to all of your enemies." Here, David's victory is personifying, as you shall see, the total victory of Jesus Christ. So we have, first of all, in this passage, defeat.

Desolation of the Wicked (v. 41)

The second truth is that we have desolation. This is a very awesome verse. Look in Psalm 18 and verse 41. After he said in verse 40, "Thou hast also given me the necks of mine enemies, that I might destroy them that hate me," watch verse 41: "They cried, but there was none to save them, even unto the Lord. But he answered them not."

It is bad to be defeated, but it is even worse to be deserted and left desolate by the only one who is able to deliver. Since God had delivered these enemies under David, that means God was the enemy of David's enemies. Do you remember Romans 8:31, where Paul said, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" Since God was for David, He was against David's enemies.

God even refused to hear the prayers of David's enemies. That is what verse 41 says: "They cried, but there was none to save them, even unto the Lord, but he answered them not." Do you realize that

God gave us a wonderful promise in Exodus 23:22? “But if thou shalt indeed obey his voice and do all that I speak, I will be an enemy to thine enemies and an adversary to thine adversaries.” God said, “If you obey me, I’ll be an enemy to your enemy and an adversary to your adversary.”

In Psalm 18:41, God was indeed an enemy and an adversary to David’s enemies. This is a very horrific thought, yet it is indeed a biblical truth. There will be individuals, men and women, who cry to God in times of distress and defeat, and God will not hear them. God will be their enemy.

If one does not call upon God in the season of grace and mercy, there will come a time when no grace or mercy shall be extended. Our Lord said in 2 Corinthians 6:2, “For he said, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee. Behold, now is the accepted time. Behold, now is the day of salvation.” In other words, if you are not reconciled to God and saved by God in God’s spirit of grace and time, you are not going to be. You will not have grace and mercy.

There will be judgment and desolation. Numerous passages in the Bible show that God will refuse to hear people when they cry. In Isaiah 1:15, He says, "And when you spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood." God says, "I'm not going to listen to you."

In Jeremiah 11:14, God told Jeremiah, "Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up crying or prayer for them, for I will not hear them in the time that they cry unto me for their trouble." God said, "Jeremiah, I'm not going to listen to them when they cry and pray. And I don't want you praying for them, because I'm not going to listen to you. I'm going to destroy them. That's exactly what I'm going to do."

In Jeremiah 14:12, God said, "When they fast, I will not hear their crying. And when they offer burnt offering and an oblation, I will not accept them, but I will consume them by the sword and by the famine and by the pestilence."

It sounds to me like there is a time when folks will be left desolate. They will cry, but there will be none to save them. They will even cry unto the Lord, but He will not hear them. In Micah 3:4, the Scripture says, "Then shall they cry unto the Lord, but he will not hear them. He will even hide his face from them at that time, as they have behaved themselves ill in their doings."

God said, "You didn't want to obey me. You didn't want to listen to me. Fine. Now I'm not going to listen to you. You didn't want to hear me. Fine. Now I'm not going to hear you."

Proverbs 1:22 summarizes this point. There is not only defeat, but desolation. Wisdom asks, "How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity?" In Proverbs 8, Jesus Christ is wisdom personified.

"And the scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge." Now look what God says: "Turn you at my reproof. Behold, I will pour out my spirit upon you. I'll make known my words unto you." That's God's reproof and God's words. God says, "Because I have called and you refused. I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded. But you have set at nought all my counsel, and would have none of my reproof."

"You wouldn't listen to me. I will also laugh at your calamity. I will mock when your fear cometh. When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind, when distress and anguish cometh upon you, then shall they call unto me. But I will not answer. They shall seek me early, but they shall not find me. Why? For that they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord, they would have none of my counsel, they despised all of my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way and be filled with their own devices."

It is bad to be defeated, but it is even worse to be left desolate by God. There is no hope and no help for the wicked who constantly and continually fight against God and His people. They shall be left desolate. Do you remember what our Lord said to the Jews in Matthew 23 and verse 38? He said to them, "Behold, your house is left to you desolate. I would have gathered you, but you would not. Since you didn't hear me, I won't hear you. Your house is left unto you desolate."

Do you remember that passage in Matthew 15, when our Lord was teaching and His disciples came to Him and said, "Lord, do you not know that the Pharisees were offended at thy word?" They were upset and offended. Our Lord said, "Let them alone. Let them alone. Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up. Let them alone. If the blind lead the blind, they shall both fall into the ditch. Let them alone." Those who will not hear God shall only be left defeated. They shall be left desolate.

Destruction of the Wicked (v. 42)

Thirdly, Psalm 18, verse 42, shows destruction. David says, “Then did I beat them small as the dust before the wind. I did cast them out as dirt of the street.” This verse demonstrates the sure overthrow, final shame, and ruin of evil to all those who oppose Jesus Christ.

To be beaten as fine and as small as the dust before the wind is to be virtually destroyed. What does the wind do to fine dust and fine particles? It blows them whithersoever it pleases. To be beaten as small as the dust and cast out as the dirt in the streets is another way of saying that their destruction is irrevocable. Those who are thus destroyed will never ever recover. They are given up by God; He will not answer their cry. They are not only defeated and not only desolate—they are destroyed.

Since David said he beat his enemies as small as the dust before the wind, remember Mark chapter 6 and verse 11. Our Lord told His disciples, “And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear you, when you depart thence, shake off the dust of your feet for a testimony against them.” Then He said, “I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah than for them in the day of judgment.” Shake off the dust of your feet as a testimony against those fine particles into which they will be beaten; those particles will testify against them that they refused to hear the Word of God. Beaten to dust is indeed a sign of the judgment of God.

David said in verse 42, “I did cast them out as the dirt in the streets.” To be cast out as dirt is to be treated with contempt and indignation. Psalm 18 is found in 2 Samuel 22, almost word for word, with a few small variations. In 2 Samuel 22:43, David says, “I did stamp them as the mire of the street and did spread them

abroad." The phrase indicates the low and miserable condition to which they were reduced, and it also shows their complete and total conquest and destruction. John Kitto pointed out that to cast forth anyone as the dirt of the streets is a strong image of contempt and rejection.

If David is casting his enemies as dirt or mire in the streets, what does that indicate? What is usually put in the streets? Garbage, trash, that which is worthless and useless. No one notices it, and no one is going to bother to stoop down and pick it up.

When God withdraws His sovereign protection from an individual or from a people, it is easy to beat them down as the dust of the earth and cast them out as the dirt of the streets. If men will not flee to Jesus Christ, repent of their sins, bow to His Lordship, and obey Him, truthfully speaking, the only thing left for them is destruction. There can be nothing else. There is only one Lord, one Savior, and one salvation, and that is found in Jesus Christ. If you reject Him, there is nothing left but destruction.

Our Lord spoke this truth plainly in Proverbs 8:35-36: "But whoso findeth me findeth life, and obtaineth favour of the Lord." Whoever finds Jesus Christ finds life and obtains favor of the Lord.

Dominion

"But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul. All they that hate me love death." All those that hate Jesus Christ love death. You have defeat, desolation, and destruction.

Dominion of Christ (vv. 43–50)

The fourth point is dominion. In Psalm 18:43–50, David says, "Thou hast delivered me from the strivings of the people. Thou hast made me to be the head of the heathen. A people who have not known shall serve me. As soon as they hear of me, they shall obey me. The stranger shall submit themselves to me. The stranger shall fade away and be afraid out of their close places."

"The Lord liveth and blessed be my rock, and let the God of my salvation be exalted. It is God that avengeth me and subdueth the people under me. He delivered me from mine enemies. Yea, thou

liftest me up above those that rise up against me. Thou hast delivered me from the violent man. Therefore will I give thanks unto thee, O Lord, among the heathen, and sing praises unto thy name."

"Great deliverance giveth he to his king, and showeth mercy to his anointed, to David, and to his seed forever." David did indeed conquer many nations and rule over them. His fame was great. It was not only Israel who sang, "Saul has slain his thousands and David his tens of thousands." Even the Philistines knew that tune. In 1 Samuel 21:11, the servants of Achish, king of the Philistines, said, "Is not this David, the king of the land? Did they not sing one to another to him, and dancing, saying, Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands?"

God most certainly, graciously, and mercifully delivered David from the strivings of the people. Absalom strove against David, and God delivered him; Absalom died. Sheba the son of Bichri strove against David, and he died. Any other tumult that arose in the land was evidently put down as well. David said, "Thou hast also made me the head of the heathen."

When you look at Psalm 18, especially verses 43 through 50, it is not just David's dominion that you should see. It is the dominion of the greater David, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Calvin writes concerning this passage, "A people whom I have not known shall serve me." The whole of this passage strongly confirms what I have just now touched upon, that the statements here made are not to be restricted to the person of David, but contain a prophecy respecting the kingdom of Christ which was to come. David, it is true, might have boasted that nations with whose manners and dispositions he was normally very imperfectly acquainted were subject to him, but it is nevertheless certain that none of the nations which he conquered were altogether unknown to him, nor removed at so great a distance as to render it difficult for him to acquire some knowledge of them. The conquest of David, therefore, and the submission of the people to him were only an obscure figure in which God has exhibited to us some faint representation of the boundless dominion of His Son, whose kingdom extends from the rising of the sun even to the going down of the same.

Even John Calvin says that Psalm 18 is only a faint picture, a faint glimmer, of the boundless dominion we have in Jesus Christ. We must remember that our God is absolutely sovereign. He rules over the heathen and reigns over the heathen. They may not know Him, acknowledge Him, or worship Him, but that is immaterial. He is still King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and He reigns sovereignly, supremely, and singularly over them.

It does not matter whether the heathen fight against Christ or whether they want to acknowledge Him. Psalm 2 begins with a good question: "Why do the heathen rage and the people imagine a vain thing?" Why are the heathen raging? Why are they imagining that they can fight successfully against God? Look in verse 2.

"The kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against His anointed," that is, against Christ, saying, "Let us break their bands asunder and cast away their cords from us." In other words, they do not like God being sovereign over them. They do not like His law or the limitations He has placed upon their kingdoms and their government. They want to be tyrants. They want to be totalitarians. They want to do what they want to do. They do not care about God, His law, or His boundaries. They want to break His bands and cast His cords away from them. How severely is that going to upset God? Watch.

"He that sitteth in heaven 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. These kingdoms, kings, and civil rulers are fighting against God, against God's law, and against Jesus Christ. Then shall He speak unto them in His wrath and vex them in His sore displeasure in the midst of all this rebellion.

Yet, in spite and in light of all this, God says, "Yet have I set my King upon my holy hill in Zion. I will declare the decree, the Lord hath said unto me, My son, this day have I begotten thee, ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." All this rebellion really upsets God, does it not? God said, "In spite of all that, I have set my Son upon His throne. All He needs to do is ask, and I will give Him the heathen for His possession." God is on the throne.

Turn with me to Psalm 46. Look at Psalm 46 and verse 10, in light of the heathen: “Be still and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the heathen. I'll be exalted in the earth.” Do you realize all the rebellion and wickedness of the heathen? It will not stop God from being exalted. Look in Psalm 47 and verse 8: “God reigneth over the heathen. God sits upon the throne of His holiness.” Who reigns over them? God does.

Look in Psalm 98. Let us read verse 1 and verse 2. Psalm 98, verse 1.

“O sing unto the Lord a new song, for He hath done marvelous things. His right hand and His holy arm hath gotten Him the victory. The Lord hath made known His salvation. His righteousness hath He openly showed in the sight of the heathen.” God is still in control. Psalm 102:15 says, “So the heathen shall fear the name of the Lord and all the kings of the earth by glory.” The heathen shall fear the name of the Lord, and all the kings of the earth. Wow.

Zechariah 9:10 says, “And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the horse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall speak peace unto the heathen.” His dominion shall be “from sea even to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth.”

Do you realize that if all the heathen in the world united against God in one vast rebellion, it would not create any uneasiness in God? It would accomplish absolutely nothing. God is still on the throne, and God is going to reign forever and ever. Malachi 1:11 says, “From the rising of the sun even to the going down of the same, my name shall be great among the Gentiles, and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name of pure offering, and my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the Lord of hosts.”

The heathen are going to know who God is, either through salvation or damnation, but they are going to know. His name is going to be exalted. Galatians 3:8 says, “And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.”

Yes, Jesus Christ is the greater David, and God has given Him all power and all authority in heaven and earth. God has raised Jesus

Christ from the dead, seated Him at His own right hand, and given Him absolute, total, and complete dominion. Jesus Christ is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He has been given a name which is above every name.

If you will look in your Bible, since you're close there, to the book of Isaiah 55. Isaiah chapter 55. And look what the Bible says concerning Jesus Christ, Isaiah 55, in fact, verse 4. Isaiah 55, verse 4. God says, "Behold, I have given him," that is Christ, "for a witness to the people, a leader and a commander to the people. Behold, thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not, and nations that thou knew not, they shall run unto thee, because of the Lord thy God, for the Holy One of Israel, for He hath glorified thee." God gave Jesus Christ as a commander. The Bible says in Psalm 66 and verse 3, "Say unto God, How terrible art thou in thy works! Through the greatness of thy power shall thine enemies submit themselves unto thee." Through the greatness of thy power shall thine enemies submit themselves unto thee. So the enemies of God are going to submit either in salvation or condemnation, but they will submit.

Let me give you a quote by Charles Haddon Spurgeon. I don't suppose anyone can say anything more beautifully than Spurgeon, but here's what he said. You're talking about this passage from Psalm 18, verses 43 through 50. He says, "Thus readily did this once struggling captain," talking about David, "become a far renowned victor, and thus easy shall be our triumphs." Now listen, "and thus easy shall be our triumphs." In other words, if God has given David victory, God's going to give us victory.

He goes on, "We prefer, however, to speak of Jesus. In many cases, the gospel is speedily received by hearts apparently unprepared for it. Those who have never heard the gospel before have been charmed by its first message and yielded obedience to it, while others, alas, who are accustomed to its joyful sound are rather hardened than softened by its teachings. The grace of God sometimes runs like a fire through the stubble that a nation is born in a day. Love at first sight is no uncommon thing when Jesus is the ruler. He can write Caesar's message without boasting."

"Veni, vidi, vici—I came, I saw, I conquered. His gospel is in some cases no sooner heard than believed. What inducements to spread

abroad the doctrine of the Christ!" Wow. And Christ does come and Christ does conquer. Now, I want you to turn to two passages. I want you to turn to Philippians chapter 2 and Revelation chapter 11. Philippians chapter 2, we're going to be reading at verse 5, we're going to see that He came, He saw, and He conquered. Watch this. Philippians chapter 2, verse 5. Get ready.

"Let this mind be in you, which also was in Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation and took upon him the form of a servant and was made in likeness of men. And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient in death, even the death on the cross. Wherefore, God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name, that the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Men will acknowledge Christ, either in salvation or damnation, but acknowledge Him they will.

The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 15, verse 25, "For He shall reign, He must reign, till He hath put all His enemies under His feet." Christ will conquer and subdue every enemy. What did David say? David said, "Thou hast subdued the people under me." That's exactly what Christ says to the Father: "Thou hast subdued all the people under me." How so will God do that? How far? How much? Here's the answer. Look in your Bibles to Revelation 11 and verse 15.

"And the seventh angel sounded, and there were great voices in heaven saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever." He shall conquer every kingdom and every nation and reign forever and ever. David's victories in time and history were just a faint glimmer of the total victory that we have in Jesus Christ.

The saints' temporary dominion in time and history foreshadows the full, total, and complete dominion Christ will exercise. Scripture tells us that God rewards the righteous in this life. Then he said, "How much more the wicked and the sinner." If God rewards us with temporary victory and dominion in time and history, that is just a

faint glimmer of the permanent and full dominion that will be given to Jesus Christ.

Application and Call to Submit

In light of all the turmoil in the world—in light of Osama, Obama, and your mama, and McCain—the truth is that Jesus Christ is still in control. I am so thankful for that. He rules. He reigns. He shall prevail. He shall conquer all his enemies, and those who fight against Jesus Christ are setting themselves up for defeat, desolation, and destruction.

In Psalm 2, kings and civil rulers unite against God, wanting to cast away God's cords and break God's bands. They did not like God or God's law. Yet God said in verse 6, "Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion." In verse 8, God said to Christ, "Ask of me and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession."

Verse 9 says, "Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron. Thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."

If you do not want to be broken, here is the biblical advice: "Be wise now, therefore, O ye kings. Be instructed, you judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish from the way when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him." Kiss the Son. What does the psalmist say?

You had better make peace with Jesus Christ. Because if you do not, when His anger is kindled but a little, He shall break them with a rod of iron, as a potter's vessel is broken. Kiss the Son; submit to Him, surrender to Him in peace and grace and mercy, or else submit to Him and kiss Him in defeat and desolation and destruction. Every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father, and He shall have dominion over every kingdom and every nation. For the kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ.

Father, thank You for Jesus Christ, the Word of God, and the hope and promise we have in Him. Thank You, Lord, that He is the victor, the conqueror, and that all power and all authority in heaven and

earth is given to Jesus Christ. We bow before Him, acknowledging that He is the only Lord and Savior, the only God, the only salvation. He is our victor. We look to Him and serve Him, and we praise and honor Him. In Thy holy and blessed name we ask and pray, Amen and Amen.

CHAPTER 5

Time to Forsake Our False Gods

May 11, 2008

The Bible says, let everything be established by two or three witnesses.

> And when the Philistines heard that David was anointed king over all Israel, all the Philistines went up to seek David and David heard of it and went out against them. And the Philistines came and spread themselves in the Valley of Rephaim. And David inquired of God, saying, Shall I go up against the Philistines, and wilt thou deliver them into mine hand? And the Lord said unto him, Go up, for I will deliver them into thine hand. So they came up to Baal-perazim, and David smote them there. Then David said, God hath broken in upon mine enemies by mine hand like the breaking forth of waters. Therefore they call the name of that place Baal-perazim. And when they had left their gods there, David gave the commandment, and they were burned with fire. And the Philistines yet again spread themselves abroad in the valley. Therefore, David inquired again of God, and God spake unto

him, Go not up after them, turn away from them, and come upon them over against the mulberry trees. It shall be when thou shalt hear a sound of going in the tops of the mulberry trees, that then thou shalt go out to battle.

Introduction: The Foolishness of Trusting False Gods

For God is going forth before thee to smite the host of the Philistines. David therefore did as God commanded him. And they smote the host of the Philistines, from Gibeon even to Gezer. And the fame of David went out into all the lands, and the Lord brought the fear of him upon all nations." false gods may suffice in a time of pleasure, plenty, and prosperity, but they cannot and will not suffice in a time of danger, destruction, and damnation. False gods are always wicked, wrong, and ungodly. However, it is a fact that many hold to false gods and at the same time deny the one true living God who has revealed himself in Jesus Christ. There are many professing Christians that hold to false gods. In fact, many of them hold to some god of their imagination. Others serve the God of convenience, or the God of prosperity, or the God of lustful desires, or the God of comfort. And the sad fact is that many hold to these false gods to their own destruction.

Many do not have sense enough to see the vanity, the uselessness, and the worthlessness of false gods. When I say they don't have sense enough, I'm saying what Scripture says. Ephesians 4, verse 18 speaks of being alienated from God through the ignorance that is in them. They do not have the understanding. They do not have the sense.

An apt illustration is given to us in 1 Chronicles, chapter 14, when it's time to forsake our false gods. The Philistines, although they were idolaters and unconverted, and certainly had no respect for the one true and living God, the God of Israel, yet they at least had enough sense to know that it was time to forsake their false gods.

Biblical Definition of Vanity as Idolatry

Scripture is very clear about trusting in vanity. Whenever you see the word vanity in the Bible, it does not only refer to that which is

useless and worthless and vain. Vanity is often used as a word for idols and idolatry.

Second Kings 17, verse 15 tells us, "And they rejected his statutes, and his covenant that he made with their fathers, and his testimonies which he testified against them; and they followed vanity, and became vain, and went after the heathen that were round about them, concerning whom the Lord had charged them that they should not do like them." When the Bible said that they followed vanity, all it means is they're following false gods or false idols.

The word vanity often refers not only to that which is worthless and useless, but to idolatry and even to those who make idols. In Isaiah 41, verse 29, we read this, "Behold, they are all vanity; their works are nothing."

"Their molten images are wind and confusion." He says, "Behold, they are all vanity."

Isaiah 44, verse 9 says, "They that make a graven image are all of them vanity; and their delectable things shall not profit; and they are their own witnesses; they see not, nor know; that they may be ashamed." And then he goes on, "Who hath formed a god, or molten a graven image that is profitable for nothing?" So once again, it's not just the idols that are called vanity, but also those who make those idols. Jeremiah 18, verse 15 tells us what God says concerning His people in general.

We could use this same scripture today. God says, "Because my people have forgotten me, they have burned incense to vanity," that is, to false gods, to idols, "and they have caused them to stumble in their ways from the ancient paths, to walk in paths, in a way not cast up." God says, it's my people that have forgotten me. And what do you do when you forget the one true and living God? You turn to idols. You turn to vanity. There are a multitude of professing Christians today who will tell you, well, we don't trust in false gods.

What we do is we believe that we need to work it out. Everything I've got I made and I work for. What are you saying when you say that? You're saying I'm trusting in my own efforts. I'm trusting in my own money. I'm trusting in my own riches. Many people do not understand that their wealth and their riches can equally be an idol.

The Bible says in Proverbs 11 and verse 4 that riches profit not in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivereth from death. Riches profit not in the day of death.

I never shall forget hearing about a very wealthy man who died, multimillionaire. And at his funeral, one man leaned over to another and asked, "How much did he leave?" To which the man responded, "He left it all." Riches profit not in the day of wrath. And the Bible says in Psalm 49 and verse 7, "None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him." If you possess all the wealth that has ever been in this world, you could not only not redeem yourself, you could not redeem anyone else as well.

Scripture teaches us that it's the love of money that is the root of all evil. Our so-called money in this country has the motto on it, "In God we trust," except for some of the newer coins. Someone has aptly suggested that we need to add one word to that motto and put it like this: "In this God we trust," because that's exactly what so many do. We've got so many false gods in this country. We've got the false god of medicine.

Modern False Gods: Medicine, Government, and Money

God himself is the great physician. He is the healer. I've often been asked whether or not I believe in divine healing. All healing is divine. If God doesn't heal you, you're never going to be healed.

The fact of the matter is, God may use means or God may not use means. But it doesn't matter what remedy you apply to your illness or your sickness. If God does not bless that remedy, you will never be healed. If God blesses the remedy, anything can work. Hezekiah was sick unto death, about to die. God used a lump of figs to heal Hezekiah. I don't know what disease he had, but that lump of figs took care of it with the blessing of God. There was an Egyptian slave wandering around in the wilderness whom his master left because he was sick.

When David found him, he had fasted for three days. No food and no water. The fasting healed him. He was well when David found him. It only took a dip in the Jordan River to cure Naaman of his

leprosy. In the New Testament, it only took some clay and some spittle to open the eyes of a man who was blind. And when our Lord went to Peter's mother, he just simply took her hand.

With the blessing and the power of God upon the remedy, you're going to get well. But I don't care what you take and I don't care what you do. If a blessing in the power of God is not on it, you will not get well. So many trust in the God of medicine. In our country, in the land of the enlightened, civilized, intellectual citizens, we believe that we can sin against God, violate his law, break his commandments, and get away with it. Why? Because we believe that if we're smitten with some sexually transmitted disease, penicillin will take care of it. Medicine will take care of it. How many depend upon medicine to cure their HIV and their AIDS? So many think that they can sin against God and get away with it just simply because they've made a God out of medicine.

We've also made a God out of government. We do not need to work, earn our living by the sweat of our brow. We do not need to plan and save and plan ahead and be frugal. Because in this day and time, we believe the government will take care of us. We don't even believe that we need to know how to protect ourselves. Why? Because the government is going to protect us. We don't believe that we need a sound money system like silver and gold because the government assures us that paper and ink is money.

I bought some gas not too long ago. Sixteen bucks. I handed the young lady a 20. She handed me back four ones and I just stood there and I looked at it. I said, "Something's wrong." She said, "Did I not give you back the correct change?" I said, "Yes, but do you realize I now have your gas and I have four times as much money as I had before I paid for it? I've got four pieces of paper when I only gave you one piece of paper." Oh, she said, "But the one piece you gave me was a 20 and those are all ones." I said, "Oh, so the value then is in the numbers that are printed on the paper. Is that it?"

It went right over her head. If paper is valuable, I should have had more from four pieces than one piece. If ink is valuable, I should have had more because I had more ink on the paper than on the one piece of paper. We think that we don't need a sound money system because the government is going to take care of us. Who needs

freedom? Who needs liberty? Who needs a constitutional republic? Why?

We believe that socialism and fascism will work equally as well. And we don't need to worry about a thing. Why? They will take care of us. The elite will work it out. We don't need to concern ourselves about anything. After all, we as Americans believe that our government is looking out after our best interests and our welfare. We love to trust in the God of civil government.

It gives us a kind of a warm, soft, safe, tingling feeling. We know that they'll take care of us. There are so many false gods in this country, I could not even begin to list them. if your God is not the one true and the living God who has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ, you're worshipping an idol. The only God that exists is the God of the Bible. The only God that exists is the God who has manifested Himself in Jesus Christ. Our Lord Himself said in John 14 in verse 6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life."

"And no man cometh unto the Father but by me." There are not a multitude of ways to get to God. There's only one way, and that's through the Mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ. First Chronicles 14, verse 12 shows the time to forsake our false gods.

Keep in mind that the Philistines were heathen. They were wicked. They were ungodly. They were unconverted. They had no regard for the God of Israel, but yet they did, at least, have a little common sense. In 1 Chronicles 14, verse 12, the Bible says this, "And when they," that is the Philistines, "had left their gods there, David gave a commandment and they were burned with fire."

The Philistines' Foolish Attack on David

Consider the context of verse 12. Why were the Philistines so foolish to pick a fight with David? I love that one scene in William Wallace, where Mel Gibson turns there as he is William Wallace, and the men ask him, "Where are you going?" He said, "I'm going to pick a fight." Why would the Philistines be so stupid as to pick a fight with David? Look in verse 8. "And when the Philistines heard that David was anointed king over all Israel, all the Philistines went up to seek David, and David heard of it and went out against them." The

Philistines certainly were not ignorant of David and his military skills. The servants of Achish said concerning David:

I gave the wrong passage when I said 1 Samuel 2:11. It is not 2:11. "And the servants of Achish said unto him, Is not this David the king of the land? Did they not sing one to another of him in dances, saying, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands?" They knew who David was. They knew all about David. Obviously, they knew about his military skills. They knew about his fighting ability. This is in 1 Samuel chapter 21.

Why did they pick a fight with David? First, you have to remember that when David was fleeing from Saul, he escaped to Achish, king of Gath, who was the Philistine, and he was the lord and ruler. So in 1 Samuel chapter 21 and verse 10, the Bible says, "And David arose and fled that day for fear of Saul and went to Achish, the king of Gath." First Samuel 27 tells us that David stayed with Achish for a long time. Beginning with verse 1: "And David said in his heart, I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul."

> "There is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines; and Saul shall despair of me, to seek me any more in any coast of Israel: so shall I escape out of his hand. And David arose, and he passed over with the six hundred men that were with him unto Achish, the son of Maoch, king of Gath. And David dwelt with Achish at Gath, he and his men, every man with his household, even David with his two wives, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail the Carmelitess, Nabal's wife. And it was told Saul that David was fled to Gath: and he sought no more again for him. And David said unto Achish, If I have now found grace in thine eyes, let them give me a place in some town in the country, that I may dwell there: for why should thy servant dwell in the royal city with thee?"
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> "Then Achish gave him Ziklag that day: wherefore Ziklag pertaineth unto the kings of Judah unto this day. And the time that David dwelt in the country of the Philistines was a full year and four months. And David and his men went up, and invaded the Geshurites, and the Girzites, and the Amalekites."

> "For those nations were of old the inhabitants of the land, as thou goest to Shur, even unto the land of Egypt. And David smote the land, and left neither man nor woman alive, and took away the sheep, and the oxen, and the asses, and the camels, and the apparel, and returned, and came to Achish. And Achish said, Whither have ye made a road today? And David said, Against the south of Judah, and against the south of the Jerahmeelites, and against the south of the Kenites. And David saved neither man nor woman alive, to bring tidings to Gath, saying, Lest they should tell on us, saying, So did David, and so will be his manner all the while he dwelleth in the country of the Philistines. And Achish believed David, saying, He hath made his people Israel utterly to abhor him."

"Therefore he shall be my servant forever." What did David do for 14 months? He lived in the land of the Philistines. And yes, he fought against his enemies, but he lied to Achish, and he said, "I've been fighting against the south of Judah," and Achish believed him.

David has been in the Philistines' land for 14 months. He knew their strong cities. He knew their weak cities. He knew their strong points. He knew their weak points. He knew their rulers. He knew their cities. He knew their roads. If David ever wanted to invade the Philistines, he would have the advantage. Because according to their thinking, David knows all about us.

Therefore, it would be better to take him out of the picture before he gains enough power and turns around and invades us. Why did they pick a fight with David? They knew that he knew everything about them.

Secondly, you have to remember that the Philistines had killed Saul and Jonathan. They not only killed them, they had mutilated their bodies and praised their false gods and hung their armor in their temple. First Samuel 31, verse 8 says, "And it came to pass on the morrow, when the Philistines came to strip the slain, that they found Saul and his three sons fallen in mount Gilboa. And they cut off his head, and stripped off his armor, and sent into the land of the Philistines round about, to publish it in the house of their idols, and among the people. And they put his armor in the house of Ashtaroth: and they fastened his body to the wall of Beth-shan." So it wasn't

enough that they had killed Saul and Jonathan and his other two sons. They had to mutilate their bodies. They had to hang their bodies on a wall. They had to put their armor in the idol's temple and praise their false gods.

In 2 Samuel 1, beginning at verse 17, David laments the deaths of Saul and Jonathan. It is true that Saul and David had no relationship whatsoever, because Saul kept trying to murder David. But you will remember that Saul and Jonathan had entered into a covenant, yet David lamented the loss of both of them. Second Samuel 1, verse 17 says, "And David lamented with this lamentation over Saul and over Jonathan his son."

"Also he bade them teach the children of Judah the use of the bow: behold, it is written in the book of Jashar. The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places: how are the mighty fallen! Tell it not in Gath." These are Philistine cities. "Publish it not in the streets of Ashkelon; lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph. Ye mountains of Gilboa." That's where they were slain.

> "Let there be no dew, neither let there be rain, upon you, nor fields of offerings: for there the shield of the mighty is vilely cast away, the shield of Saul, as though he had not been anointed with oil. From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan turned not back, and the sword of Saul returned not empty. Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided."

"They were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions." He goes on and tells the children of Israel to lament for Saul and Jonathan. So David lamented over their deaths. The Philistines knew that since David was a patriot, it would not be long before his love for his country and his love for Jonathan would lead him to take away the reproach of Gilboa for Saul and Jonathan and his sons were slain.

They said we'll have to stop him because he will plan an attack upon us. Thirdly, David had just assumed and ascended to the throne of the kingdom. And in all probability, here was their

thinking. We need to strike him now before he has time to consolidate his power and consolidate his people. In other words, they were planning a surprise attack and they were thinking that David is now in a weakened condition, although he assumed the kingdom. He hasn't had time to consolidate everything. Therefore, they were going to attack him while he is weak.

The enemies of God and the enemies of faith never take into account the One True and the Living God. They presume, based upon their humanistic thoughts and plans, they presume, based upon their secularism, they presume, based upon their humanism, and they never count in the fact that God is the defense of His people. Yet we're going to find out that the sovereign God of the universe had a hand in all of this because now He is confusing and confounding the minds of the Philistines and bringing them together so that David may destroy them and wipe away the reproach of Gilboa.

First Chronicles 14, verse 9 says, "And when the Philistines came and spread themselves in the valley of Rephaim." They spread themselves in the valley of Rephaim.

God's Sovereign Victory and the Philistines' Abandonment of Idols

Interestingly, the word Rephaim has two meanings. First of all, it has reference to the Valley of the Giants. In fact, this word, Rephaim, is translated giants in our Bible 17 times. It is translated Rephaim 8 times. So the reference is in all probability first to an old tribe of giants. They probably dwelt in that valley. The second meaning is given to us in the Septuagint, and that means the valley of the dead. So, the Philistines spread themselves out in the valley of the dead. I think I would want to spread myself out in the valley of the living. But they spread themselves out in the valley of the dead, which was pictorial of the fact that they would soon be dead.

Because God Himself was against them. Verse 10 tells us what David does: "And David inquired of God, saying, Shall I go up against the Philistines? And wilt thou deliver them into mine hand? And the Lord said unto him, Go up, I will deliver them into thine

hand." David wanted to know whether he should go up, and whether God would deliver them into his hand.

The answer is yes. I will allow you to go up and yes, I will deliver them into your hand.

The same story is in 2 Samuel chapter 5, but with an additional word. Second Samuel 5, verse 19 says, "And David inquired of the Lord, saying, Shall I go up to the Philistines?"

"Wilt thou deliver them into mine hand? And the Lord said unto David, Go up: for I will doubtless deliver the Philistines into thine hand." When you and I read that, we understand that when God says, "I will doubtless deliver the Philistines into your hands," it means without a doubt, it means absolutely certain they shall be delivered. There is something that you cannot discern in the English. In the Hebrew, the word doubtless and the word deliver are one and the same word. Literally what God says to David, "I will deliver, deliver the Philistines into your hands."

How much more assurance could you give? God says, David, you go up; whether you translate it doubtless or double deliver. He says, you make sure that you understand. I will put them in your hand.

First Chronicles 14, verse 11 says, "So they came up to Baal-perazim and David smote them there. Then David said, God hath broken in upon mine enemies by mine hand like the breaking forth of waters. Therefore they call the name of that place Baal-perazim." The word smote literally means to slay, to slaughter, to kill, to be fatally smitten. You and I could put it like this. David virtually slaughtered them. It was like shooting ducks in a pool where the ducks can't get out. David literally wiped them out. How could David accomplish such a victory? David says in verse 11: "So they came up to Baal-perazim, and David smote them there. Then David said, God hath broken in upon mine enemies by mine hand like the breaking forth of waters." David said, I did the fighting.

But it was God who gave the victory. And he says, "God has broken forth upon mine enemies," then he says, "like the breaking forth of waters."

When an earthen pitcher full of water breaks, the water just gushes out everywhere. Those of us who've lived on farms have seen

dams break. All that water that's backed up in that pond rushes right out. It goes everywhere. David said God hath broken forth upon my enemies, as water breaks forth. Water rushes out rapidly. God broke in on those Philistines in righteous anger and righteous fury by the hand of David. David called the place of his victory Baal-perazim. Baal-perazim is also known as Mount Perazim. Isaiah 28, verse 21 says, "For the Lord shall rise up as in mount Perazim, he shall be wroth as in the valley of Gibeon, that he may do his work, his strange work; and bring to pass his act, his strange act."

Here God is going to rise up and God is going to break forth again just like He did in Mount Perazim under the hand of David. And now it's called His strange work or His strange act. Why? What was the result of God breaking forth upon the Philistines through David's hand?

It meant simply that they were slaughtered, that they were defeated. When God broke forth upon them, they were so defeated and devastated, as 1 Chronicles 14, verse 12 shows. They left their gods there. And David commanded and they were burned with fire. What good is a God who cannot deliver? What good is a God who cannot save?

They found out their gods were no gods. They found out their gods were impotent. They were worthless. They were vain. They were useless. They were no good. They left them on the battlefield. David also recognized their worthlessness. Therefore, David had them burned. In this instance, as wicked, as vile, and as heathenistic as the Philistines were, at least they had enough sense to realize their gods were useless. Oh, that America had that much sense, that we could recognize the impotence and the worthlessness of our false gods. Our sin in America is this: we love our false gods. We love our conveniences. We love our comfort. We love our money. We love our socialism. We love our welfarism. We love our humanism. We love our materialism. We love our secularism. What in the world would it take to get us to the point, like these Philistines, that we're willing to forsake our false gods?

Clues That It Is Time to Forsake False Gods

This passage shows what it took to bring the Philistines to the point that they were willing to leave their false gods. First, there was the overthrow of their plans and schemes. What did they plan? They planned to come up, attack David, whip him, take the cities, and go home. All their plans, all their schemes failed.

As a nation, as a family, as a church, as individuals, it should make us stop and think when all of our plans and schemes go awry, when nothing works. It teaches us that man is not in control. Man may plan and scheme, but he cannot work it out. We like to think that, we can plan this thing out. We can think this thing through. We can prepare.

And with all of our carefulness, we will succeed. We will work it out. Proverbs 16, verse 9 says, "A man's heart deviseth his way: but the Lord directeth his steps." You can scheme and plan and prepare all you want to, but the Lord is in control. Neither the multitude nor the magnitude of our devices will accomplish our end. The Bible says in Proverbs 19 in verse 21, "There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand." There are many devices in a man's heart. There are many plans and schemes. Nevertheless, the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand.

Look at how our nation, our politicians, our leaders have planned and schemed against God, against his word, against his people. And yet, everything goes awry. It just simply does no good to fight against God. When you fight against God, you are fighting a losing battle. You will lose every time. So when things begin to go wrong, when we fail over and over, it's time to examine ourselves. It's time to examine and ask, are we fighting against the Lord?

Proverbs 21 verse 30 says it like this. "There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the Lord." That means all of the plans and all the schemes fail if God does not work it out. Gamaliel gave some good advice in Acts chapter 5 to the Jews. They were going to persecute the disciples, the apostles. Here is what Gamaliel said to them in Acts 5, verses 38 and 39.

He said, "And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will

come to nought: But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God."

If this thing is of men, it'll fizzle out all by itself. And he's talking about Christianity. that ought to show you that Christianity is indeed the true faith because it has not fizzled out and it's not going to fizzle out. He said if this thing be of men, it'll come to nought. But if it's of God, you can't stop it. Why? Because God is in control, not man.

We need to keep our eyes upon God's providential dealings. Matthew 21, verse 32 shows that you and I are responsible to learn from God's providential dealings, not only in our lives, but in the lives of other people as well.

"For John came unto you in the way of righteousness," that is, John the Baptist, "and ye believed him not." Our Lord's talking to the Pharisees here. He says you believed him not. "But the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him."

Our Lord is telling these self-righteous religious Pharisees, John came to you in the way of righteousness. You didn't believe him. But the publicans and the harlots believed him. You saw the work of God in their lives. You saw what the power of the gospel did in their lives. And you, when you had seen it, believed not and repented not that you might believe. He's saying you better watch the providence of God and you're responsible to profit from the providential acts of God in your life and in the lives of other people as well.

The first clue that Scripture gives us as to when it's time to forsake our false gods is when nothing is working out for us. We are not in control and neither are our false gods. We are unable to accomplish those plans and schemes that we prepare. Nothing worked out for these Philistines.

Secondly, it is when there is a realization of danger, defeat, death and destruction. David said God broke out upon those Philistines by his hand, and I told you the word smote there literally means slaughtered. How long do you think it took those Philistines to realize that they were in danger? They were in a desperate state. How long do you think it took them to realize, if we stay here, we're going to die.

We better get out while we can get out. How long do you think it took them to analyze in their mind, boy, everybody's being slaughtered. Red flags should have been up everywhere. All of them should be filled with fear and trepidation. Fear is not necessarily a bad thing all of the time. I realize that God has not given us a spirit of fear, but when you and I are afraid, it's a siren going off in our brain saying, danger is all around us.

Hebrews 11, verse 7 says, talking about Noah: "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." In that instance, fear is good. He feared God. Then he realized that what was going on around him, he needed to get out of there. He needed to believe God and do that which was right. These Philistines, some of them had enough sense to say to themselves, well, if we stay here in this valley, we're going to die. David's going to kill us all. We're leaving. And we're leaving these worthless gods on the battlefield. I love Proverbs 16, verse 6: "By mercy and truth iniquity is purged." "And by the fear of the Lord men depart from evil." You will never depart from evil until you fear the Lord. You know why there is so much evil in this world? The Apostle Paul tells us, because there is no fear of God before their eyes.

If you feared God, you wouldn't do those things. I can assure you that the one thing that we need in this nation desperately is a good case of the fear of God. I don't know how many couples and individuals I've counseled in 43 years of preaching. But every now and then you get someone, it seems like, just never hears anything. It's like water off a duck's back.

There have been times I have really, in the flesh, wanted to reach out, catch that man by the shirt, hold him up against the wall, slap his face four or five times and say, "What in the world is wrong with you? Wake up!" I believe that's basically what needs to be done to this country. Our Lord said in Luke 12, verse 5:

He says, "But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him." You will never flee to Christ until you realize the danger that you're in? You will never repent of your sins until you realize the devastation of your sins. You will never seek forgiveness

until you realize that unless you are forgiven, you will die. What we need is a good dose and a good case of a fear of God.

The first clue was that nothing was working out for them. The second was danger and defeat and death. The third was a military defeat. It was not just an individual defeat. It was not just that a few Philistines died. It was not just a few regiments got killed. David defeated the entire Philistine army.

It would behoove us to take note of the fact that Israel was a relatively young kingdom. David was only the second king. The Philistines had occupied their land for years and had king after king after king. Saul, the first king, only reigned 40 years, and David had just taken over the kingdom. You might say that the kingdom of Israel was an upstart. It was a young kingdom.

First Samuel chapter 13 shows how the Philistines had absolute control over the people of Israel. David had just taken over. The Philistines had an arms registration and control program. I think some of the people of this land today probably descended from these folks. First Samuel 13, verse 19 says, "Now there was no smith found throughout all the land of Israel: for the Philistines said, Lest the Hebrews make them swords or spears: But all the Israelites went down to the Philistines, to sharpen every man his share, and his coulter, and his axe, and his mattock."

"Yet they had a file for the mattocks, and for the coulters, and for the forks, and for the axes, and to sharpen the goads. So it came to pass," "in the day of battle," and this is when Saul and Jonathan are there fighting. "So it came to pass in the day of battle, that there was neither sword nor spear found in the hand of any of the people that were with Saul and Jonathan: but with Saul and with Jonathan his son was there found." Saul and Jonathan were the only two that had swords or spears. Why? Philistines had taken away every means of making weapons and sharpening weapons and said, look, you can't have those things.

Would it be considered and construed as a warning and a thing of wonder when a young, upstart kingdom, basically untrained and unarmed kingdom like Israel, could defeat a powerful empire like the Philistines? It would be akin to Cuba invading and conquering

America. Such a thing has happened in time past. Second Chronicles 24, verse 24 shows that the mighty do not always win. The Bible says, "For the army of the Syrians came with a small company of men, and the Lord delivered a very great host into their hand, because they," that is Israel, "had forsaken the Lord God of their fathers."

"So they executed judgment against Joash." So Judah and Jerusalem were defeated by a small group of Syrians. Why? Because they had forsaken the Lord God of their fathers. it doesn't take many to whip you if God is against you. And here this young upstart kingdom, Israel, under David, whipped the socks off of the Philistine Empire. Solomon stated in Ecclesiastes 9 and verse 11 that the battle is not to the strong. If God is not for us, it does not matter how many weapons we have or how many military men that we have or what we have. If God is against us, we shall lose and we shall fail.

The Judgment of God and the Danger of Delay

When is it time to forsake our false gods? The first clue is when our plans and our schemes go awry. The second clue is when we're in danger, when we're facing death and destruction. The third clue is when there are military defeats. The fourth clue is when there is obvious judgment of God. David said, God hath broken forth upon the Philistines through my hands. It was not David's mighty powerful hand. It was God's mighty, powerful hand.

And Nahum 1 in verse 6 of Scripture asks, "Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? his fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him." No one can abide the anger and the fury of God. There is indeed a time to forsake our false gods. There is also a time when it's too late to forsake your false gods. Yes, some of these Philistines in 1 Chronicles chapter 14, they got to leave their false gods on the battlefield.

They realized they're useless, they're worthless. But what about all of those men who died with their false gods? It's too late for them. Over and over in the book of Judges, Israel sinned against God, deserted Him and turned to their false gods. God always sent judgment. And in that judgment, they began to whine and complain

and bellyache and say, oh, it's our fault, God, we've sinned against you. And they had turned from their false gods and God would deliver them. But what about those who died holding on to their false gods? It is true that God is gracious and God is merciful. But it's equally true that God is also just. And God is holy.

For those who have eyes to see and ears to hear, the judgment of God is just like that little trickle that begins to come through the dam. Those who have eyes to see and ears to hear say, this dam is not safe. That's just a little trickle now. But the more it trickles, the bigger that crack is going to get. And one day, this dam is going to blow out and all those waters are going to come down. And so, the wise thing for me to do is to prepare and just get out of the way of this flood. Those who have eyes to see and ears to hear pick up on the clues and say, I better be doing some repenting now. Amos chapter 4 shows the trickle and finally the dam bursting.

In Amos chapter 4, verse 6 God says, "And I also have given you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and want of bread in all your places: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord." Here is that little trickle of famine. God said it didn't get your attention. The trickle gets a little bigger in verse 7. "And also I have withholden the rain from you, when there were yet three months to the harvest: and I caused it to rain upon one city, and caused it not to rain upon another city: one piece was rained upon, and the piece whereupon it rained not withered. So two or three cities wandered unto one city, to drink water; but they were not satisfied: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord." The trickle gets a little larger.

"I have smitten you with blasting and mildew: when your gardens and your vineyards and your fig trees and your olive trees increased, the palmerworm devoured them: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord." Now it starts to run and pour more fiercely. Verse 10, "I have sent among you the pestilence after the manner of Egypt: your young men have I slain with the sword, and have taken away your horses; and I have made the stink of your camps to come up unto your nostrils: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord."

It begins to really flood. "I have overthrown some of you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and ye were as a firebrand plucked out of the burning: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the

Lord." The dam burst. "Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel." I'll wipe you out.

Application to America: National Failures as Divine Warnings

Apply this teaching from Scripture to America. I hope that you have noticed the fact that all of our national plans and schemes have failed. Social Security is a misnomer. FHA is in trouble. Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac are worthless. HUD is a failure. Every foreign policy that we have pursued has proved to be fruitless.

The United Nations, an agency to stop war, has created more wars than you can count. Try to name one policy, one plan, one scheme that the federal government has made that has been successful. The only one that I could ever think of is that our politicians have successfully destroyed our sovereignty, our freedom and our liberty. We've been made homeless and we've been made paupers in our own land. We have gone down the hill and we've gone down quickly. Are Americans safe? The answer is no. We're not safe abroad and we're not safe at home. There is more crime in this country than ever before.

Are we fearful, apprehensive, frightened? The answer is yes. Where is the confidence in our police departments? Where's the confidence in our sheriffs? Most law enforcement officers are simply that. Law enforcement, that is, equals revenue enhancement agents. Where's the confidence in our economy? Where's the confidence in our executive branch? Where's the confidence in our judicial branch? Congress is nothing but a gaffe in this land today. Who has any respect for the judicial system?

When justice can be bought by the highest bidder. When innocent people are thrown in prison and those who commit rape and murder and pillage and armed robbery are let go in just a few short months. Who in the world trusts a politician? Who trusts Washington? And our state capitals are no better. If I could drive around Atlanta, I would drive around it. I don't even want to go through it.

Corruption and fraud and immorality abound in every sphere of government and on every hand. Not only have our plans and schemes failed, but we've been defeated. We lost Korea. We lost Vietnam. We're hopelessly locked up in no-win situations all over the world. Not just in Iraq, but now they're planning to invade Iran as well. There's no way in the world we can win in Iraq or Iran unless we just bomb everybody and destroy everybody and everything.

You cannot change a culture with bombs. You can devastate, but you cannot change a culture. You cannot win a people with death. We've lost the war on poverty. We've lost the war on drugs. We've lost the war on terrorism. We've lost the war to secure our borders. We've lost the war on common sense. We have gone absolutely stark raving mad in this country. We have been defeated. God is judging us.

And according to Scripture, it's going to get a lot worse. It's time to forsake our false gods. It's time we wised up to the clues, not only from Scripture, but from the hand of God in Providence in our country. It's time to repent and turn to God the Father who has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ. I hate to say this, but those wicked, rebellious, God-hating, God-denying Philistines in 1 Chronicles 14 had more sense than a lot of Americans today. At least they knew it's time to leave these worthless gods alone.

Call to Repentance and Faith in Christ

There are two applications. First, We need to learn from the heathen in this instance. Our Lord said the children of men are oftentimes more wiser than the children of light in some things they are. In this instance, the Philistines were. It's time that you and I forsake everything that's unbiblical, unscriptural, ungodly. We need to forsake our materialism, our secularism, our humanism and all of our other isms and turn to the word of God. Our God has promised, in Isaiah 55, verses 6 and 7, He said this, "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found."

"Call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." A good illustration is found in 1 Thessalonians

chapter 1, verses 9 and 10. This is what the Apostle Paul said to those Thessalonians.

He said, "For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come." What did they do? They turned to God from idols. We need to turn to God from idols. We need to drop all of these false gods and come back to the one true, the living God.

What did God tell David the second time? God told David, now, David, don't do a frontal attack this time. You go around behind him. And when you hear the moving in the tops of the mulberry trees, that's when you strike. Because I've gone out. I do believe with all of my heart, we're hearing the divine moving in the tops of the mulberry trees.

And as John the Baptist preached, flee from the wrath to come. What did God say in Isaiah 28 and verse 21? He would do His strange work. His strange act. And that strange work and that strange act is judgment. We need to wise up and say, we're going to turn from any and everything that is unbiblical, unscriptural and ungodly. We need to serve one God, and that is the God who revealed himself in Jesus Christ, because Jesus Christ is King of Kings and Lord of Lords and God of Gods. Let's serve Him. Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we ask for Your blessing, for Your grace, for Your help. And, O God, open our eyes, open our ears, give us eyes to see and ears to hear. And may we turn, Lord, from our false gods and serve the one true and living God, and Jesus Christ our Lord, in whose name we pray, Amen. Amen.

CHAPTER 6

Dying Laughing

January 27, 2012

SCRIPTURE READING - Mark 5:21-43 (KJV)

Introduction: The Expression 'Dying Laughing'

"And when Jesus was passed over again by ship into the other side, much people gathered unto him, and he was nigh unto the sea. And behold, there cometh one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name. And when he saw him, he fell at his feet, and besought him greatly, saying, My little daughter lieth at the point of death. I pray thee, come and lay thy hands on her, that she may be healed, and she shall live. And Jesus went with him, and much people followed him and thronged him." The next passage deals with the woman with the issue of blood.

"While he yet spake, there came from the ruler of the synagogue's house certain which said, Thy daughter is dead. Why troublest thou the master any further? As soon as Jesus heard the word that was spoken, he saith unto the ruler of the synagogue, Be not afraid, only believe. And he suffered no man to follow him, save Peter and James and John, the brother of James. And he cometh into the house of the ruler of the

> synagogue, and seeth a tumult in them that wept and wailed greatly. And when he was come in, he saith unto them, Why make you this ado and weep? The damsel is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn. And when he had put them all out, he taketh the father and the mother of the damsel, and them that were with him, and entered into where the damsel was lying. And he took the damsel by the hand, and saith unto her, Talitha cumi, which is being interpreted, Damsel, I say unto thee, arise. And straightway the damsel arose and walked, for she was of the age of twelve years, and they were astonished with great astonishment."

"And he charged them straightly that no man should know it, and commanded that something should be given her to eat." Each of us has used the expression, "I nearly died laughing." We understand it to mean that our laughter was intense, great, and vocal. My wife can tell you that there was a time when a friend and I were so tickled and laughed so hard that we were literally rolling on the floor. Neither of us could stop laughing or get up for a good while. So we use the expression, "I nearly died laughing."

The Biblical View of Laughter

Have you ever considered the frequent use of the word "dying"? We say, "I nearly died of embarrassment," or, "I've been dying to see you." In that context, the word refers to great intensity. To say I nearly died of embarrassment means I was extremely humiliated; to say I'm dying to see you means I have an intense longing to see you. We are not really dying, nor are we about to die. It is simply an expression.

Dying and laughter are usually considered opposites. One does not laugh when he dies. Laughter has to do with life and the enjoyment of life. Proverbs 15:13 says, "A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance, but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken." If you want a smile on your face, you have to have a merry heart. Proverbs 15:15 says, "All the days of the afflicted are evil, but he that is of a merry heart hath a continual feast." If you have a merry heart, you are happy and have a continual feast. If you cannot laugh at yourself, you are in deep trouble, because we make some of

the most atrocious mistakes. Sometimes they are not only stupid; they are absolutely funny.

A merry heart, the Bible says, "doeth good like medicine" in Proverbs 17:22: "A merry heart doeth good like medicine, but a broken spirit drieth the bones." Ecclesiastes 9:7 says, "Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart, for God now accepteth thy works." There is a lot in the Bible about being merry and having a laughing, joyful spirit and attitude.

Scientific research has proven the benefits of laughter as a prescription for health. Cardiologists at the University of Maryland Medical Center said laughter might help prevent heart disease. Their findings, presented in 2000 at the American Heart Association's 73rd scientific meeting, showed that laughing can reduce the risk of heart attack by curbing unwanted stress, which can destroy the protective lining of blood vessels. The researchers surveyed people with and without heart disease to gauge their reactions to humorous and non-humorous situations. They discovered that people with heart disease were 40% less likely to laugh in a variety of situations. This was reported by Sound Medicine from the Indiana University School of Medicine.

Dr. Michael Miller, director of the Center of Preventive Cardiology at the University of Maryland Medical Center, said, "The old saying that laughter is the best medicine definitely appears to be true when it comes to protecting your heart."

The title of my message is "Dying Laughing." I cannot say that people actually die of laughing, but I can assure you that some die while laughing. I found at least two very informative incidents. If you type in "dying laughing," you'll be amazed at what you can find. These incidents also show that people have different senses of humor.

Instances of Dying While Laughing

On March 24, 1975, 50-year-old bricklayer Alex Mitchell of Kingsland in Norfolk, England, kicked the bucket while roaring with laughter at one of his favorite television shows, The Goodies. The skit involved a kilted Scotsman flailing away with his bagpipe at a

vicious black pudding intent upon attacking him. Mitchell was unable to stop laughing, and after 25 minutes of uproar, gave one last tremendous belly laugh, slumped on the settee, and died, said his widow, who witnessed his passing. Mr. Mitchell had expired from heart failure. I don't know that laughing killed him, but he certainly died while he was laughing. Here's another account of someone dying laughing, this time very unique because it happened in Bangkok in 2003.

An ice cream truck driver in Thailand died while laughing in his sleep. Damion Sayanum, 52, laughed for about two minutes and then stopped breathing, the Nation newspaper reported. His wife tried to wake him, but he kept laughing. An autopsy suggested that he might have had a heart attack. “I've never seen a case like this, but it is possible that a person could have heart seizure while laughing or crying too hard in their sleep,” said Dr. Somchai Chakramban, Director Deputy General of the Mental Health Department. Man died laughing in his sleep. I don't know what he was dreaming, but it must have been funny.

Then there was the fictional account of the death of Pecos Bill, the cowboy hero who rode the cyclone. When Bill was getting on in years, a Boston man came down to New Mexico for a visit. He fancied himself a bit of a cowboy and got himself one of the mail-order suits: lizard-skin boots, a shiny brass belt buckle, blue jeans, and a huge ten-gallon hat with not a speck of dust on it. When Pecos Bill saw him trying to swagger into a bar, he lay down on the sidewalk and laughed and laughed and laughed himself to death. That is a fictional account, naturally.

But undoubtedly, it is possible to die physically while laughing. I can assure you that it is also possible to die spiritually while laughing physically. Many today laugh at God, at His Word, His grace, and His mercy. That laughing is a demonstration of disbelief, unbelief, and outright doubt. As you read the Bible, it may surprise you to find certain people who at times laughed at God.

Laughing at God: Abraham and Sarah

The first passage is Genesis 17, and the second is Romans chapter 4; hold Romans 4, and we will come back there after reading Genesis 17

and 18. Turn to Genesis chapter 17, beginning with verse 15. Everyone remembers this story about Abraham and Sarah. Notice Genesis 17, beginning with verse 15:

"And God said unto Abraham, As for Sarah thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. And I will bless thee, and give thee a son also of her. Yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations, kings of people shall be of her."

God addressed Abraham concerning Sarah herself. He promised that she would be blessed, become a mother of nations, and that kings of people would come from her. Now watch: "Then Abraham fell upon his face and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is a hundred years old, and shall Sarah that is ninety years old bear? And Abraham said unto God, O that Ishmael might live unto thee. And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed, and thou shalt call his name Isaac. And I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with a seed after him."

When God told Abraham he was going to have a son, and Abraham was one hundred and Sarah ninety, Abraham laughed. Evidently there was a little disbelief in that laugh, because his very next request was, "O that Ishmael might live before thee." Ishmael was the child of Abraham and Hagar, the Egyptian. But God said, "Let me tell you something, Ishmael is not going to be your heir, I am going to give you a son."

In Genesis 18, the men who had come to visit Abraham and Sarah asked, "Where is Sarah thy wife?" Abraham answered, "Behold, in the tent." The Lord said, "I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life; and lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son." Sarah heard it in the tent door. Abraham and Sarah were old and well stricken in age, and it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. She could not bear.

"Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxen old, shall I have pleasure, my Lord, also being old?" The Lord said unto Abraham, "Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child which am old? Is there anything too hard for the Lord? At the time appointed I will return unto thee according to the

time of thy life, and Sarah shall have a son." Sarah denied it, saying, "I laugh not." For she was afraid. The Lord said, "But nay, thou didst laugh."

Why was she laughing? It was a laugh of unbelief. She could not believe that at ninety years of age she would be able to bear a child, or that Abraham at one hundred years of age would be able to produce one.

Evidently, they repented of their laughter. Romans 4 says, "For what saith the scripture, Abraham believed God and it was counted unto him for righteousness." As impossible as the promise was, and even though he laughed, and so did Sarah, he changed his tune and believed God. "Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be." He was "not weak in faith," and "considered not his own body now dead at a hundred," nor "the deadness of Sarah's womb at ninety." "He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully persuaded that what he had promised he was able to perform," and therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness.

Abraham came to the realization that whatever God promised, He was able to perform. There is a big difference between laughing at God and laughing with God. Men laugh at God in various ways. It may be a guffaw, a sneer, amusement, or a jest. Yet the results are the same regardless. Because God has been denied, belittled, rejected, and blasphemed, laughing at God will always end in death and judgment.

The Scornful Laughter at Jairus's House

In Mark chapter 5, there was a ruler of the synagogue by the name of Jairus, who came to Christ beseeching Him on behalf of his little daughter. She was at home, seriously ill; in fact, the Scripture says that she lay a dying. When Jairus came to our Lord, he himself was a ruler of the synagogue. Yet he fell down and was very humble and reverent. Although he was a ruler, he humbled himself and acknowledged Christ as the greater ruler. He was very importunate, saying, "Please, please come and heal my daughter."

Jairus did not have the faith of the centurion, who sent word to Christ, “You don't even have to come to my house. Just speak the word and my servant shall be healed.” Nevertheless, it did not matter; at least Jairus had some faith. Strong faith may be commended, but weak faith is not going to be rejected. Christ, of course, agreed to come to the house and heal the daughter.

In Mark 5:35, we read, “While he yet spake, there came from the ruler of the synagogue's house certain who said, Thy daughter is dead, Why troublest thou the Master any further?” This was a message of unbelief and despair. They were simply asking the ruler, “Why are you troubling the Master? Your daughter's dead.” In other words, there was nothing Jairus could do now, and nothing Christ could do. “Your daughter's dead. Leave Him alone. Let Him go about His business.” Their unbelief was expressed in having no faith at all in Christ.

But when our Lord heard these words, He turned to Jairus and said, “As soon as Jesus heard the word that was spoken, he saith unto the ruler of the synagogue, Be not afraid, only believe.” There were two things He did. First, He encouraged faith in Jairus: “Jairus, you just make sure that you believe.” Second, He said, “Be not afraid.”

I want you to understand something: faith and fear are opposites. They do not dwell together. If you have faith, then you are not going to be afraid. If you have fear, then you do not have faith. It is true that perfect love casts out fear, the Bible says. But perfect faith casts out fear as well. So our Lord says, “Don’t fear, only believe.”

They continued to Jairus’s house. By the time they arrived, the family, friends, and professional mourners were all at work. This is something we do not experience in our day and time, but in Bible times, believe it or not, there were professional mourners—people who made a living by going around and mourning at funerals over the deaths of loved ones.

It was quite a program. In verse 38, we read, “And he cometh to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and seeth the tumult, and them that wept and wailed greatly.” Here was a great tumult. Everybody was weeping and wailing. In fact, the louder the wailing

and crying, the greater the love it was supposed to express for the individual who had died. Therefore, He classifies it as a great tumult, because they were already weeping and wailing.

Now look what our Lord does in verse 39. He gives them a gentle rebuke: “And when he was come in, he saith unto them, Why make you this ado and weep? The damsel is not dead, but sleepeth.” Let me paraphrase this: Our Lord says, “Why are you so bent out of shape? Why are you raising this ruckus? Why are you making this fuss? She’s not dead; she only sleeps.”

Now look at verse 40, because here is the subject of the message: “And they laughed him to scorn.” When our Lord said, “She is not dead, but sleeps,” they laughed Him to scorn.

Turn to Luke chapter 8 and verse 53. The same story adds these words: “And they laughed him to scorn, knowing that she was dead.” Here were people who had looked upon this young girl and satisfied themselves that she was dead. When Christ said, “She’s not dead, she’s only sleeping,” they laughed Him to scorn. Why? Because they said, “We know she’s dead.” Period. John Gill said concerning these words, “They mocked at his words.”

They held Him in the utmost contempt as a very weak, silly man, taking Him either for a madman or a fool. They knew she was really dead; they had all the evidence they could have, and they had no faith in Him or in His power to raise her from the dead. So when they laughed Him to scorn, they were treating Christ as a madman, a silly man, or a fool. Why? Because they said, “We know she is dead. We have been there, we have seen her, and she is dead.”

The interesting thing is that when the Bible says in Mark 5:40, “And they laughed him to scorn,” the important matter is the tense of that verb. It is the perfect tense, meaning that they laughed and continued laughing. They did not laugh only once; they kept laughing at Him, mocking Him, and ridiculing Him. Now, why were they laughing?

Interpretations of Christ's Statement

Christ’s statement that she was not dead, but only sleeping, was contrary to their interpretation of the facts. I hope you know there is

a difference between facts and someone's interpretation of those facts. When everyone tells his side of the story, he tells it with his interpretation of the facts. Facts may be facts, yet individuals may interpret them variously, placing personal slants upon them. These people had interpreted the fact that the girl was dead, period. Nothing could be done for her; it was over. That was their interpretation of the facts.

Our Lord said, "She is not dead, she is only sleeping." The word "sleeping" is kathudo in the Greek. It is translated as "sleep" in our Bibles twenty-two times. Normally, the word means to fall asleep, drop off to sleep, or sleep normally; euphemistically, it speaks of death. Sleep is often a euphemism for death—a light way of saying something very hard. I remember hearing many Black people, when speaking of someone who had died, say not that he had died, but that he had passed. That is a euphemism. So our Lord was saying, "She is not dead; she is asleep."

Albert Barnes comments on our Lord's words, "The maid is not dead, but sleepeth": "It cannot be supposed that our Lord means literally to say that the child was not dead. Every possible evidence of her death had been given, and He acted on that Himself, and conveyed to the people the idea that He raised her from the dead. He meant to speak in opposition to their opinions. It is not unlikely that Jairus and the people favored the opinions of the Sadducees and that they understood by her being dead that she had ceased to be and that she would never be raised up again. In opposition to this, he used the expression, 'she sleepeth,' affirming mildly both that the body was dead and implying that her spirit still lived and that she would be raised again."

Barnes points to a similar mode of speaking in John 11:11, where Christ said, "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth." The sacred writers who hold the doctrine of the resurrection often spoke of the dead as sleeping: 2 Peter 3:4, Acts 7:60, 1 Corinthians 15, and 1 Thessalonians 4. "The meaning of this passage then is the maid has not ceased to exist, but though her body is dead, yet her spirit lives, and she sleeps in hope of the resurrection."

Barnes says it is not unlikely that Jairus and the people favored the opinions of the Sadducees. The Bible tells us specifically that the

Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. They thought that when a man died, that was it: he ceased to exist; he was eradicated. You are dead, you are dead—that is it; it is all over with, and you are gone. There would never be a resurrection. Our Lord, therefore, is saying, "Well, she may be physically dead, but she is still there because the spirit is still alive." Certainly, that interpretation is very viable because it contradicts the Sadducees' view.

John Gill said it like this: "Christ's meaning is that she was not so dead as the company thought, as always to remain in the state of the dead and not to be restored to life again, whereas our Lord signifies it would be seen in a very little time that she should be—"

She was raised again just as a person is awakened out of sleep, so there was no occasion to make such funeral preparations as they did. In other words, there was no reason to cry and wail as they were doing, because the girl was going to be awakened from the dead.

Matthew Henry says, "Number one, he said, some think our Savior spoke ambiguously, for death is in Scripture often called a sleep." He then gives the scriptural references concerning the resurrection. He says, "Number two, others think that our Savior spoke ironically, knowing that some of them would so diminish the miracle to slander Him or to abate His reputation. But it is a better answer to say that He speaks with reference to their opinion. She is not dead in the sense that you judge her, which, of course, would refer to the Sadducean doctrine, so as she shall not come to life before the resurrection. She is not so dead, but she shall come to life again, as he said to Mary concerning Lazarus in John 11:23."

"Or three, number one, to me she is not dead, and number four—and I love this—or shall we say, as soon as Christ came into the house, who is the resurrection and the life, her soul again returned into her body, which, though to their appearance it was separated from her body, yet was not fixed in its eternal mansion."

Remember the passage in John 11, where Jesus Christ went to Bethany to raise Lazarus from the dead. Lazarus had been sick, and our Lord purposefully stayed away. When He told His disciples that He was going back, He said, "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth." The disciples said, "Well, Lord, if he sleeps, he does well." But then the

Lord said, “Look, he’s dead.” “And I’m glad for your sakes that I was not there, that ye might believe.” Jesus Christ went to Bethany, and Mary and Martha went out to meet Him: “Lord, if thou hadst been here, our brother had not died.” Jesus said, “I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. Believest thou this?” Martha said, “Yea, Lord, I know that he shall live again in the resurrection.” But that is not what our Lord said. He said, “I’m here, and I am the resurrection and the life.”

I love what Lester Olaf used to say. Preaching on that passage, when he came to the verse, “I am the resurrection and the life,” he would look down and say, “Folks, the resurrection just walked into town.” And that is right. Lazarus was raised from the dead, and very obviously, when Jesus Christ walked into this house, He was going to raise this young girl from the dead.

Christ was correct in His assessment of the situation. She was not so dead that she could not be raised again, because Christ went in and raised her. I want to point out something: those who do not believe the Word of God, Jesus Christ, or His work are always ready to laugh at Christ, His Word, His work, and His people. Have you noticed that unbelievers always hold God’s preachers and people in absolute and utter contempt and view the ministry as absolutely worthless?

Historical Mockery of God's Messengers

In fact, anything pertaining to Christianity is a laughable matter to them. Watch some of the late-night comedians, and some of the daytime comedians as well. They make fun of Christ, Christians, and the Word of God. Silly preachers. They were laughing at Christ. Do you remember what our Lord said in John 15? Jesus said, "If they listen to me, they're going to listen to you. If they didn't listen to me, they're not going to listen to you."

Then He said, "The servant is not greater than the master." In other words, if they laughed at Christ, the Master, they are certainly going to laugh at the servants. I want to show you that this has been true down through the ages. Turn in your Bibles, if you would please, to 2 Chronicles chapter 30.

There was a great revival under King Hezekiah. Hezekiah was doing everything in his power to have Israel observe the Passover and bring the people back to God. The Bible says in 2 Chronicles chapter 30 and verse 1, "And Hezekiah said to all Israel and Judah, and wrote letters also to Ephraim and Manasseh, that they should come to the house of the Lord at Jerusalem to keep the Passover to the Lord God of Israel."

Now, what's wrong with that? Here is the highest civil ruler in the land trying to call the nation back to God: "Come back, let's be obedient, let's do what God has commanded." "For the king had taken counsel and the princes and all the congregation in Jerusalem to keep the Passover in the second month."

Now skip down, if you would please, to verse 5: "So they established a decree to make proclamation throughout all Israel, from Beersheba even to Dan, that they should come to keep the Passover unto the Lord God of Israel at Jerusalem, for they had not done it of a long time in such sort as it was written." They had not kept it biblically. Verse 6: "So the post went with the letters from the king and his princes throughout all Israel and Judah, and according to the commandment of the king, saying, You children of Israel, turn again to the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, and He will return to the remnant of you that are escaped out of the hand of the king of Syria. And be not ye like your fathers, and like your brethren, which transgress against the Lord God of their fathers, who therefore gave them up to desolation, as you now see."

Now watch, he's preaching to them: "Now be ye not stiff-necked, as your fathers were, but yield yourselves unto the Lord, and enter into His sanctuary, which He has sanctified forever, and serve the Lord your God, that the fierceness of His wrath may turn away from you." Israel had already been attacked by the Assyrians. He says, "Look, we need to turn back to God. Come on back. Let's do what's right. Let's do what's biblical." He sends letters out all over Israel saying, "Come, let's observe the Passover biblically."

He says, "For if you turn again unto the Lord, your brethren and your children shall find compassion before them that lead them captive, so that they shall come again into this land. For the Lord your God is gracious and merciful and will not turn away His face

from you if you return to Him." Isn't that a wonderful message? He said, "Think about all your family that's being persecuted. If you would just return to God, He would have compassion upon your family members."

The post passed from city to city through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh, even into Zebulun. But they laughed them to scorn and mocked them. Isn't that amazing? If God in His sovereignty allowed me to get on national TV, and if God in His sovereignty allowed every person in this country to listen to me preach for an hour and to listen to me proclaim, "Repent, repent, repent," do you know what the majority of the Americans would do? Laugh and mock.

You try to tell people that those floods are the judgment of God. You try to tell people that the tornadoes and the hurricanes are the judgment of God. You try to tell people that the drought is the judgment of God. You try to tell people that the economic collapse in our country is the judgment of God.

And they look at you like, "You don't have one eye and half sense. Something's wrong with you." Just like they mocked in Hezekiah's day, they mocked in Christ's day. It didn't matter. They laughed them to scorn.

Nehemiah had a burden to build a wall around Jerusalem because Jerusalem was in great reproach. He was allowed by Artaxerxes, the king, to return and to build the wall. Nehemiah said, "You see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire. Come and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more of reproach."

Nehemiah told them of the hand of his God, which was good upon him, and of the king's words spoken to him. They said, "Let us rise up and build." So they strengthened their hands for this good work. But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the servant, Geshem the Arabian, and the Ammonite heard it, they laughed them to scorn, despised them, and asked, "What is this thing that you will do? Will you rebel against the king?" What did the unbelievers do? They mocked and laughed to scorn.

Historically and biblically, when men despise God, they hold His people and His work in contempt. They sneer, laugh, deride, and scorn. Job, a righteous and godly man who was suffering, said, “I am as one mocked of his neighbour, who calleth upon God, and he answereth him, the just upright man is laughed to scorn.”

They use such language as, “Oh, you are so weak-minded and so weak to have to believe in a God or a Savior. Can’t you think for yourself? Can’t you break your emotional ties in your need of a God?” They think it is absolutely funny that someone believes in God and Christ, that we need a Savior, and that we want to follow biblical principles and do what is right and holy. Consequently, they curse, mock, take the Lord’s name in vain, laugh, and ridicule. It is nothing less than amusement to them.

God's Laughter and Judgment

Let them laugh. Let them alone. It is now their time to laugh. Remember when the Pharisees were upset at Christ and the disciples asked, “Knowest thou not that thou hast offended the Pharisees?” Christ said, “Let them alone. They be blind, leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.” Let them alone. Let them laugh.

The term lex talionis means the law of retribution. The law of retribution is when God gives people exactly what they deserve. Remember that passage in Galatians 6, 7, and 8, where God says, “Be not deceived, God is not mocked, whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. He that sows of the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption, and he that sows of the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.” But He said, “Be not deceived, God is not mocked, whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” We have a number of sayings that resemble that principle of Scripture, that lex talionis, that a man reaps what he sows.

Have you ever heard someone say, “Well, the skeletons are coming out of the closet”? How about, “The chickens have come home to roost”? In other words, you are getting paid back. You are getting what you deserve.

When men laugh at God, they shall be laughed at by God. We have a saying, “He who laughs last has the best laugh.” Psalm 2 describes the rebellion of the heathen and the rulers against the Lord and His anointed: “Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? 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.” Here is their rebellion. They are going to rebel, mock, and do their own things. But verse 4 says, “He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh, the Lord shall have them in derision.” What is God going to do to those who laugh at Him in their rebellion and wickedness? He is going to have the last laugh. Psalm 37:13 says the same thing.

Psalm 37, verse 12, gives the context: “The wicked plotted against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth. The Lord shall laugh at him, for he seeth that his day is coming.” The wicked plotted against the just, gnashing at him with his teeth. But what does God do? God laughs at the wicked because He sees His day is coming.

Psalm 52, verse 6, says, “The righteous also shall see and fear, and shall laugh at him.” Now it is not just God laughing; it is the righteous who are laughing. But what is the context? This psalm was written against Doeg the Edomite, the man who told Saul that David had gone to Abiathar the priest, and who killed the Lord’s priests.

David begins in verse 1: “Why boastest thou thyself in mischief, O mighty man?” He is talking about Doeg. “The goodness of God endureth continually. Thy tongue deviseth mischief, like a sharp razor working deceitfully. Thou lovest evil more than good, and lying rather than to speak righteousness. Thou lovest all devouring words, O thou deceitful tongue. God shall likewise destroy thee forever. He shall take thee away, and pluck thee out of thy dwelling place, and root thee out of the land of the living. The righteous also shall see and fear, and shall laugh at him,” that is, at the man who laughed at God. They shall say in verse 7, “Lo, this is the man that made not God his strength, but trusted in the abundance of his riches, and strengthened himself in his wickedness.” Not only will God be laughing at the wicked, but so will the righteous.

Psalm 59, verse 8, says, “But thou, O Lord, shalt laugh at them. Thou shalt have all the heathen in derision.” Now consider the

context. David prays, “Deliver me from mine enemies, O my God. Defend me from them that rise up against me, deliver me from the workers of iniquity, and save me from bloody men. For lo, they lie in wait for my soul. The mighty are gathered against me, not for my transgression. Not for my sin, O Lord. They run and prepare themselves without my fault, awake to help me. And behold, thou therefore, O Lord God of hosts, the God of Israel, awake to visit all the heathen. Be not merciful to any wicked transgressors.”

“They return at evening, they make a noise like a dog, they go round about the city. Behold, they belch out with their mouth, swords are in their lips: for who, say they, doth hear? But thou, O Lord, shalt laugh at them; thou shalt have all the heathen in derision.”

What is he saying? God will have the last laugh.

Now remember those who mock God, who sneer at Him, His people, His preachers, and His words. Look at what is going to happen. Here is wisdom, none other than Christ personified. Wisdom says, “Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you; because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof.” Look what God says.

"I will also laugh at your calamity. I will mock when your fear cometh. When your fear cometh as desolation and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind. When distress and anguish cometh upon you, then shall they call upon me." But God says, "I will not answer. They shall seek me early, but they shall not find me. Why? For that they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord. They would have none of my counsel. They despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way and be filled with their own devices." God said, "I will also laugh at your calamity. I will mock at your destruction."

Our Lord says in John 8:24, "I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins. For if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins." Is it possible? Oh yes. All you have to do is laugh at Christ, His Word, and His truth. Your laughing against Christ is a

sin. You shall die in your sins, and you shall die laughing. But God shall have the last laugh, because He will laugh at your wickedness, unbelief, sin, and rebellion, and you will laugh your way to death and judgment.

Applications: Laughing With God or At God

The first application is this: one may laugh with God or one may laugh at God. We may laugh at God in our foolishness, rebellion, wickedness, and sin, or we may laugh with God at the foolishness of wicked men because we have sided with God and His Word. Mark it down: those who reject Christ, His Word, and the preaching and teaching of the truth of His Word shall die in their sins.

When judgment day comes, all who believe will side with Christ against the wicked. We shall laugh with Him against the wicked. But we may also laugh with God when we prove Him in our lives by our obedience to His Word.

You know what the Bible says in Job 5:22? "At destruction and famine thou shalt laugh, neither shalt thou be afraid of the beast of the earth." Those who love God and obey Him may laugh at famine and destruction. You know what David said? "I've been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." You may laugh with God in the sense that you prove Him and say, "Lord, thank You. You have shown me this over and over."

Our Lord Himself said in Luke 6:21, "Blessed are ye that hunger now: for ye shall be filled. Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh." You cannot out-give God, and you cannot out-bless God. God's blessings will always fall upon the obedient. So you may laugh at Him or laugh with Him. As for me, I prefer to laugh with Him. I do not want to be laughed at by God, nor do I want to laugh at God. People literally die laughing, because when they laugh against God, it is a sin. As our Lord said, "Ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins."

Father, again, we thank You for Jesus Christ and for the Word of God. We agree with You today and confess that Your Word is truth, and that You are right and holy in all that You do and say. Lord, we

do not laugh at You; we believe You, we bow to Thee, and we worship Thee. But we do want to laugh with Thee—not only at the silliness and foolishness of the wicked, but as we rejoice in all that You do and provide for us, proving over and over in our lives that Your Word is indeed true, and that Your blessings are real and genuine. We thank You for all that You are, all that You have, all that You are going to do, and all that You have done. In the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen.

CHAPTER 7

Heart Inclinations

May 6, 2012

Introduction: The Command to Incline Your Heart

In Joshua 24:22, Joshua said to the people, "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen you the Lord, to serve him." And they said, "We are witnesses." He continued, "Now therefore put away the strange gods which are among you and incline your heart unto the Lord God of Israel." And the people said unto Joshua, "The Lord our God will we serve, and his voice will we obey."

Joshua calls attention to the heart's inclination toward the Lord. Each of us has used an expression in our lives by saying, "My heart belongs to..." Usually, we would put our wife, our children, our grandchildren, or simply our family in that place. Most of us have never really thought about heart inclinations. Yet Joshua said, "Incline your heart unto the Lord God of Israel."

There is a conference where I preached years ago. The theme of the conference was, "My heart belongs to Dixie." In other words, we understand that we are Southerners, that we are for the South, and that we certainly love the South. That expression shows that the

heart is inclined toward something, and that our affection and loyalty are directed toward it.

Let me give you an illustration of heart inclinations from Judges chapter 9, beginning with verse 1. The passage says, "And Abimelech the son of Jerubbaal went to Shechem and to his mother's brethren, and communed with them and with all the family of the house of his mother's father, saying, 'Speak, I pray you, in the ears of all the men of Shechem, whether it is better for you, either that all of the sons of Jerubbaal, which are threescore and ten persons reign over you, or that one reign over you? Remember also that I am your bone and your flesh.'"

"And his mother's brethren spake of him in the ears of all the men of Shechem all these words, and their hearts inclined to follow Abimelech, for they said, 'He is our brother.'" So here is what Abimelech does. Gideon had seventy sons, and after he was dead, Abimelech, who happened to be the son of Gideon by a concubine, comes along and says, "Is it better that 70 people reign over you or one?" He was speaking mainly to his brethren. The Bible says very clearly, "And their hearts inclined to follow Abimelech, for they said, 'He is our brother.'" Their hearts inclined to him because of their relationship to him.

The people should not have inclined their hearts to follow Abimelech because he was a murderer. He murdered seventy of his brothers and eventually a host of others. But notice that their hearts were inclined. Everyone has an inclined heart; we have inclinations in our hearts. The question is, where is our heart inclined, and what is it inclined toward?

We often speak of heart inclinations, or we could say, “I’m inclined to go hunting.” No one has to pressure us to do what we are already inclined to do. We like to shoot, so we are inclined to go shooting. We like to fish, so we are inclined to go fishing. We like to play, so we are inclined to go out and play. It is amazing that you have never had to pressure your children to play. You always have to pressure them to work, but never to play. The truth of the matter is that our hearts are inclined. We are either inclined to holiness, or we are inclined to sin.

The Meaning of Inclination

We use the word inclined in many different ways, but often we use it to refer to and reveal our own attitude and disposition. You could ask me a question, and I could answer, “At this point, I am inclined to say no,” or, “At this point, I’m inclined not to give you an answer to that particular question.” Another synonym for being inclined is leaning. We could even use the word bent. We might say, “I’m leaning in this direction,” or, “My bent at the moment is in this direction.” When we use the word leaning or bent, we understand that we are speaking about inclinations.

The Negative and Positive of Inclining

Every verse that has the word inclined or incline in it is from the same Hebrew word, natah, which literally means to stretch out, expand, bend, extend, turn, or incline. So the question is this: Is your heart really inclined toward the Lord? Do you want your heart inclined toward the Lord? Do you have an inclination to be obedient, godly, and holy? Do you have an inclination toward biblical truth, or toward worldly and fleshly activities? If you want to be inclined toward the Lord, look back in Joshua 24:23: “Now therefore put away,” said he, “the strange gods which are among you. And incline your heart unto the Lord God of Israel.”

In this passage there are literally two parts: a negative and a positive. He said in verse 23, “Now therefore put away,” said he, “the strange gods which are among you.” That is the negative. And here is the positive: “and incline your heart unto the Lord God of Israel.” There are always two parts of inclining. Sometimes there is a negative and a positive. They may be reversed, but it is exactly the same truth. For instance, in Amos chapter 5 and verse 15, God said, “Hate the evil and love the good.” He put the negative first and the positive second. But in Psalm 97 and verse 10, He says, “Ye that love the Lord hate evil.” In that instance, the positive is first—loving the Lord—and the negative is second, hating evil. In Joshua 24 and verse 23, he gives us the negative first.

He says, “Now therefore put away the strange gods which are among you,” and the positive is second: “and incline your heart to the Lord God of Israel.” We cannot incline our hearts toward the

Lord as long as we are embracing and holding idols in our lives. You object and say, “But I don’t have an idol in my life.” Oh yes, you do.

The Bible teaches us in Colossians chapter 3 and verse 5, “and covetousness which is idolatry.” Do you realize a covetous individual is an idolater? Covetousness is exceedingly broad. Our thoughts, lusts, desires, and even our actions can be idolatrous when we think in an unbiblical manner and act in an unholy and ungodly manner. What we are doing is basically setting ourselves up above God.

If we desire that our hearts be inclined toward the Lord, then we have to put away anything and everything contrary to the Lord. You remember the passage David spoke of in Psalm 66 and verse 18: “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.” If merely regarding iniquity is sufficient that the Lord will not incline His ear toward us, how much worse is it when you and I regard other things equal to Him or above Him?

In either case, we would still be guilty of gross idolatry. I want you to see how easy it is to be captured by an idol. In Genesis 35, God is speaking to Jacob and calling him back to Bethel: “And God said unto Jacob, Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there, and make there an altar unto God that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother.”

Biblical Examples of Putting Away Idols

Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him, “Put away the strange gods that are among you.” Isn’t that amazing? How could Jacob have allowed anyone to have strange gods? But he continued, “Put away the strange gods that are among you and be clean and change your garments and let us arise and go up to Bethel and I will make there an offering to God who answered me in the day of my distress and was with me in the way which I went.” And they gave unto Jacob all the strange gods that were in their hands, and all their earrings which were in their ears. And Jacob hid them under the oak, which was by Shechem.

Now, anything that is against the Lord, anything that we treasure above the Lord, is idolatry. Isn’t it strange that they gave their earrings to Jacob? Of course, these were women; these were ladies.

It was not just the strange gods, but they gave their earrings. Usually jewelry in those days was either dedicated to some strange god or had the image or the form of that god in that jewelry.

What they were doing was giving up any and everything that was even questionable. Their attitude was, "I do not want anything between Jacob and his family, and the Lord." So they put it away. Any token or reminder of a false and idolatrous god, act, state, or fashion should immediately be put away. I remember years ago when I was in college, my aunt and uncle went to Hawaii.

They tried to bring everyone back a few little presents. I remember they brought us a salt-and-pepper shaker set, which we had on our kitchen table. But the shakers were in the form of little tiki gods. Every time I went into that kitchen, I saw those things. Finally, I told Alice, "I don't want those things in the house. I know it's nothing but a salt-and-pepper shaker. I understand it's a piece of wood, but it is in the form of false gods. I don't want it." She said, "Throw it away." That is exactly what I did.

This is exactly what was happening here. Anything and everything that would even reflect another god, they were getting rid of. So we must first put away the strange gods in our lives. We must put away our covetousness and every form of idolatry. Secondly, he said, we must incline our hearts toward Him.

It is imperative, as you look back at Joshua 24:23, that you understand this simple statement: "Now therefore put away," said he, "the strange gods which are among you." Then, "incline your heart unto the Lord God of Israel." It is our responsibility to incline our hearts to the Lord God of Israel. We must learn to pray that we would be inclined toward Him, that He would be the desire of our hearts, and that He would be our delight, so that we would delight ourselves in Him.

Let me ask you a question. I already know the answer, but I am going to ask it anyhow. Do you want God to be inclined to help you? I have been crying every day, "Lord, restore this hand. Lord, heal me. Lord, help me." I would imagine Henry has been crying, "Lord, help my back." If you are sick, you want healing. If you are in financial distress, you want help. If you are having marital problems, you

want help. You want the Lord to be inclined to hear you. Turn to the book of Psalms, and let us begin with Psalm 17. I want to show you several verses throughout Psalms, and I will quote one from Daniel. Look at Psalm 17, verse 6. We want the Lord to be inclined to hear us.

Praying for God to Incline His Ear

David said, “I have called upon thee, for thou wilt hear me, O God: incline thine ear unto me, and hear my speech.” Incline thine ear. God, I want you to hear me. In Psalm 40:1, David said, “I waited patiently for the Lord, and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry.” He inclined unto me. He had an inclination to hear David. In Psalm 71, David is praying. In fact, we can read verse 1 there. He said, “In thee, O Lord, do I put my trust. Let me never be put to confusion.”

"Deliver me in thy righteousness and cause me to escape. Incline thine ear unto me and save me." I know that God is not hard of hearing. But when I pray, I sure would like to know that God is bending over, inclining Himself toward me so that He can hear every request that I make. And that's exactly what David is saying: "Incline your ear."

It is amazing how many times we run across this word in the prayers of David. "Let my prayer come before thee, incline thine ear unto my cry." He begins, "O Lord God of my salvation, I have cried day and night before thee." Then he says, "Let my prayer come before thee, incline thine ear unto my cry."

David also said, "Hear my prayer, O Lord, and let my cry come unto thee. Hide not thy face from me in the day when I am in trouble. Incline thine ear unto me in the day when I call upon and call. Answer me speedily." He wants God to hear, and he wants God to hear him now. In Psalm 116, David said, "Because He hath inclined His ear unto me, therefore will I call upon Him as long as I live." God did hear him; God inclined to him; therefore, David would call upon Him as long as he lived.

Daniel prayed, "Oh my God, incline thine ear and hear. Open thine eyes and behold our desolations in the city which is called by thy name. For we do not present our supplications before thee for

our righteousness, but for thy great mercies." Notice what he says: "incline thine ear unto us and hear."

If we want the Lord to be inclined toward us, if we want Him inclined to hear us and to help us, do you not think that the Lord would also want us to be inclined to Him—to hear Him and to obey Him? That is why Joshua said, "incline your hearts to the Lord God of Israel."

So the question has to be asked: Where do we begin, and how do we continue with heart inclinations?

The Natural Tendency of Fallen Man

Before I try to answer those questions, I want to point out the natural tendency of fallen man. Man's tendency is not to incline his heart toward that which is right and holy. His natural tendency is not to hear and heed God.

Some people say, "Well, if God said something and I knew that God told me this, I would obey Him." But if you understand the biblical doctrine of inspiration, God has spoken and told you; He said it in His Word. Inspiration is the strong, conscious in-breathing of God into men, qualifying them to give utterance to the truth, so that the words they wrote and spoke were and are indeed the very words of God Himself.

When you look at the Bible, read the Bible, or hear the Bible expounded, that is God speaking. God has inspired and breathed out these words, and the individual who will not hear the Word of God will not hear God. The individual who will not obey the Word of God will not obey God. This is God's Word. God has spoken, and He still continues to speak through this Word.

One of the greatest problems we have today in Christianity is the same problem Jeremiah had in his day. The professing people of God, the people of the covenant, would not hear God. They would not heed God's Word. It is amazing when you stop and think about professing Christians who are so disobedient and whose lives are so messed up. They will not hear the Word of God. How do we expect the unsaved and the pagan to listen when God's own professing people will not listen?

Consider the average church member, the average professing Christian. His life is in turmoil, and his family is divided. He is in debt up to his eyeballs, knows nothing of biblical principles, and merely exists month in and month out, hoping that somehow something will happen and change the misery of his life. He knows nothing concerning the blessings and curses of God from the Bible. He does not understand, nor does he really want to understand. What he wants is to live as he pleases and do as he pleases while expecting the blessings of God upon himself, even though he is in complete disobedience to God.

Which will not ever be. It is impossible to live in ignorance of God and His Word and have the blessings of God in one's life. I know you are going to say, "But Brother Weaver, don't you know that the Bible does say that God blesses the just and the unjust alike?" That is true. He does give general blessings. He does send His rain upon the just and the unjust. He does give us life. He does give us nourishment. But I will tell you this: the special blessings of God that are related in the Word of God are given to those who obey Him. The secret of the Lord is with those that obey Him, the Scripture says. There are things that God's obedient people know and experience that the average individual never knows or never experiences. If you do not believe that, just read Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, where you have the blessings and the curses, and you will find out for yourself.

Now, fallen man's tendency is to not hear God. Fallen man's tendency is to ignore God, to live his life the way he wants to live it—not the way God demands, not the way God commands. The people during the time of Jeremiah demonstrate this attitude. Jeremiah 7:24 says, "But they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear, but walked in the counsels and the imagination of their evil heart, and went backward and not forward." Notice, they would not listen, nor were they inclined to listen. They would not even turn their ear toward God.

Verse 26 says, "Yet they hearkened not unto me, nor inclined their ear, but hardened their neck, and did worse than their fathers." Again, Jeremiah 11:8 says that "they obeyed not, nor incline their ear, but walked everyone in the imagination of their evil heart."

“Therefore, I will bring upon them all the words of this covenant, which I commanded them to do, but they did them not.” That is, he is going to bring the curses upon them. But notice: they did not obey, nor did they incline their ear.

Jeremiah 17:23 says, “But they obeyed not, neither inclined their ear, but made their neck stiff, that they might not hear nor receive instruction.” Again, in Jeremiah 25:4, God says, “And the Lord has sent unto you all his servants, the prophets rising early and sending them, but you have not hearkened nor inclined your ear to hear.”

Jeremiah 34:14 says, “At the end of seven years let you go every man his brother an Hebrew, which have been sold unto thee. And when you serve these six years, thou shalt let him go free from thee. But your fathers hearkened not to me, neither inclined their ear.” Again, they would not listen.

In Jeremiah 35:15, God says, “I have sent also unto you all my servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them, saying, ‘Return you now every man from his evil way, and amend your doings, and go not after other gods to serve them. And you shall dwell in the land which I have given to you and your fathers.’ But you have not inclined your ear, nor hearkened unto me.”

Jeremiah 44:5 says, “But they hearkened not nor inclined their ear to turn from their wickedness to burn no incense unto other gods.” Over and over, God says, “Listen, they not only will not listen, they will not even lend or bend or incline their ear to hear.”

They are inclined to hear their own heart, their own imagination, and their own thoughts, but they are not inclined to hear God. As Christians, it is our duty, responsibility, obligation, and privilege to overcome, by the grace of God, the natural bent of our hearts and incline our hearts unto the one true and living God. That is our responsibility. That is why Joshua said, “incline your heart to the Lord God of Israel.”

Do you remember what he said in Proverbs 3, verses 5-8? "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not to thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes. Fear the Lord, and depart

from evil. It shall be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones." What is he saying?

If you want to prosper physically, mentally, spiritually, emotionally, maritally, nationally—any way that you want to—you incline your heart unto me; you hear me, you heed me. We should want to do exactly that which Solomon has given us direction and wisdom to do in Proverbs 3. So the question is this: We know that we have a responsibility to incline our hearts to the Lord. How do we do that? How do we begin? First of all, there must be prayer for divine help.

The Necessity of Divine Help

Do you remember what our Lord said in John 15, verse 5? "Without me you can do" how much? "Nothing." If inclining our hearts to the Lord is something—and it is—we need divine help. If our hearts are ever inclined toward God, toward His truth, toward righteousness and obedience, we must have divine help. It is not something that we can do on our own.

In 1 Kings chapter 8, Solomon is dedicating the temple to the Lord. Notice what he says in verse 57, and especially verse 58: "The Lord our God be with us as he was with our fathers. Let him not leave us nor forsake us that he may incline our hearts unto him to walk in all his ways and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments which he commanded our fathers."

Now, what did Solomon just get out of his mouth? "Let the Lord be with us. Let the Lord not forsake us." Why? "That he may incline our hearts to walk in His ways and to keep His laws and His statutes and His judgments." In other words, it may be our responsibility to incline our hearts, but it is God's ability and grace and mercy that enables us to incline our hearts. In Psalm 80, David relies upon the Lord for this over and over and over. Look at Psalm 80, beginning with verse 3.

He has said that over and over in Psalm 80: “Turn us, quicken us, enable us.” Look in verse 3: “Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine, and we shall be saved.” What did he just say? “Turn us again, O Lord.” God, you’ve got to turn me. You’ve got to incline me.

Look in verse 7: “Turn us again, O God of hosts, and cause thy face to shine, and we shall be saved.” Wow. Look in verse 18: “So will not we go back from thee, quicken us, and we will call upon thy name.” Verse 19 says, “Turn us again, O Lord God of hosts, cause thy face to shine, and we shall be saved.”

Do you realize that God must turn us from the things of the world, the things of the flesh, our idolatry, our covetousness, secret sins, and anything contrary to Him? Look in Psalm 85, verse 4: “Turn us, O God, of our salvation and cause thine anger toward us to cease.” In Lamentations 5:21, Jeremiah, watching the destruction of Jerusalem, says, “Turn thou unto us, O Lord, and we shall be turned.”

"Renew our days as of old. Turn thou unto us, and we shall be turned." First and foremost, see the absolute necessity of divine help. Isaiah 12 says that God has wrought all of our righteousness in us. We have no righteousness of our own. Isaiah 64 tells us that all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags. They are worthless, nothing, and useless. If we have any righteousness in us, it is because God has put it there in His grace and mercy. He has turned us, quickened us, and enabled us. God is the only one who can do this.

One of my favorite illustrations is found in 2 Kings 6:27. The Syrians had besieged Jerusalem, and the people were starving to death. Women were killing, cooking, and eating their own children. Moreover, the Bible tells us they were selling dove's dung for about five shekels, and people were eating dung.

Finally, a woman came to the king and cried, "Help, Lord, help, O king." She said, "This woman said to me, 'Give me that child that we may eat him today and we'll eat my child tomorrow.' So she said, 'I gave my child and we ate him and now she's taken her child and hid him.' Help, O King."

The king rent his clothes and said, "If the Lord do not help thee, whence shall I help thee out of the barn floor or out of the wine press?" All he had to give her was dung and dried grape hulls. If God does not help us, how can anyone help us?

Do you realize the absolute necessity of the grace and mercy of God in our lives? God must incline our hearts. How often have we

cried unto God, "Lord, incline my heart unto thee, incline my heart unto thy word, incline my heart unto thy people, incline my heart unto thy truth." Most people never ask God to incline their heart; they simply want to go on their merry way. If we are going to have inclined hearts toward the Lord God of Israel, we must have divine help. Secondly, there must be careful attention to hear and to heed the word of God.

Careful Attention to God's Word

When Jacob got ready to go back to Bethel, he said, “Put away those strange gods and anything and everything that reeks of idolatry. Put it all away.” We have to learn to hear and to heed. Do you realize that most of the time we are so unaccustomed to listening to the Word of God and so easily distracted that, even when we have an opportunity to hear the Word of God, we do not really listen?

It is amazing how, in churches where there have been three, four, or five hundred people, a little child will get up and go to the bathroom in the middle of the sermon. Everybody turns and watches the child walk out, just as if they had never seen a child go to the bathroom before. When was the last time you were so grasped by the Word of God and gave it such rapt attention that nothing fazed you? Everything going on around you, you totally ignored. That is what I am talking about.

The problem is this: Many times, when we have the opportunity to hear, we will not listen. It will have to be God’s grace that gives us not only the ability but also the motivation to hear and heed God’s Word. In Proverbs 5:13, without turning there, we hear the lament of one who refused to listen: “And have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor incline mine ear to them that instructed me.” I did not listen.

Young people, let me tell you something. Many times your mother and father, grandmother and grandfather, give you counsel and advice to keep you from falling into the same sins into which they fell. Many times you say, “Well, I know what is best for me. I want to do this. I want to do my own thing.” And you do.

And you always end up in trouble. One of these days you are going to be saying, “I have not listened to the voice of my teachers, and I have not inclined my ear to those who instructed me.” It will be wise to listen to those who have lived much longer than you have and have had far more experience than you have had. It would also be wise to hear the Word of God over and over and over.

Stop and think of all the times in the Bible where we are admonished to hear. Over and over, the Lord said, “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.” In Luke 8 and verse 18, He said, “Take heed therefore how you hear.” In Mark 4 and verses 23 and 24, He said, “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear,” and, “Take heed what you hear.”

Psalm 78, verse 1, says, “Give ear, O my people, to my law, and incline your ears to the words of my mouth.” Listen to me, said God. Listen to me. Give ear to me. If you want an inclined heart, you must not only have divine help; you must have a responsible hearing and heeding of the Word of God.

In Psalm 119, verse 36, David prays, “Incline mine heart unto thy testimonies and not to covetousness.” David had been praying over and over to the Lord for Him to incline His ear unto him and hear his prayers. Now David prays, “Incline mine heart unto thy testimonies and not to covetousness.” Incline my heart to Your testimonies. Let me love Your word, Your truth, Your judgments, and Your law.

Proverbs chapter 2, beginning with verse 1, says, “My son, if thou will receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; so that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart unto understanding. Yea, if thou cryest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding, if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hidden treasures, then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of thy God.” If you knew that somewhere on your property was a chest filled with gold and silver and precious jewels—you knew it for sure, though you did not know where it was—you would search for it.

It was yours if you found it. Would you take a shovel and go out and dig a couple of holes and say, “Well, I’m tired. I’ll come back

next week and dig a few more holes"? No. If you knew a treasure chest was buried on your property, you would dig until you could not dig anymore, and then you would rent a backhoe and come out and dig the thing up.

You are going to find it. You are going to give attention. Did you hear what God said? "If you want wisdom, if you want my truth, then you need to search for that truth as for silver and for gold hidden." Then he said, "Then you're going to understand wisdom." There has to be a determination to hear. In Proverbs 4:20, listen to what he said: "My son, attend unto my words, incline thine ear unto my sayings."

You remember what Isaiah wrote in Isaiah 55:3: "Incline your ear and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live, and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David." Notice: "Incline your ear, come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live." We have to learn to hear and to heed the word of God. We have to make sure that we pay attention, that we listen, and that we learn. I have often said I would love to live my life over again only if I could know as a child what I know now. Stop and think of the difference it would make in your life. We need to learn to listen.

Obedience and Practical Application

Thirdly, if we are going to incline our heart, there must not only be divine help, and we must not only learn to listen; there must always be obedience, or practical application of that which is heard. It is absolutely necessary to understand this simple concept: if you do not use the truth, you lose the truth. You can take your arm and tie it to your body for four or five months. When you untie it, you will have to learn to use that arm all over again. The muscles will have atrophied, and you will have no control over it. If you do not use the truth, you lose the truth.

Mark 4, beginning in verse 24, gives us a principle: "And He said unto them, Take heed what you hear. With what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you. And to 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."

In verse 24, He says, “Take heed what you hear. With what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you.” The word mete literally means another word for measurement. Meteyard, you remember, is in the Bible. Whatever measure you use in learning and hearing the Word of God, that same degree of truth is going to be measured back to you. You cannot study the Scripture fifteen minutes and get two hours’ worth of truth. You get fifteen minutes’ worth of truth. You cannot study the Scripture for an hour and get a month’s worth of truth. You get an hour’s worth of truth. With what measure you measure, it shall be measured to you.

“And to you that hear shall more be given.” If you want to learn more truth, you have to obey the truth that God has already given you. Why would God give you any more truth if you are not going to obey what He has already given you? “For he that hath to him shall be given.” But here is the opposite: “And he that hath not from him shall be taken even that which he hath,” or even that which he seemeth to have.

You might think you have something, but if you never use it or apply it, it will be gone. When I was a boy, I could tell you when to plant corn, cotton, and peanuts, how deep to plant them, and everything about it because I did it so often. I have not done it in years and years and years. Guess what? I have forgotten. I can get by, generally speaking, but I could not go out tomorrow and start farming, because I would have to learn all that stuff all over.

I used to know it, but I haven't used it in 50 years, so I've lost it. Some of you used to take martial arts. You say, “Man, I was good 30 years ago.” You can't do it now. I might could kick you in the knees really well. I might could even get your groin or your stomach. There's no way in the world I'm going to try to kick you in the head right now, because I'd end up on the floor with my back out and probably a broken leg.

I've had people tell me, “Well, I was an expert shooting in the army.” Yes, you were 40 years ago, and you haven't shot since. You can't do it now. If you don't use it, you lose it. That's exactly what our Lord is saying.

Now, I want you to turn to Psalm 141. Look at verse 4. You remember I told you there were negatives and positives. A lot of times these negatives and positives can be worked together. When he said, “Put away the strange gods,” that's the negative. Here's the positive: “Incline your heart.” “Ye that love the Lord hate evil.” There's the positive, loving the Lord; the negative is hating evil. “Hate the evil, love the good.” That's the negative, and there's the positive.

Now look what David prayed in Psalm 141, verse 4: “Incline not my heart to any evil thing, to practice wicked works with men that work iniquity, and let me not eat of their dainties.” I have already told you that you must pray that the Lord would incline our hearts. Ours is the responsibility; His is the ability.

First, David asks that his heart not be inclined to any evil thing. Secondly, he does not wish to practice any evil thing with wicked men. Thirdly, he does not wish to delight in anything wicked. Here is the negative prayer: “Lord, do not incline my heart to any evil thing. Do not incline my heart to practice wicked works with men that work iniquity. Lord, do not even let me delight in their wickedness, but incline my heart to You.” That is the positive. The positive may be asked first and the negative second.

David puts them both together. You remember the prayer that Jabez prayed in 1 Chronicles 4:10: “And Jabez called upon the Lord God of Israel, saying, ‘Oh, that thou wouldest bless me indeed and enlarge my coast and that thy hand might be with me and that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it might not grieve me.’” The rest of the verse says, “And the Lord God granted him all his requests.” When is the last time you prayed that God would keep you from evil? It seems to me our Lord taught us to pray, “deliver us from evil.”

Positively, look again at Psalm 119:112. After David prays, “incline not my heart to any evil thing, or to practice it with any wicked man, or to delight in it,” he says, “I have inclined my heart to perform thy statutes always, even unto the end.” He is saying, “Lord, I do not want any wicked inclinations. I want a godly, holy inclination. By Your grace and mercy, I have inclined my heart to perform Your statutes always, even to the end.”

Applications and Conclusion

That is where we need to be. We need, by God's grace, to incline our hearts always to be faithful and true to the Word of God. We must understand that it is our responsibility to incline our hearts, but also that it is God's ability that enables us to do so. Without Him, you are nothing; without Him, you can do nothing. If you think you are something and can do something without God, ask God to withhold your breath for about five minutes and see how much you can do. God has ordained the means, but He must make those means effectual.

The Bible says, “beat thy child with a rod. If thou beatest him with a rod, he shall not die, thou shalt deliver his soul from hell.”

Does that mean just because a child is whipped he is going to heaven? Of course not. If it did, one of the best means of evangelism would be to get some rods and start beating everybody we could find. Some might straighten up a little better, but understand what that means: it is with God's blessings upon the discipline. God must make that discipline effectual. Without His blessing, you could beat a child all day long until he died, and he would still go to hell. Beating a child with a rod does not save him. God's blessing upon the means is what saves him.

We must seek God's blessing upon our prayer, our study, and the preaching and teaching of the Word. We must seek His blessing upon inclining us to His Word and His truth.

The second application is this: Do you realize that it is easy to be inclined toward things we love to do? Stop and think about that. I never have to pressure you to enjoy recreation, or to shoot, vote, or fish. We do these things because we like to do them. You do not have to be pressured to eat steak and ice cream, and no child has to be pressured to eat candy; they do it because they like it. We try to get them to eat broccoli, asparagus, and cabbage, and there we have to pressure them.

The point is this: If we love the Lord and His Word, we should never have to be pressured to be faithful to the preaching and teaching of the Word of God, to read and study the Bible, to pray, or to worship the Lord. If you love Him, enjoy Him, and enjoy His

presence, you will delight yourself in Him. There is something terribly wrong with Christians who hate to attend the preaching and teaching of the Word of God, or who hate to be around God's people and spiritual things. If we love the Lord, no one will have to push us or make us incline our hearts.

We must always, at all times, seek Him and His grace and His mercy and His power to enable us and turn us and incline us to Himself. Put away your strange gods and incline your heart to the Lord God of Israel. Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee this day. We thank You for Your love and for Your mercy and for Your grace. Lord, we do pray today that You would incline our hearts. Lord, incline us negatively towards sin and evil and wickedness. Lord, may we have an aversion to those things. But Lord, incline our hearts positively to Thee and Thy law and Thy Word and the things of God, and help us to delight ourselves in Thee and rejoice in Thee. We give ourselves unto Thee and ask for Your mercy and Your grace. In Christ's name, Amen.

This program was produced by Dominion Ministry. For more information about Pastor Weaver's sermons, you may contact Dominion Ministry by mail at 7400 Abercorn, that's A-B-E-R-C-O-R-N Street, Suite 705, PMB 175, Savannah, Georgia, 31406. Or give us a call at 912-925-0995.

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CHAPTER 8

The Fruit of Sin Part 1 of 3 Rebellious Children

January 30, 2012

The Fruit of Sin: Rebellious Children

SCRIPTURE READING - Isaiah 1:1-9 (KJV)

Introduction and Scripture Reading

I am beginning a message today that will take two more weeks to finish. By the time I have finished, I hope you will have a clear understanding of where we are in this country and how we got to where we are. Today is basically an introduction, but I believe the next two messages will certainly spell everything out for you.

"The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

"Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the LORD hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they

> have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider. Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger.
>
> "They are gone away backward. Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment. Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire.
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> "Your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers. And the daughter of Zion is left as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city. Except the LORD of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah."
>
> Sin produces fruit, and it is not a very pleasant fruit. Someone has aptly said that sin will take you further than you want to go, it will keep you longer than you want to stay, and it will cost you more than you want to pay. That is certainly a very true statement.

The Principle of Sowing and Reaping

Everyone wants to sow their wild oats and wild seeds, and then leave before the harvest comes in. But that certainly is not possible. The Bible says in Galatians 6:7-8, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." God has decreed in Proverbs 1:31, "Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices." There is no escaping that which we sow. We are going to reap it. The fruit of sin is death. The Bible says in Romans 6:23, "For the wages of sin is death."

One of the greatest books outside of the Bible ever written is Pilgrim's Progress by John Bunyan. Bunyan writes, "Now I saw upon a time when he was walking in the fields, that he (that is, Pilgrim) was, as he was wont, reading in his book, and greatly distressed in his mind; and as he read, he burst out, as he had done before, crying, 'What must I do to be saved?' I saw also that he looked this way and that way, as if he would run; yet he stood still, because, as I perceived, he could not tell which way to go. I looked then and saw a man named Evangelist coming to him, and he asked, 'Wherefore dost thou cry?' He (Pilgrim) answered, 'Sir, I perceive by the book in my hand that I am condemned to die, and after that to come to judgment.'"

The Source of Temptation and Sin

"I find that I am not willing to do the first, nor am I able to do the second." Sin does bring death. We sow it. We reap it. We bring destruction upon ourselves.

In James 1:13, the Bible 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."

The word "tempt" is used in several different ways. When the Bible says, "Now it came to pass that God did tempt Abraham," the word there means to test or to try. It does not mean trying to entice someone to evil or to do something wrong. Thus, when James says, "For God cannot be tempted with evil," He is untemptable because He is absolutely and perfectly holy; "neither tempteth he any man." In other words, God does not try to entice us into sin.

Where, then, does our sin come from? James says, "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." What James has written, and what Paul has written when he says, "the wages of sin is death," is true of individuals. It is also true of families.

Sin's Impact on Individuals, Families, Churches, and Nations

Each one of us has seen families destroyed by sin. What is true of individuals and families is also true of churches. I have seen a multitude of churches destroyed because of sin. What is true of individuals, families, and churches is equally true of states. What is true of individuals, families, churches, and states is also true of nations. In fact, God said to the nation Israel in Hosea 13:9, "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself." Judgment fell upon the entire nation because of its sin and rebellion against God.

Families, churches, states, and nations are made up of individuals. God not only judges individuals; He also judges collective bodies of persons. When you look at verse 6, "From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment," it is speaking of an individual, yet it is applied to the entire nation.

Isaiah 1:1 says, "The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, kings of Judah." The Bible is teaching us clearly that we are talking about a nation. Verse 4 says, "Ah sinful nation."

"A people laden with iniquity." He gives an illustration of a sick man, a dying man, but yet he is talking about a nation. When you look at verse 2, we begin to see the wickedness and wretchedness of rebellious children in detail: "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the LORD hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me."

The Witnesses Summoned: Heaven and Earth

Notice, first of all, the witnesses summoned. We will not get out of verse 2. God says, "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth." Isn't that strange? God summons the heavens and the earth to be witnesses against His people. It appears that all of His people were in rebellion against Him, and that absolutely none would stand with Him. Therefore, He calls heaven and earth to be His witnesses. This is

clear not only in Isaiah, but also in the other prophets in the Old Testament.

If you would hold Isaiah 1, but turn over to Jeremiah chapter 5, and look at verses 1 and 2, you will see how thoroughly corrupt the people were, and their rebellion and wickedness. Here it is again in Jeremiah 5, verse 1. Look what God tells Jeremiah: "Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a man, if there be any that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth; and I will pardon it. And though they say, The LORD liveth; surely they swear falsely."

God told Jeremiah to run to and fro throughout the streets of Jerusalem. If he could find one man who sought the truth and executed judgment, God would pardon the entire nation. If he could just find one man. Then God said, "Though they say, The LORD liveth"—in other words, they knew the lingo and the language—"surely," He said, "they swear falsely." The nation as a whole had forsaken God. None would be a witness for God; none would stand with God. Therefore, God calls heaven and earth to witness against His people. Throughout Scripture, God has indeed called

Heaven and Earth as Witnesses in Scripture

For instance, let us go back in our Bibles, holding Isaiah 1, to Deuteronomy chapter 30 and verse 19. It is interesting that God gave these witnesses and stated them in the very beginning. Deuteronomy 30:19 says, “I call heaven and earth to record this day against you,” and again, “I call heaven and earth to record this day against you.” Watch: “that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live.”

What is God saying? “I’m calling my witnesses to record this before me. I’ve set before you the way of life and the way of death. I’ve set before you the way of blessing and I’ve set before you the way of cursing. And I’m urging you, I’m beseeching you, to choose life and to choose blessing.” Heaven and earth are going to witness against you. They have recorded that I have offered you life and death, blessing and cursing.

It should not be strange, then, when you get to Isaiah 1:2, that God says, “Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth,” because they recorded His instruction and His warning way back in the beginning. What is God doing when He calls heaven and earth to witness against His people? First and foremost, God calls heaven and earth to witness in expressing abhorrence to a nation’s sins and rebellion.

You and I look at the heavens, see the moon, the sun, and the stars, and think nothing of it. We look at the earth, see the trees, flowers, birds, and everything there, and think nothing of it. Yet God uses the heavens and the earth to witness against His people because of their sins and wickedness.

In Jeremiah chapter 2, notice what God says beginning with verse 11. He asks this question: “Hath a nation changed their gods, which are yet no gods? but my people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit. Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid, be ye very desolate, saith the LORD. For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.”

Now look what He said in verse 12: “Be astonished, O ye heavens,” and “be horribly afraid. And be ye very desolate, saith the LORD.” Why? Because of the rebellion and the sin of His people: “they have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and they’ve hewn them out cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water.” So God is calling the heavens to witness. In Psalm 89:11, the Scripture says, “The heavens are thine, the earth also is thine: as for the world and the fulness thereof, thou hast founded them.”

Let me tell you something: the heavens and the earth which God has created will always stand for Him. So He calls heaven and earth, number one, to witness the atrocious and wicked sins against His people. Secondly, He calls heaven and earth as witnesses for the prosecution. I want you to notice how God is calling heaven and earth as a witness for the prosecution. So even the heavens and the earth have been sinned against by the wickedness and rebellion of His people. Notice Psalm 50, beginning with verse 3. Watch carefully: “Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence.”

"A fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him. He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that he may judge his people. Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice." He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that he may judge his people. What is he doing? He is summoning heaven and earth to be witnesses against his people.

Deuteronomy 4:25 says, "When thou shalt beget children, and children's children, and ye shall have remained long in the land, and shall corrupt yourselves, and make a graven image, or the likeness of any thing, and shall do evil in the sight of the LORD thy God, to provoke him to anger: I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that ye shall soon utterly perish from off the land whereunto ye go over Jordan to possess it; ye shall not prolong your days upon it, but shall utterly be destroyed." God not only uses heaven and earth to witness against the sins of his people; he uses heaven and earth as a witness for the prosecution as well. Because heaven and earth were created by God, they will stand with him.

Third, here is an interesting thought: the heavens and earth rejoice when the sovereign God of heaven and earth exercises his government, either in salvation or condemnation. Heaven and earth are not only God's witness against the sins of his people; heaven and earth will be God's witness for the prosecution. And heaven and earth rejoice when God exercises governmental authority, whether it is for salvation or damnation.

First Chronicles 16:31 says, "Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice: and let men say among the nations, The LORD reigneth." Why? Simply because the heavens and the earth know that God reigns. Psalm 69:34-35 says, "Let the heaven and earth praise him, the seas, and every thing that moveth therein. For God will save Zion, and will build the cities of Judah: that they may dwell there, and have it in possession."

Here is God's salvation. God says, “Let the heaven and earth praise Him.” But listen to Jeremiah 4:28: “For this shall the earth mourn, and the heavens above be black: because I have spoken it, I have purposed it, and will not repent, neither will I turn back from it.” There is God's judgment. Once again, He is using the heavens

and the earth. The heavens and the earth are always going to be on the side of the Creator. We are told in Deuteronomy 10:14, “Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens is the LORD thy God's, the earth also, with all that therein is.” And in Isaiah 48:13, God said, “Mine hand also hath laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand hath spanned the heavens. When I call unto them, they stand up together.”

Whenever God calls heaven and earth, He calls them either as a witness against our sins, a witness for the prosecution, or to rejoice when He exercises His governmental authority, whether for our salvation or for our destruction. The very fact that God calls the heavens and the earth as witnesses underlines the dignity of God.

The Warning Spoken: The LORD Hath Spoken

For instance, go back to Isaiah chapter 1. Isaiah 1:2: “Hear, O heavens, give ear, O earth.” There are the witnesses summoned. Notice, secondly, the warning spoken: “For the LORD hath spoken.” Nothing else really needs to be said, for when God speaks, the entire earth should keep silence. Jeremiah said in Jeremiah 22:29, “O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the LORD.” Three times: “O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the LORD.” When God speaks, everyone and everything should listen.

Habakkuk 2:20 says, “But the LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him.” If the realization that God sovereignly and supremely reigns from on high, and that God is in His holy temple, requires the earth to keep silence before God, how much more are we required to keep silence when God speaks? And how much more are we required to keep silent when God speaks in anger and in wrath?

I can assure you, as a child, you have done things wrong and wicked. When your parent confronted you, very upset and very angry, all you could do was drop your head and keep your mouth closed. This is exactly what the Bible is telling us. When God speaks, we should be silent, especially if He is speaking in anger.

Turn to the little book of Micah, a minor prophet, right before Nahum and right after Jonah—Jonah, Micah, Nahum. In Micah 1:2

we read: “Hear, all ye people; hearken, O earth, and all that therein is: and let the Lord GOD be witness against you, the Lord from his holy temple.” Notice what He is saying: Shut up and listen. Listen to God’s controversy. Listen to God’s complaint.

Look in the book of Micah, chapter 6, beginning there with verse 1: “Hear ye now what the LORD saith; Arise, contend thou before the mountains, and let the hills hear thy voice. Hear ye, O mountains, the LORD’s controversy, and ye strong foundations of the earth: for the LORD hath a controversy with his people, and he will plead with Israel.” Notice that He is calling again for even the earth to remain silent and listen to God’s charge, God’s complaint, and God’s controversy against His people.

Now, when you look back at Isaiah 1:2: “Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the LORD hath spoken.” We know that the Lord had spoken by Moses. We know that the Lord had spoken by the prophets. And we now know that God is speaking by the prophet Isaiah. What Isaiah is about to deliver are not the words of Isaiah, but the words of God Himself. So Isaiah is speaking by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Are you listening? If Isaiah is speaking by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, then the words he speaks are God’s words, not his.

The Doctrine of Inspiration

As God's people, we need a fresh understanding of the doctrine of inspiration. Most of us say, yes, we believe the Bible is inspired; we believe it is the Word of God. But we never really think of the implications of that truth.

Inspiration is the strong, conscious in-breathing of God into men, thus qualifying them to give utterance to the truth, so that the words which they wrote and spoke were and are indeed the very words of God Himself. Inspiration is a strong, conscious in-breathing of God into men, thus qualifying them to give utterance to the truth, so that the words they spoke and wrote were and are indeed the very words of God. Inspiration means that the Bible is just as much the Word of God as if God spoke every single word out of His own mouth. When you get to 2 Timothy 3:16, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God.”

The word “inspiration” means God-breathed or God-exhaled. Inspiration means that God exhaled or breathed the very words of God. I will be honest: I literally detest those Bibles that have the words of Jesus in red. Every word in the Bible is the Word of Jesus Christ. I know what they are trying to do: Jesus spoke these words, and so they highlight them in red. The truth is, He spoke everything from Genesis 1:1 all the way to Revelation 22. He spoke every word. Every word is God's Word.

Some people try to say, “I believe in Jesus Christ, but I don't believe the Bible,” or, “I believe the Bible, but I don't believe in Jesus Christ.” That is impossible, because Jesus Christ is the living Word of God, and the Bible is the written Word of God. You cannot maintain one attitude toward Christ and a different attitude toward the Bible. You cannot have one attitude toward the Bible and a different attitude toward Jesus Christ.

Hold Isaiah 1, but turn in your Bibles to the book of John, chapter 12. Look at verse 48. You remember the Bible says this in John 1:1: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God.”

"Without him was not any thing made that was made." When you get to verse 14, "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." Jesus Christ is the living Word; the Bible is the written Word. Look how He does this in John 12:48: "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day."

"He that rejecteth me" is Christ, the living Word, and "receiveth not my words" is the written Word. The word that He has spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day. To say, "I believe the Bible, but I do not believe in Christ," is impossible. To say, "I believe in Christ, but I do not believe the Bible," is also impossible. Our Lord said that He and His Word are one. If you turn your back upon either one, you will be judged by His Word.

The Apostle Paul said to the Thessalonians, "But when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word

of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe." When Paul preached, he did not say, "That is what Paul thinks." They received it as the Word of God. The Word of God is not good advice that one may receive or reject at his leisure. It is nothing less than the Word of the Sovereign God of Heaven and Earth, who issues His commands, instructions, demands, warnings, and promises, which one rejects at his own peril. "The LORD hath spoken."

God's Word is the full, final, authoritative answer to every question. How often do we think, "Well, I know the Bible says this, but I want to do this"? When it comes to the Word of God, no one can change it, hinder it, thwart it, or stop it. It is still the Word of God. God said in Isaiah 46:10, "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure." And it is going to stand.

The Wickedness Stated: Rebellious Children

The French atheist and infidel was Voltaire, who said that within a hundred years after his death, Christianity would be gone and the Bible would be extinct. Within just a few years after his death, the American Bible Society purchased his house, set up printing presses, and printed and sent out thousands of Bibles. The Word of God is here to stay.

Go back to Isaiah chapter 1 and look at verse 2, because we are going to get started on what I want to bring to you. Notice that the witness is summoned: “Hear, O heaven, and give ear, O earth.” The warning is spoken: “The LORD hath spoken.” Now the wickedness is stated. God said, “I’ve nourished and brought up children, and they rebelled against me.”

The wickedness that abounded in God’s people is given to us in a way that we can easily, quickly, and readily comprehend and identify with: He has given it to us in the picture of rebellious children. If you have ever had a rebellious child, you know the heartache firsthand. If you have never had one, undoubtedly you know some family member or friend who has, and you are still familiar with that heartache. If you have never in your entire life had a rebellious child, you should immediately thank God and give Him the honor, praise, and glory.

It was not your instruction or wise leadership that caused your child to turn out right. You may have instructed your child and led your child, but what made your child turn out right was the blessing of God upon that instruction and leadership. For the Scripture says, "Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain." If God had not blessed your instruction and leadership, your child would have turned out just as wicked and ungodly as others.

I have known godly parents who gave their children a Christian education and raised them in church under the preaching of the gospel, yet their children still turned out rebellious and wicked. It is not education that saves; it is Jesus Christ. God does choose to save through the foolishness of preaching, but it is still Christ who must save. Let me give you an illustration.

Pastor Isaac Case began his ministry in Readfield, Maine, and stayed up in there until his death at the age of ninety-one on November 3, 1852. He gave his life to preaching the gospel. The War for Independence was over, the message of Christ was being expanded, and Pastor Case was used in planting many churches in that area. He established the First Baptist Church of Thomaston and the First Baptist Church of Readfield. He baptized innumerable people; in those days, an individual was not counted as a convert unless he was baptized and added to the church.

He had a multitude of them. In 1904, Dr. A. R. Crane presented a paper to the Maine Baptist Missionary Convention entitled, "The Baptist Ministers in Maine from 1804 to 1904." He listed Pastor Isaac Case as one of the most important pastors and said he had heard Pastor Case preach in his old age and considered him to have as much power with God as any man he had ever heard. Here was a man who had given his life to the ministry and to preaching the gospel, evidently having the power of God upon him. Dr. Crane himself, a believer and preacher, could not understand how Pastor Case could have a grown son who would not even attend church. Finally, Dr. Crane asked the son why he never attended church.

The son's answer was this: "Grace is not hereditary, depravity is."

"Grace is not hereditary, depravity is." Depravity is indeed hereditary. If God's grace is not shed abroad in one's heart, depravity will shine through at every stage. I find it interesting that Dr. Case's grown son at least knew that his rebellion and his unbelief was due to his own depravity.

Isaiah 1:2 says, "I've nourished and brought up children, and they rebelled against me." This verse indicates that God had indeed loved, provided for, and nourished His people. The Hebrew word "nourished" means to nourish in body, mind, and estate. It means to increase, promote, and to make excellent. Isn't that amazing? God nourished them. God promoted them. God wanted to make them excellent. The word "brought up" means to raise up, to bring up, to exalt, to give elevation, to give dignity, honor, and eminence. Now notice what He said: "I've brought up children, and they've rebelled against me."

God's Nourishing and Israel's Rebellion

In Exodus 4:22-23, God told Moses to say to Pharaoh, "Thus saith the LORD, Israel is my son, even my firstborn: And I say unto thee, Let my son go, that he may serve me: and if thou refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay thy son, even thy firstborn." What did God say? Israel was His son. In Deuteronomy 32:6, God asked, "Do ye thus requite the LORD, O foolish people and unwise? is not he thy father that hath bought thee? hath he not made thee, and established thee?" What is God saying?

You are what you are because of Me. You're My son, you're My child. Unlike other nations, Israel's origin was due to the divine, miraculous, supernatural grace and work of God. It was God who came to Abram in the Ur of the Chaldees. Abram was not seeking God. God came to Abram and brought him out. It was God who gave him the inheritance in the land. It was God who provided and protected Abram. It was God who sent those people down into Egypt. He multiplied them and preserved them. When He brought them out into the desert, He provided for them. When He sent them into Canaan land, He gave them victory. He allowed them to have everything that their enemies had prepared. Everything they had was due to God.

The amazing thing is this: even though Israel was what it was by the grace of God and had whatever it had only by the grace of God, in light of the fact that God had chosen them, called them, provided for them, and protected them, yet they rebelled against Him. The word "rebelled" literally means to break away, to break loose. It has the idea of dissolving a relationship with a person through violence and self-will.

Israel's sin was not just the sin of rebellion, but also the sin of idolatry, ingratitude, thanklessness, and defiance. In Isaiah chapter 1, God gives us a picture that we can very easily, clearly, quickly, and readily comprehend: the picture of rebellious children. He says, "For I've nourished and brought up children, and they've rebelled against me."

The Prodigal Son and Misused Blessings

It is the same with our children. We begat them, raised them, provided for them, taught them, educated them, gave to them, and sacrificed for them. There are many times when parents did without just so their children could have, and the children never even realized it. You sacrifice for them and give them your heart and your love. Then what do they do? They spit in your face. They rebel, demand their own way, demand to do their own thing, and will not listen. They love their own way and are filled with self, greediness, and covetousness. They have no concern for their parents, their siblings, or anyone else. All they want is what they want. They refuse to consider, repent, return, do what was right or is right, or come back to the way they were raised and taught.

All they do is create confusion, consternation, anarchy, and division. What do rebellious children become? A heartache to their parents.

One of the most heart-rending experiences is having a rebellious child whom you want to help and save, but who will not allow you to help him. He will not allow himself to be saved. He does not want salvation or help; he wants his own way. What God is saying is this: What your children do to you, you have done to Me. This is the epitome of a rebellious child, as seen in Luke 15, verse 12.

Everyone knows the story of the prodigal son. Luke 15, verse 12: "And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want."

"And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him."

Go back to verse 12 and notice the demanding, demeaning attitude of this young boy: "And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living." Here was a grown son, certainly old enough to leave home, and old enough to sin, be wicked, and be ungodly. Yet he was demanding that his father give to him.

Have you ever had a child demand something? If you do not give it, they get angry and cannot have their way. People do this all the time. I have told my children and grandchildren over and over, "I will help you as long as I can. I would break my neck to help you, but if you think for one minute that I am going to subsidize your sin, rebellion, and wickedness, you are mistaken."

There is a principle in Scripture: He who sins must suffer. If you think I will take whatever little bit God has given me and give it to a rebellious child, you have another thought coming. I am not going to do that. My responsibility is to my wife. My children and grandchildren are grown, and if they are going to sin, they are going to sin by themselves and without me.

The point I am trying to make is this: what our children do to us, we do to God. Before I read Jeremiah 5, let me ask you a question: Do you not think it was absolutely wicked, wrong, and rebellious for this young man to demand that his father give to him?

When the prodigal received his inheritance—what his father had worked for and saved—what did he do? He took it and threw it all away. He had nothing and wanted to eat with a swine, with a husk.

Consider what this boy did: he took all the blessings of his father, abused and misused every one of those blessings, and was totally ungrateful, unthankful, and wicked.

Does God give us air to breathe? Sure He does. Does God give us food to eat? Yes, He does. Does God give us money to spend? Some have far more than others; I understand that. But everything that we have is from God. People do exactly the same thing to our Heavenly Father that our children do to us.

Look in Jeremiah chapter 5, at verse 7. Look what God says to Judah and Jerusalem: “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, they then committed adultery, and assembled themselves by troops in the harlots' houses. They were as fed horses in the morning: every one neighed after his neighbour'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?”

What is He saying? You took everything that I gave you in love, and you turned around and perverted it and misused it to sin and rebel against Me. God gave us health, strength, and life. Why did God do that? In order that we might honor Him, worship Him, praise Him, and serve Him.

But what do we do? We take everything that He has given us and pervert it, turning it into an avenue and a sphere of sin and wickedness. “I've nourished and brought up children,” said God, “but they've rebelled against me.”

God's Longing to Bless the Obedient

Now, as a parent, be honest; you do not have to answer this out loud. Would you be more willing to give and to help a loving, obedient, and respectful child? Or would you be more willing to give and to help one who is despiteful, wicked, and fights against you every turn of life? Which would you be more willing to help? I think I know the answer to that. It is easier to help a child who wants to do what is right, who is loving, kind, and respectful. It is very difficult to help one who is the opposite. Turn to Psalm 81. As you turn to Psalm 81, I want to remind you of what God said.

He said, “I have nourished and brought up children, but they’ve rebelled against Me.”

I ask you those questions for a reason: Would you rather help an obedient, loving, respectful child, or one who is hateful, wicked, and rebellious? Here is the answer. You know that, as a parent, you are going to help the obedient, respectful, and loving child. Here is the problem: You want to help the other child, but he will not let you help him, because he is not going to want to do what is right.

Now look at what God said to His people. Look in Psalm 81, beginning with verse 10: “I am the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt: open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.” What a blessing! God says all you have to do is open your mouth wide.

Like a mother bird poking that worm down her baby bird’s beak, God says, “Open your mouth wide. I’ll pour the blessings in.” But verse 11 says, “But my people would not hearken to my voice; and Israel would none of me. So I gave them up unto their own hearts’ lust: and they walked in their own counsels.”

Now listen to what this loving parent said: “Oh that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways! I should soon have subdued their enemies, and turned my hand against their adversaries. The haters of the LORD should have submitted themselves unto him: but their time should have endured for ever. He should have fed them also with the finest of the wheat: and with honey out of the rock should I have satisfied thee.”

God said, “I wanted to do this. But you would not listen. You rebelled.” If Israel had listened and obeyed, He would have subdued her enemies; the haters of the Lord would have submitted themselves to Him; and He would have fed her with honey and with the finest of wheat. But she would not listen.

How our Heavenly Father longed to do for Israel! He wanted to sustain, nourish, and defend her. But because of her sins and rebellion, He gave her over to chastisement, servitude, and punishment.

Here is a good lesson for our children: if they really want their parents to help them, they need to learn submission, obedience,

honor, and respect. Here is a lesson for every Christian: if we really want our Heavenly Father to help us, defend us, and provide for us, then we need to learn submission, obedience, honor, and respect. Our Heavenly Father will always help those who are submissive and obedient to Him, and He will always chastise and discipline those who are otherwise.

“ Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: the LORD hath spoken. I have nourished and brought up children, and they've rebelled against me.” What God said of an individual, He applies to the nation.

Father, I pray that You would help us today. Give us understanding, grace, and mercy. Help us, Lord, not to be rebellious as physical children, but help us not to be rebellious as spiritual children.

May we realize that Thy Word is truth, and submit, bow to Thee, honor Thee, and respect Thee, for Thou art our God and our Father. Give us grace, Lord, that we may serve Thee acceptably with reverence and godly fear. Speak to those of our children who are lost, those still in rebellion; deal in their hearts. We commit them unto You and ask for Your mercy and grace. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 9

The Greatest Counsel

February 3, 2012

SCRIPTURE READING - Psalm 16:1-11 (KJV)

Introduction: The Need for Perfect Counsel

All right, let's open our Bibles, if we would please, to Psalm 16. Psalm 16. I'm going to preach on that which Hobie began a little while ago. Psalm 16. Notice, if you would please, beginning with verse 1. We'll read the entire Psalm. It's very, very brief. Only 11 verses. I'm going to bring a message which I've entitled, "The Greatest Counsel." The Greatest Counsel. Notice Psalm 16 verse 1, David says, "Preserve me, O God, for in thee do I put my trust."

"O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, Thou art my Lord: 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."

Psalm 16. Notice, if you would please, beginning with verse 1, we'll read the entire Psalm. It's very, very brief. Only 11 verses. I'm going to bring a message which I've entitled "The Greatest Counsel," the greatest counsel. Notice Psalm 16 verse 1. David

> says, "Preserve me, O God, for in thee do I put my trust. O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, Thou art my Lord: 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."
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> "Their sorrows shall be multiplied that hasten after another god: their drink offerings of blood will I not offer, nor take up their names into my lips. The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot. The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage. I will bless the Lord, who hath given me counsel."
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> "My reins also instruct me in the night seasons. I have set the Lord always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope. For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore."
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> Now I'll call your attention to verse 7. Look at it if you would please. David said, "I will bless the Lord, who hath given me counsel: my reins also instruct me in the night seasons." I want you to think for a moment of the families, the churches, the individuals that are in turmoil and in trouble in this country. We have individuals, families, churches, as well as states and our nation that really do not know which way to turn.

If you would take any phone book, you will find in the yellow pages numerous counselors. The interesting thing is that there are so many counselors offering their services. The question has to be asked: to whom do we listen? You can also ask: What would you give to have absolutely perfect counsel? Can you imagine the heartache, trouble, and turmoil that you could save yourself if you had perfect counsel? If you had perfect counsel and followed it, then you could never make a mistake or a wrong move.

Can you imagine how many millions of people have lost money in the stock market just because of bad counsel? Think of the people who have lost money in plenty of places because of bad counsel,

including those who wish they had never listened to or heard the name of Bernie Madoff.

The Fool Rejects Counsel

Think about the husbands, wives, children, and entire families that have been divorced or separated and are at odds with each other, refusing even to speak, all because of bad and wicked counsel. It really boils down to this: If you had perfect counsel and followed it, you would not have any problems. You would always be right and always do right.

One of our problems is that we truly do not wish to listen to counsel of any kind, much less perfect counsel. Many people—in fact, I would venture to say most people who go to counseling—do not really want to be counseled. What they want is for the counselor to put a stamp of approval upon what they have already determined to do. They have made up their minds and simply want approval of that decision. Trying to talk them out of their determined course of action is like talking to a stone wall.

In Proverbs 12 and verse 15, we read: “The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise.” The way of a fool is right in his own eyes. A fool in the Bible is not a mentally deficient person; a fool is someone who will not listen, heed, or hear godly counsel. The Bible tells us in Proverbs 23 and verse 9, “Speak not in the ears of a fool: for he will despise the wisdom of thy words.” A fool is a fool simply because he will not listen to anyone.

He will not follow instruction. We are forbidden in the Bible to emulate fools. Proverbs 18:2 says, "A fool hath no delight in understanding, but that his heart may discover itself." The only thing a fool is interested in is doing what he wants to do, having a good time, and pleasing himself. Proverbs 24:7 says, "Wisdom is too high for a fool: he openeth not his mouth in the gate." In other words, he cannot grasp wisdom.

When you look at Psalm 16, remember that it speaks not only of David, but also of our Lord. Neither David nor our Lord were fools. Each one listened to counsel and obeyed. Although Psalm 16 was written by David and applies to David, it also applies to the greater

David, the Lord Jesus Christ. Verse 10 says, "For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." That verse is quoted in Acts 2:27 as applying directly to Jesus Christ: "Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." Psalm 16 is about our Lord as well.

In verse 2 we read, "O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, Thou art my Lord: 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."

Psalm 16 Applies to Christ

Even the perfect obedience of God the Son did not extend to God the Father. God the Father was not increased in any way by the obedience of the Son, but His obedience extended to the saints that are in the earth. We were the ones who benefited from the person and work of Christ.

Verse 9 says, “Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope.” That verse refers to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Verse 11 says, “Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore,” speaking of the resurrection, ascension, and exaltation of Christ. Thus verses 2 and 3 speak of Christ, as do verses 9, 10, and 11. But how does verse 7 apply to Christ? He says, “I will bless the Lord, who hath given me counsel: my reins also instruct me in the night seasons.” We can understand how that verse applies to David and to each one of us, but how does it apply to Jesus Christ?

Christ Received and Obeyed the Father's Counsel

You have to remember one main truth: Jesus Christ is one person with two natures. He is not two persons; He is one person with two natures. He has the nature of God, since He is God, and He has the nature of man, since He is man.

Jesus Christ came as the servant of the Father. Over and over in the New Testament, we read that He was sent by the Father. In other words, Jesus Christ came as the Father’s servant. As you read through the New Testament, the phrase most frequently applied to

Christ by Christ Himself is that He is the sent one. Jesus Christ, then, is the sent one; He came as a servant of the Father. Therefore, as the Son of Man, the servant of the Father, and the sent one, Christ could rightfully and truthfully say in John 14:28, “My Father is greater than I.”

Since Jesus Christ is God, He could just as rightfully and truthfully say in John 10:30, “I and my Father are one.” The Bible says it like this in 1 Timothy 3:16: “And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.” Without all controversy, great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh.

In John 1:1, we read, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” “The same was in the beginning with God.” Since He is God, He is the Creator. Verse 3 says, “All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.” Thus, in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Verse 14 says, “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us. And we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

So Jesus Christ is God. Listen carefully. Jesus Christ is not part of God, or part God, or little God. No, the answer is Jesus Christ is God. He is God manifested in the flesh. He was sent of the Father, and He came into this world born of a virgin. He grew as a child, and in that growth He received counsel and instruction of the Father.

How do we know that? Luke 2:40 says, “And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him.” Jesus Christ came as a servant. He is the Son of Man as well as God in the flesh, but He grew as a child and received counsel from His Father as a child. Now that is one verse, but let us read on.

Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover. When he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast. When they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it. Supposing him to have been in

the company, they went a day's journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance. When they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions.

All that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers. When they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing. And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business? And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them.

He went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man. If you go back to verse 40, the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him. How did Jesus Christ increase in wisdom? How did He grow? How did He wax strong in spirit? How did He become filled with wisdom?

The answer is, He listened to the counsel of His Father. As a child, He grew into manhood, obeying His Father and doing His Father's will. Jesus Christ said, I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. Why did He come? He came to obey the Father. Jesus Christ received perfect counsel from the Father, and He obeyed that counsel perfectly.

John Gill wrote: "For though he himself is the Counsellor with respect to his people, yet as man he received counsel from God, and the spirit of counsel rested upon him, and fitted him for and directed him in the execution of his prophetic office. For the doctrine he taught was not his own, but his Father's, and he said nothing of himself but what his Father taught him, and instructed him to speak."

John Gill says very clearly, based upon the Scriptures—and he included about ten Scriptures here—that Christ received counsel from His Father and obeyed: “And he also gave him counsel about the execution of his priestly office, or about his sufferings and death,

drinking of the cup which he with submission to the divine will desired might pass from him, but having advice in this matter most cheerfully and courageously yielded to take it."

Isaiah 11 gives a prophecy concerning Christ: "And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots." This is talking about Christ. One of the names for the Messiah, one of the names for Jesus Christ in the Bible, is the Branch. "And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots."

Then the passage says, "And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord; And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: But with righteousness shall he judge." Notice that it is the spirit of wisdom and the spirit of counsel that is to be upon Jesus Christ. Our Lord's obedience, then, to this divine counsel was absolutely perfect. Let us see how perfect it was.

Christ's Perfect Obedience and Exaltation

In John 8 and verse 46, Jesus Christ looked at His enemies and said, "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" He did not say that to His friends; He asked it of His enemies. "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" Which of them could show one place—just one place—where He violated the law of God? Not man's interpretation of the law, but a violation of the law of God. Which of them could convict Him of such a violation? No one answered a word.

If His enemies could have shown it, they would have shown it, for they desired to discredit Him totally and completely. In fact, our Lord went on to say in John 8 and verse 29, "He that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone;" and, "for I do always those things that please him." On the one hand, Christ says no one can convict Him of sin. On the other hand, Christ says that He only always does those things which please Him.

So perfect counsel and perfect obedience were paramount in our Lord's life. Philippians 2 shows how our Lord was rewarded for His

perfect obedience as He followed that perfect counsel. Christ is in view here:

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Notice especially that He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. So here, this perfect obedience is rewarded with the ascension and the exaltation. Jesus Christ now has absolute and total dominion.

Isaiah 9:6 says: "For unto us a child is born." How did that child get born? "Unto us a son is given." Had not God given His Son, no child would have been born. But God gave His Son. "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government," that is total dominion, "shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever."

“The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.” He is now Counsellor. He who received perfect counsel and obeyed perfect counsel is now the great Counsellor.

He is the living Word of God, and the Bible is the written Word of God. Jesus Christ is wisdom incarnate. Here is something that ought to thrill your heart. The Bible tells us in 1 Corinthians 1:30, “But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.” “But of him,”

that is, of the Father, “are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom.”

Do you realize that I do not care how dumb you are intellectually or how the world looks down upon you: if you have been saved by the grace of God, you have been given the wisdom of Jesus Christ? That is why, in 1 Corinthians chapter 1, those who are despised and looked down upon by the world are called of God and chosen of God to confound the mighty and confound the wise. Why? Because the wisdom of God is wiser.

The Believer's Heritage and Counsel

In fact, the Scripture says, “The foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of man.” We have been made wisdom in Christ. We who have no wisdom have been given wisdom in Christ.

Now, how does this apply to us? We understand how it applies to Jesus Christ: He received perfect wisdom and obeyed perfectly. How did it apply to David, and how does it apply to us? Let us go back to Psalm 16, and to verse 6. David wrote, “The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places.” “Yea, I have a goodly heritage. I will bless the Lord, who hath given me counsel: my reins also instruct me in the night seasons.”

The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup. David is claiming here that the Lord is his portion, and he states that he has a good heritage. What was this heritage that David is saying is goodly? What was his heritage as a child of God? He said, “I have a goodly heritage.”

"Lines have fallen to me in pleasant places." Let us examine the heritage David is talking about as a child of God. Romans 9:4-5 says, "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 for ever. Amen."

It was Israel that received the law of God, the covenants, the worship, and the service. It was not the Assyrians. It was not the Babylonians. It was not the Moabites. It was not the Jebusites, the Hivites, or the Hittites. It was only Israel. Romans 3:1-2 asks, "What

advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God." What advantage did Judah and Israel have over all the other nations? "Chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God." They had the written Word of God.

We have seen how Jesus Christ has made in us wisdom because He is expressly called the wisdom of God. But consider something that may have been overlooked in reading the Bible. In Luke 11:49, while pronouncing woes upon the Pharisees and the Sadducees, Jesus says, "Therefore also said the wisdom of God, I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they shall slay and persecute."

Christ is quoting the Scripture. He said, "Therefore also said the wisdom of God." Jesus Christ is the living wisdom of God, and the Bible is the written wisdom of God. The whole of Scripture is referred to by Jesus Christ as the wisdom of God. Therefore, it may accurately be said that he who neglects Jesus Christ neglects wisdom, salvation, and deliverance. It may equally be said that he who also neglects the Word of God neglects wisdom, salvation, and deliverance. The source of our counsel and the source of our wisdom is twofold: Christ, the living Word, and the Bible, the written Word.

That is why 2 Timothy 2:15 commands us—listen carefully—“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” Study to show yourself approved unto God.

Let me clear up a little misconception. I have heard a few well-meaning Christians who wanted really and truly to appear super pious and super spiritual. I am always cautious of anyone who wants to appear super pious and super spiritual. Whenever you see television preachers with sweet, syrupy smiles on their faces all the time, walking around with that sweet, syrupy smile, you had better be careful.

I have news for you: I do not always walk around with a smile on my face. I do not, and neither do you. There are things that concern you and things that you do not want to smile about. Yet I have heard

well-meaning Christians say they did not have to study or read their Bibles because the Spirit teaches them and the Holy Spirit brings things to their minds. There is a verse that sounds similar to that in Scripture.

Let me quote it for you. In John 14:26, our Lord said, "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things." He did say that, but He did not stop there: "He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." How can the Holy Spirit bring truths to your remembrance if you have never read them? If you have never studied them? If you have never thought about them? If you have never meditated on them? How can you remember that which you have never experienced? How can you remember that which you have never read?

David said, "I have a goodly heritage." What was his goodly heritage? First, he had the law and the covenants; he read them and knew them both. You cannot remember what you have never read. You cannot remember what you have never experienced. How in the world do you know whether you have a goodly heritage if you have never read it? Secondly, David said, if you look back in Psalm 16:7—look at it—"I will bless the Lord, who hath given me counsel: my reins also instruct me in the night seasons." In Hebrew, the word "night" is actually plural: "in the nights seasons." In other words, it was not merely one night, but a multitude of nights.

Now a question has to be asked. What does David mean when he says, "My reins also instruct me in the night season"? The Hebrew word reins literally means kidneys. Some of us understand that very well at 10, 2, and 4—and I am not talking about in the daytime. But the word reins is usually a word referring to the secret inner workings in man. It actually refers to his heart and emotions.

For instance, consider two verses in Jeremiah. Both verses show how the word reins refers to the innermost workings of man. In Jeremiah 17:10, God 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." When the Lord searches the heart and tries the reins, He is trying the innermost workings of man—our secret thoughts and imaginations. Then, in Jeremiah 20:12, we read, "But,

O Lord of hosts, that triest the righteous, and seest the reins and the heart. Let me see thy vengeance on them: for unto thee have I opened my cause." There are many such passages, but these two make the point.

Notice that it is God who sees the reins. He sees the innermost workings of man's thoughts. So David says, "my reins also instruct me in the night seasons."

What does he mean by that? David could mean simply that he meditates upon his bed during the night seasons. It is not only during the daytime that he thinks about God and His Word; it is during the nighttime as well. While others may be sleeping, David is saying, my mind is working. My mind is fixed upon the things of God. He tries to improve the silence, the leisure, and the solitude of the night with holy meditations, and he tries to excite his affections toward God. David may simply have been lying there meditating upon God and upon His Word. I do not doubt that David did what has been described.

However, this verse could also refer to the teaching and illumination of the Holy Spirit. It is God who must educate us, and it is God who must illuminate our understanding. The Apostle Paul wrote Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:7, "Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things." What did Paul tell Timothy? He was to think about what Paul had written, meditate upon it, and study it. As he studied, thought, and meditated, the Lord gave understanding in all things. It is not study alone; God has to open our eyes. It is our responsibility to study.

It is God's grace and mercy that illuminates our mind and enables us to understand. The truth is really simple. If God does not give us understanding, if He does not illuminate our mind to apply the truth and the wisdom of God, all of our study is useless. So David could not only be referring, in verse 7, to his own personal meditations, but he also could be referring to the work of God the Holy Spirit, even as he lay in bed at night.

God is not confined to the daytime. Notice Job 33:14: "For God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not." Do you realize that God can speak to you at times and you do not even know it is

God speaking to you, but He does? He says, "For God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not." Then notice: "In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed; Then he openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction, That he may withdraw man from his purpose, and hide pride from man." He is just as capable of speaking in the night. He opens our ears. He seals our instruction.

There is a similar verse in the New Testament. In John 16:13–14, our Lord is talking about the ministry of the Holy Spirit: "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you." What did He say? The Holy Spirit will guide you into truth.

He is not going to open your mind to understand something that you have never heard, never read, or never studied. No. He will guide you in the truth that is true. He will not speak of Himself. He will show you whatsoever He has received of Christ. What have we received of Christ? We have received His Word. What is the Holy Spirit going to teach us? He is going to teach us His Word.

This is very important. Here is illumination; here is the definition: Illumination is the ministry of the Holy Spirit of God whereby He guides us to understand previously revealed truth. What?

Illumination is the ministry of the Holy Spirit whereby He guides us to understand previously revealed truth. It is not revelation. When you say, “Let me show you what the Holy Spirit just revealed to me,” the Holy Spirit did not reveal anything new to you. He may have illuminated your mind to understand previously revealed truth. Revelation is an act of God whereby God reveals to the human mind things never known before.

The Ministry of Illumination

For instance, who wrote the first five books of the Bible? Moses. What is in the first three chapters of Genesis? Creation. How did Moses know what happened? He did not live then; he was not around. Moses knew because God revealed it to him, and he penned

it. Revelation is the act of God whereby God reveals truth never known before to the human mind.

There is no further revelation. The Bible says very clearly in Hebrews chapter 1 that God in these last days has spoken to us by His Son. If you say that God is giving additional revelation today, you are saying that Jesus Christ is not the full and final revelation of God and that the Bible is not the complete Word of God. Illumination means that the Holy Spirit guides us to understand what He has already revealed. He powerfully instructs and convincingly teaches us how to walk, how to live, and how to apply the wisdom God has already given us in this perfect counsel.

Sometimes God does it with a very strong hand. Isaiah 8:11 says, "For the Lord spake thus to me with a strong hand, and instructed me that I should not walk in the way of this people." God often instructs us in a very strong way. That instruction comes through this Word. He brings things to our remembrance that we have read and studied. There have been times when I have been talking with and counseling people, and suddenly a verse comes to mind that I probably had not read in a long time. It is the perfect verse needed to help that individual. But it cannot come to mind if I do not read it, study it, and know it. Here is what Charles Haddon Spurgeon said, based upon Psalm 16, verse 7.

He said, "By the reins understand the inner man, the affections and the feelings. The communion of the soul with God brings to it an inner spiritual wisdom, which in still seasons is revealed to itself. Our Redeemer spent many nights alone upon the mountain, and we may readily conceive that together with his fellowship with heaven, he carried on a profitable commerce with himself, reviewing his experience, forecasting his work, and considering his position."

"Great generals fight their battles in their own mind long before the trumpet sounds, and so did our Lord win our battle on His knees before He gained it on the cross. It is a gracious habit after taking counsel from above to take counsel within. Wise men see more with their eyes shut by night than fools can see by day with their eyes open. He who learns from God and so gets the seed, will soon find wisdom within himself growing in the garden of his soul."

"Thine ears shall hear a voice behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left." The night seasons which the sinner chooses for his sins are the hallowed hours of quiet when believers hear soft still voices from heaven and of the heavenly life within themselves. Spurgeon is saying that great generals fight their battles in their minds long before the trumpet sounds, and God gives us understanding as we study and read His perfect counsel.

Applications: Hear and Obey God's Counsel

So the questions you need to ask are these: Have you been counseled by the Lord and His Word? Have you received this counsel, or have you refused to listen? There are so many who could save themselves so many heartaches if they would hear, heed, and obey the Word of God. God gives us counsel to deliver us from our sins. Most of us have children, and it grieves and breaks our hearts when we see them committing some of the same sins we committed. We have done everything we can to stop them and teach them, yet they still refuse to hear and suffer the consequences. We could say to them, "How many heartaches I could save you if you would just listen to your dad or just listen to your mother."

Do you not know that is why God gave us this book? "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works." How in the world can you refuse the counsel of God? God tells you how to live. He tells you how to invest, what real money is, how to treat your wife and husband, how to discipline your children, and how to conduct yourself. He tells you everything that you need to know. The question is, will you listen to His counsel?

Our Heavenly Father is gracious and kind to provide everything we need to walk through this life. We need to learn to obey. In 2 Peter 1:3, we read, "According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue." According as His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness. If you want to know how to live, or how to be

godly, God has given us that through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue. God has given us everything we need.

We have the greatest counsel from the greatest Counsellor. The counsel of God is ours if we will just hear and obey. In Ezekiel 33:11, God said, “Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?” Why are you going this way?

I've given you everything you need to avoid that. Why would we continue in sin? Why would we continue in practices and habits that destroy us when God has told us exactly how to change things and how to live our lives pleasing and honoring to Him?

Here's a second application. When we see, hear, and obey, the outcome will be a heart rightly affected and more disposed to praise God because His grace has inclined our hearts to love Him and serve Him. I don't know if this has ever affected you, but it has affected me.

Alice and I enjoy watching the History Channel, though you always have to take it with a grain of salt. When they show some of these natives, some of these foreign people, their gods and religions, and what they do to themselves and each other, how can you not say, "Thank God You've given me Your Word. Thank God You've opened my understanding. Thank God I don't think like that. I don't act like that. I don't live like that. I don't want to be like that."

What a joy and blessing it is when you realize that God has given you truth. He has not only given you truth; He has given you a mind to understand, comprehend, and apply it. If that doesn't make you want to praise Him, I don't know what will. You don't have to go to foreign lands.

Just look in Atlanta, Georgia, and Washington, D.C., and say, "Thank God we don't think like those reprobates."

We have the perfect counsel from the perfect Counsellor. If Jesus Christ, our Lord, who is not only perfect God but perfect man, needed to listen to the counsel of His Father, how much more do you and I need to hear and heed that counsel? If we want to be like Christ, holy and godly, and able to say with Christ, "For I do always

those things that please him," we need to hear His counsel and obey His Word. We have the perfect counsel and the perfect Counsellor.

I don't care what your problems are—financial, family, or personal. His Word has the answer. If you neglect it, you will go on with your problems and heartaches. No problem is ever resolved unless you resolve it scripturally and biblically. Once it is resolved biblically, it is taken care of.

We have the perfect counsel and the perfect Counsellor; we just need to obey. Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we ask for Your grace and mercy in our lives. Thank You for Your Word, for Jesus Christ, and for the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Give us grace to obey, help us to live for Thee, and to honor Thee in every area of our lives. In Christ's name, we ask it. Amen.

CHAPTER 10

Are You Shamed?

February 8, 2012

Introduction: The Question of Shame

David said in his prayer, “Let my heart be sound in thy statutes, that I be not ashamed.” Think about it: “Let my heart be sound in thy statutes, that I be not ashamed.” Unhappily, each one of us has often been told, “You should be ashamed,” or “You should be ashamed of yourself.”

Having heard those words even as a child, we understood that we had done something wrong, wicked, or unethical. Consequently, we would hang our heads in shame and awe, seek to escape the presence of our parents, and hope that they would soon forget the incident. In those days, even as children, we were embarrassed, humiliated, and ashamed of our conduct—and hopefully it was not just because we had been caught, but because we had done something wrong. It was pointed out to us.

As adults, we have done things that are wrong and for which we are now ashamed. In fact, David prayed, “Remember not the sins of my youth.” The truth of the matter is this: We have not only done

things for which we are ashamed; we have done things that we do not want our family and friends to learn about. Whether you call them mistakes, misdeeds, or sins, it is still the same thing.

Some of us have done things that, even after many years have passed and our misdeeds and sins are shrouded with time, still cause us to hang our heads in shame when they come back to our minds. We say, “I wish I’d never done that,” or “I wish I did not have that attitude,” or “I wish that had not happened.” But the truth of the matter is that it did happen. We have that attitude, and now we are ashamed.

If I were to ask you today whether you have ever done anything for which you are ashamed, and tell you to raise your hand, I can assure you every hand would be raised. Every wife could tell on her husband, and every husband could tell on his wife. Children could tell on their parents, and parents could tell on their children. We understand what it means to be ashamed.

Look back down at Psalm 119 and verse 80. David said, “Let my heart be sound in thy statutes, that I be not ashamed.” So the question that is pressing today, that is set before us by our text, is this: Are we ashamed of our lack of knowledge, our lack of understanding, and our lack of application of the Word of God to our lives? Our text clearly indicates that it is possible to be shamed for one's lack of soundness in the Word of God. Now if David wanted to be sound in God's statutes, that he not be ashamed, then the opposite is also true: When we are not sound in God's statutes, then we have a reason to be ashamed.

The Meaning of a Sound Heart

Let's consider the word “sound.” First of all, David said, “Let my heart be sound in thy statutes.” The Hebrew word for “sound” literally means to be whole, to be complete, to be entire, to be sound, to be upright, to be perfect, to be mature, without blemish, and without spot. It means one who is in accord with truth and fact.

Now, I want to show you how this same word is translated in our King James Bibles. This is the same Hebrew word that is translated as “sound” in Psalm 119 and verse 80. In Genesis 6 and verse 9, the

Bible says: “These are the generations of Noah: Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God.”

Now the word "perfect" in verse 9 is the same Hebrew word that is translated as "sound" in Psalm 119 verse 80. So the Bible says that Noah was a just man and sound in his generations, and Noah walked with God. If you look in Deuteronomy chapter 18, the fifth book in the Old Testament, the fifth book of the Law, Deuteronomy chapter 18, and look at verse 13. Deuteronomy 18 verse 13. The Word of God says, "Thou shalt be perfect with the Lord thy God." Now, it's the same Hebrew word. Literally, "Thou shalt be sound with the Lord thy God." Now, if you would turn right over to the book of Job, Job chapter 1, right before the book of Psalms, Job chapter 1, I want to show you the same root word and how it is translated. It is not the same exact word, but it is from the same root word. Notice, if you would please, Job 1, and look at verse 1. Job 1, verse 1. "There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God and eschewed evil."

Now the word "perfect" is the word "sound." "And that man was sound and upright, one that feared God and eschewed evil." I love that word "eschewed." It literally means to spit out. You can't stomach it. You can't swallow it. Spit evil out. If you'll skip down to verse 8, here is the same word again. "And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect"—or a sound—"and upright man, one that feareth God and escheweth evil."

Now, let me point something out that is very important for you to understand. When the Bible is talking about Noah and Job being perfect men, God is not saying that these men are sinless. No, they were sinners. Noah was a sinner; he got drunk. Job was a sinner; he had a false idea concerning himself and concerning God as well. So when the Bible says that these men were perfect men, He is not using the word "perfect" in the sense of sinlessness. The state of being sinless is not attainable in this life. It is only attainable in immortality and in glory. The Bible says very plainly, "There are none that sinneth not."

Even Solomon said in all of his wisdom that everyone sins. Everyone has gone out of the way. If you would look in your Bibles to

the book of 1 John chapter 1, let me emphasize this. 1 John chapter 1 and notice, if you would please, first of all, verse 8. 1 John chapter 1 and verse 8.

Soundness and Sinlessness Distinguished

It is important to see these next two verses, because they enlighten us as to the fact that no individuals are sinless in this life. The only sinless individual, of course, is Jesus Christ. Outside of Christ, no one is sinless. First John 1:8 says, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."

Here the Bible is talking about our sin nature—that is, our inherited depraved nature, the sin imputed to us as sinners because we are descendants of Adam and were in his loins. If we say that we do not have a sin nature, God says we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. In verse 10, he says, "If we say that we have not sinned"—that is, committed actual sin—"we make Him a liar, and the truth is not in us." The reason we have actual sin is that we have imputed sin. We have a sin nature, and because we are sinners, we actually sin. When someone tells you that he is sinless, God says he is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

I remember the first time I met a man who claimed to be sinless. He owned a dry-cleaning establishment, and I knew he was a professing Christian. I carried a suit to him to be cleaned and said, "Isn't it wonderful to have your sins forgiven?" He responded, "I don't know, I haven't sinned in 10 years." When I finally picked my jaw up from the floor, I said, "Well, you just broke your record, for you just did—you lied. The Scripture says, 'If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and the truth is not in us.' You just sinned, you just lied, and you called God a liar."

After that, he did not want my business, but that is all right too. Jesus Christ is the only sinless individual. All others are sinners. Noah and Job were sinners, but they were called perfect in this sense: they walked soundly and uprightly, in accord with God's truth; they were men who feared God and hated evil.

These two things go together. They are actually different sides of one coin: you fear God and you hate evil. We do not reach our state

of sinlessness as children of God until we are in eternity in glory. So David said—and I want you to think this sentence through with me, this prayer request—“Let my heart be sound in thy statutes, that I not be ashamed.” David wanted his heart to be sound.

The Necessity of a Sound Heart for Sound Wisdom

Psalm 51 gives us almost the same sense of the word and the same truth. This is the Psalm in which David is confessing and acknowledging his sin. He says in Psalm 51 and verse 10, “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.” What he wanted was a clean heart. David had sinned; therefore, his heart was unclean. David had sinned; therefore, his heart was unsound. He was praying that God would restore in him not just a clean and pure heart, but an undivided heart—one that was mature and upright and walked according to the truth of God.

In the book of Proverbs, chapter 14 and verse 30, we are told, “A sound heart is the life of the flesh, but envy is the rottenness of the bones.” What is true physically is also true spiritually. A sound heart is indeed life to the flesh physically, while an unsound heart very clearly means death. A sound heart is life to the soul; an unsound heart would be basically death to the soul.

James wrote in James 1 and verse 8, “A double-minded man is unstable in all of his ways.” A double-minded man has a divided mind; he flip-flops. We could say he is just a politician, couldn’t we? James could equally have said, “A double-hearted man is unstable in all his ways,” or, “A man with an unsound heart is unstable in all his ways.” A sound heart is therefore set in contrast to a double or deceitful heart. So when David said, “Let my heart be sound,” what was he saying? “I do not want an unclean heart. I do not want an impure heart. I do not want a divided heart. I do not want an unsound heart.” Now let us see clearly why it is necessary that we have a sound heart.

Consider what God does for us. Proverbs 2:6-7 says, "For the Lord giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding. He"—that is, God—"layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous." He is "a buckler to them that walk uprightly."

Note what kind of wisdom God lays up for the righteous. It is sound wisdom—not merely wisdom, and not the wisdom of the world, which is contrary to God. It is sound wisdom that He lays up. In Proverbs 3:21, He says, "My son, let not them depart from thine eyes: keep sound wisdom and discretion." God lays up sound wisdom for us, and He commands us to keep sound wisdom.

Then, in Proverbs 8:14, Jesus Christ, who is wisdom personified, says, "Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom. I have understanding," or, "I am understanding, and I have strength." Notice again: "Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom. I am understanding."

Now here is the question: If God has laid up sound wisdom for the righteous, if God has commanded us to keep sound wisdom, and if Jesus Christ says, "I am sound wisdom," how can we grasp and understand sound wisdom with an unsound heart? Very obviously, it is impossible. You cannot do that. If you have sound wisdom, the prerequisite is a sound heart. It takes a sound heart to grasp and understand sound wisdom.

An unsound heart does not have wisdom. An unsound heart does not have understanding. So David is praying, "Let my heart be sound in thy statutes, that I be not ashamed."

Sound Doctrine and the Law

Now let's take this a little bit further. Let me just give you a quote. While I'm giving you the quote, I want you to turn to 1 Timothy, if you would. In fact, if you're going to turn to 1 Timothy, which I hope that you will, you might as well go ahead and turn to 2 Timothy. I can quote the verse, but I want you to see it. Look in 2 Timothy chapter 1 and verse 7—2 Timothy chapter 1, right before the book of Titus and right after 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy chapter 1. Look, if you would please, at verse 7. Look what the Bible says, 2 Timothy 1 verse 7: "For God hath not given us a spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a

sound mind," or a sound heart. "God has not given us a spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind," or a sound heart.

Now, let me ask you a question. Why in the world does God give us a sound heart? Why was David praying for a sound heart? I want you to turn back to 1 Timothy chapter 1 and let's begin reading there with verse 8. 1 Timothy chapter 1 and verse 8. We're talking about sound wisdom and a sound heart. Notice 1 Timothy 1 verse 8. Paul writes, "But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully." Do you realize that you may use the law of God unlawfully? The law was never given for justification. And yet some people try to use the law to be saved by it. They try to base their salvation upon their works. That's an unlawful use of the law. The law was never given for salvation. It was never given for justification. No one can be saved or justified by keeping the law of God because it's impossible for a sinner to keep the law of God. You cannot keep it perfectly. You cannot keep it perpetually. And you cannot keep it personally.

Paul says, “But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully.” Then he explains: “Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine.”

Do you know what the Apostle Paul has just done in verses 9 and 10? He has enunciated the Ten Commandments. He did not spell them out, saying, “Thou shalt have no other gods before me.” He said the law was made for the lawless and disobedient. A lawless, disobedient individual places another god before the one true and living God. If you take these verses and go right on down, you will see Paul giving an application of the Ten Commandments.

After applying the Ten Commandments, he says, “For whoremongers”—that would be the seventh commandment—“and them that defile themselves with mankind”—the seventh commandment—“for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons.” You go right down to, “Thou shalt not bear false witness.” That is the ninth one. Then here is the tenth one: “Thou shalt not covet.”

He says, “and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine.” The Apostle Paul is saying that all sin, all wickedness, and

all rebellion are unsound doctrine. Let us go back. David said, “Let my heart be sound in thy statutes.” What was David praying for? He wanted a heart that understood and kept the law of God, because sin is contrary to sound doctrine. You cannot have sound doctrine and sin together. They are mutually exclusive.

Now look in your Bibles to Job 28:28, right before Psalms. If you do not memorize or learn any verse today, learn Job 28:28. Remember, as I quoted from Proverbs 2:6, “For the Lord giveth wisdom and understanding.” Wisdom and understanding are the gifts of God; they come from God. Look in Job 28:28.

Notice what the Bible says in Job 28:28: "And unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding." What is the fear of the Lord? It is wisdom—sound wisdom. What will you do if you have sound wisdom? You will have understanding; you will depart from evil. The Apostle Paul said that sin, rebellion, and wickedness are contrary to sound doctrine. If you have sound wisdom that stems from a sound heart, you are going to have sound doctrine. Your sound wisdom, sound heart, and sound doctrine will teach you that you must depart from evil. It is wisdom and understanding derived from the Lord that teaches us we cannot sin against God and get away with it. We must depart from evil.

The Bible says in Proverbs 8:13, "The fear of the Lord is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate." The fear of the Lord is to depart from evil; it is to hate and despise it. If you have a sound heart with sound wisdom, and are sound in God's law, you hate evil. You hate everything contrary to God and His law. Proverbs 16:6 says, "By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the Lord men depart from evil."

Why is it that I do not pull out a pistol and shoot Dr. Holmes between the eyes? Why do I not murder him? There are a number of reasons, but the first and paramount reason is that I fear God. God says, "Thou shalt not murder," or, "Thou shalt not take life unlawfully." I happen to love him and count him a friend, but the main reason is that I fear God.

Why do I not steal from him? The same reason: God says, "Thou shalt not steal." If you fear God, you will depart from evil. If you fear God, you will not do that which is wicked and wrong.

Do you remember when the Apostle Paul is relaying the sins and the wickedness of the Jews and the Gentiles in Romans 1, 2, and 3? How does he culminate all of those sins? He says, and I quote, “There is no fear of God before their eyes.” Do you remember the passage in Luke 18 where our Lord talked about the unjust judge? He said, “There was an unjust judge who feared not God nor regarded man.” In other words, if you do not fear God, you are not going to have any regard for man. In other words, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and understanding is to depart from evil. By the fear of the Lord, men depart from evil.

If you are sound in your heart, then you will have sound wisdom and sound doctrine, and you will depart from evil. Are you listening? If you do not depart from evil, if you do not depart from wickedness, it evidences that you do not have sound doctrine, you do not have sound wisdom, and you do not have a sound heart.

The Call to Sound Words and Doctrine

Your actions, your conduct, reveal the state and the condition of your heart. Your life is an open book by what you do. “As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.”

Now, there are so many commands in the Bible that demand that we have a sound heart and everything that is connected with it. For instance, in 2 Timothy chapter 1, verse 13, the apostle Paul told young preacher Timothy, “Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.” Hold fast the form of sound words. What are sound words? They are words that communicate sound doctrine. They are words that communicate sound wisdom.

In Titus chapter 2, verse 8, God says, “Sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you.”

What is sound speech? Sound speech is speech that is right, speech that is in agreement with the Word of God, with doctrine that

is sound, and with wisdom that is sound and comes from a sound heart.

How can one use sound speech and sound words and possess sound doctrine and sound wisdom with an unsound heart? If you would like to know what has happened in our country, in America religiously speaking, and why there are so few churches that really, truly, and honestly preach and teach the totality of the Word of God, I am going to show you from the Bible.

We have churches on every corner of most every major city, and most of them are absolutely, totally worthless when it comes to preaching and teaching the Word of God. Why is it that those men who really, truly preach and teach the Word of God usually have a very small congregation? And why is it that those who compromise and cut corners, refuse to name a lot of sins, and refuse to preach a lot of doctrines have a huge, successful ministry?

Here is why. Look in your Bibles to 2 Timothy chapter 4, beginning with verse 1. The Apostle Paul tells Timothy, "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables."

The time is coming when they will not endure sound doctrine. You cannot endure sound doctrine unless you have a sound heart. When you do not like sound doctrine, you turn away from the Word of God and get that which tickles your ears and pleases you.

If you look back in your Bibles to Titus chapter 2 and verse 1, the Apostle Paul tells Titus, "But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine." And in Titus 1:9 he says, "Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers."

It is impossible to have sound doctrine and sound wisdom with an unsound heart. David prayed, "Let my heart be sound in thy statutes,

that I be not ashamed." It is important to note that David wanted a heart that was sound in God's statutes. The word "statutes" refers to God's decree, His boundary, His ordinance, and His commandments. When David said, "Let my heart be sound in thy statutes," he was saying, "Lord, I want to please You. I want to honor You. I want to know what Your boundaries are. I want to know what I may do and what I may not do."

David's Prayer for a Sound Heart in God's Statutes

God's law is God's boundary marker. In it He tells us, as He told the sea, "Hitherto shalt thou come, and no further." In other words, you may do this, but you may not do that. It is God's decree, His commandment, and His boundary marker.

Remember what David prayed: "Let my heart be sound in thy statutes, that I be not ashamed." Charles Haddon Spurgeon, commenting on Psalm 119:80, said concerning David's prayer: "This is the root of the matter. If the heart be sound in obedience to God, all is well, or will be well. If right at heart, we are right in the main. If we be not sound before God, our name for piety is an empty sound."

Mere profession will fail and undeserved esteem will disappear like a bubble when it bursts. Only sincerity and truth will endure in the evil day. He who is right at heart has no reason for shame and he never shall have any. Hypocrites ought to be ashamed now and they shall one day be put to shame without end; their hearts are rotten and their names shall rot. This 80th verse is a variation of the prayer of the 73rd verse. There he sought for sound understanding; here he goes deeper and begs for a sound heart.

Those who have learned their own frailty by sad experience are led to dive beneath the surface and cry to the Lord for truth in the inward parts. In closing the consideration of these eight verses, let us join the writer in his prayer: "Let my heart be sound in thy statutes." Why did David pray, "Let my heart be sound in thy statutes"? The answer is, that he be not ashamed. That he be not ashamed. How in the world can we help but to be shamed when our hearts are not sound in God's statutes?

The word “ashamed” is the Hebrew word “bush,” and it refers to one who is ashamed, one who is confounded, one who is confused, one who is disappointed, one who is disconcerted, and one who feels shame. When you are disconcerted or confused, you do not know which way to turn. You do not know what to do. Someone asks you, “What’s the answer?” and you say, “I don’t know.” You just have to hang your head in shame.

The Consequences of an Unsound Heart

What David is saying is this: “I don’t want to be ashamed. I don’t want to be disconcerted. I don’t want to be confused. I want my heart sound in your statutes, that I be not that way.” In other words, David was praying, “Lord, I want to know how to make application of your law, how to make application of your word to my life.” Psalm 119:105 says, “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.”

If I were to ask you how many of you have stumped your toe in the dark—good South Georgia language—how many of you have stumped your toe in your own home at night, walking without a light? Every one of us. Some of us have tripped and fallen. David said, "Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." In other words, as long as I am walking in Your doctrine, in Your Word, I am not going to stump my toe. I am not going to stumble, fall, or trip, because Your Word is lighting the way.

Now look back very quickly to Psalm 1, the very first Psalm. Notice how David describes the godly man, the righteous man. In Psalm 1:1, David says, "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful."

Wait a minute. What did David just say? He said, "There's a lamp to my feet and a light in my path." Now he says, "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful." Put it like this: "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the advice of the ungodly."

I can show you illustrations of men who followed the advice of the ungodly, and they ended up dead. They ended up in sin and rebellion. I can show it to you not only in the Bible but in history as

well. God says, You do not listen to the advice of the ungodly. What happens when you begin listening to the advice of the ungodly?

Look back in verse 1: "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel"—or the advice—"of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners." That is association. You start listening to their advice, and the next thing you know, you are associating with them and standing around with them, like Peter when he warmed himself by the enemy's fire. Once you follow their advice and begin to associate with them, he says that lastly, "nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful"; you end up in agreement. If you follow their advice and associate with them, ultimately you are going to end up agreeing with them.

David said, "Blessed is the man who doesn't do any of those things," but look at verse 2: "But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night." What did David say? "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." I am not going to walk with the wicked.

Go back to Psalm 119 and see how David illuminates this fact for us. In verse 15, David said, "I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways." In verse 23: "Princes also did sit and speak against me: but thy servant did meditate in thy statutes." In verse 48: "My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments, which I have loved; and I will meditate in thy statutes." David said, "I'm going to reach for your truth. I'm going to meditate in your statutes." In verse 78: "Let the proud be ashamed; for they dealt perversely with me without a cause: but I will meditate in thy precepts." The proud have a reason to be ashamed, because they do not follow the word of God.

David said, "I have no reason to be ashamed, because I will meditate in thy precepts. I want your word." One of my favorite verses that I used to use when I was in college is verse 99: "I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation." I often quoted that verse, jokingly, of course. They did not like my interpretation, but they knew I was teasing. If I had more understanding than my teachers, I would not have been in college. David is saying that he does have more understanding than some men who are teachers. Why? Because he has the Word of God. He has the truth of God.

David said, “Let my heart be sound in thy statutes, that I be not ashamed.” How can we as Christians be ashamed for not having a sound heart in God’s statutes? How can we be ashamed? We should be ashamed for our neglect in reading, meditating upon, and studying the Word of God. We should be ashamed for our neglect of reading, meditating upon, and studying the Word of God.

There are many who profess to be Christians who have never ever read the Bible all the way through even one time—not even once. There are many who may read the Bible, but they never really meditate upon it. They never really study it. They never really take it seriously. They just kind of read it as a textbook.

It is like what many students do, not only in college, but in the lower academic levels as well. They study hard for a test just so they can pass the test, and then promptly forget everything they had studied. It is worthless. It is useless. Two weeks later, they have no idea what they read or what they did on the test. We read it and forget it.

Sometimes reading our Bible is like going through a ritual or a ceremony. It is something that we do, and if we do not read, we feel guilty about it. So we read it just so we will not feel guilty, just so that we can say, “We read our Bible today.” You ought to read your Bible every day, but you ought to read it with understanding, and you ought to meditate upon it.

You may say, “But pastor, you do not understand. I work for a living.” Everybody works for a living. Everybody has twenty-four hours in one day. Let me tell you something. Here is the absolute bottom line. Here is the absolute truth: You do what you want to do. You have your priorities. Unhappily, sometimes our priority is not reading the Scriptures, not meditating, not studying, and not even thinking about the Scripture.

Most of us do like a lot of the Southern Baptists do. I was raised Southern Baptist. The Southern Baptists have this little Sunday School report, a little slip that, when you go to Sunday School, asks, “Did you read your Bible?” Check yes.

"Did you give to missions?" Check yes. "Did you tithe?" Check yes. In other words, we read it just so we can go and check yes, then turn

our little slip in so they can say, "We had 50 who read their Bible this week." I've got news for you, folks. It doesn't do you one bit of good to read the Scripture if you don't understand it and apply it. I'd rather read one verse, understand it, and apply it than read 40 chapters and not understand a thing I've read.

The truth of the matter is this: We should really be ashamed that we don't know the Word of God as we should. We should be ashamed that we're not scholars in the Word of God. After all the time we have spent listening to the Scriptures being taught and listening to the preaching of the Word of God, we should be ashamed that we don't understand more than we do! David said, "Let my heart be sound in thy statutes, that I be not ashamed."

How can we as Christians be shamed? Here's the second way: We should be shamed, and we are shamed, when we're tested and tried and don't know how to act. Peter writes in 1 Peter 1:6–9, "Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold 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 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: receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls."

Go back to verse 6. He says, "Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in..." What? You are in heaviness! You're weighted down. You may be discouraged. Why? Through manifold temptations.

One of our problems is this: Everyone has tests, trials, and temptations. We're so ignorant of the Word of God and of its principles that we just don't know how to act. We don't know what to do or where to turn. We're disconcerted and confused. If you know the answer, you don't have a problem. You only have problems when you don't know what to do.

Each of us has tests and trials. But have you ever asked, “Why am I in this test? Why am I in this trial? What is God trying to teach me? What must I learn?”

I had several courses in college that I absolutely hated. I despised them. I saw no value or use for them, but they were requirements, and I had to take them. I can think of one particularly right now. I despised it. I hated it. Do you know what my grade was in that course? An A. Do you know why I made an A? Because I wanted to make dead sure I did not have to take it again. I hated it so much.

What I am trying to tell you is this: if we are in a test, trial, or temptation, we need to know why we are in it. We need to know what God is teaching us so we can get out of it and not have to go through it again.

Look carefully at 2 Peter chapter 1 and verse 3: “According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption

Let us go back to verse 3: “According as his divine power hath given us all things that pertain unto life and godliness.” God has given us every answer to every problem. He has given us everything. But how has He given it to us? “Through the knowledge of him that hath called us.” Then he says, “Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises.” How can we claim the promises if we are ignorant of them? How can we know what God is teaching us if we are ignorant of God? We should be ashamed that we do not know how to act, which way to turn, or what to do when we are in our tests and trials.

What does the Bible say in 1 Corinthians 10:13? “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man.” What does that mean? Ed’s trials are my trials. My trials are Henry’s trials. My temptations are Doug’s temptations. There is no temptation, no test, and no trial taking you but such as is common to man. “But God is faithful, who will not suffer”—or allow—“you to be tempted above that ye are able.” God will never put more on you than you can take. If God has put something on you, you can take it by His grace.

In every test and every trial, there is a way of escape. There is an exit door. But how can we exit if we do not know the way to the door?

How can we get out of our test and trial if we do not even know there is an exit? The promise is this: “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.”

We should be ashamed, first, because we are so ignorant of the Word of God. Second, we should be ashamed that, being so ignorant of the Word of God, we do not even know how to get over our problems. Christians ought not to have the problems that the unsaved have. Ought not to. Why? Because we have the answers, and the knowledge is right here.

We just need to study it and apply it. There is a third reason we should be ashamed: when we have the opportunity to minister to others, we do not know the words to use. We do not know the Scriptures, the promises, or the warnings. God said in Isaiah 43:10, “Ye are my witnesses.” In Isaiah 43:12, He says, “I have declared, and have saved, and I have shewed, when there was no strange god among you: therefore ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, that I am God.” In Isaiah 44:8, He says, “Fear ye not, neither be afraid: have not I told thee from that time, and have declared it? ye are even my witnesses. Is there a God beside me? yea, there is no God; I know not any.” How can we be faithful witnesses to other people if we do not know what to say to them?

If we do not know what to share with them, how to warn them, or how to give them promises, how can we witness? How can we tell them about the greatness of our God if we do not even know His greatness? Old Lester Olaf said something I have never forgotten: “In the time of sorrow, how many can come and how few can comfort.” Most of us do not know what to say to comfort someone. We can repeat what everybody else says, but we really do not know how to comfort because we do not know the promises and Scriptures that encourage and give people comfort.

Fourthly, we should be ashamed when we come before Him in prayer with an unsound heart. God's given us His Word. Why should we have an unsound heart? In 1 John 3:19, John writes, “And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.” What will assure our hearts before Him? We know that we are

of the truth; we have the truth. “For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.” How can we come before God in prayer and not be ashamed when we have an unsound heart?

We do not know His doctrine or His wisdom, and our heart condemns us. When our heart condemns us, we no longer have confidence toward God. He said, "If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God." We should be ashamed when we come before the Lord and say, "Lord, I've got a confession to make, and I'm ashamed of it. I don't know your Word like I should. I don't know your doctrine. I don't know your statutes. I don't know your boundary markers. Lord, I'm just ashamed you've given me your Word. And Lord, here I am to ask your blessing and ask your help." Like Daniel, I am ashamed and afraid even to lift up my head. We should be ashamed when we come before God in prayer with an unsound heart.

Fifthly, we should be ashamed, and we will be ashamed, when we appear before our Lord at the judgment seat. In 2 Corinthians chapter 5 and verse 10, the Apostle Paul wrote, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." This is not a judgment to determine salvation. If you are not already saved, you would not even be there. This is a judgment that determines our service. We want to have served Him well because we want to hear those words, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant." Every one of us will be ashamed when we stand there, because we should have loved Him and served Him better, even more than we have.

Conclusion: A Call to Soundness

Thomas Hooker, who died in 1647, said this, commenting on David's prayer, "Let my heart be sound in thy statutes, that I be not ashamed": "Let my heart be sound. This is a plain difference between a sound heart and a false heart. In the receiving of Christ, the sound heart receives Him as a favorite receives a prince. He gives up all to Him, and lets him have the command of all."

A mere innkeeper entertains whoever comes to him. He will take any man's money; he cares not, for he loves gain above all things. It does not matter if the man is the worst in the world; he will take his money. Not so with a good heart. The good heart welcomes Christ alone and resigns all to Christ. Whatever is pleasing to Christ, he will do; whatever comes from Christ, he will welcome.

That was David's prayer: "Let my heart be sound in thy statutes." Why? "That I be not ashamed." And, folks, I will be honest with you, including myself: We should be ashamed that our hearts are not sound in God's law and God's Word. We should be ashamed that we do not know how to make application or how to act. We should be ashamed when we come before Him in prayer with an unsound heart. David's prayer was, "Lord, teach me. Make me what I should be. Let my heart be sound in thy statutes." Why? "That I be not ashamed." One of my prayers every day is, "Lord, let me not be ashamed. Let me not be confounded."

David also prayed, "Let those that hate Thee be ashamed and confounded. But let those that love Thee rejoice before Thee."

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee this day. We thank You for Your love, grace, and mercy. We must confess that there is much reason in our lives to be ashamed before Thee. Correct that in us today; prepare our hearts, open our hearts and minds, and give us understanding. May we understand Thy Word, apply Thy Word, and walk in Thy Word for Your honor and glory and for our good. Let our hearts be sound in Thy statutes, that we be not ashamed. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 11

When God Laughs

February 17, 2012

Introduction: Does God Have a Sense of Humor?

The title of the message is "When God Laughs." Psalm 2, verse 4, says, "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh, the Lord shall have them in derision." I want to call your attention to this phrase: "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh." Have you ever wondered whether or not things were funny to God? If so, have you ever wondered what it would be that would make God laugh? Since God is a person, obviously He has a sense of humor. Billy Sunday, the Presbyterian evangelist, used to say, "I know that God has a sense of humor because he made monkeys and some of you folks."

I suppose one of the funniest, or most humorous, incidents in Scripture for me is found in 2 Kings, chapter 13, verses 20 and 21. Elisha had died and been buried, and here were some men who were burying a dead man.

The Moabites had invaded the land. Of course, they were armed and after anyone they could find. In 2 Kings 13, beginning with verse 20, we read: "And Elisha died and they buried him. And the bands of

the Moabites invaded the land at the coming of the year. It came to pass as they," that is, several Israelites, "as they were burying a man, that behold they spied a band of men," that is, a band of Moabites. "And they cast the 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."

Now, what is so funny about this? Stop and think. They were already frightened because they saw the band of Moabites. So they cast the dead man into Elisha's sepulcher and undoubtedly ran away—just a couple of them. But when the man hit Elisha's bones, he came back to life. Can you see these two men running away, looking back to check where the Moabites were, and seeing the dead man running to catch up with them? I would imagine it helped them run just a little bit faster. So I would say, yes, God does have a sense of humor, that is for sure. When God laughs, when we think of laughter, however, we must consider that there are several different kinds of laughter.

Four Kinds of Laughter

First of all, there is a playful laugh that is short, friendly, and fun. Secondly, there is rip-roaring laughter that overwhelms us when we are thoroughly tickled—the kind you and I refer to as rolling-in-the-floor laughter. I have experienced that kind of laughter a number of times. I remember one occasion with the greatest fondness because another fellow and I were literally rolling on the floor over something he told that was absolutely true.

Thirdly, there is nervous laughter. It usually originates in confusion, ignorance, or fear. When one gives forth a little nervous laughter, he is unsure of himself or of the proper response, and therefore gives a small nervous laugh. Fourthly, there is mocking, derisive, scornful laughter.

Such laughter stems from absurd situations and the ridiculous actions of others. It looks at someone and says, in essence, "You big dummy, you should have known better than this." Each of us has experienced all four types of laughter. Interestingly, when Scripture says that God laughs, it always refers to scornful, derisive, mocking laughter. The same word can indicate playfulness and sport, but the

context determines the correct interpretation and use of the word laughter. This mocking, scornful laughter is usually given in light of absurd and ridiculous situations.

I can recall one instance when I did that. Some years ago, I was rebuking a teenage boy who had done some mighty sinful and stupid things. I was rebuking him very kindly, but he became upset and threatened to whip me.

In light of the fact that I outweighed him by a hundred pounds, that I was in the best physical shape of my life at that particular time, and that I had a secondary black belt in Shorinji Kempo, I laughed when he threatened me. I said, "Son, if you jump on me, it will be the worst mistake you ever made in your entire life."

Thankfully, he did not try to put his threat into effect, and later he apologized to me for even saying what he did. The point is, I was not intimidated, frightened, or upset. My response was to laugh at him, because it was absolutely absurd to think that this young boy could whip me at that particular time. I knew that he could not. I certainly was not intimidated at all.

If such is true in a man-to-man scenario, how much truer is it in a scenario between man and God? How amused God must be at the absurd and ridiculous actions of men who threaten Him, ignore Him, rebel against Him, and seek to overthrow Him. How vain are their confidences? How arrogant are their voices? How worthless are their plans and schemes? The big dummies should know better.

God's Laughter in Psalm 2: Context of Rebellion

All they have to do is read the Word, and they would find out. The very first passage that records that God laughs is found in Psalm 2:4: "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh. The Lord shall have them in derision." It is important to note the context in which God laughs.

Psalm 2 begins, "Why do the heathen rage and the people imagine a vain thing?" 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." Why do the heathen rage and the people imagine a vain thing? The word "vain" means that which is useless, that which is

worthless. Uselessly and worthlessly they take action against God. They scheme and plan against God, take counsel against the Father and His Son, purpose to rebel against God and overthrow Him, cast away His restraints, do what they want, and establish their own kingdoms.

Now what is God's response to this rebellion of wicked vain men? His response is that He laughs at them. He laughs at their stupidity, their foolishness, their vanity, and their rebellion. Why would God laugh? Because He knows they cannot overthrow Him, destroy His kingdom, or stop Him. God is omnipotent. God does not run scared. You cannot frighten the Almighty or intimidate the One True and Living God. Has it ever occurred to you that if every rebel who has ever lived, who is now living, and who shall live, and every demon out of hell, ever combined together to fight against God, it would occasion God no uneasiness?

Why God Laughs: His Omnipotence and Sovereignty

He would not be upset, He would not be disturbed, or be in a panic. What would God do? He would laugh at them. Our text tells us, verse 4, “He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh.” The implication is that God is in His home, on His throne, ruling and overruling and administering the affairs of the world. He is the sovereign; He is the omnipotent One.

He has the upper hand. “He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh.” He merely laughs and smiles at their futility in seeking to resist Him and overthrow Him. He will not be disturbed or agitated by their efforts. He will calmly go on about His own business. He will calmly establish His purposes. The interesting thing is, the Bible says, “He that sitteth in heaven shall laugh.”

“The Lord shall have them in derision.” The word “Lord” is the word Adonai. It means He who controls everything, He who is all-powerful. How can they fight against the One who controls everything? He is Lord of Lords and King of Kings. Remember that these are the kings and rulers of the nations trying to revolt against God. Isaiah 40:17 says, “All nations are before him, all nations are before him are as nothing and they are counted to him less than nothing and vanity.” All the nations together are accounted as

nothing, even less than nothing. The Scripture then directs us to verse 22.

"He that sitteth upon the circle of the earth and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers that stretches out the heavens as a curtain and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in." Notice that all the inhabitants of the earth together are nothing more than grasshoppers to God. Is there anyone in this room afraid of a grasshopper? No. All you have to do is step on him, and he's gone.

What has God said? All the nations together are reputed as nothing. All the inhabitants of the world are mere grasshoppers. Vast armies, secret conspiracies, confederated alliances, and powerful weapons have no effect upon God. What can grasshoppers do against the sovereign God of heaven and earth? If all the nations united in rebellion against Him, it would not occasion God any alarm. All nations are as nothing; yes, they are less than nothing. Since they are less than nothing, how can they be taken seriously by God? God merely laughs at them.

His laughter is a scornful, derisive, mocking laughter that says in essence, "You big dummies ought to know better." Why would all of this rebellion be an occasion for God to laugh? They cannot slip up upon God's blind side, for God does not have a blind side. He is omniscient. They cannot catch Him at a weak moment, for God does not have a weak moment. He is omnipotent. They cannot negotiate a secret attack, because there is nowhere where God is not. God is omnipresent.

They cannot catch Him at a bad time, for He is timeless, the eternal God. They cannot catch Him when His supplies are low, because He is exhaustless. He is the eternal God and the infinite God. They cannot rule over Him or overrule Him, because He is the judge of all the earth. They cannot reach Him, for He is unreachable. He is the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity. They cannot control Him, for He is uncontrollable. He is the sovereign God of heaven and earth. No wonder God laughs at them. There is not one thing that the world can do against God.

God's Unthwartable Purpose

Now look in Isaiah 46:10: "Declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times of things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand and I will do all my pleasure."

How much of God's counsel is the rebellion of men going to overthrow? None. How many men are going to stop God from doing His pleasure? None. None can thwart Him, hinder Him, evade Him, or stop Him. He is God, and beside Him there is no other.

Isaiah 44:6 says, "Thus saith the Lord, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts, I am the first, and I am the last, and beside me there is no God." There is no one who can stop or hinder God. He does not need great armies to repress the rebellion of wicked men. Sometimes we think, Look at the Chinese army. Look at the Russian army. Yet to defeat large armies is no arduous task for God. He can dispose of armies with the greatest ease.

In the Bible, in one night, one angel with one stroke of the sword killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers. What did our Lord say? "Know you not that I could ask my Father and have how many legions of angels?" If one angel, with one swipe of the sword, could kill 185,000 soldiers, surely a legion of angels—or a dozen legions—would have no problem with the inhabitants of this world. You can read about it in 2 Kings 19:35, where the angel killed 185,000 in one night.

God does not even need an angel or an army. Psalm 2:4 says, “He that sitteth in heaven 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.” All God has to do is speak, and they are vanquished and destroyed. In reality, God does not even have to speak. All God has to do is withhold their breath, and they die. Psalm 66:9 says that it is God who holds our souls in life. Everyone’s life is in the hands of God.

Our God, then, is what Psalm 2 is telling us: He sits undisturbed and unmoved in heaven while men rage against Him and combine together to cast off His authority. He is not intimidated in the least. Why is He not intimidated? He laughs because He knows the end of their rebellion will be a fiasco and will accomplish absolutely nothing.

God Uses Rebellion to Accomplish His Will

Now look at Psalm 2 and see how much this disturbs, upsets, thwarts, and stops God: “Why do the heathen rage and the people imagine a vain thing? 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.”

“He that's in heaven 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.” In light of their rebellion, wickedness, and violations of God’s law, God says, “I have set my king upon my holy hill in Zion. I will declare the decree. The Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my son, this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and for the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron. Thou shalt dash them in pieces with a potter's vessel. Be wise now therefore, ye kings, and be instructed, you judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling.”

“Kiss the Son, lest it be angry, and you perish from the way when this wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.” Now go back. What did he say in verse 6? In light of all that rebellion, yet have I done this. God just calmly goes on with His eternal purpose. They cannot stop Him. They cannot overthrow Him. And here is the mighty and powerful truth: all of their rebellion, all of their wickedness, God simply uses to accomplish His own purpose. All of their fighting against God just makes them become His tributaries. In their rebellion, they support God’s eternal purpose. There is a verse, if you have not memorized it, that I would encourage you to memorize. It is Psalm 76 and verse 10.

Now listen to this. Psalm 76, verse 10, is a very, very short verse. Here is what God says: “Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee, and the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.” Do you know how much wickedness and sin and evil and rebellion will occur in this world? Just enough to give God honor and glory. That which will not honor Him, that which will not glorify Him, He will restrain. He will not let it come to pass.

You say, “I don’t understand. How in the world can sin and wickedness and rebellion redound to God’s honor and glory?” Well, have you ever stopped to think that, if there were no sin and wickedness and rebellion, you would know nothing of God’s justice? Moreover, you would know nothing of God’s mercies. You would know nothing of God’s longsuffering. You would know nothing of God’s patience.

I want to show you something. God is on the throne. He is in control. He has not abdicated His throne. Martin Luther, the heroic reformer, was excommunicated by the Pope. He was proscribed by the Emperor. At that particular time, almost all professing Roman Catholics hated Luther with a passion and sought his destruction. And yet Luther had one man who protected him: the Elector of Saxony. The Elector was generally afraid of what was going to become of Luther. He feared that Luther would be killed, and then the teaching and preaching of the Word of God would vanish there in Germany. So when Luther heard about the elector’s concerns, he wrote the elector a letter.

He said many brave things in the letter, but one thing he told the elector was this: “Let your Highness rest well assured of this, that things are far otherwise carried and concluded in heaven than they are at the Imperial Diet or Parliament held in Nuremberg.” Do not listen to what they say in Nuremberg or in the capital. There is another council in heaven, far more valuable, informative, and instructive than what happens on the worldly level.

Now let me show you how God uses the wickedness and rebellion of men. In Acts 4:26, we read, “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 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.”

Out of all the rebellion of the Jews, the Romans, Pilate, and Herod, how many of them actually thwarted the purpose of God? What they did to Jesus Christ was foreordained, predetermined, and predestined by God the Father down to the letter. God simply used their rebellion to accomplish His will.

God did not instigate their wickedness. God did not infuse their wickedness. God is not the author of wickedness. But since God is God, He is the controller of wickedness. There is absolutely nothing over which God does not have sovereign control. If there is anything that can happen apart from God and without God, then that thing is God, and God is not God. God even takes the wickedness of man and uses it to accomplish His purpose. That is why the Bible says, “Surely the wrath of man shall praise the Lord, and the remainder of wrath he shall restrain.”

Turn to Genesis 20. Here we see how God can sovereignly restrain the wickedness of men. I do not know how beautiful Sarah was, but she was undoubtedly a beautiful woman, even later in her life. Genesis 20:1 says, "And Abraham journeyed from thence toward the South country and dwell between Kadesh and Shur and sojourned in Gerar. And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, She is my sister." 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. He asked, "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." He continued, "In the integrity of my heart and in the innocency of my hands have I done this."

God answered him in a dream: "Yea, I know that thou didst this in the integrity of thine heart. For I also withheld thee from sinning against me. Therefore suffered I thee not to touch her." What did God do? It would not have brought God honor to have had the line of Messiah defiled. When Abimelech took her, God restrained him. I do not know what He did. He may have given him a case of the 24-hour virus, but the Bible says he had not come near her or touched her. God said, "I withheld thee from sinning against me."

"Surely the wrath of man shall praise the Lord, and the remainder of wrath shall he restrain." There will be just enough wickedness and evil to ultimately redound to God's honor and glory; that which will not redound, He will restrain.

God's Derision of the Wicked

Now return to Psalm 2:4: "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh. The Lord shall have them in derision." Derision is spoken of several times in regard to the wicked. Each time, the Bible says that God shall have them in derision; that is, they will be beside themselves.

They will not know what to do, which way to turn. Everyone will mock them, deride them, and make fun of them because of their foolishness. Let me ask you a question or two. How would you like to end up as a Haman or Doeg the Edomite? Would you be willing to trade your salvation for the power, position, and wealth of an Ahab, Pilate, or Herod?

I read again today how Abimelech murdered seventy of his brothers just so he could be king. During his reign, there were several wars in which he killed many other people. Do you know how long Abimelech reigned? Three years. Can you imagine trading your salvation, your soul, your life, for three lousy years?

Now the Bible says God shall have them in derision. Turn to Psalm 52. This Psalm is written against Doeg the Edomite, the man who slew the priest of the Lord. When Saul commanded his army to slay the priest of the Lord, they would not obey. But Doeg certainly killed them. The headnote reads: "To the chief musician, Maschil, a psalm of David, when Doeg the Edomite came and told Saul and said to him, David has come to the house of Abimelech."

Watch verse 1: "Why boastest thou thyself at mischief, O mighty man? The goodness of God endureth continually. Thy tongue deviseth mischief like a sharp razor working deceitfully. Thou lovest evil more than good, and lying rather than to speak righteousness. Thou lovest all devouring words, O thou deceitful tongue. God shall likewise destroy thee forever. He shall take thee away, and pluck thee out of thy dwelling place, and root thee out of the land of the living. The righteous also shall see, and fear, and shall laugh at him. Lo, this is the man that made not God his strength, but trusted in the abundance of his riches, and strengthened himself in his wickedness. But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God. I trust in the mercy of God forever and ever. I will praise thee forever, because

thou hast done it. And I will wait on thy name, for it is good before thy saints."

Why is he being derided? “This is the man that made not God his strength. This is the man that trusted in all of his wickedness.” Yes, he was the chief herdman of all the cattle of King Saul. And he may have gotten another promotion and more money, but God destroyed him. Scripture teaches that God shall find out on earth and destroy all of His enemies; not one shall escape.

Psalm 21:8 declares, “Thine hand shall find out all thine enemies. Thy right hand shall find out those that hate thee. Thou shalt make them as a fiery oven in the time of thine anger. The Lord shall swallow them up in His wrath, and the fire shall devour them. Their fruit shalt thou destroy from the earth, and their seed from among the children of men. For they intended evil against thee.” Remember our text back in Psalm 2: the kings of the earth have raised up together. “They intended evil against thee.”

“They imagined a mischievous device which they were not able to perform. Therefore thou shalt make them turn their back when thou shalt make ready thine arrows upon thy strings against the face of them. Be thou exalted in thine own strength. So will we sing and praise thy power.” Note that He said, “Thy right hand shall find out all thine enemies. Thy right hand shall find out all those that hate thee.” None of their schemes, none of their plots, none of their connivings are they able to bring to pass.

All they can do in their rebellion is work out the will of God. This is another instance where I think that God has a real sense of humor. The dagons of this world shall be broken to pieces before our sovereign God.

The Dagons of This World Will Fall

In 1 Samuel chapter 5, the children of Israel had fought against the Philistines and been defeated because of their sin and rebellion. The ark of God had been captured, and the Philistines rejoiced in their god, Dagon. They brought the ark and put it before Dagon. The Scripture says, “And the Philistines took the Ark of God and brought it from Ebenezer unto Ashdod. When the Philistines took the Ark of

God, they brought it into the house of Dagon and set it up by Dagon. And when they of Ashdod arose early on the morrow, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the earth before the ark of the Lord. And they took Dagon and set him up at his place again. When they arose early on the morrow morning, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the ground before the ark of the Lord."

"And the head of Dagon and both of his palms of his hands were cut off upon the threshold. Only the stump of Dagon was left unto him. Therefore, neither the priest of Dagon nor any that come into Dagon's house tread on the threshold of Dagon and Ashdod unto this day. But the hand of the Lord was heavy upon them of Ashdod, and He destroyed them and smote them with emerods, even Ashdod and the coast thereof."

Notice that Dagon fell over before the ark of God. They set him back up, and the next day he fell over again. Then, when they went in, his hands were gone and his head was just a stump. The dagons of this world will fall before God in such a way that they will be thoroughly humiliated, exposed for their uselessness and worthlessness, and derided by men and women as well as God.

All will bow to Him. It is true that sometimes God allows, for a short time, for His own glory and for the good of His people, that we be persecuted and His church be ravaged, much like the temple of old. Yet God is going to knock the dagons of this world down, and God will smile when He causes the knees of Belshazzar to knock, his voice to tremble, and his heart to fear, just as God delivers Belshazzar to the Persians to be put to death.

Belshazzar should have known better than to try to insult God, drink wine out of God's holy vessels, and share with those who laughed and mocked God and worshipped the gods of gold and stone. No. God will destroy all the dagons of this world, and as He does so, He will laugh at them, in essence saying, "You big dummies. You should have listened. You should have known better. You cannot fight against God and win."

God Laughs at the Simple Who Refuse Wisdom

Some may think that one has to be a mighty big Dagon to be laughed at by God, or has to be some king or civil ruler. But here is the word again where God laughed. Proverbs 1:20 says, "Wisdom crieth without, she uttereth her voice in the streets. She crieth in the chief places of concourse, and the openings of the gates in the city she uttered her word saying."

Wisdom is none other than Christ personified in Proverbs 8. Here is what wisdom cries: "How long you simple ones when you love simplicity and the scorners delight in their scornings and fools hate knowledge." Then wisdom says, "Turn you at my reproof," that is, repent. "Turn you at my reproof. Behold, I will pour out My Spirit upon you. I will make known My words to you." God says, if you will listen, I will teach you. But you did not listen, and here is what God says: "Because I've called and you refused, I stretched out My hand and no man regarded. But you have set at nought all My counsel and would have none of My reproof."

What does God say? "I will also laugh at your calamity. I will mock when your fear cometh, when your fear cometh a desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind, when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall you call upon me, but I will not answer."

“They shall seek me early, but they shall not find me. Why? For that they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord. They would have none of my reproof or my counsel. They despised all my reproof. Therefore,” says God, “They shall eat of the fruit of their own way and be filled with their own devices.” What did God say back in verse 26? “I will also laugh at your calamity.”

You will not listen to Me, repent, or obey Me. You will be laughed at by God because of your foolish, ignorant, stupid rebellion, when God says, “I gave you my word, but you would not listen.”

Applications: Will God Laugh at You?

Now let me make a couple of applications. The pressing question in light of this message is, will the Lord laugh at you? Do you refuse to hear His Word, bow to His commands, and submit to His divine

authority? How foolish, sinful, ridiculous, and ignorant it is for you and me to think that we can sin against God, ignore Him, defy Him, evade Him, and get away with it.

We cannot, and we will not. Scripture teaches that the Lord merely laughs at people who think and act like that. They cannot win. If that teenage boy had made the mistake of jumping on me, there would have been absolutely no way he could have won that fight. There is no way that you can win fighting against God. Period. All God will do is laugh at those so silly and foolish as to think they can escape it.

The second application is this: “But Brother Weaver, it looks like the wicked are having their day.” Yes, we must understand that the joys of the wicked are short. Who would trade their lives to be king for three years? How stupid would you have to be to face the judgment of God for three simple years? Psalm 37:28 tells us, “But the seed of the wicked shall be cut off.” Psalm 94:23 says, “And He shall bring upon them their own iniquity, and cut them off in their own wickedness. Yea, the Lord our God shall cut them off.”

Is Dagon stood up in his place again? God shall knock him down. Are the hands of Dagon glued back in place? Fine. God shall knock him down, take them off again, and laugh as he does so. God will not leave the dagons of this world any power, pride, or imposition. He will cut them down. What a horrible time it is going to be when the dagons fall and experience the laughter of God.

Thirdly, this is the third application: we must not take the wicked too seriously. I want you to see this in light of the truth that is being read. It is true that the wicked are dangerous, and it is true that they plan our destruction. However, all their plans will backfire and fail. Every Haman is going to be hanged on his own gallows. Every Herod is going to be slain in his own pride. Every Judas will be destroyed by his own covetousness.

Psalm 7:11 says, "God judgeth the righteous. And God is angry with the wicked every day. If he turn not, he will whet his sword. He hath bent his bow and made it ready. He hath also prepared for him the instruments of death and ordained his arrows against the

persecutors. Behold, he travaileth with iniquity and have conceived mischief and brought forth falsehood."

Look what God says: "The wicked made a pit and digged it, and has 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." The pate is the top of the head. God's going to bring it down upon the top of the heads of all the wicked.

We should not take the wicked too seriously. Why? Psalm 37:12-13 says, "The wicked plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth. The Lord shall laugh at him, for he seeth that his day is coming." The Lord just laughs. The wicked plot against the just and gnash upon him with their teeth, but the Lord sees that their day is coming.

It is not only the Lord who laughs. Psalm 52:6 says, "The righteous also shall see and fear and shall laugh at him." The righteous will laugh at the wicked. David said, "But I am as a green olive tree in the house of God. I trust in the mercy of God forever and ever." Yes, he does. There's a big difference. No wonder we can laugh at the wicked. We're blessed by God.

Psalm 59:7-8 says, "Behold, they belch out with their mouth. Swords are in their lips." This is the wicked speaking and threatening, but their words cannot alter the day that God has appointed for them.

"For who say they doth hear? But thou, O Lord, shalt laugh at them. Thou shalt have the heathen in derision." So we, the saints of God, may laugh with God, knowing that the days of the wicked are short. Yes, we must be as wise as serpents and harmless as doves, but the righteous shall laugh at the wicked. We know that God is in absolute and total control. He is sovereign.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to thee. We ask you, Father, to enable us to worship thee and to laugh with thee, knowing, Lord, that thou art in control and none can overthrow thee. None can thwart thee, hinder thee, or stop thee. Thou art the God of heaven and earth, and besides Thee there is none other. We bow, worship, and give Thee honor and glory through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and whose name we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 12

Biblical Integrity

September 8, 2013

Introduction and Definition of Integrity

In Job 2:9–10, we read: “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. What? Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did Job sin with his lips.”

Integrity is a missing attribute in the lives of most people, even in the lives of most professing Christians. Unhappily, the average professing Christian cannot be clearly distinguished from the average unsaved person. Truthfully, many do not even know what the word integrity means, much less how it is to be applied in our lives. We do not know the essence of integrity and therefore do not know its value. This is why we need to consider carefully what the Scriptures teach concerning integrity.

So let me ask you a very important question before we consider those Scriptures: Would you be willing right now to pray David’s petition that he petitioned God in Psalm 7 and in Psalm 26? You may

say, “Wait a minute. I have to know what that petition is.” Look first at Psalm 7:8. David says, “The Lord shall judge the people: judge me, O LORD, according to my righteousness, and according to mine integrity that is in me.” Would you be willing to pray right now that God would judge you according to the integrity that you have? Would you ask God to examine you by that standard?

Then, in Psalm 26:1, David says, “Judge me, O LORD; for I have walked in mine integrity: I have trusted also in the LORD; therefore I shall not slide.” He is asking God again to judge him because he has walked in his integrity. He does not merely speak of integrity as an idea; he presents his own life before God and asks God to judge him according to it. So would you, at this point in time and history, be willing for God to judge you according to the integrity that you have? Would you be willing to have your profession, your conduct, and your trust examined in that way? Would you stand or fall based upon your integrity?

The word integrity in the Hebrew refers to uprightness, perfection, completeness, simplicity, and fullness. The first time the word integrity is used in the Bible demonstrates the meaning of simplicity. In Genesis chapter 20, Abraham had said to Abimelech concerning Sarah, his wife, that she was his sister. Sarah herself said, “He is my brother.” Abimelech saw that Sarah was exceedingly beautiful and desirable. I think at that time she was pushing eighty or ninety. God had truly blessed her, for Isaac was born when she was ninety and Abraham was one hundred.

Abimelech took Sarah to be his wife. God came to him in a dream at night and said, “If you touch her, you’re a dead man. I’ll kill you because she’s a man’s wife.” He had also fast closed up all the wombs in Abimelech’s household. In Genesis 20:5–6, Abimelech said, “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 in the innocency of my hands have I done this.” God said unto him in a dream, “Yea, I know that thou didst this in the integrity of thine heart, for I have also withheld thee from sinning against me, therefore I suffered thee not to touch her.”

What did Abimelech mean? He was saying, “Lord, my sin in taking Sarah was unintentional and unpremeditated. It was done in

my simplicity. Had I not been deceived, I would not have taken this woman, because her husband said she was his sister and she herself said, 'I am his sister.'" Thus God sovereignly protected Abimelech from violating Sarah and sinning against him. Abimelech was simple in this matter; he did not know the true situation.

Integrity consists of walking uprightly and refusing to do that which is evil, sinful, and contrary to God's Word. Job 1:1 says, "There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil." I really like that word, eschewed.

Integrity as Obedience and Preservation

He could not stomach evil. He could not swallow it; he spit it out. Integrity, then, consists of walking uprightly and eschewing, or spitting out, evil and wickedness and anything contrary to God in His Word. Integrity involves holding fast to truth regardless of circumstances or situations. It preserves us and enables us to persevere in the face of unethical and immoral situations.

David said in Psalm 25:21, "Let integrity and uprightness preserve me; for I wait upon thee." Then he said in Psalm 26:11, "But as for me, I will walk in mine integrity: redeem me, and be merciful unto me."

Integrity preserves and protects us and enables us to face unethical and immoral situations in a straightforward manner. Psalm 26 proves that it is integrity that protects and preserves us. "Judge me, O Lord, for I have walked in mine integrity: I have trusted also in the Lord; therefore I shall not slide. Examine me, O Lord, and prove me; try my reins and my heart. For thy lovingkindness is before mine eyes: and I have walked in thy truth.

"I have not sat with vain persons, neither will I go in with dissemblers. I have hated the congregation of evildoers, and will not sit with the wicked. I will wash mine hands in innocency: so will I compass thine altar, O Lord: that I may publish with the voice of thanksgiving, and tell of all thy wondrous works. Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth.

"Gather not my soul with sinners, nor my life with bloody men: in whose hands is mischief, and their right hand is full of bribes. But as for me, I will walk in mine integrity: redeem me, and be merciful unto me. My foot standeth in an even place: in the congregations will I bless the Lord."

He walked in God's truth; therefore, he did not sit with vain persons, would not sit with the wicked, and would not associate with evildoers. He would compass God's altar and loved the habitation of God's house. He did not want to be with wicked, ungodly men or around mischief and men who took bribes.

Because of this biblical integrity, my foot standeth in an even place. Biblical integrity will enable you to stand in an even place in an uneven world and in an uneven life. Biblical integrity is more than an attribute or a characteristic; it is a way of life that leads us, guides us, and directs us in our choices.

Integrity Guides and Blesses

It has implications and applications not only in our lives, but in the lives of our family and friends as well. Biblical integrity will enable us to minister to others. One cannot give out that which he does not possess. Psalm 78 and verse 72 says, "So he fed them, that is the people of Israel, according to the integrity of his heart; and guided them by the skilfulness of his hands." He fed them with the integrity of his heart. Proverbs 11:3 says, "The integrity of the upright shall guide them: but the perverseness of transgressors shall destroy them." It is integrity, then, that guides us.

God said in Proverbs 19:1, "Better is the poor that walketh in his integrity, than he that is perverse in his lips, and is a fool." You would rather be poor and have integrity than be perverse, be rich, and be a fool. Proverbs 20:7 says, "The just man walketh in his integrity: his children are blessed after him." You not only cannot dish out that which you do not possess; you cannot pass on to your children that which you do not possess. Biblical integrity, in reality, is a life of obedience to God and His Word. Each one in this room knows that David was called a man after God's own heart.

Hold Job 2, but turn to 1 Kings chapter 9 and see what God told Solomon, David's son, who ascended to the throne after David's death. First Kings 9:4–5 demonstrates again that biblical integrity equals obedience. God tells Solomon, "And if thou wilt walk before me, as David thy father walked, in integrity of heart and in uprightness, to do according to all that I have commanded thee, and wilt keep my statutes and my judgments: then I will establish the throne of thy kingdom upon Israel for ever, as I promised to David thy father, saying, There shall not fail thee a man upon the throne of Israel."

If you will walk in the integrity of the heart, the way David did, and keep God's commandments, statutes, and judgments, then He will honor and bless you. When you understand that biblical integrity is obedience to God, you can understand David's statement in Psalm 41:12: "And as for me, thou upholdest me in mine integrity, and settest me before thy face for ever." What is God doing? God is upholding those who obey Him. David said, "You uphold me in my integrity."

When we talk about Job, one characteristic or attribute for which he is known is his patience. James, the apostle, said in James 5:11, "Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy." Job's patience was in reality a manifestation and demonstration of his integrity. He had biblical integrity, and therefore he was patient in his sufferings.

Job's Integrity in Suffering

Now look in Job 2:3 at the question God asks Satan: "And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect or mature and an upright man, one that feareth God and escheweth evil? and still, that is, in light of all that Satan hath afflicted him with, and still he holdeth fast his integrity, although thou movedst me against him, to destroy him without cause." Without reading and reviewing all of chapter one, most of you know that Job lost his ten children.

He had seven sons, I believe, and three daughters, as well as a multitude of possessions. He lost all his possessions, all ten of his

children, and all his thousands of cattle in one day. In light of all that, Job still did not act defiantly or transgress against God. The Bible says, “In all this Job sinned not with his lips.”

I want you to underline something in your heart and understand my emphasis upon this point: Biblical integrity will enable you to give God honor and glory, worship and praise, even in the direst situations. What did Job do when he lost all ten children and all his possessions in one day? I will tell you what he did not do. He did not fall apart or go into an emotional frenzy. He did not whine, complain, bellyache, or attack God as being unfair and unkind.

If you look in Job 1:20, you will see what he did do. After he had lost his ten children and all his possessions, “Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped, And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither.”

“The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.” And in all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly. Isn’t that amazing? He had just lost ten children and everything he possessed, yet he was still blessing and praising God. Did you know that David did exactly the same thing when his child died? In 2 Samuel, chapter 12 and verse 20, the Bible says, “Then David arose from the earth, and washed, and anointed himself, and changed his apparel, and came into the house of the Lord, and worshipped: then he came to his own house; and when he required, they set bread before him, and he did eat.” What did David do? He went to the house of the Lord and worshipped.

Job’s Wife’s Foolish Counsel

Now look back at Job 2 and verse 9. This further elucidates Job’s integrity. His wife gives him an admonition: “Then said his wife unto him, Dost thou still retain thine integrity? Curse God, and die!” Job’s wife is referred to only twice in the book of Job, and each time it is not in so good a light. In Job 19 and verse 17, Job says, “My breath is strange to my wife, though I intreated for the children’s sake of mine own body.” This is the second allusion to his wife in the entire book.

A few scholars have tried to be kind to Job's wife by suggesting that her admonition in Job 2 was born out of her love for Job. She did not want to see him suffer, they say, and therefore, out of her great love, she told him, "Curse God, and die!" Personally, I do not believe that is the case. I will show you why. Turn again to Job 19, and begin reading at verse 13. See how everyone forsook Job, including his wife. Job says concerning what God had done in his sufferings, "He hath put my brethren far from me, and mine acquaintance are verily estranged from me."

"My kinfolk have failed, and my familiar friends have forgotten me. They that dwell in mine house, and my maids, count me for a stranger: I am an alien in their sight." They would not even speak to him. They avoided him. Watch what he says: "I called my servant, and he gave me no answer; I intreated him with my mouth. My breath is strange to my wife, though I intreated for the children's sake of mine own body." In other words, his wife would have nothing to do with him either. If his breath was strange to his wife, she was not near him or around him, and he had to beg for her attendance for the children's sake. Very obviously, she had forsaken him as well.

If you look back at Job 2 and verse 9, one scholar has rendered what his wife says like this: "And yet dost thou hold fast on integrity, blessing God and dying?" In other words, Job's wife would have been absolutely baffled by him. How could he continue to bless and praise God even while he was suffering and dying? If that is a correct interpretation, then obviously Job's wife was a stranger to the grace of God, or at least completely and totally ignorant of truth.

Another scholar I read said this, and I could not help but smile: "It is incredible that an angry woman could be content with saying so little as is ascribed in the Hebrew to the wife of Job." She may not have said much, but what she did say certainly revealed not only her character, but her lack of faith as well.

Understand that Job has not only lost everything at this point; he is sitting in a pile of ashes with boils all over his body and worms eating his body. He is sitting there with a potsherd—that is, a broken piece of pottery—scraping his boils and the worms off as well. Job 2:7 says, "So went Satan 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." You say, "Well, that does not say anything about worms there." No, but in Job 17:14 Job said, "I have said to corruption, Thou art my father: to the worm, Thou art my mother, and my sister." The worms, then, were eating him as well.

Job was suffering immensely. When his three friends came, they did not give him any comfort; they falsely accused and condemned him. One commentator said of his wife's words, "Bless God and die": "Here it seems to be a strong irony. Job was exceedingly afflicted and apparently dying through sore disease, yet his soul was filled with gratitude to God. His wife, destitute of the salvation which her husband possessed, gave him this ironical reproof, bless God and die. What? Bless him for his goodness while he is destroying all that thou hast. Bless him for his support while he is casting thee down and destroying thee. Bless on and die. And die, probably, she regarded God as a stern and severe being. And suppose that by indulging in blasphemy, Job would provoke him to cut him off at once."

She did not expect Job to lay wicked hands upon himself. She expected God to interpose and destroy him. Nothing but death was expected, and the sooner he provoked God to cut him off from the land of the living, the better. With enmity toward God and uncharitableness toward her husband, was there in her words more than mockery?

Job's Godly Response and Sovereignty

Would she be counseling him to commit suicide? Would she be counseling him to take God on, rebel, and let God kill him? Job, however, repelled her in a godly manner. I came across this little poem concerning Job; the author is not given:

"When the devil engaged with Job's patience in battle, Tooth and nail strove to weary him out of his life. He robbed him of children, slaves, house and castle, But mark me, he ne'er thought of taking his wife. But heaven at length, Job's forbearance rewards. At length, double wealth, double honor arrives. Heaven doubles his children, slaves, house and herds. But we don't hear a word of a couple of wives."

Who would want two wives like that? No man needs a wife like Job's wife, much less a couple of them. Her counsel was wicked, and her agitation was vile.

I do not care how much you suffer or how much pain you are in: death is never an easy way out if you take it in rebellion to God. Job was indeed quite a man, filled with biblical graces and biblical attitudes.

If you are suffering and destitute, and your wife of a lifetime comes to you, mocks you, and counsels you to curse God and die, how would you respond to such counsel? I am almost positive that most of us would have yelled, screamed, and become incensed at such atrocious advice. I am sure that most of us would not and could not have contained ourselves.

Job was different because of his integrity. Job not only kept his cool, but gave a biblical answer. After she admonished him to curse God and die, “he said unto her, Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?” In all this did not Job sin with his lips. Job gave a biblical answer.

He bravely resisted and overcame the temptation. He not only gave her an answer, but a right, good, and godly answer. Satan had smitten him from the top of his head to the bottom of his foot. The only limitation Satan had was this: God said, “you may touch his body, but you must spare his life.” Could it be that Satan spared the use of his tongue in hopes that he would curse God with it? And yet Job used his tongue to give a blessed truth, and he retained his integrity.

Although Job’s wife spoke foolishly, Job did not call his wife foolish, nor did he call her a fool. He simply states in verse 10 that she is speaking as one of the foolish women speaks. The word foolish in the Hebrew refers to one that is stupid or foolish. It also refers to one that is wicked and impious, as well as ungodly. The words sin and folly are closely connected in Scripture, because in Scripture sin is regarded as the supreme folly. Thus he tells his wife, “You’re speaking as one of the stupid women speaks,” as one of the foolish women, one of the wicked women, or a woman who is impious.

Job's wife may have been mocking him as well as upbraiding him for his continual trust in the Lord and his holding fast to biblical principles. Yet Job did not attack her. Remember when David brought the ark to Jerusalem? Michal saw David dancing before the Lord, despised him in her heart, and mocked him. Consequently, the Bible says that God cursed her, and she bore no children; she died childless. So Job's wife comes to him and says, "Dost thou still retain thine integrity? Curse God and die."

And he said, "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?" Listen very carefully. If you truly understand the sovereignty of God, then you must understand that, in His divine providence, whatever God allows to come to pass in our lives, He allows for our good and His glory.

We just lost two friends. Our brother Joe died of cancer in four months. Brother Lowry died of cancer after fighting it for four years, and he was in far more pain and agony than our brother Joe. But have you ever stopped to think about this? When God allows us to suffer greatly, His comfort is also greatly increased. Job understood God's sovereignty and providence.

He understood Romans 8:28, though it was never written: "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." Albert Barnes, commenting on "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and not evil?" says, "Shall we not expect it? Shall we not be willing to bear it when it comes? Shall we not have sufficient confidence in him to believe that his dealings are ordered in goodness and equity? Shall we at once lose all of our confidence in our great benefactor the moment he takes away our comforts and visits us with pain? This is the true expression of piety. It submits to all the arrangements of God without complaint."

True piety receives blessings with gratitude. It is resigned when calamities are sent in their place. It esteems it a mere favor to be permitted to breathe the air which God has made, to look upon the light of His sun, to tread upon His earth, to inhale the fragrance of His flowers, and to enjoy the society of friends whom He gives. When He takes one or all away, it feels that He has taken only that

which belongs to Him and withdrawn a privilege to which we had no claim. In addition to that, true piety feels that all claim to any blessing, if it had ever existed, has been forfeited by sin. What right has a sinner to complain when God withdraws His favor and subjects him to suffering? What claim has he on God that he should make it wrong for Him to visit him with a calamity?

"Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?" Lamentations 3:39. Stop and think about that. What right do we have to any of God's blessings? The answer is none. Why in the world should we complain when God brings suffering or calamity upon us? I must hasten to point this out: Job had far more blessings than he had curses. He had far more good days than he had bad days.

And it is true with us. No matter how sick we become, no matter how destitute we become, no matter how much we suffer, we still must confess that God has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. We have had far more blessed days than cursed days, and far more days when we have been healthy than days when we have been sick. The truth is, we have had mercy upon mercy, grace upon grace, and blessing upon blessing.

So why in the world should we complain when we are smitten with some calamity or evil? Are we not willing to suffer for our sins, for our own stupidity and acts of rebellion against God? Are we not willing to suffer for His glory? Are we not willing to learn by chastisement? We can either learn by instruction of the Word or instruction of the rod.

The Bible says in Philippians 1:29, "For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake." Do you realize that, just like faith is the gift of God, suffering is a gift of God? God does not give that gift of faith to every individual, nor does He give the gift of suffering to every individual. But to those to whom He gives the gift of suffering, He also gives greater consolation, greater grace, and greater mercy.

Do you remember the song, "Am I a Soldier of the Cross?" Am I a soldier of the cross, a follower of the Lamb? And shall I fear to own his cause, or blush to speak his name? Must I be carried to the skies

on flowery beds of ease, while others fought to win the prize and sailed through bloody seas? Are there no foes for me to face? Must I not stem the flood? Is this vile world a friend of grace to help me unto God? The answer, of course, is no. Sure, I must fight if I would reign; increase my courage, Lord. I'll bear the toil, endure the pain, supported by thy word.

Yes, we suffer at times. What did Job say? "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and not evil?" Proverbs 24:10 says, "If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small." You can also change that a little bit: If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy faith is small—or thy integrity is small.

Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 7:14, "In the day of prosperity be joyful, 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." What is he saying? In the day of prosperity, be joyful. But in the day of adversity, consider, because what God is doing is setting one against the other, that we may find out that there is nothing under the sun worth living or dying for except Him. Our hope, our trust, our faith, and our comfort should be in God alone.

Applications of Biblical Integrity

Job is applauded by the Lord Himself for holding fast his integrity. The sovereign God of heaven and earth looked at Satan and said, "Hast thou considered my servant Job? There's none like him. He's a mature, upright man. He holdeth fast his integrity, even though you moved me against him without cause."

Obviously, biblical integrity pleases the Lord. It glorifies the Lord. It is an acknowledgement and worship of the Lord when you and I stand true in desperate situations, hold fast to the faith, and hold fast to biblical obedience. If you want to honor and glorify God, if you want to please Him, you need to develop biblical integrity in your life.

For all men and women, especially the younger men, understand the importance of having a good and godly wife. A woman can make or break a man. She can support him, stand by him, and be a real blessing. Or she can whine, complain, bellyache, attack him, and be a

curse. Each one of you knows that God counsels and commands wives to be like godly Sarah in First Peter chapter three. Everyone here knows the description of the good, godly, and energetic wife of Proverbs 31.

One author said about Job's wife: "What experience of life and insight the writer manifests in introducing Job's wife as the mocking opposer of his constant piety. Job had lost his children, but this wife he has retained, for he needed not to be tried by losing her. He was tried and proven sufficiently by having her."

She is further on, once referred to, but even then not to her advantage. Why, asked Chrysostom, did the devil leave him his wife? Because he thought her a good scourge by which to plague him more acutely than by any other means. Moreover, the thought is not for distance, that distant that God left her to him in order that, when in the glorious issue of his sufferings he receives everything doubled, he might not have this thorn in the flesh also doubled.

A good godly woman can make a man. An ungodly woman and an unkind woman can break a man. In 1 Kings 21:25, the Bible says, "But there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up." Ahab was wicked enough in and of himself, but he had a wicked wife who constantly stirred him up. It was Jezebel that caused the murder of Naboth and his sons.

Do you remember Solomon and all of his wisdom? In his old age, he lost some of that wisdom. The Bible says in Nehemiah 13:26, "Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? yet among many nations was there no king like him, who was beloved of his God, and God made him king over Israel: nevertheless even him did outlandish women cause to sin." You can go back to 1 Kings and find that Solomon built all of those altars to these false, wicked gods for his wives.

Here is the third application: Biblical integrity only comes with age, experience, and application. When we talk about Job's integrity, Job was an older man with grown children. I did not say old man; he was just an older man with grown children.

I realize that Scripture tells us that old men are not always wise. But when we are converted, we do not instantly and miraculously become wise, holy, and full of wisdom and integrity. Integrity comes as we grow in grace, apply God's Word to our lives, and develop biblical convictions. Let me prove this: How many of you would really want and desire to live your life all over again, knowing what you know now? Wouldn't you? Look at all the sins we would avoid and all the stupid mistakes we would not repeat if we could start out as a young man knowing what we know now.

The point I am trying to make is this: We will never mature or possess biblical integrity unless we study and apply God's Word to our lives. Do you remember that passage in Psalm 119, verses 9–11, where David asked, "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to thy word. With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments. Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee"?

As a young man, you have to study the Word of God. You have to make applications in order that you might have biblical convictions and mature in biblical integrity. If you do not have a desire to study, a desire to learn, and a desire to apply God's Word in your life, then very obviously you are not going to end up with biblical integrity. You cannot. It is impossible. The point I am trying to make is this: I might have done some things stupidly when I was twenty years old that I would never do now, because I did not have the integrity then that I hope, by God's grace, I have now. So we are going to be like Job. We have to study the Word of God, make application in our lives, and conform our lives to that Word in order to develop biblical integrity.

Number four, listen carefully: temptations to curse God, sin against Him, defy Him, and distrust Him should be rejected with the greatest of horrors. We must refuse to identify with anyone or anything that mocks or reproaches our Heavenly Father.

I am not going to listen to music that mocks God or is unbiblical. I am not going to watch a television program that mocks God. I am not merely talking about making fun of God; I am talking about promoting those things which God condemns. I am not going to

watch something that includes abortion and adultery. I am not even going to read things that intimate that somehow God is unkind, unfaithful, or untrue. We cannot put those things in our minds. What we must put in our minds is His Word. And, by the way, past mercies.

Past mercies should make present afflictions more easily endured. Why? Because of our faith in Him. Since He has blessed us and been merciful to us in times past, we have hope for future mercies and future blessings. When I am sick, I have hope that God will heal me because He healed me in times past. When I need a blessing, I have hope that God will bless me because He has blessed me so bountifully in times past.

I love the way verse 10 ends. Look at Job 2 and verse 10: "In all this Job did not sin with his lips." Do you know it is our mouth that gets us in trouble most of the time? Every one of us has said things we wish we had never said. The computer is the same way. When you hit that little send button, you cannot take back a word you have written. It is there for anybody and everybody to see.

David said it like this in Psalm 34 and verse 13: "Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile." I love Psalm 39, verse 1, where David said, "I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue: I will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me." One of my favorite verses is Proverbs 21:23: "Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles."

Job said what needed to be said, but he left out that which was not needed to be said. We need wisdom to say what needs to be said, and we need the same biblical wisdom to refrain from saying what does not need to be said. "Curse God, and die," said his wife. "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 Job sinned not with his lips.

Each of us needs to seek biblical integrity and apply it in every area of our lives. Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow before Thee. We honor Thee. We glorify Thee. We marvel at Job, the integrity that he had, and the grace and mercy that You gave him. Lord, we ask today for that biblical integrity in our lives.

Make us what we should be. Give us grace to serve Thee acceptably with reverence and godly fear. In Thy name we pray, Amen. This program was produced by Dominion Ministry. For more information about Pastor Weaver's sermons, you may contact Dominion Ministry by mail at 7400 Abercorn, that's A-B-C-O-R-N Street, Suite 705, PMB 175, Savannah, Georgia, 31406. Or give us a call at 912-925-0995. You can also visit our website at www.dominionministry.com

CHAPTER 13

The Making of a Faithful Man

November 20, 2012

Introduction: The Crisis of Unfaithfulness

Nehemiah chapter 7, verses 1 and 2: “Now it came to pass when the wall was built and I had set up the doors and the porters and the singers and the Levites were appointed, that I gave my brother Hanani and Hananiah, the ruler of the palace, charge over Jerusalem. For he was a faithful man and feared God above many.”

Faithfulness is a quality and attribute that is lacking so greatly today. I do not know if you have ever stopped or paused to think about the importance and necessity of faithfulness or not. When I talk about faithfulness, I am not just referring to faithfulness in marriage, but faithfulness in every area of life: faithfulness in our word, faithfulness in our business, and faithfulness in our church. One of the greatest evidences of the deterioration in our society is the lack of faithfulness in every area. Think of marriages that have been broken, businesses that have gone under, churches that have deteriorated and actually dissolved, and governments and other institutions devastated by unfaithfulness.

Back during David's time, unfaithfulness was so horrible and conditions were so terrible that David, in Psalm 12 and verse 1, cried out, "Help, Lord, for the godly man ceaseth, and the faithful fail from among the children of men." If you read the rest of Psalm 12, he will delineate a few of the conditions that arise there from unfaithfulness.

So let me ask you several questions. Are you faithful? Would you consider yourself faithful? Do you have any idea concerning the essence of faithfulness? Are you a faithful friend, a faithful steward, a faithful follower of the Lord Jesus Christ? Have you learned to value faithfulness? If so, have you made it a priority in your life? Let me show you how important faithfulness is. I quote this Scripture often. You have heard me quote it hundreds of times. And if the Lord allows me to live, you will hear me quote it hundreds of more times. But it is one of my favorite passages, and it demonstrates the absolute importance and necessity of faithfulness.

The Importance of Faithfulness

For in Lamentations 3:22–23, the Bible says, "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is Thy faithfulness." Have you ever stopped to think that if God ceased being faithful, we would cease to exist? Do you think it is important for God to be faithful? If it is important for God to be faithful, you would think it is important for you to be faithful as well. According to Deuteronomy 7:9, God is called the faithful God. In 2 Timothy 2:13, the Bible says, "If we believe not, yet He abideth faithful: He cannot deny Himself."

When we stop and think about faithfulness, our desires are expressed many times and in many ways, but our main desire is that others be faithful to us. Certainly, we would want to be faithful to others as well. But do you realize that we expect and desire our friends to be faithful to us and, in one sense of the word, we want that, while in another sense of the word, we do not want our friends to be too faithful to us?

You say, "What in the world are you talking about?" Hold on to Nehemiah 7; I am going to come back and explain this. Turn to Proverbs 11:13: "A talebearer revealeth secrets: but he that is of a

faithful spirit concealeth the matter." If you confide one of your deepest secrets to your best friend, do you want that friend to blab everything you have told them? Do you want them to spread your innermost secrets, thoughts, and fears to anyone and everyone? Absolutely not. You want your friend to keep everything you said under wraps.

I never will forget years ago, a fellow came to me for counseling, and he was a dear friend of mine. A couple of weeks later, he and his family were at our house for supper. While I was outside doing something, Alice was in the kitchen cooking. He walked in and said to her, "I suppose your husband has told you all about my problems." Alice looked at him and said, "I'm sorry."

"I don't know what you're talking about. My husband never divulges anything to me that's told him in confidence." I have often thought about that. If I had told her what he had confided in me, do you think I would have lost a friend? I certainly would have lost his trust. We do not want our friends blabbing our inmost secrets and desires. We demand faithfulness in that area.

Now, I have said that we want our friends to be faithful to us in one sense of the word, and in another sense, we do not want them to be too faithful. What am I talking about? Proverbs 27:6 tells us exactly: "Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful."

We do not like wounding, rebuke, reproof, or reproach from a friend, even though the Word of God teaches us that if someone is truly our friend, he will indeed rebuke us. He will not allow us to go forward in sin or rebellion. He will stop us, even to the point of hurting us—hurting our feelings and our relationship. He will not suffer sin upon us, even if it costs the friendship. Enemies deceive. Enemies could care less. But faithful are the wounds of a friend. A good, godly, faithful friend will rebuke, reproach, and admonish us even when we sin.

Biblical Mandate for Faithful Admonishment

Usually, he will do it privately, for which we should be grateful and thankful. The Bible demands this. Leviticus 19:17 says, "Thou shalt

not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him." If Ron and I are friends, and Ron does something wrong, and I totally ignore it, that is unbiblical and ungodly. According to the Word of God, I hate him: "Thou shalt not hate thy neighbour in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him."

Now the exact same truth is taught in the New Testament. In Romans 15:14, the Apostle Paul tells these Roman Christians, "And I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another." The word "admonish" is important. Paul says that we are able also to admonish one another, and the reason we are able is because we are full of goodness and filled with knowledge.

In 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15, the Word of God gives the context: "And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother." There is that word "admonish" again: admonish him as a brother. The person who has disobeyed is not to be counted as an enemy, but is to be admonished as a brother.

In Colossians 1:28, the same word is translated a little differently. The Apostle Paul says, "Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus." The purpose is that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To present every man perfect means mature, complete, and upright in Christ Jesus.

The interesting thing is this: in Romans 15:14, the word is "admonish"; in 2 Thessalonians 3:15, it is again "admonish"; and in Colossians 1:28, it is "warning." These words are all from the same Greek word, noutheteo, which literally means, "I cause to stand in your mind." In other words, it is a rebuke, a reproof, a warning, or an admonishing caused to stand out in our minds. It is given in such a way that we do not forget it. The same word, therefore, describes admonishing one another, admonishing a brother, and warning every man so that every man may be presented mature, complete, and upright in Christ Jesus.

The Apostle Paul said, "I know that you're full of goodness in all wisdom or knowledge and that you're able also to reprove and rebuke each other." Again, in 2 Thessalonians 3, he tells us not to count each other as an enemy, but to admonish, rebuke, and warn each other as our brother.

In Colossians 1:28, the Apostle Paul says, "Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus." He has just told us the three things absolutely necessary to make someone mature, upright, and complete in Christ: preaching, warning—that is, rebuking, reproof, and admonishment—and teaching. A man who is a faithful friend will do all three. Why? Because he wants you to be mature and complete in Jesus Christ.

Stewardship Requires Faithfulness

If you and I are to serve Christ, we must serve Him faithfully. Christ does not want someone up and down, off and on. You remember what He said in the book of Revelation: "I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth."

He wants us to be faithful in whatever we do. In 1 Corinthians 4:1-2, the apostle Paul writes, "Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful."

You may say, "Brother Weaver, you're a steward, you're a pastor, you're a preacher." Oh yes, I am. But so are you. You may not be a pastor, but has God not given you a life, breath, a family, a vocation, a calling, or a work? Has He not given you His salvation? If so, you are a steward over everything God has given you, and God requires that you be faithful.

It's not enough to teach the truth. It's not enough to understand the truth. We must learn to be faithful in all things. We must learn to be faithful in every area of our life. John, in 3 John 1 in verse 5, wrote unto Gaius. Let me read to you what he said. "Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers." What did John say of Gaius? Doesn't matter who you're working

with, you are faithful, not only to the brothers, but to the strangers as well. John's statement reaches beyond those who are close to us; it includes strangers as well.

We're talking about faithfulness. This is what the Word of God says about the faithful man and the one who makes haste to be rich. Proverbs 28 and verse 20 says: "A faithful man shall abound with blessings: but he that maketh haste to be rich shall not be innocent." A faithful man shall abound with blessings. God is going to honor and reward faithfulness. But that's not all. Look back in your Bibles to Psalm 101 and verse 6. Here's an interesting and a very beautiful promise. This promise is beautiful and interesting. God says it like this. "Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me:

“He that walketh in a perfect way, he shall serve me.” God pays particular and close attention to those who are faithful to Him and His Word. He said, “Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land.” Then He goes on to say in verse 6, “and he that walketh in a perfect way, he shall serve me.” The Lord’s eye is upon the faithful, and He has a special relationship with those who are faithful. You remember that passage in Mark 4:25, where God says, “For he that hath, to him shall be given.” In other words, the more we receive from God, and the more faithful we are to that which He gives us, the more He gives us.

If you and I fail in the small things, how in the world would God ever trust us with greater things? Look at Luke 16:10, because our Lord spells it out very clearly: “He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much.”

Most of us have dreams of grandeur. We want to be big, important, and rich, and most of us will never be any of those. I never will forget a friend I had years ago, right as I started preaching, forty-six years ago. His desire and dream was to be a millionaire. He was going to serve Christ as a millionaire, giving out of the abundance of what he possessed. Until I told him one day, “If you can’t be faithful in what little you have right now, you’re not going to be faithful if God gave you twenty million.” That is exactly what God is saying here. We may not be the greatest people on earth, but we

can be some of the most faithful. If you are unjust in that which is least, if you cannot do the simplest and easiest things right, what makes you think God is going to let you have greater and bigger things?

False Foundations of Faithfulness

You have to learn to be faithful in that which is least in order that God will give you that which is far greater. We are talking about faithfulness. Have you ever asked yourself this question: What makes a man faithful? Why are some people faithful and others are not? Why is it that there are some folks you can always depend upon and others you never trust?

There are a number of answers that have been given as to what makes someone faithful, but most of these answers fall short. For instance, some have suggested that it is responsibility that makes someone faithful. The theory is that you place a huge burden upon someone and force him to act, and he will then act in a very responsible way.

The only problem is that it does not work. Look at the husbands and wives and parents who have plenty of responsibility and yet are totally, absolutely unfaithful. There have been preachers, as well as other Christians, who have brought unsaved people into the church, given them responsibility, and let them start teaching a Sunday school class or do something else, thinking that all of this responsibility will suddenly force them to come to grips with the truth and then be thankful. It will not work. Responsibility alone will never make anyone faithful. It is true that faithful men are responsible men, but it is not responsibility that makes them faithful.

There is another theory: that accountability makes one faithful. You have to be accountable. The theory is that we should place someone over another person to watch his every move, require frequent reports, and force him to give an answer for each and every action that he makes. According to that theory, he will become faithful. But the problem with that theory is, again, it does not work. Bureaucracy has never made anyone faithful. If you do not believe that, just look at Washington, D.C., and any state capital that you

want to look at. The fact of the matter is, faithful men are accountable, but accountability is not what makes them faithful.

There is another theory, and that is that stability makes someone faithful. That theory says all that you need is a stable environment, stable friends, and a stable family. One imitates what he sees and what he is around, and presto, automatically, you have a faithful man.

The problem with that is this: some of the most faithful men and women have been unfaithful. I've heard about men and women who have not only been married for a multitude of years and stayed at the same work for a multitude of years, but who have suddenly been discovered to be living a double life. They've been unfaithful to everything. Some of those people have been embezzling from their company for years.

I suppose you read recently of a soldier who was killed in, I guess, Afghanistan or somewhere, and it was found out that he had two wives and two sets of children. Neither wife knew about it. He had a stable job, and I guess he was stable with both wives and both families, but he was certainly unfaithful. If you think stability is going to make you faithful, prisoners ought to be the most faithful people in the world. They've got stability.

Hanani: A Faithful Man Who Feared God

It is true that a faithful man will be a stable man, but stability does not make anyone faithful. What does? Let us go back to our text, Nehemiah chapter 7, verses 1 and 2. I said all that about faithfulness to show you this from the Word of God: “Now it came to pass, when the wall was built, and I had set up the doors, and the porters and the singers and the Levites were appointed, that I gave my brother Hanani, and Hananiah the ruler of the palace, charge over Jerusalem: for he was a faithful man, and feared God above many.”

In this context, Nehemiah is about to return to Persia. He had to leave the work at Jerusalem in capable hands. When Nehemiah left the king to go to Jerusalem and do the work, he requested permission: “If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favour in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the

city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may build it." The king asked how long the journey would be and when he would return; Nehemiah answered, and "it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time."

Nehemiah was the Tirshatha of Jerusalem. You will see that word in Nehemiah 8:9; it simply means governor. Nehemiah was the governor of Jerusalem. In Nehemiah 5:14, the Bible says, "Moreover from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year even unto the two and thirtieth year of Artaxerxes the king, that is, twelve years, I and my brethren have not eaten the bread of the governor." Evidently, the time Nehemiah had given to the king was twelve years. Those twelve years were now up. Nehemiah had labored, built the wall, helped rebuild the city, and was about ready to return to Jerusalem.

He certainly did not want to leave that work in the hands of an unfaithful man. Unfaithfulness would destroy all the work he had accomplished in twelve years. If he left it in the hands of an unfaithful man, twelve years of his life would be wasted. I have known a multitude of parents who died and left their possessions to unfaithful children. Think of homes, farms, plantations, businesses, and many other things ruined and absolutely destroyed because of unfaithful children or unfaithful people who inherited them. Nehemiah was not about to leave work that had cost him twelve years in the hands of an unfaithful man.

When you look in Nehemiah 7:2, Hanani is singled out as the faithful man. Hananiah is also mentioned, yet Hanani is the one singled out. Obviously Hananiah was faithful also, though not necessarily to the point of Hanani.

What stood out in Hanani's life? What characteristic made him faithful? Verse 2 says, "Then I gave my brother Hanani, and Hananiah the ruler of the palace, charge over Jerusalem: for he, Hanani, was a faithful man, and feared God above many." It was the fear of God that made him faithful. Other characteristics and attributes aided him, yet the overriding characteristic was that he feared God.

Before developing this truth, I want to show you several other things about Hanani's character. First, Hanani was a very gracious man. How do we know this? His name, Hanani, means gracious. Names in the Bible were given to individuals to represent their character. They were not given simply because they were popular names or because their parents liked them. The name of a person in the Bible spoke of his character.

Everybody remembers the story of Nabal and Abigail. David kept Nabal's sheep in the wilderness, and when shearing time came, he sent some men, saying, "It's a good day. Send us a few sheep that we may rejoice with thee." First Samuel 25:3 says, "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." Nabal railed upon David's servants, saying, "There be many servants now a days that break away every man from his master. Shall I then take my bread, and my water, and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers, and give it unto men, whom I know not whence they be?"

When the men returned, David said, "Gird ye on every man his sword." They had kept this man's possessions in vain. Abigail learned what had happened, loaded camels and donkeys, and took provisions to David. She met him as he was coming 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 thine handmaid saw not the young men of my lord, whom thou didst send."

Folly was with him, even as his name. The name Nabal means a fool. He was a fool, and he was named Nabal. They did not necessarily name their children at birth; they observed their characters. Hanani was a gracious man.

Let me show you how his graciousness is demonstrated in Scripture. It was Hanani who gave this report to Nehemiah, and Hanani sparked in Nehemiah a desire to rebuild the walls. Nehemiah 1:1-4 says, "The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. And it came to pass in the month Chisleu, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the palace, that Hanani, one of my brethren, came,

he and certain men of Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire. And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven."

Here, Hanani is the one who comes to Nehemiah. Nehemiah asks what is going on and how everybody is doing, and Hanani says, "We're in great reproach. We're despised. The wall is broken down." The walls and gates were exactly like the Chaldeans had left them seventy years earlier. This made the condition of Jerusalem's inhabitants very despicable, putting them under the abiding marks of poverty and slavery.

It was exceedingly dangerous because the enemies could come in, get what they wanted, and leave any time they wanted to. The temple may have been built under Ezra, and a good government may have been set up, yet the work was undone because the walls were still torn down and had no gates. I want you to understand something: the word Hanani means gracious.

Here is an illustration of graciousness. A gracious man is always interested and concerned with the welfare of others, and not just himself. Why should you learn to be a gracious individual? The answer is, because graciousness is an attribute of our Heavenly Father. In Exodus 22, God was saying that if you loan a poor man some money and take his garment as a pledge or as collateral, you had better return it before night falls, because he sleeps in it. Exodus 22:27 says, "For that is his covering only, it is his raiment for his skin: wherein shall he sleep? and it shall come to pass, when he crieth unto me, that I will hear; for I am gracious."

It is the graciousness of God that moves Him to think upon those who are helpless and deprived. Israel had sinned against God so many times. The amazing thing is that God did not completely destroy those people a multitude of times. Yet in 2 Kings 13:23 we read, "And the LORD was gracious unto them, and had compassion on them, and had respect unto them, because of his covenant with

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not destroy them, neither cast he them from his presence as yet." What? He was gracious unto them. Why? Because of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and His covenant. A gracious man is always a compassionate man and a concerned man.

Why in the world was Hanani at the palace in the first place? The answer is that he had left Judah to go to the capital to try to find some help and support for his brethren who were there in Jerusalem. He knew firsthand of the conditions in Jerusalem, for he was from Jerusalem. He had been there. He came to seek help and protection for his brethren and had firsthand knowledge of what was going on.

His graciousness stemmed from the fact that he feared God. Graciousness is a direct result of fearing God. A gracious man is not interested in offending God or man.

Sometimes offenses come because of the gospel; I understand that. But do you know what the Apostle Paul said in Acts 24:16? "And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men." He was saying, I am not going to offend God, and I am not going to unnecessarily offend men.

The Fear of God as the Source of Faithfulness

I'll be gracious to them and kind to them. But, when the situation merits rebuke, he does it. What did he do to Peter? He put his finger in Peter's face and said, "You're wrong." Read Galatians chapter 2 and 3, and you'll find out. Here is a gracious man. Men who fear God are gracious men, and they are particularly concerned with obedience to God in every area of their lives. That's what makes them faithful men.

Faithful men will do that which is right in every situation and circumstance, regardless of the cost. You remember the two midwives in Exodus chapter 1. The word "men" here could be used generally, because here are two women. The king said, "Every male child you're to kill." But the Bible says, "But the midwives feared

God, and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the men children alive."

Why did they not murder those babies? Because they feared God. They were willing to do that which was right even if it meant that they faced death themselves. The Bible says in Job chapter 1 and verse 1, "There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil."

I love that word, "eschewed." It's an old word, and it means to spit out. I took all my girls and gave each one a green persimmon. You bite into it, and the first thing you do is spit it out. You can't stomach it; it is bitter. Everybody ought to have the experience of knowing what a green persimmon tastes like. Job spit evil out. He could not stomach it, swallow it, or keep it down. It was the fear of God. There was a man who feared God; he was upright, perfect, and eschewed evil. And you remember when Job not only lost all his possessions, but lost all ten of his children.

Seven sons and three daughters. The Bible says, "In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly." Here is the man who was faithful. What made him faithful? It was the fear of God.

Do you wish to know why people are unfaithful, and why there are so many people upon whom you cannot depend? Here is the answer: They do not fear God. The Bible says in Psalm 36 and verse 1, "The transgression of the wicked saith within my heart, that there is no fear of God before his eyes." The Apostle Paul, after listing the wickednesses of the wicked in Romans 3, said, "There is no fear of God before their eyes."

I remember, when I was a boy, seeing my father make multi-thousand-dollar deals with other farmers, and all they would do was shake hands. There were no contracts. They simply shook hands. I have also seen, when a neighbor farmer died, my father and other farmers go to the widow and say, "I had a deal with your husband. I owe him so much money. Here it is." Why? Because they had character and were faithful men.

In this day and time, you can get a man's word, a contract, have it notarized, and get forty-five witnesses to it, and it still does not do

any good. They will still find a way to beat you, hook you, and crook you. Why? Because they do not fear God. There is no fear of God before their eyes.

Look in your Bibles to Luke 18. Verse 1 says, "And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint;" Then our Lord said, "Saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me."

Here is a judge, a civil ruler, who is uncompassionate and unconcerned, not interested in justice or in right and wrong. Why? He feared not God.

Why was this judge so corrupt? Because he did not fear God. Why was he so unfaithful as a judge? Because he did not fear God. It is impossible to be faithful without the fear of God. It is impossible, listen carefully, it is impossible to depart from evil without the fear of God. Why was Hanani a faithful man? Because he feared the Lord, listen, and he was determined to do that which was right and holy.

I just made a statement. I want you to think about this. It is only the fear of the Lord that enables us to depart from evil. Proverbs 3:7 says, “Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil.” Fear the LORD and depart from evil.

Proverbs 8:13 tells us what the fear of the Lord is: “The fear of the LORD is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate.” The fear of the LORD is to hate evil. That’s what the fear of the LORD is. It’s wisdom, yes.

Here the fear of the LORD is to hate evil. Proverbs 16:6 gives us another important passage: “By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the LORD men depart from evil.” By the fear of the LORD men depart from evil.

Why are you not an adulterer or fornicator? Why are you not a thief or a liar or a murderer? The answer is, because you fear God. You’re not going to do those things. You’re not. A man that fears God

is going to depart from evil. Just stop and think. If you fear God, you will not want to do one thing that is displeasing to Him. Period. I told you this before, but it fits in right here.

The first time I took Tripp and Daniel out to Front Sight, we landed in Las Vegas, Nevada, and had a hotel there for the night. I was talking to Alice on the phone. Tripp, Daniel, and I were in Bass Pro, and Alice asked me, "Where are you staying?" I smiled and said, "Oh, we're staying at Hooters," because they had a hotel there. Alice laughed; she knew I was not staying there. When I finished talking to her, I looked at Tripp and Daniel.

I said, "Now, you know, I was teasing Granny when I said that. I would never, ever stay at a hotel like that because I fear the Lord." Tripp said, "Papa, if you stayed there, it's not the Lord you need to fear, it's Granny." That is probably true.

But I am simply pointing out the fact that Hanani was someone who, the Scripture says, feared God above many. Above many. Hananiah is mentioned, and evidently Hananiah feared God too. Evidently Hananiah was faithful, but he was not as faithful, and he did not fear God the way Hanani did. The fact that Nehemiah 7:2 says Hanani feared God above many is given to us as both the ground and the reason why he was faithful and why Nehemiah put such confidence and trust in him.

Nehemiah knew that the fear of God would keep Hanani from yielding to the sinful and wicked temptations he would likely meet while Nehemiah was away at the palace. Nehemiah also knew that without the fear of God, a man had absolutely no defense against temptations. Stop and think about that. Without the fear of God, a man has no defense against multiplicity of temptations. It is the fear of God that makes us faithful men. When we are full of the fear of God, we are also full of wisdom and understanding.

Wisdom and Understanding Through the Fear of God

Look first at Proverbs 9:10, and then turn back a few pages to Job 28. I want to put these two passages together.

Proverbs 9:10 says, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding." Most

people can quote it: The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the holy is understanding. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom. Let us go back to Job 28:28: "And unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding." I thought the knowledge of God was understanding. Well, it was, and it is. If you have the knowledge of God, you will depart from that which is evil if you fear God. Here are the positive and the negative: the fear of the Lord is indeed wisdom, but with that wisdom comes knowledge, and with that knowledge comes a departing from that which is evil and wicked.

Hanani could be trusted to oversee the work that Nehemiah had begun and possibly finished. Do you realize that it is the fear of the Lord that makes us truly patriotic, as well as truly Christian, as well as truly being willing and ready to depart from that which is evil? Hanani loved the Lord, or he feared the Lord above many. Our forefathers were right when they chose only Christian rulers. Why did Nehemiah choose Hanani? He feared the Lord above many.

John Jay, the first Supreme Court Justice of the United States, said, "Providence has given to our people the choice of their rulers. And it is the duty as well as the privilege and interest of our Christian nation to select and prefer Christians for their rulers." Why would our forefathers want Christians as rulers? Because they understood that Christians feared God and would rule faithfully.

A faithful man can be trusted. But the Bible says confidence in an unfaithful man is like a broken foot, or a foot out of joint. You cannot depend upon it, and you cannot depend upon him. A faithful man will not look at men, but at principles; he will look at that which is right. That is why, in Exodus 23:3, God said to the judges, "Neither shalt thou countenance a poor man in his cause." Just because a man is poor does not mean that you favor him. God does not demand sympathy; He demands righteousness and justice.

Applications: Dependability and God's Use of the Faithful

What makes us faithful? We fear God. What will make us even more faithful, with greater understanding and possession of the fear of

God? Let me make a couple of applications. Dr. Bob Jones Sr. used to say, “The greatest ability is dependability.” When someone is dependable, he is faithful. He may not be able to do much, but he can be faithful.

Faithfulness sustains and upholds every institution. When faithfulness fails, so do institutions. Look at Washington, D.C.; Atlanta; churches; marriages; society. When God entrusts us with a stewardship, He expects us to be faithful. Are you dependable? You need to be faithful to the preaching of the Word of God. God always provides for His people, and you need to be here to receive what He gives you.

I never will forget the first time at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, when they fed me creamed beef on toast. I said, “I am not eating that slop, period.” I came from a farm, where my mother fixed eggs, grits, biscuits, and gravy. I would not eat it, and I did not—until we went on about a five-mile hike with a full field pack. The next time they served me creamed beef on toast, I asked for an extra portion.

Because they dished out what they knew that we would need. And that's what God does. God dishes out in the messages that which He knows you're going to need, which will sustain you on those five-mile hikes with full field packs.

The second application is this: God will always have a man for His work. Everybody knows about Nehemiah and Ezra, but how many knew about Hanani? God does not always use Ezras and Nehemiahs. He uses those small, insignificant people that most of us have never heard about, but who are faithful in every area of their life. A small, insignificant individual who is faithful is capable of doing the work that God entrusts to him. God will always have a worker for His harvest. Those men who fear God will evidence that fear by their faithfulness.

I know I'm a sinner. I want to be faithful. I know that I probably have not always been faithful, but I want to be. The Apostle Paul said in 1 Timothy 1:12, "And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry." He counted me faithful. Not that Paul was faithful—he was probably far more faithful than most of us, that is true—but he

said, "He counted me faithful." Counted there means to deem, to account, to consider.

Do you realize that in the grace, mercy, and compassion of God, even with our faults, failings, shortcomings, and sins, God is still pleased to use us and to count us faithful? And when we are faithful, He receives all the honor, all the glory, and all the praise. For if we're faithful, He is the only one who can make us so, because He is the only one who can give us the fear and love of God in our hearts. A faithful man shall abound with blessings. Let's be faithful.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we ask You for Your grace and mercy. We ask, Father, that You'd make us faithful; and those of us who are faithful, Lord God, make us more faithful, make us more dependable. Give us, Lord, Your grace that we may serve Thee acceptably with reverence and godly fear. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 14

Ole Bedford Forrest

July 13, 2014

Old Bedford

Introduction and Scripture Reading

I want to bring a message today entitled Old Bedford and show you some biblical principles from Old Bedford's life. A couple of years ago, I brought another message on General Nathan Bedford Forrest, but this one is totally different. The title is drawn from 1 Samuel 4:9: "Be strong and quit yourselves like men, O ye Philistines, that ye be not servants unto the Hebrews as they have been to you. Quit yourselves like men, and fight." You may be wondering why I am reading this verse, but I think you will discover the answer shortly.

Forrest's Character and Lack of Formal Education

General Nathan Bedford Forrest was better known as Old Bedford. He was probably one of the most colorful, courageous, talented, and unique men that ever lived. In reality, Old Bedford was everything that Hollywood actors wanted to be.

The difference was simply this: Old Bedford was real and genuine, and they were fakes. He was a fighter; they were pretenders. Forrest had down-to-earth common sense, while they merely had lines memorized. Forrest drew from his bountiful experiences, from which he had learned greatly, and from great principles and great lessons; they drew only from scripts. Old Bedford was the genuine article. He was a man's man, yet he was tender, gracious, and kind, especially toward women.

Listen carefully. His great temper was brought under control only after he was converted. But his great temper and indignation were usually unleashed in battle or against those who were incompetent, lazy, or cowards. He had no use for any of those individuals.

Before I finish this message, let me pose something to you. Can you imagine what Washington, D.C., would be like if we had four or five Old Bedfords up there today? Can you imagine what Atlanta, Georgia, would be like, or any state capital? Forrest was one of those individuals who was a fighter; he never gave in and he never gave up. Forrest has often been betrayed as a backwoods bumpkin, so to speak.

It is true that he did not have any formal education. He even had tested a pencil. He said a pencil reminded him of a snake. His spelling was atrocious, and he usually spelled words by their sounds, that is, phonetically. Yet his reports were readable, although the spelling was horrible.

He had no formal education, and yet he was educated: educated in the school of hard knocks, the school of experience, and the school of common sense. Such an education is usually far superior to one that is merely from scholastic endeavors, especially on the college level. What good is a diploma if one does not know how to work, apply the knowledge that he has, or respond to others?

I have known a number of men who had earned PhDs behind their names, and they could not teach their way out of a wet paper bag. Just because someone has a diploma signed by a university, that piece of paper does not mean that one is able to function in society or hold a job. Dr. Bob Jones, Sr., years ago, gave some sage advice:

Never go possum hunting with a man who wishes to pursue opossums.

He surmised correctly that if a man did not know about possum hunting, he knew nothing about possums at all, and you were simply wasting your time pursuing opossums with such an individual. Forrest was a man who knew the difference between a possum and an opossum. He may have never gone to West Point, but he outthought those who did go to West Point.

Forrest quipped to Captain Louis Hosea, a Union captain, in 1865, “I ain't no graduate of West Point and never rubbed my backside up against any college.” It is impossible to learn the lessons that Bedford learned in college.

Forrest's Military Genius and Tactics

Young Bedford was self-educated, using the wilderness and his life on the frontier as his classroom and teacher. He lived by his instincts and by his wits. Violence was very common on the frontier, and Forrest had his share of it at a very early age. He had to learn to act, think, and defend himself. In those days, hunting and marksmanship, as well as horsemanship, were not sports. They were absolutely necessary, not only to support your family, but also to defend your life. Simply because Old Bedford did not have a formal education does not mean that he was a country buckton.

Forrest was not ignorant or dull-witted. On the contrary, he learned to think things through, make decisions based upon facts, and apply those decisions. Militarily, he was unsurpassed; that is why he was given the nickname the Wizard of the Saddle. His ability to see the battle, assess the strengths and weaknesses of the enemy, and quickly make use of those assessments was unparalleled. Forrest had a very unusual mind.

He could reason calmly and rapidly, no matter how perilous or dangerous the situation. Even in moments of extreme peril, he recognized and analyzed problems with great speed, which always aided him in the military arena. Nathan Bedford Forrest was a product of his time, and yet he was ahead of his times. His tactics are still being taught in military academies. Three men who studied

Forrest were the German General Erwin Rommel, the Desert Fox; George Patton; and Norman Schwarzkopf. All of these men studied the tactics of Nathan Bedford Forrest.

Forrest was not converted to Christianity until after the war was over. However, his mother and his wife were Christians, and he imbibed many scriptural principles from them. They may not have been derived immediately from Scripture, yet they were scriptural principles. Boris spoke the truth, even though his language and speech were not necessarily in full agreement with Colossians 4:6: "Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man." Forrest's speech was always seasoned, but not necessarily with grace or salt. He was a cusser. His speech was sound in the sense that he could not possibly be misunderstood. Those around Old Bedford, even pastors, said that although his language may have been rough before his conversion, it was never vulgar or obscene. Forrest would not put up with vulgarity from anyone.

Forrest's Thoughts on Fighting and Independence

I don't know if you've ever read anything about Nathan Bedford Forrest, but I've read a number of books. I've often wondered what goes through the mind of a man like Nathan Bedford Forrest. What were his thoughts on certain subjects? What were his thoughts, for instance, on fighting? While it is impossible to answer those questions in every particular, Scripture does give us certain principles by which we may go. You remember Proverbs 23:7, where the Bible says, "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." Simply stated, your conduct and actions reveal the state of your heart. They reveal what you are thinking. That is why Proverbs 4:23 says, "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life."

Do you remember Acts chapter 8, where Peter read the heart of Simon the sorcerer? Simon went to Peter and the other apostles and offered them money that he might buy the power of the Holy Ghost. Peter looked at Simon and said, "Thy money perish with thee," literally, your money go to hell with you, "because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter. Listen, for thine heart is not right in the

sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive," said Peter, "that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity." How did Peter know that Simon's heart was not right with God? The answer is: by what he said and what he did. Obviously, conversation, conduct, and actions reveal the state of our hearts.

Old Bedford was a unique individual in that he thought for himself. He was an independent thinker and did not necessarily follow the ideas and opinions of others. Neither did Forrest hold his tongue. He did not give in to political correctness. He said what he thought and believed, and he did not care who liked it. Forrest once said that he believed a Tennessean in blue was an outrage, and he hoped that blue world would burn good in hell. In other words, any man from Tennessee who would fight for old Lincoln's army ought to go to hell. He believed such a man was a turncoat and a traitor.

The very fact that he was fighting for Abe Lincoln showed his lack of character and his untrustworthiness as well. One of my favorite stories concerns Forrest after the war. He was attending a dinner as the guest of honor, but his conversation was constantly interrupted by a very talkative widow. Finally, she asked General Forrest why his beard was still black while his hair was turning gray. With great politeness, yet straightforwardness, he explained to her that he could not give a statutory explanation for that, with this exception: he might have used his brain a little more than he used his jaw. The widow, whose hair showed not a shred of gray, was evidently satisfied and became quiet for the rest of the meal.

Forrest's Call to Arms and Early War Actions

At the outbreak of the war, Forrest volunteered as a private until he decided to raise and equip a unit at his own expense. He was commissioned lieutenant colonel and issued his call to arms in June 1861: "I wish none but those who desire to be actively engaged. Come on, boys, if you want a heap of fun and to kill some Yankees." Note the absolute honesty of Old Bedford in this call. He wanted only those who were going to be active. He planned on engaging the enemy; if they did not want to fight, he did not want them. Secondly,

he promised them excitement and a heap of fun. Those who followed Forrest did not lack excitement. Third, his goal was to kill some Yankees. Simply stated, he was going to protect his state and the South. If the Yankees invaded and came to fight, he was going to make sure they got that which they came for.

Major John Pelham said it a little more politely: “Ours is a just war, a holy cause. The invader must be met or must meet the fate he deserves, and we must meet him as becomes us and becomes men.” Pelham said it more nicely, but he said the same thing: You invaded us, and we are going to kill you. We are going to fight. It is just that simple.

Napoleon said, “In war, men are nothing, but a man is everything.” One cannot study the life of old Bedford without realizing that he was a man.

His character, his courage, his consistency, and, after his conversion, his Christianity were evident in many ways. I have a message that I have preached in times past from John 1:6, where God said of John the Baptist, “There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.” I have often stopped and thought about that. When God looked at John the Baptist, He said, “There was a man.” You cannot help but ask, did God choose John because John was a man, or did God choose to make him a man, or perhaps was it part of both? But you have to remember, John was a man.

When those Pharisees came to his baptism, what did he say? “O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?” And what did John do? He reproved and rebuked King Herod to his face. He was a man in every sense of the word. Forrest was just like him. You can criticize old Forrest all you want, but the truth of the matter is this: you have to admit that he was a man. He fought like a man. He acted like a man. He refused to give in. He refused to give up.

I read our text in 1 Samuel 4:9, and I believe that text is very revealing. It is impressive to understand that even the heathen appreciate manhood, freedom, and fighting abilities: “Be strong, and quit yourselves like men, O ye Philistines, that ye be not servants unto the Hebrews, as they have been to you: quit yourselves like

men, and fight." Here is the enemy. Here are the pagans. Here are the heathen.

And what do they say? "We're not going to be a servant. We're not going to be a slave to the Hebrews like they have been to us." So what's the remedy? Quit yourselves like men and fight. Certainly, that is exactly what Old Bedford did. He always fought, and we know what his thoughts were on fighting because of his actions.

In early 1862, during the fighting at Fort Donelson, Bedford outfought and whipped the regular army soldiers of Ulysses S. Grant. However, the inept generalship of the Confederate forces allowed Bedford's heroic actions to be wasted. The fort was eventually surrounded, and the Confederates decided to surrender. When Forrest, then a lieutenant colonel, discovered that Generals Pillow and Floyd were planning to surrender, Old Bedford reported to them, "To hell with that! I didn't come here to surrender!" And he did not. He told them that they did not have to surrender, that he would find a way out. And he did find a way out. Four thousand of his men followed him, and the rest could have escaped as well without surrendering.

A few days later, Forrest reached Nashville, Tennessee, when the fall of Nashville was imminent. He took command of the city, evacuated a number of governmental officials, and then took millions of dollars' worth of heavy machinery used to make weapons, saving it because the Confederacy could ill afford to lose those machines.

It was this type of action that made Bedford the great general that he was. He did not rely upon others, nor did he even rely upon the Confederate government. Initially, he equipped his men out of his own pocket; afterward, he equipped them with weapons taken from defeated Yankees. The Forrest men were always some of the best-equipped and best-armed men in the Confederate Army.

Forrest's Philosophy of War and Relentless Pursuit

Obviously, he was a man who knew exactly what to do. Forrest captured a Union officer and took his sword. A little later, while examining it, he saw that it was sharp only for the first couple of

inches and demanded a grindstone. When one of his militarily educated staff officers told General Forrest that the sword was sharp for only a couple of inches because it was for show, for decoration,

It was not for fighting. Forrest said, “Damn such nonsense. War means fighting, and fighting means killing. Turn the grindstone.” He was not going to have a weapon that was useless or worthless, one that would not function.

That is like today. I have been in some of these Bass Pro Shops, where they have fancy shotguns costing thirty, forty, and fifty thousand dollars. I often thought, If I had the money to have something like that, I would not buy it. If I spent fifty thousand dollars for a shotgun, do you think I would shoot it? No. I would have it in a vault somewhere. It would be worthless. Forrest said, “I’m not going to have any weapon that’s worthless.”

John Wythe, John Allen Wythe, who was Forrest’s principal biographer, said this: “Forrest knew that the excitement of a forward movement inspired even the timid with courage, while to stand in the open and receive a charge was a severe test even for the bravest of men.”

Forrest understood the role of boldness and audacity in combat leadership. One Confederate private wrote concerning Forrest: “Mounted on his big sorrel horse, saber in hand, sleeves rolled up, his coat lying across the pommel of his saddle, looking the very god of war, Forrest exhorted his tired troopers, ‘Get up, men. When you hear the bugle sound, every man must charge, and we’ll give them hell.’” That is exactly what Forrest would do.

Stonewall Jackson said it like this: “Always mystify, mislead, and surprise the enemy if possible. When you strike and overcome him, never give up the pursuit as long as your men have the strength to follow. For an army routed, if haughtily pursued, becomes panic-stricken and can then be destroyed by half its number.” Forrest may never have heard Stonewall say that, but he took that maxim and became its master. He would never give up; he would run his enemy into the ground.

He believed in courage, boldness, and aggression. He believed that you should never miss an opportunity to strike the enemy. He

said to his soldiers, “Whenever you meet the enemy, no matter how few there are of you or how many there are of them, show fight. If you run away, they will pursue you and probably catch you. If you show fight, they will think there are more of you and will not push you half as hard.”

Forrest practiced what he preached. The Lord was clearly with Forrest in all of his battles. You have to remember that Forrest was not saved at that particular time. But God was going to save him. As you study the Bible, you will find that God oftentimes not only preserves the lives of those whom he has ordained to eternal life, but he will also preserve the lives of individuals whom he is going to use for future service.

Listen to what God said to King Cyrus, who was a Persian, in Isaiah 45, verses 4 through 6: “For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by name, though thou hast not known me. I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me. I am the Lord, there is none else, there is no God beside me. I have girded thee, though thou hast not known me, that they may know from the rising of the sun and from the west that there is none beside me.”

“I am the Lord, there is none else.” It was Cyrus who let the children of Israel go. He wrote the decree. God said, “I've called you. I surnamed you, though you have not known me.” Certainly, God was with Forrest, and the Lord protected him and preserved him.

David said it like this in Psalm 41, verse 11: “By this I know that thou favourest me, because my enemy doth not triumph over me.” General Forrest had twenty-nine horses shot out from under him, one with a cannonball. He personally killed a minimum of thirty men in battle himself. His enemies did not triumph over him.

Listen to Leviticus 26, verses 7 and 8: “And ye shall chase your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword. And five of you shall chase an hundred, and an hundred of you shall put ten thousand to flight: and your enemies shall fall before you by the sword.” Forrest could certainly put his enemies to flight, and he often did so with a handful of men. He literally ran them into the ground.

Forrest was one of the first men to understand mobile warfare, which later became very prominent in the twentieth century. His strategy was fast movement, even if it meant pushing his horses at a killing pace, which he did far more than once. I want you to understand where we are lacking today—not only as individuals, but also in our military and among our politicians.

Forrest's capture of Colonel Abel Strait is a good illustration of this point. Colonel Strait was a Hoosier from Indiana. He took 2,000 hand-picked men and intended to destroy the railroads that ran from Chattanooga, Tennessee, to Atlanta, Georgia, and to Knoxville, Tennessee. Colonel Strait was joined by General G. M. Dodge, who brought 7,500 men. General Dodge had one mission: to hold Forrest and contain him while Colonel Strait tore up all the railroads.

Forrest knew what was happening. He left most of his men to deal with General Dodge and told them to make Dodge believe that there was going to be a major assault and make him dig in. That is what they did. Then Forrest took 1,000 men and went after Colonel Strait. He called up the Colonel Strait on April 30, 1863. His order was, “Shoot at everything in blue and keep up the scare.”

Since Strait was already on top of Sand Mountain when the Confederates attacked, they were initially repulsed. But Strait was scared, and he took his men and turned to run. He ran, and Forrest and his men were right behind him. Strait laid ambush after ambush, but none were really successful; none stopped Forrest. He finally attempted another battle with Forrest on Hog Mountain, but that battle was equally unsuccessful. Whenever Strait would burn a bridge, Forrest would find a way to cross the river or creek.

This is where he wrote the note and got the lock of Emma Samson's hair, when old Strait burned one bridge and Forrest couldn't get across the river. Finally, this little girl came up and said, “Well, I saw some old cows ford down the road down here, and said, you might can get”

Forrest said, “Where?” She said, “Let me saddle my pony and I’ll show you.” He said, “There’s not time for that.” He pulled her up behind him, and she rode and showed him where they crossed. He

let her go, wrote her a note, and got a lock of her hair as well. Then he and his men crossed and kept up the chase after Strait.

To understand the stamina, courage, and fortitude of Forrest and his men, it must be understood that they had ridden forty-four out of forty-eight hours to catch and confront Strait. They had fought during the last eighteen of those hours, in and out of the saddle, with almost no cessation. Strait also had the advantage of fresh mounts, plenty of horses and mules, and, whenever he was in advance, he stole all the horses, mules, and food he could in order to deprive Forrest of fresh mounts and provisions.

But Forrest simply pressed on. If a horse died or a soldier faltered, Forrest did not slow down. He was merely out a soldier and short a horse. That was all there was to it. He pressed Colonel Strait so heavily that Strait wrote, "I needed to march all night, but the command was in no condition to do so. I only halted at Gadsden sufficiently long to destroy a quantity of arms and stores found there and proceeded."

"Many of our animals and men were entirely worn out and unable to keep up and were captured. It now became evident to me that our only hope was in crossing the river at Rome and destroying the bridge, which would delay Forrest a day or two and allow my command a little time to sleep, without which it would be impossible to proceed."

Forrest was already ahead of Strait because he knew that. He had sent men to arouse others, control the bridge, and keep Strait from crossing it. He had him, and he knew he had him. Starting from Cortland, Alabama, at 1 a.m. on April 29, he and his command marched sixteen miles to Moulton, Alabama, then seventeen miles to Days Gap. They rode and fought all day on April 30 and through much of the night, reaching Blountstown, seventy-six miles from their starting point, at 10 a.m. on May 1.

The time consumed was 57 hours, and for 52 of those hours, his troops were in the saddle. From Blountstown to Gadsden to Lawrence, where Strait finally surrendered, they covered 31 more miles, making a total of 150 miles. You must also remember that the terrain was rough, mountainous, and in mud and rain. General

Braxton Bragg reported to the War Department May the 3rd, from Gadsden in Rome, after five days and nights of fighting and marching, General Forrest captured Colonel Strait with his whole command of 1,600 men, with rifles, horses, etc.

When Colonel Strait stopped at L'Arche to feed and rest most of his troops, they fell asleep instantly by the time they hit the ground. When Forrest caught up with Colonel Strait, he advanced at once, making the most of his numerical weakness. Strait tried in vain to awaken his men. Some sat up half dazed, not knowing where they were or what they were doing. Finally, Strait aroused about half of his command and placed them in a prone position for better protection and more accurate shooting. Instead of shutting one eye and taking deadly aim at the Confederates, however, the Federal soldiers closed both eyes and went fast asleep.

Colonel Strait actually said this in his report: “Nature was exhausted. A large portion of my best troops actually went to sleep while lying in a line of battle under a severe skirmish fire.” All the time the Confederates were shooting, the Yankees were sleeping. Then General Forrest called upon Colonel Strait to surrender.

Strait asked him what the conditions were. Forrest replied, "Immediate surrender; your men to be treated as prisoners of war; the officers are to retain their side arms and personal property." Colonel Strait asked for time to consult with his officers, and Forrest replied, "All right. But you will not require much time. I have a column of fresh troops at hand, now nearer Rome than you are. You cannot cross the river in your front, and I have men enough right here to run right over you."

That was a bluff. None was true. While Strait talked to Forrest, Forrest turned and signaled Captain Pointer, who was responsible for Forrest's two pieces of artillery. Pointer knew what to do. He began to circle the two pieces behind the hill. Forrest's back was to the artillery, and Colonel Strait was facing it. Colonel Strait said, "Name of God, how many guns do you have? That's fifteen; I've counted already."

Forrest turned his head slightly and said, "Well, I reckon that was all that was able to keep up with us." Forrest shouted orders to

Captain Pointer for the disposition of imaginary commands. Two of his officers caught the drift and moved their troops over and over to make it appear that Forrest had thousands at his disposal.

Strait and his men agreed unanimously to surrender. Thus, Forrest, with around 500 men, captured Strait and his 1,600 men, even though some of Forrest's men had fallen by the wayside and could not keep up. He had sent some ahead in case Strait did not surrender.

The Battle of Bryce's Crossroads

Forrest was a fighter. He refused to give up. He refused to give in. Many have stated that Forrest's greatest battle was known as the Battle of Bryce's Crossroads. It was there, June the 10th through the 13th of 1864, that Forrest, with 3,500 men, met and defeated General S. D. Sturgis with 8,000 men.

Forrest predicted that June 10 in Mississippi would be a scorcher. He needed to be at the crossroads at least three hours in advance, because he knew they were coming that way. Forrest knew the federal cavalry would move ahead of the infantry. “We can whip their cavalry in that time,” he said. “As soon as the fight opens, they will send back to have the infantry hurried up. It’s going to be hot as hell, and coming on a run for five or six miles, their infantry will be so tired out that we will ride right over them. I want everything to move up as soon as possible. I will go ahead with the line and the escort and open the fight.” Forrest hid many of his men among the scrub oaks and dense foliage.

“The country is densely wooded and the undergrowth is so heavy that when we strike them, they will not know how few men we have.” Although Forrest had a total of 3,500 men, not all were with him; others were behind and still coming. Yet Forrest said, “I’m going to be there, and I’m going to take these few men and go ahead and open the fight.” Fewness in number never hindered Forrest from striking his enemy.

Sure enough, Forrest whipped the cavalry and those three out. The infantry was hurried up just as he predicted. He whipped the cavalry so quickly that there was momentarily a lull in the fighting,

and his men got a few minutes' rest. Finally, the federal infantry came, and Forrest began shouting, "Get up, men! Get up! I've ordered Bell to charge on the left. When you hear the guns and the bugle sounds, every man must charge, and we'll give them hell."

Forrest gave them exactly what he described. They began to retreat, and their retreat turned into a rout. Order gave way to confusion and panic. Forrest pushed them so hard and quickly that they could not form any defensive line. Men threw away their gear, arms, and anything that would slow their escape. Wagons were abandoned, and some were purposely set on fire by the Yankees to deprive the Confederates of their contents. Forrest rode up and saw several of his men sitting on their horses watching the wagons burn. He shouted, "Don't you see the damn Yanks are burning my wagons? Get off your horses and put those wagons out!" They snatched off the burning beds they had set on fire, and most of the wagons were saved.

One of General Sturgis's officers asked for the ammunition being discarded, so that he and some of his men might try to save the day from complete disaster. General Sturgis replied, "Listen," he said, "for God's sake, if Mr. Forrest will leave me alone, I will let him alone. You've done all that you could, and more than was expected of you. Now all you can do is save yourselves." But Forrest had no intention of letting Sturgis and his men alone.

He pushed them with all speed and power. One of Forrest's troopers came upon a discouraged and dejected Union soldier. When the soldier saw the Confederate, he said, "Old Forrest gave us hell today." "Yes," he said, "and we were fooled about Old Forrest's strength. He certainly had fifty thousand men in that fight. The woods were full of them. They were everywhere." The Confederate soldier then informed him that he was now a prisoner of one of Old Bedford's men. "What did they—fifty thousand?" He did not have more than 3,500 in all. What did Forrest say? "They'll never know how few we are if we strike them hard."

General Sturgis himself described the rout as "a hell of a stampede," in which every man would have to take care of himself. The commander of the Federal rear guard wrote: "The day was very hot. The soldiers had eaten nothing since the morning of the 10th.

They were without rations; many had thrown away or destroyed their arms; and all the infantry near the rear had reduced their clothing as much as possible, hoping to keep in advance of the rear guard. But the general in command was leading the retreat so rapidly that I was obliged to leave hundreds every mile who could not keep up with ordinary marching."

How fast were the Yankees retreating? It had taken a week for them to march from Collierville to Brice's Cross Roads, but the return march of ninety miles was made without rest and without food, after a day in battle and two nights and a day. What had taken them a week to accomplish, they covered in two nights and a day. Moreover, when the Yankees reached White Station on the morning of the 13th, many did so with deadbeat horses.

Men so stiffened as to require assistance to enable them to walk, and some of them too footsore to stand upon their feet, crawled upon their hands and knees to the railroad cars. General Sturgis reported the loss of 2,240 men, of whom 223 were killed, 394 wounded, and 1,623 missing. All of his artillery was lost, along with more than 200 fine six-horse wagons. General Sturgis was the man who boasted that he would bring back Forrest's head or his hair, and he did not even get a single strand of that hair, much less his head.

Old Bedford reported 96 killed and 396 wounded. However, Forrest lost nothing in the fight. He captured 60 Yankee officers, 1,558 enlisted men, 16 pieces of artillery, 1,500 stands of small arms, 1,000 rounds of artillery ammunition, 300,000 rounds of small arms ammunition, and 176 wagons, mostly six-horse, with a vast supply of harness, quartermaster, medical, and other equipment and supplies.

Biblical Principles and Application

I hope you are beginning to understand why General Sherman wrote Secretary of War Edwin Stanton: "I know that I would have been willing to attempt the same task with that force of 8,000 men, but Forrest is the very devil. And I think he has some of our troops under power. I have two officers at Memphis that will fight all the time, A.J. Smith and Maurer. I will order them to make up a force to go out and follow Forrest to the death. If it costs 10,000 lives and breaks the

treasury, there will never be peace in Tennessee until Forrest is dead."

Old Bedford was a fighter. Let us first emphasize a biblical principle. It is found in Ecclesiastes 9, verse 11: "I returned and saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift nor the battle to the strong." Forrest, with fewer men, consistently whipped and destroyed much stronger, more numerous, and better-equipped troops.

We have to remember David in 1 Samuel 17, verse 47, where he said, "The battle is the Lord's." In Deuteronomy 20, verse 1, God says, "When thou goest out to battle against thine enemies and seest horses and chariots and a people more than thou, be not afraid of them, for the Lord thy God is with thee, who brought thee up out of the land of Egypt." God said, Do not be afraid of a large host. It does not matter. David said it like this in Psalm 3, verse 6: "I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people that have beset themselves against me round about."

There is no doubt that old Bedford could have accomplished that which he did without the grace, power, and mercy of God. However, what we are lacking today is Forrest's philosophy of fighting. Forrest did not intend simply to win a battle; he intended to defeat his enemies. There's a big difference. Forrest was like David: he intended to conquer.

Psalm 18, verses 37 through 42, gives David's philosophy of war, and this was Forrest's philosophy of war: "I pursued my enemies, and overtaken them: neither did I turn again till they were consumed. I have wounded them that they were not able to rise: they are fallen under my feet. Thou hast girded me with strength unto the battle: thou hast subdued under me those that rose up against me. Thou hast also given me the necks of mine enemies; that I might destroy them which hate me." They cried, but there was none to save them, even unto the Lord, but he answered them not. "Then did I beat them small as the dust before the wind: I did cast them out as the dirt in the streets."

What did David say? "I pursued mine enemies, and overtaken them: neither did I turn again till they were consumed." It is not just

a battle that we need to win. We need to understand that God's enemies need to be destroyed. We cannot stop just because we win a battle. Surely, we can be thankful, but the war is not over just because the battle has been won. We will never be what we were in this nation until we produce a generation of men.

Even the Philistines, as wicked as they were, said, “We're not going to be servants to the Hebrews, as they were to us. Quit yourselves like men, and fight!” We need men today who will quit themselves like men—men of character, courage, and Christian principles; men unafraid of prison, death, or defeat; men who will face tyranny and never back down; men who will fight like Forrest in the face of overwhelming odds and never, ever consider quitting. We need men who will never give up, men who will learn to chase their enemies like old Bedford until those enemies cannot run any further. That's what David said: “Neither did I turn again till they were consumed.”

We can learn all kinds of biblical principles. Remember Psalm 144, verse 1: “Blessed be the Lord, my strength, which teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight.”

We need to learn to fight—not only physically, but spiritually, mentally, emotionally, and in every area of life—and never give in or give up. If God were pleased to give us men like John the Baptist of old and old Bedford of more recent times, we would see changes, because such men would never quit.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank You for Your love and grace, and for the principles. We thank You for men like Forrest. Help us, Father, to learn from those things that are biblical and mold our lives by them, not by things that are unbiblical. Give us grace, Lord, to serve and worship Thee. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 15

Are You Dumber Than a Beast?

November 27, 2012

Introduction and Reading of Psalm 104:20-22

Psalm 104, verses 20 through 22, says, "Thou makest darkness and it is night, wherein all the beasts of the forest do creep forth. The young lions roar after their prey and seek their meat from God. The sun arises, they gather themselves together and lay them down in their dens."

The title of the message is actually twofold. The first is a question: Are you dumber than a beast? The subtitle is Inarticulate Prayers. You may be wondering about the connection between the question, "Are you dumber than a beast?" and the subtitle, "Inarticulate Prayers." I am going to answer that question before I end the message. When I ask, "Are you dumber than a beast?" interestingly enough, there are several times in the Bible when man is compared to beasts and often stated to be dumber than beasts.

Man Compared to Beasts in Scripture

Psalm 49, verse 12, says, "Nevertheless man being in honor abideth not, he is like the beasts that perish." So here he is talking about man being like the beast that perish. Then verse 20 says, "Man that is in honor and understandeth not is like the beast that perish." Once again, man is likened unto a beast. Someone who is in a position of honor and does not understand, God said he is like the beast that perish.

Psalm 73 shows us that at times even Christians may act beastly. For instance, godly Asaph, in a moment when he saw his ignorance and his ignorant way of thinking, said in verse 22, "So foolish was I and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee."

What was happening in Psalm 73? Asaph had been envious against the workers of iniquity in the sense that they had plenty; their eyes stood out for fatness. After watching the prosperity of the wicked, he said, "Surely I've cleansed my hands in vain. I've washed them in vain." In other words, it was the wicked who prospered. Asaph looked at the wicked and saw that they had plenty, while he had sought to live for God and wondered whether he had cleansed his hands in vain. In that moment, because of his ignorance and ignorant way of thinking, he confessed that he was as a beast before God.

Asaph was a righteous man suffering within and without. Yet in Psalm 73:16 he says, “When I thought to know this,” that is, the prosperity of the wicked and the suffering of the righteous, “it was too painful for me; until I went into the sanctuary of God, then understood I their end.”

“Surely thou did set them in slippery places, and castest them down into destruction. How they are brought into desolation, as in a moment they are utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream, when one awakens, so, Lord, when thou awakenest, thou shalt despise their image. Thus my heart was grieved, I was pricked in my reins, so foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee.”

When God opened his eyes and showed him the end of the wicked, he said, “I’d rather be righteous and suffer.” He had been envious of them; he was ignorant as a beast before God. Very

obviously, there are times when Christians may act beastly. Asaph certainly did.

Men Are Dumber Than Animals (Isaiah 1:2-3)

Isaiah 1:2 says, “Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth. For the Lord has spoken. I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider, a sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corruptors, they provoke the Lord, they provoke the Holy One of Israel into anger, they are going away backwards.”

Notice verse 3: “The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.” God is saying that men are dumber than animals. At least animals know where they are fed and who feeds them. Men oftentimes eat at the trough of God’s mercies and then immediately deny Him and deny His mercies.

At least animals look to their owners for nourishment and sustenance. Every time I go out into the pasture or go to the barn, it is amazing how those cows, every one of them, lift up their eyes and look at you and follow you. They watch everything that you do because they know who feeds them and where they are fed. At least they have sense enough to look to their owner and master. But God says, “My people don't have the sense of an animal in the fact that they don't look to Me.” Unhappily, men seldom look to their divine owner and master, the Lord Jesus Christ.

God's Sovereign Creation and Ownership of Animals

Yet the truth of the matter is, without Him, we would perish. Now, I want you to go back to Psalm 104. I am going to be expounding this passage shortly, but I want you to see the verse that caught my eye. In Psalm 104 and verse 21, the Scripture says, “The young lions roar after their prey and seek their meat from God.” As I looked at that verse, I had to ask a few questions. First, do animals really seek their meat from God? If so, how? Secondly, is there a connection between the lion roaring and seeking his meat from God? Thirdly, how are we

to understand this verse in light of the overall teaching of the Word of God?

In order to begin understanding our text, we have to review and rehearse a number of fundamental truths. We know that God has sovereignly created every animal. He is the Creator, and by virtue of His creatorship, all animals, everything, belongs to Him. Not only do animals belong to the Lord, but He is the one who designed their bodies and appetites and placed them in their respective environments. Have you ever wondered why animals live where they live?

In Psalm 104, verse 18, he says, “The high hills are a refuge for the wild goats and the rocks for the conies.” Why are the mountain peaks the home for the wild goats? If you want to go wild goat hunting, you are going to have to do a lot of climbing because that is where they live. Wild sheep as well. And why are the conies in the rocks? If you want to go rabbit hunting, you are going in a briar patch. You are not going to go up on top of a mountain somewhere.

God has sovereignly designed all of these animals, and He has placed them sovereignly and providentially in their respective environments. Jeremiah 27, verses 5 and 6, shows God's divine ownership of everything. God had given everything in this passage into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar when He sent him to attack Jerusalem and Judah. God says, "I have made the earth, the man, and the beasts that are upon the ground, by my great power and by my outstretched arm, and have given it unto whom it seemeth meet unto me. 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 also to serve him."

Very obviously, one cannot give what he does not possess. The very fact that God gave the beasts of the field into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar to serve him meant, therefore, that they were His creation and His property. Psalm 50, verses 10 and 12, shows how God claims divine ownership over every animal: "For every beast of the forest is Mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains, and the wild beasts of the field are mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell thee, for the world is mine, and the fullness thereof."

Note what God says: "Everything is mine. Every beast of the forest is mine. The cattle upon a thousand hills is mine." Everything belongs to God. God has so ordered and so ordained the animal kingdom in their respective natures and habitats that they honor Him. You say, "What? Animals honor God?"

Isaiah 43, verses 19 and 20, contains words that may astound you. In this passage, God speaks of how He is going to bless His people. God says, "Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth. Shall you not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert." Then He says, "The beast of the field shall honor me, the dragons and the owls, because I give waters in the wilderness and rivers in the desert to give drink to my people, my chosen."

The sense of this passage is plain, and the image is highly poetical but beautiful as well. The Bible is teaching here that God will pour out such copious floods of water upon the sandy waste deserts to supply His people that even the wild beasts will be sensible of the fact that God has abundantly supplied it. And He says, “They will honor Me.”

John Calvin said, “It was proper that magnificent language should be employed in extolling the power of God, that words might supply that which seemed to be wanting in the reality. The meaning is that the power of God will be so visible and manifest that the very beast impressed with the feeling of it shall acknowledge and worship God.”

Animals Praise and Teach Us

Someone is going to object and say, “But animals cannot honor, praise, or worship God.” My question is, how do you know? God, who created them, may have given them some rudimentary knowledge, or at least some rudimentary ability in some way to recognize Him and honor Him. In one sense of the word, they do honor Him because they fulfill the purpose for which God created them. You do not see animals running around trying to change their nature, their calling, or their habitat. They are willing to stay right exactly where God placed them and the way God created them.

Look in your Bibles to Psalm 148. Animals do indeed function the way God created them to function. The entire psalm deals with praising God. Once someone objects and says, “Well, animals cannot praise God,” look at what the Bible says: “Praise ye the Lord. Praise the Lord from the heavens. Praise Him in the heights. Praise ye Him, all His angels. Praise you Him, all His hosts. Praise you Him, sun and moon. Praise Him, all you stars of light. Praise Him, you heaven of heavens, and you waters that be above the heavens. Let them praise the name of the Lord, for He commanded and they were created.”

Do you see what He is saying? God created the sun, the moon, the stars, and the waters above the heaven, and now He says, “Let them praise the name of the Lord, for He commanded, and they were created.”

SCRIPTURE READING - Psalm 148:5-14 (KJV)

So somehow, in God's creation, there is a way that His creation redounds to His honor, His glory, and His praise.

"Let them praise the name of the Lord, for He commanded they were created. He hath also established them for ever and ever. He hath made a decree which shall not pass. Praise the Lord from the earth, you dragons and all deeps, fire and hail, snow and vapor, stormy wind fulfilling His words, mountains and all hills, fruitful trees and cedars, beasts and all cattle, creeping things and flying fowl, kings of the earth and all people, princes and all the judges of the earth, both young men and maidens, old men and the children. Let them praise the name of the Lord, for His name alone is excellent. His glory is above the earth and heaven. He also exalted the horn of His people, the praise of all of His saints, even of the children of Israel, of people near unto Him. Praise ye the Lord."

It is interesting how in this passage, God is telling even the beast and the cattle, the flying fowl, and creeping things to praise Him.

Well, in a sense they do. In a sense they do because they were created by God and God commands them.

Now, I want you to turn in your Bibles to the book of Job. Turn in your Bibles to the book of Job, if you would, chapter 12. And let me answer and ask a question. Job chapter 12, and notice if you would please, verse 7. Job 12, verse 7. Do you realize that there are numerous times in the scripture that you and I are bidden to go to the animals and the insects to learn? Look in Job 12 and verse 7. Job says, "But ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee, and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee."

Now just stop right there. "But ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee, and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee." So Job here sends his friends to the beasts and the birds for instructions.

Now obviously the beast and the birds did not create themselves, nor do they provide for themselves or sustain themselves. It is God who supports, sustains, and provides for them. Moreover, all the animals, all the beasts, all the fowls, all the insects are governed and directed and disposed of as God pleases. And so all of the animals, insects, and fowls then furnish an illustration of God's sovereignty, God's power, God's wisdom, and God's providence.

Now Job bids his friends, "Go to the beasts, and they shall teach thee. And the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee." What is it that we can learn from God's animal creation? And the answer is, there's plenty that we can learn. In fact, if you will turn in your Bibles to Proverbs chapter 6, let me just show you. God here sends individuals to the ants so that they may learn and understand godly preparation and a biblical work ethic. Notice in Proverbs chapter 6, beginning there in verse 6, God says, "Go to the ant, thou sluggard, consider her ways, and be wise."

"Stop and watch the ants, which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provided her meat in the summer, and gathered her food in the harvest. Now watch. 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."

God says you need to go to the ant and learn some things. What does the ant do? The ant prepares for itself during the summer. It puts up while the putting up is good. It gets while the getting is good.

The ant is preparing for when there is no food available, when there is nothing to eat; the ant is going to have something. The ant does not have an overseer or a guide. God says, just go to the ant, and you will learn to put up, to prepare, to put things back, and to save.

Moreover, you can learn from the ant a biblical work ethic. The ant works while it can work and gets while it can get. Most people are willing, if they have just a little money in their pocket, to go play. It does not matter whether work is available. They have money for the moment and are happy, and they are not going to work. But the ant teaches us that there comes a time when work may not be available. You have to get it while the getting is good.

Make hay while the sun shines? One thing I learned growing up on the farm is this: when harvest comes in, you do not piddle around. You do not have time to play. When the harvest comes in, you have to work and get it while you can. If not, it is going to rot in the field.

This is what God is saying: "Go to the ant thou sluggard, consider her ways and be wise." Learn to prepare, learn to put up, and learn a biblical work ethic. Work while you can work.

Learning from Birds: Judgment and Providence

We can even learn concerning the judgment of God from the fowls of the air. Jeremiah 8:6 says, "I hearken and heard, and they spake not aright." He is talking about His people: "No man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done? Everyone turneth to his course, as the horse rusheth into battle."

“Yea, the stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times, and the turtle,” that is, the turtle dove, “and the crane, and the swallow, observe their time of their coming. But my people know not the judgment of the Lord.” Now wait a minute. Look at verse 6 again. He says, “No man spoke aright. No man repented him of the wickedness, saying, What have I done? Everyone turned to his course, as the horse rusheth into battle.” Then he says, “The stork and the turtledove and the crane and the swallow observed the time of their coming.” Then he adds this: “But my people know not the judgment of the Lord.” Now what in the world is God saying?

Jeremiah here is appealing to the obedience which migratory birds render to the law of their natures. Do you realize the stork knows when it is time to migrate from one country to the other? So does the swallow, and so does the crane. In other words, they know when to seek a warmer climate to escape the adversity and severity of winter. They know how to get out of danger. They know how to get out of the way. But God says, “But my people know not the judgment of the Lord.” In other words, God says, “My people are dumb.” Look what He said in verse 6: “I hearkened and heard, and they spake not aright.”

“No man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done?” In other words, nobody is willing to get out of the way of adversity or judgment. When God says, “But my people know not,” He is pointing out the fact that the people did not have the sense of the birds. The birds knew how to get out of adversity. They knew how to get out of the severity of winter. But what did God’s people do?

They just sat back, lax and lazy. They did not see the judgment coming, did not prepare, and did not get out of the way. God says they are more stupid than birds. May I suggest that being called a birdbrain might actually be a compliment? At least the birds know how to get out of danger. That is what God is saying. And He sends us to the fowls of the air. He says that they will tell you if you will just ask.

In Matthew chapter 6, we can learn about God's sovereign providence. We have already learned a biblical work ethic from the ants and preparation from the ants, and we can learn about the judgment of God from birds. Our Lord says, “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 you not much better than they?”

At least the ant prepares. A bird can build a nest, but a bird cannot sow and reap and put its harvest into a barn. So what do the birds do? They just trust God every day to give them their food. And He gives it. He takes care of them. He provides for them. There is not a billionaire in this country that could feed every bird every day for

one year. Stop and think about that. And yet God feeds them all the time, every day. They look to Him. They trust in Him.

These fowls of the air are content with God's sovereign provision and God's sovereign providence. What can we learn? What does He say in Hebrews chapter 13? “Be content with whatsoever things that you have.” You can learn contentment. I use that verse on Alice many times. She tells me she needs a new dress. I say, “Well, we're biblical. Let's see what the Bible says.” And I'll turn to Hebrews 13 verse 5: “Be content with such things as you have.” I say, “That's what the Bible says. You don't need a new dress.” But that's what the Bible does teach. It does teach contentment. And that's what He said. We can learn contentment from the birds. We just have to do it.

With all this in mind, go back to Psalm 104. I told you I was going to come back to this passage and explain it, but I wanted you to keep all this in mind because Psalm 104 and verse 21 does need some explaining in light of what we just reviewed and rehearsed. “The young lions roar after their prey and seek their meat from God.” Lions roar probably for various reasons, but our text details the roar of the lion for one specific reason here, and that is hunger. Let me give you a little bit of information, one paragraph of something that I researched about the roar of a lion.

The Lion's Roar as Prayer and Seeking

Research gives this answer concerning why lions roar. The roar of a male lion can reach the human ear from as far as five miles, though it is not clear how far a lion can hear another lion's roar. Lions communicate among themselves even beyond that distance, showing that they have a better hearing capacity than humans. They roar mostly at night, when they are most active, and they roar only in their own territory. If a lion enters another territory, it remains silent until it is sure it has reached its own. Isn't that amazing? The human ear can hear a lion's roar up to five miles; a lion can probably hear it much farther. But what struck me as I read verse 21 was this: "The young lions roar after their prey and seek their meat from God."

The lion's roar is indicative of hunger and is part of seeking and capturing prey. A lion's roar is so unnerving and terrible that it

astonishes and terrifies the beast being pursued. Although that animal may be faster and fleeter of foot, the roar so frightens it that it almost falls down and becomes easy prey. I have seen lions roar in a zoo just as a man fed them. Although the meat was pushed in and no other lion was around, the lion roared and pounced upon it. Before feeding it, I saw the man reach in and pet the lion like a little kitten. But when he went to feed him, he said, "You stand back," because the lion roared and jumped on that prey.

Now look in Psalm 147, remembering that we are reading about the lion roaring and seeking his meat from God. Notice verse 9; in fact, let us begin with verse 6: "The Lord lifted up the meek, He casted the wicked down to the ground, singing to the Lord with thanksgiving, singing praise upon the harp of our God, who covereth the heavens with clouds, who prepareth rain for the earth, who maketh grass grow upon the mountains."

"He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry." Notice, God gives to the beast its food, and to the young ravens who cry, indicating that even birds cry out to God for food.

Look in Joel chapter 1, beginning with verse 18: "How do the beasts groan? The herds of cattle are perplexed, because they have no pasture. Yea, the flocks of sheep are made desolate. O Lord, to Thee will I cry, for the fire hath devoured the pastures of the wilderness, and the flame hath burned all the trees of the field. Look, the beasts of the field cry also unto Thee. For the rivers of waters are dried up, and the fire hath devoured the pastures of the wilderness." Not only the ravens cry unto God, but also the beasts cry unto God as well.

Now look at Amos chapter 3, verse 4. Consider the question that is asked: "Will a lion roar in the forest when he hath no prey? Will a young lion cry out of his den if he hath taken nothing?" Remember our text: the young lions do roar and seek their prey from God. Here is the question: Will a lion roar in the forest when he has taken no prey? In other words, somehow the roaring is connected with the taking of the prey. Will a young lion cry out of his den if he's taken nothing? The answer would obviously be no; they are not going to roar. The lion's roar brings fear to the lion's prey.

Now look at verse 8 of Amos chapter 3: "The lion hath roared, who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken, who can but prophesy?" Without going into an explanation of this text, note the first part.

"The lion hath roared, who will not fear?" So the roar of the lion does indeed produce fear in the prey. Remember, we are talking about the roar of the lion. The young lions roar and seek their meat from God. In Isaiah 5:29, God is talking about the enemy He is going to send to judge His people, but notice the analogy He uses: "Their roaring shall be like a lion. They shall roar like young lions, yea, they shall roar and lay hold of the prey and shall carry it away safe, and none shall deliver it." When lions roar, then, it is connected with their catching their prey and taking it away.

Now remember: the young lions roar and seek their meat from God. Obviously, there is a connection between the lions roaring and seeking their meat from God. It is a fact that God must give them their food. The roar suggests that even brute creation calls upon God to supply its needs.

God Feeds All Creatures; Our Responsibility to Pray and Thank

Psalm 104:21 says, "The young lions roar after their prey and seek their meat from God." Then, after speaking about all the animals, even the fish of the seas, the psalmist says in verses 27-29, "These wait all upon Thee, that Thou mayest give them their meat in due season. That Thou givest them, they gather. Thou openest Thine hand, and they are filled with good. Thou hidest Thy face, they are troubled. Thou takest away their breath, they die and return to dust."

Note what God says concerning all the animals, even all the fishes: "These all wait upon Thee." When He opens His hand, they have food; they are filled with good. If God does not open His hand, if God turns His face away, then they all die. It is just that simple.

Psalm 145:15-16 says, "The eyes of all wait upon thee, and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand and satisfies the desire of every living thing." It is God who not only feeds us, but feeds all the animals as well.

These quotes are based upon Psalm 104:21: “The young lions do roar and seek their meat from God.” Matthew Poole says, “Seek their meat from God. This is a figurative and poetical expression. Their roaring is a kind of natural prayer to God for relief, as the cries of infants are a kind of prayers to their mothers for the breast.”

“And this is justly noted as an act of God’s special providence, because the lions are very ravenous and need much prey.”

Spurgeon says, “This is the poetic interpretation of a roar. To whom do the lions roar? They, after their own fashion, express their desires for food, and the expression of desire is a kind of prayer. Out of this fact comes the devout thought of the wild beast appealing to its Maker for its food. But neither with lions nor men will the seeking of prayer suffice. There must be a practical seeking, and the lions are well aware of it. What they have in their own language asked for, they go forth to seek, being in this thing far wiser than many men who offer formal prayers, not half so earnest as those of the young lions, and then neglect the means and the use of which the object of their petitions might be gained. The lions roar and seek. Too many are liars before God. They roar, but they never seek.” I’ll explain that.

Joseph Carl says, “How comforting is the thought that the Spirit translates the voice of a lion and finds it to be a seeking of meat from God. May we not hope that our poor broken cries and groans, which in our sorrow we have called the voice of our roaring, will be understood by Him and interpreted in our favor. Evidently, he considers the meaning rather than the music of the utterance, and puts the best construction upon it. The young lions seek their meat from God. God feeds not only sheep and lambs, but wolves and lions.”

I don’t watch too many movies, but one Western I’ve watched probably twenty times is The Outlaw Josie Wales. When Josie killed the two bushwhackers who were trying to kill him and the wounded boy, the boy asked, “Aren’t you going to bury them?” Josie spat his tobacco juice on the forehead of one of them and said, “Nope, buzzards got to eat too.” Just stop and think about this.

The young lions seek their meat from God. God feeds not only sheep and lambs but wolves and lions. Even the lions, even the

buzzards have to eat. It is a strange expression that young lions, when they roar after their prey, should be said to seek their meat of God, implying that neither their own strength nor craft could feed them without the help of God. The strongest creatures left to themselves cannot help themselves. They who fear God are fed by special providence of God. So all creatures are fed and nourished by the general providence. The lion, though he be strong and subtle, yet cannot get his own prey. We think a lion might shift for himself.

No, it is the Lord that provides for him. The young lions seek their meat from God. Surely then, the mightiest of men cannot live upon themselves, as it is of God that we receive life and breath. So all things needful for the maintenance of this life.

Matthew Henry says, "The roaring of young lions, like the crying of the ravens, is interpreted, asking their meat of God. Both God put this construction upon the language of mere nature, even in venomous creatures, and shall not He much more interpret favorably the language of grace in His own people, though it be weak and broken groanings which cannot be uttered?"

Here is why I gave the two titles of this message: the first one, a question, "Are you dumber than a beast?" and the second one, "Inarticulate Prayers." Inarticulate simply means that which cannot be uttered, that which cannot be spoken. First, it should be obvious that most people are indeed dumber than animals.

When I say that, I am not trying to be ugly or unkind. I am simply saying they are dumber than the animals in the sense that they refuse to seek their meat from God, and when God does feed them, when God does supply their need, they refuse to honor Him and thank Him and acknowledge Him. Moreover, many who pray for something refuse to put feet to their prayers. They refuse to work. They abhor a biblical work ethic. They refuse to believe that God will judge laziness and slothfulness and wickedness. In that sense, they are less than bird brains, because birds at least look to God and trust God to feed them on a daily basis. Many people across this country, including many who profess to be Christians, live their lives in total stupidity, refusing to acknowledge and honor God for everything they are and everything they have. We may not be the richest people in the world.

We may not be the best-looking people in the world, nor the slimmest people in the world. But whatever we are, we are by the grace of God, and whatever we have, we have by the grace of God. We need to thank Him and honor Him. If we do not, God says we are dumber than animals, because even "the ox knoweth his crib, and the ass knoweth his stall."

Secondly, consider inarticulate prayers. If God is able to interpret the roar of a lion, the shriek of a bird, and the cries of so-called dumb animals, do you not think He is capable of reading our groanings which cannot be uttered? There have been times in my life, and I am sure there have been times in your life, when I have been so burdened and stressed that I have been unable to pray. All I could do was lie before the Lord and groan, "Oh Lord, oh Lord." You do not know which way to turn, what to pray, or what to say.

I am dealing with a situation right now that is very distressing and grievous. I want to take the person and slap them upside the head and say, "What is wrong with you? Are you absolutely stupid? You know better than this. You have been taught better all your life. What is wrong with you?" But I cannot reason with the person. What do you do? You say, "Lord, if You do not take care of it, it will never be taken care of."

"Likewise, the Spirit helpeth our infirmities. For we know not what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searches the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God." When we are so burdened that all we can do is groan and say, "Oh God, oh God, oh God, oh Lord, help, oh Lord, work it out," it is the Holy Spirit who is making intercession for us according to the will of God.

If God can interpret the roar of a lion, the shriek of an animal, and the cry of a bird, He can certainly interpret our prayers. This places upon us a greater responsibility to cry unto Him. It does not matter that we are unable to phrase our thoughts, orient our words, or control our tongues. He knows, He understands, and He prays for us according to the will of God.

We are of far more value, He said, than many sparrows. He is going to supply our needs and take care of us. What we need is grace to cry unto Him; and once He supplies our needs and answers our prayer, we need grace to turn around and thank Him, honor Him, worship Him, and glorify Him. Do you remember the ten lepers? One turned around, came back, kneeled, and thanked our Lord. Our Lord said, "Where are the nine? Were there not ten healed? Where are the other nine? Just this one has come back to give honor and glory to Me."

In that instance, I would rather be in the minority. I want to be the one who acknowledges God's grace and mercy. The young lions roar and seek their meat from God. Here is my question: Do you roar in prayer unto God? Are you seeking Him? Are you seeking your daily provision from Him? Do you put feet to your prayers? Do you not know that God has not only ordained the end, He has also ordained the means to the end?

I am of the firm conviction that we are about to see problems in this country like we have never seen before in a long time. We had better learn to pray. We had better learn to trust God. We had better go to the animals, the birds, and the insects and learn the biblical truths that God has ordained for them to teach us. So, are you dumber than a beast? Do you roar and seek your meat from God? Do you trust Him? Do you praise Him? Do you honor Him? Go to the beast, and they shall teach thee. Go to the birds, and they shall tell thee: God is sovereign, and He supplies the needs of His creation and the special needs of His people.

Let's pray.

Father, we are so thankful for the Lord Jesus Christ and for His grace and mercy to us. We are thankful for Thy Word and for the truths of God that we know and understand based upon Your Word. Give us grace that we may trust Thee, look to Thee, learn what You have told us to learn, and apply it to our lives. In the name of Jesus Christ we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 16

Injustice, Grace and Patience

December 3, 2012

SCRIPTURE READING - Genesis 40:1-13 (KJV)

And it came to pass after these things that the butler of the king of Egypt and his baker had offended their lord, the king of Egypt. And Pharaoh was wroth against two of his officers, against the chief of the butlers and against the chief of the bakers, and he put them in a ward in the house of the captain of the guard into the prison, the place where Joseph was bound. And the captain of the guard charged Joseph with them, and he served them, and they continued a season in the ward.

And they dreamed a dream, both of them, each man his dream in one night, each man according to the interpretation of his dream, the butler and the baker of the king of Egypt, which were bound in the prison. And Joseph came in unto them in the morning, and looked upon them, and, behold, they were sad.

And he asked Pharaoh's officers that were with him in the ward of his lord's house, saying, Wherefore look you so sadly today? And they said unto him, We have dreamed a dream, and there

> is no interpreter of it. And Joseph said unto them, Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell me them, I pray you.
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> And the chief butler told his dream to Joseph, and he said to him, In my dream, behold, a vine was before me, and in the vine were three branches. It was as though it budded, and her blossom shot forth in the clusters that are brought forth ripe grapes. And Pharaoh's cup was in my hand, and I took the grapes and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup, and I gave the cup into Pharaoh's hand.
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> And Joseph said unto him, This is the interpretation of it. Three branches are three days. Yet within three days, Pharaoh lift up thine head and restore thee into thy place. And thou shalt deliver Pharaoh's cup into his hand after the former manner, when thou wast his butler.

"But think on me when it shall be well with thee, and show kindness, I pray thee, unto me, and make mention of me unto Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house. For indeed I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews, and here also I've done nothing that they should put me into this dungeon."

When the chief baker saw that the interpretation was good, he said unto Joseph, "I also in my dream, and I behold, I had three white baskets on my head. And in the uppermost basket there was all manner of baked meats for Pharaoh, and the birds did eat them out of the basket upon my head." Joseph answered, "This is the interpretation thereof, the three baskets are three days. Yet within three days shall Pharaoh lift up thy head from off thee, and shall hang thee on a tree, and the birds shall eat thy flesh from off thee."

It came to pass the third day, which was Pharaoh's birthday, that he made a feast unto all of his servants. He lifted up the head of the chief butler and of the chief baker among his servants, restoring the chief butler into his butlership and giving the cup into Pharaoh's hand; but he hanged the chief baker as Joseph had interpreted them. Yet the chief butler did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.

Now look at verse 1 of chapter 41: "And it came to pass at the end of two full years that Pharaoh dreamed, and, behold, he stood by the river." The title of this message is Injustice, Grace, and Patience.

Each of you understands that God is a God of justice. He is righteous in all of His acts and righteous in all of His works.

Introduction: God's Justice

Psalm 89:14 declares, “Justice and judgment or the habitation of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face.” Notice that justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne. Deuteronomy 32:4 teaches, “He is the rock, His work is perfect: for all of His ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He.” God is infinitely holy and infinitely just. Zephaniah 3:5 teaches us, “The Lord is just in the midst thereof; He will not do iniquity.”

Every morning doth He bring forth His judgment to light. He faileth not, but the unjust knoweth no shame. If I were to take the time to take you through the Bible, I could show you multitudes of verses on justice. There are so many verses. Let me just give you a few of them. We are told in Proverbs 21 and verse 3 that to do justice and judgment are more acceptable unto the Lord than sacrifice. God had rather have justice. God had rather have judgment than all of the sacrifice that we could give. Moreover, the Bible says in Proverbs 16 and verse 11 that a just weight and balance are the Lord's. All the weights of the bag are His works. So God wants a just weight and a just balance.

In fact, in Leviticus 19 in verse 35, God commanded this: You shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, in meat yard, in weight, or in measure. So God is demanding that even in business, in our business dealings, that we do everything that is absolutely just. God in His person is a just God, and consequently He demands justice from each one of us.

Justice in Salvation

Let me point out also that God is absolutely just in the salvation that He has provided in the Lord Jesus Christ. God did not compromise His law, and God did not slacken His judgment even when it came to our salvation. These Old Testament verses show that truth. In Zechariah 9 and verse 9, the Bible says, Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Jerusalem! Or, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, thy King cometh unto thee. He is just and having

salvation, lowly and riding upon an ass and upon the colt the fold of an ass. Notice that the Bible says He is just and having salvation.

Isaiah chapter 9, verses 6 and 7, is a passage that probably most of you, if you cannot quote it, at least are very familiar with. It shows again that God is absolutely just in the salvation that He has provided in Jesus Christ. Notice in Isaiah chapter 9, beginning at verse 6.

Scripture says, “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.” So notice, if you would, God's salvation in Jesus Christ is just. He is going to rule, the Scripture says, with justice.

In the book of Jeremiah, notice chapter 23 and verse 5. Here we are reading about Jesus Christ. He is the Branch. “Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth.” So Jesus Christ is going to execute justice in the earth.

Now turn to the book of Romans, chapter 3, beginning with verse 21. “But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: 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: whom God hath 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 which believeth in Jesus.”

Notice again, God has not compromised His law. God has not thrown justice out the window. Even in our Lord's salvation, God is

still just and the justifier of him who believeth in Jesus Christ. How can God be just and the justifier?

The answer is very simple. God did not set aside His law. Jesus Christ came and fulfilled that law absolutely perfectly, and then He died as our substitute. He not only fulfilled the law; He then suffered the penalty for the broken law.

Let me tell you what was prophesied of Christ. You do not have to turn there, but in Isaiah 42:21, the Scripture says, “The Lord is well pleased for his righteousness’ sake; he will magnify the law, and make it honourable.” What did Jesus Christ do? He magnified God's law. All that Christ did, He did in obedience to God's law. Christ is the only One who rendered to the law of God that which the law demanded. The law demands a personal, perfect, and perpetual obedience, and Jesus Christ rendered that to the law. So even in the actions of Jesus Christ, even in His obedience, He was absolutely just. That is why, in Acts 3:14, when Peter was preaching to those Jews, he said, “But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you.”

What did he say? “But ye denied the Holy One and the Just.” He is saying that Jesus Christ was absolutely just. And He was. You see, God is not only just in His person, and God not only demands justice in our lives; God was absolutely just in giving us our salvation. He demands justice in our lives. I am not going to have time to prove this this morning, but I can. In fact, all you have to do is read Psalm 82. He demands justice in the lives of magistrates. Psalm 2 would be another passage that would prove that to you.

God Demands Justice from His People

Let me take you very quickly through several passages of the Bible and show you how God rebukes, admonishes, and reproves all those who fail to give forth justice. Turn to Isaiah 56 and look at verse 1. We will start there. God is rebuking and admonishing those who fail to issue forth biblical justice. Isaiah 56:1 says, “Thus saith the Lord, Keep ye judgment, and do justice: for my salvation is near to come, and my righteousness to be revealed.” Here He is admonishing and commanding righteousness, judgment, and justice. But look at

Isaiah 58. He is still talking to the same people, and He tells Isaiah this: Isaiah 58, verses 1 and 2.

He tells Isaiah, "Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show my people their transgressions, and the house of Jacob their sins." Yet look what his people did: "They seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinances of their God. They ask of me the ordinances of justice, they take delight in approaching to God."

But if you read the rest of the chapter, they were hypocritical. They were professing it, but it was not real or genuine. Turn to Isaiah 59 and look at verse 4. Here is God's conclusion concerning these people: "None calleth for justice, nor any pleadeth for truth. They trust in vanity and speak lies. They conceive mischief and bring forth iniquity." They hatch cockatrice's eggs and weave the spider's web. He that eateth their eggs dieth, and that which is crushed breaketh out into a viper. He is describing how perverted these people were. Although they pretended that they really wanted justice, they did not.

In verse 14, he says, "And judgment is turned away backward, and justice standeth afar off, truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter." Judgment is turned away backward; justice standeth afar off; truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter.

Two more passages, right quickly. Turn to Jeremiah 22. These people were exceedingly prosperous, building themselves great houses, and God asks, "Shout thou rain, because thou closest thyself in cedar. Did not thy father eat and drink, and do judgment and justice?"

And then it was well with them. God says, "You think you are going to get by by not doing justice, just because you have plenty and just because you are prosperous? No." You need to think back. Those who did judgment and justice were the ones who prospered.

If you would turn to Ezekiel chapter 45 and look at verse 9, I want you to see what God says to the magistrate, to the prince, to the ruler. Ezekiel 45:9 says, "Thus saith the Lord God, Let it suffice you, O princes of Israel, remove violence and spoil, and execute judgment and justice. Take away your exactions from My people, saith the

Lord God." God admonishes the princes to remove violence and spoil, execute justice and judgment, and take away their exactions from His people. I think that is an appropriate verse for today. It is very applicable.

Anyone who understands justice—and by justice I mean biblical justice—abhors injustice. The Hebrew word for justice and the Hebrew word for righteousness are the same word. Whatever is just is righteous; whatever is righteous is just. If there is injustice, that equals unrighteousness.

Anyone who understands that God is just, that He is the just God, and that in the salvation He provided in Jesus Christ He was equally just, will understand that God demands justice in our lives and will necessarily hate injustice. Those who know God will want to be like God, be absolutely just, and love justice, for God is a lover of justice. Judgment and justice are the habitation of His throne.

Before we start the message today, consider this introduction to the truth that God loves justice. Psalm 11:7 says, "For the righteous Lord loveth righteousness. His countenance doth behold the upright." Since the word righteousness and the word just are the same, we could read that verse, "For the just Lord loveth justice. His countenance doth behold the upright." This is an amazing statement concerning the Lord.

Psalm 33:4-5 says, "For the word of the Lord is right, and all of his works are done in truth. He loveth righteousness and judgment. The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord." Still, we are talking about the Lord now. Psalm 99:4 says, "The king's strength also loveth judgment. Thou dost establish equity. Thou executes judgment and righteousness in Jacob." Here again the Scripture says that God loves judgment. He establishes equity, executes judgment, and executes righteousness in Jacob.

Proverbs 15:9 says, "The way of the wicked is an abomination unto the Lord, but he loveth him that followeth after righteousness," or, "he loveth him that followeth after justice." These verses show why this matters. Those who love justice, those who understand justice, and those who know that justice is what God declares cannot help but be grieved at the injustice that is in the world today.

The Reality of Injustice

It appears that our politicians, our judges, and—even using the term very broadly—even our law enforcement officers, in every branch of government, in every department, and in every bureaucracy, have literally gone stark raving mad in this country. It is absolutely insane the way truth is denied, history is perverted, liberties are trampled, and freedoms are destroyed. No one is really concerned, and no one is willing to stand in the gap.

In my years in the ministry, I have seen pastors arrested for truth's sake. They had not broken a law, but they were standing against tyranny and wickedness, and they were arrested and thrown in prison. I have seen Christian men and women arrested and thrown in prison for the slightest pretense. If you have been following the news, you will know that some preachers in Michigan were recently arrested for preaching at a Muslim festival. Thankfully, they were vindicated, and Detroit, Michigan, now has to pay out several hundred thousand dollars.

We cannot even begin to conceive of what is really going on in this country. Let me tell you something that happened a number of years back. My wife and I attended a trial held for a pastor and his wife. If I were to tell you all the details, you would shake your head in unbelief and say that such a thing could not possibly happen here in America, but it certainly did. He and his wife were arrested and put on trial, though no law had really been broken.

The church had floated some bonds to help pay for a building. The pastor had sold some of those church bonds, as pastors across this country have done. I do not agree with bonds, and I do not agree with going into debt, but pastors everywhere have done exactly the same thing. No one had lost any money, and every bond payment had been met. Yet someone became upset with the pastor because he was selling bonds without being regulated by the FCC and without having a license.

What was his wife's crime? She had endorsed one check for deposit only and put it in the church account, as she was supposed to do. The reason they were persecuting her was that they wanted her to testify against her husband, and she refused. They offered her a

deal: if she would testify against her husband, they would not take her to trial.

My wife and I were sitting in the courtroom. It was full of Greek architecture and Greek gods. The judge would not allow a Bible in the courtroom. The pastor and his wife could neither refer to the Bible nor quote any Scriptures in defending themselves. When another pastor's wife was going to testify on behalf of the wife being persecuted, the judge—who was a woman—learned that she could not testify to the duties of a pastor's wife without referring to the Bible. She refused to

Allow her to testify on behalf of the victim—not the defendant, but the victim, because that is exactly what she was. When the judge determines what evidence is admitted and what is kept out, the judge determines the outcome of the trial. This godly man and his godly wife were both found guilty and sentenced to prison. She served one year; he either served three or five—I think it was three.

When I found out—and you would have to know the couple—that they had taken this beautiful, godly Christian woman, stuck her in a hell hole, and strip-searched her not once, but a number of times, my blood boiled. I was so angry. These people had not committed a crime. They had not violated God's law, and they certainly had not particularly violated man's law. Yet I was absolutely, totally helpless. I could not do one thing except cry to the Lord for mercy.

Here is something absolutely astounding: when that wife came out of prison, and when that husband came out of prison, having endured such affliction, degradation, humiliation, and embarrassment, both of them came forth from that vile depth with kind, gracious, gentle, and loving attitudes. Both of them are still in the ministry today. I will tell you the truth, they fared much better than I did.

I think of those verses that God gives to the judges, when He tells them, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” In other words, the punishment is to fit the crime, and the judges are to ensure and see that justice is done. When those in charge of justice pervert justice, you want to think, “Oh Lord, let it be done to them exactly what they have done to these other people.”

I felt like the Apostle Paul. You remember, in Acts 23, he was brought before the council and started to defend himself. Ananias commanded Paul to be smitten, and the soldier slapped Paul against the face. Paul looked at Ananias and said, “Thou sinnest to judge me according to the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law. God shall judge thee, thou whited sepulchre.” Someone said to Paul, “Speakest thou thus to God's high priest?” Paul said, “Oops, I did not know that was the high priest.” It is written, “Thou shalt not revile the ruler of thy people.”

I think Paul was making a point. Paul probably knew it was the high priest. How could he not know it? But what he was saying is this: If you claim to be the high priest, you ought to be acting like the high priest. You ought to be obeying God.

What does all this have to do with our text? Why am I emphasizing that God is a lover of justice and that God demands justice, while showing you injustice on every hand? Did you see or read where five policemen beat a man mercilessly while he was passed out on the ground in a diabetic coma? They kept kicking him and beating him in the head, saying, “Quit resisting, quit resisting.” He could not resist; he was in a coma. Thankfully, one car caught it on video. He and his wife are going to end up with half a million or so, but every one of those cops should have been immediately fired. No one in a position of authority should be able to abuse that authority and escape justice.

What has all this got to do with what Artek said? Go back to the book of Genesis. Joseph was a man exceedingly familiar with injustice. Joseph was deprived of life, liberty, happiness, and property—not by foreign enemies, but by his own brothers. Yet Joseph was godly, obedient, gracious, and full of character and grace.

Joseph's Experience of Injustice

Look in Genesis 37. You know the story of Joseph and how he told his dreams. Genesis 37:4 says concerning his brethren, “And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him and could not speak peacefully unto him.” The coat Jacob gave Joseph meant that he was to be the

administrator of the estate. He would receive the double portion, and he actually did so. That was what the coat symbolized. It was not simply a beautiful piece of material. It may have been beautiful, but because Joseph had been elevated above his brethren, they hated him and could not speak peacefully to him. So they planned to get rid of him.

Now look at Genesis 37:26: “And Judah said unto his brethren, What profit is it if we slay our brethren, conceal his blood?”

Originally, they planned on killing him: “Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother in our flesh.” His brethren were content. Then there passed by Midianites merchantmen, and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver, and they brought Joseph into Egypt.

There is no contradiction in saying that they sold him to the Ishmaelites and to the Midianites. They were Ishmaelites since they were descendants of Ishmael, and they lived in the land of Midian, so they were Midianites. Joseph was absolutely righteous in this instance. His brothers were unrighteous. They hated him and sold him into slavery.

Once Joseph enters slavery, he is again unjustly condemned by his master's wife and by his master. Genesis 39, beginning in verse 3, says: “And his master saw that the Lord was with him, and that the Lord made all that he did to prosper in his hand, And Joseph found grace in his sight and served him, and he made him overseer of his house, and all that he had he put into his hand. And it came to pass from the time that he had made him overseer of his house, and over all that he had, that the Lord blessed the Egyptians' house for Joseph's sake. And the blessing of the Lord was upon all that he had in the house and in the field. And he left all that he had in Joseph's hand.”

And he knew not all he had save the bread which he did eat. And Joseph was a goodly person and well-favored. His master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph, and she said, Lie with me. But he refused and said unto his master's wife, Behold, my master whateth or knoweth not what is with me in the house, and he hath committed all he hath

into my hands. There is none greater in this house than I, neither hath he kept back anything from me but thee, because thou art his wife. How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?

So he turned her down. As she spake to Joseph day by day, he hearkened not unto her to lie by her or to be with her. When Joseph went into the house to do his business, and there was none of the men in the house within, she caught him by his garment, saying, Lie with me. He left his garment at her hand and fled and got him out. When she saw that he left his garment in her hand and was fled forth, she called unto the men of the house and said, See, he hath brought in a Hebrew unto us to mock us. He came unto me to lie with me, and I cried with a loud voice. When he heard that I lifted up my voice and cried, he left his garment with me and fled and got him out.

She laid up his garment by her until his lord came home. She spake unto him according to these words, saying, The Hebrew servant which thou hast brought unto us came in unto me to mock me. When I lifted up my voice and cried, he left his garment with me and was fled out. When his master heard these words of his wife, his wrath was kindled. Joseph's master took him, watch, and put him into the prison, a place where the king's prisoners were bound. And he was there in prison.

Joseph again was absolutely, perfectly innocent in the whole affair. He maintained his character and his integrity, and now Joseph is unjustly condemned, unjustly slandered, because he feared God and did that which was right and holy before the Lord. His master, instead of even asking Joseph, just had him thrown in prison where the king's prisoners were kept.

Let me assure you of something: the king's prisoners were not kept in a fine hotel. They were basically in what you and I would call a vile hell hole, and later on you will see it is called a dungeon. Joseph had done nothing wrong. He had done everything right. When his brother sold him into slavery, all Joseph was doing was obeying his father, and he got sold into slavery.

Now all he is doing is obeying the Lord and doing what he is supposed to do, and he gets slandered, lied about, condemned, and

thrown into prison. Peter writes, “And if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ. For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing.”

I wonder if Joseph was happy in that dungeon. I wonder if he was happy in slavery. Yet Peter says, “If ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye.”

Notice a pattern developing in Joseph's life. He was obedient to his father and did that which was just and right, and he got sold into slavery. Joseph obeyed God, refused to dishonor his master and his master's wife, did that which was right and holy, and got thrown into prison. Thirdly, now that Joseph is in prison, once again his character shines very brightly.

Joseph's Continued Injustice in Prison

Genesis 39:21 says, “But the LORD was with Joseph, and shewed him mercy, and he gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison. And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners that were in the prison; and whatsoever they did there, he was the doer of it. The keeper of the prison looked not to any thing that was under his hand; because the LORD was with him, and that which he did, the LORD made it to prosper.” So now Joseph is in prison, but he is the head honcho even in prison.

Genesis chapter 40 brings us to the text that we read. Two of the king's servants are thrown into prison: the butler and the baker. Joseph is responsible for their health. When he sees them very sad, he asks what is wrong. They say that they have both had dreams, and there is nobody to interpret them. They do not know what is going on. Joseph says, “Wait a minute. The interpretation of dreams belongs to God. Tell me your dream.”

The chief butler dreamed of three branches and grapes, and he was pressing the grapes into Pharaoh's cup again. Joseph said the interpretation was simple: the three branches were three days; three days from then, the butler would be lifted up and restored to his chief butler's ship, pressing grapes into Pharaoh's cup again. When the chief baker heard that it was good news, he told Joseph his dream about birds pecking the baked meats from the top of his head. Joseph said, “I've got news for you.” Within three days he would be hanged, and the birds would peck his flesh off his body.

After interpreting the chief butler's dream, Joseph looked at him and said, “But think on me when it shall be well with thee, and show kindness, I pray thee, unto me, and make mention of me unto Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house.” Joseph explains why: “For indeed I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews, and here also I've done nothing. Watch that they should put me into the dungeon.” One time it is called a house, and one time it is called a dungeon. He is simply saying, “Just think upon me.”

Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgot him.

How can you forget a man that saved your life? How can you forget a man that helped you to be restored to your butlership? Yet the chief butler forgot Joseph. How long did he forget him? Two years. Can you imagine that? Genesis 41:1 says, “And it came to pass at the end of two full years, that Pharaoh dreamed, and behold, he stood by the river.” I am not reading Pharaoh’s dream, but if you skip down, the chief butler says, “Then spake the chief butler unto Pharaoh, saying, I do remember my faults unto this day.” It took two full years, and a dream of Pharaoh, to jog the butler’s memory.

God’s timing is perfect, but humanly speaking, I would think that the chief butler should have been a little more appreciative of Joseph than he was. I would think he probably ought to have been thanking the Lord every day for Joseph. When Joseph was sold into Egypt, he was seventeen years old. When he stood before Pharaoh, he was thirty years old. That meant thirteen years. You have to add the seven years of plenty, then these two years, and actually there were two more years after that before his brethren came down into Egypt to try to buy grain. So you are talking about twenty-two to twenty-four years that Joseph was deprived of his family. He was

deprived of life, liberty, and property—what he should have had from his father. He was deprived of that all those years.

You know the story of how Joseph was elevated to second in command in Egypt. Pharaoh said nobody was going to move without him in Egypt: “I’ll give you that command. Whatever you say is going to go.” After the seven years of plenty, there began to be two years of famine, and Joseph’s brethren came down into Egypt to buy grain.

Given all the facts, and knowing that Joseph was unjustly hated, unjustly enslaved, unjustly condemned and imprisoned, and unjustly forgotten by the chief butler for two years, here is my question: How did Joseph take all of this injustice in his life?

I must confess that most of us, including myself, would have been exceedingly angry and bitter—not only against our brothers, but against the entire system as well. You have to think about this. Joseph's imprisonment would never have happened if his brothers had not sold him into Egypt. None of this would have started had his brothers not hated him. Humanly speaking, the brothers were the cause of it all. Now Joseph is elevated to a position of absolute total control.

All of a sudden, these Hebrews come from the land of Canaan to buy grain, and Joseph recognizes them, but they do not recognize him. He does not speak to them in the Hebrew tongue; he speaks in the Egyptian tongue through an interpreter, and he speaks very roughly. He tells them they are spies. “Oh no, no, no, we're not spies. We're all the sons of one man. One is not, and the youngest is still with him this day.” Joseph asks, “Is the old man, your father, still alive?” “Yeah.” “What about your younger brother?” “Oh, yeah.” Joseph says, “Let me tell you something. You're not going to buy any more grain unless you bring your younger brother back. Surely, if you don't do that, by the life of Pharaoh, you're spies, every one of you.”

On the way home, they found all their money restored in their sacks, and they were afraid.

Finally, all that grain was eaten up, and Jacob said, “All right, make it back; get us some more nut.” “Dad, we're not going. We're not going. The man told us that if we didn't bring Benjamin, he

would not see us." Jacob asked why they had told him they had a younger brother. They answered, "He asked. How could we know what he would say?" Finally, Jacob said, "Listen to this: Take him and go."

"If I be bereaved of my sons, I'll be bereaved of my sons." Then he said, "All these things are against me." They took Benjamin and went back down into Egypt. Joseph made them a meal, and they had to eat with him. Joseph was still making himself strange to them, but he gave Benjamin about five times as much as he gave everybody else. He must have been eating like trip, I don't know.

I want you to look in Genesis 45. I want you to see this. He was going to keep Benjamin. You remember that? Let's begin reading in Genesis 44, because Judah had become a surety for Benjamin. When Joseph was going to keep Benjamin, Judah tried to intervene. Look at him.

SCRIPTURE READING - Genesis 44:19-26 (KJV)

> My Lord, ask his servants, saying, Have you a father or a brother? And we said unto my Lord, We have a father, an old man, and a child of his old age, a little one. And his brother is dead, and he is alone, is left of his mother, and his father loveth him. And thou saidst unto thy servants, Bring him down unto me, that I may set mine eyes upon him. And we said unto my Lord, The lad cannot leave his father, for if he should leave his father, his father would die. And thou saidst unto thy servant, Except your youngest brother come down with you, you shall see my face no more. And it came to pass, when we came up unto thy servant my father, we told him the words of my Lord. And our father said, Go again, buy us a little food. And we said, We cannot go down, if our youngest brother be not with us. Then will we 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 bear me two sons. And the one went out from me, and I said, Surely he is torn to pieces, and I saw him not since. And if you take this also from me, and mischief befall him, you shall bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave. 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 servants will bring down thy gray hairs of thy servant our father with sorrows to the grave. Thy servant became surety for the lad and my father, saying, If I bring him not unto thee, then I shall bear the blame to my father for ever. I pray thee, let thy servant abide instead of the lad as a bondman to my lord, and let the lad go up with his brethren. 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 on my father.

Joseph could not refrain himself before all them that stood by him. He cried, Let every man go out from me. And there stood no man with him, while Joseph made himself known to his brethren. And he wept aloud. And the Egyptians of the house of Pharaoh heard.

Joseph's Gracious Response

Joseph said unto his brethren, I am Joseph. Doth my father yet live? His brethren could not answer him, for they were troubled, afraid of his presence. Joseph said to his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt.

“Now therefore be not grieved nor angry with yourselves that you sold me hither, for God did send me before you to preserve life. For these two years hath the famine been in the land, and yet there are five years in which there shall be neither earing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives with a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God. And he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and Lord of all his house, and ruler without all the land of Egypt. Haste you, and go up to my father, and say unto him, Thus saith thy son Joseph, God hath made me Lord of all Egypt. Come down unto me, and tarry not. And thou shalt dwell in the land of Goshen, and thou shalt be near unto me, thou and thy children, and thy children’s children, and thy flocks, and thy herds, and all that thou hast, and I will nourish thee. For there are yet five years of famine, lest thou and thy household and all that thou hast come to poverty.”

Pay careful attention to the absence of bitterness, anger, ill will, hatred, revenge, and strife. Also notice why Joseph says that God sent him into Egypt. First, God sent him before them to preserve life, so they were not to be grieved or angry with themselves for selling him. Second, God sent him to preserve their posterity in the earth and to save their lives by a great deliverance. He was sent down there not merely to save life in general. That was true, but the purpose included saving their lives and the lives of their children, preserving them a posterity in the earth. Joseph understood that everything that happened to him served the preservation of life, even the lives of his brethren.

Application: Trusting God's Sovereignty

How could Joseph endure such injustice in his life and still be kind, gracious, loving, and patient? The answer is that he believed in the absolute sovereignty of God. He said, “God sent me down here,” and understood that God does not make mistakes. If we suffer, we are to suffer for His sake, His honor, and His glory. Philippians 1:29 says, “For unto you it is given on behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake.” God will use our suffering and our injustices to bring grace, patience, and character into our lives. Joseph was absolutely certain that God was sovereign and had directed everything in his life, and that certainty kept him from bitterness and resentment.

“Jacob is alive. We know Joseph is going to do this for Jacob’s sake.” But Jacob died. Genesis chapter 50. Joseph’s brothers thought the same: “Joseph is going to be kind to us while Daddy is alive, but when Daddy is dead, he is going to punish us for what we did to him.” Their conscience was condemning them. They deserved to be punished.

Joseph's Continued Grace After Jacob's Death

After Jacob died, Genesis 50, verse 15: “And when Joseph’s brethren saw that their father was dead, they said, Joseph will perventuate us and will certainly require to require us all the evil that we did of him.” He will pay us back; he will get us. They had done him wrong, and they knew it. It is human nature to think he will get us back

since Dad is dead. Verse 16 says, “And they sent a messenger to Joseph, saying, Thy father did command before he died, saying, Whether he did or not, I don’t know.”

Scripture does not say, “Maybe he did, maybe he didn’t.” But they said, “Thy father did command before he died, saying, So shall you say unto Joseph, Forgive, I pray thee, the trespass of thy brethren in their sin.” This is the first time in Scripture they acknowledge their sin and that they sinned against Joseph: “So shall you say unto Joseph, Forgive, I pray thee now, thy trespass of thy brethren in their sin, for they did unto thee evil. And now we pray thee, forgive the trespass of thy servants of thy God and thy Father.” “And Joseph wept when they spake unto him.” His brethren also fell down before his face and said, “Behold, we be thy servants.” And Joseph said unto them, “Fear not. For am I in the place of God? But as for you, you thought evil 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 you not. I will nourish you and your little ones.” And he comforted them and spake kindly unto them.

Here is a man who suffered injustice for at least twenty-two years, yet remained as gracious, kind, and merciful as he was before enduring those injustices. I stand amazed at the grace of God in Joseph’s life, and in the lives of all His saints who have endured torture, prison, and martyrdom while maintaining their integrity, graciousness, and kindness.

We had Harlan Popov in our home years ago, and the kids had gerbils—little ones, both the kids and the gerbils. Mr. Popov had been in a Romanian prison for fourteen years; his book tells how he was tortured for his faith. When the girls showed him their gerbils, he said, “Rats!” They answered, “No, Mr. Popov, they’re gerbils.” He replied, “Rats! I know what they are. Had to eat them for fourteen years just to stay alive.”

I stand amazed at what some people can endure and still come out gracious, kind, and loving. I can only pray that God would give me the same grace in the same kind of situation. In our day of corruption—and it is everywhere—and persecution, when there is

hatred of God and His Word, Christianity, and Christians in general, I believe we need all the grace of God that we can get.

Two Applications from Joseph

Who knows where we will be next year, or even before this year is over? Who knows where we will be a year after next, or what circumstances and situations we will find ourselves in? We may be in desperate times, like those Egyptians in the seven years of famine. We may be in times when conditions are hot and heavy against Christians, and we will need the grace of God. We need to be faithful and ask God to keep our hearts tender.

Old Dr. Bob Jones Sr. taught all his preacher boys to pray, "Make my heart tender and my hide tough." That is exactly what we need: tender hearts and tough hides.

Joseph is a prime example of the truth that before honor is humility, as Proverbs 15:33 teaches. Joseph was greatly humbled before he was exalted. Exaltation without humility will always lead to pride, arrogance, and tyranny. Proverbs 22:4 declares, "By humility and the fear of the Lord are riches, honor, and life." Before honor is humility, and Joseph was greatly humbled. He was persecuted, imprisoned, slandered, and condemned for doing that which is right and holy.

Application: Humility Before Honor

Here is a second truth: God has promised in Romans 8:28 to work everything for our good. He did not promise that everything happening to us would be good, but He did promise to work everything for our good. Joseph was deprived of life, liberty, and property.

Application: God Works All for Good

When Joseph came into power, he wanted to make sure that his family and others had the blessings he had been denied. What did he tell them? "Fear not, I will nourish you. I'll sustain you. I'll take care of you. God sent me here to preserve your posterity." If we understand that God is absolutely sovereign in every area of our

lives, it will change our attitude. Suffering was God's school for effective leadership in Joseph's life.

One reason we probably have such ineffective, wicked leaders today is that they have never had character, suffered, or done without. They do not know what it is to be deprived of life, liberty, and property; therefore, they do not know what it is to preserve those blessings for other families and people. Joseph learned through suffering. I can assure you, there are things that make my blood boil.

Conclusion: Prayer for Grace

At times I want to slap folks upside the head. But I pray God would make me like Joseph, enduring whatever He sends and coming out with a gracious, kind, loving spirit.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank You for Your love, mercy, grace, goodness, and kindness. Help us, Lord, to be like Joseph and like our Lord Jesus Christ. Help us to love justice and do that which is right. And when we suffer, Lord, may it be for righteousness' sake and not because of our sins and our stupidity. Make us holy in the name of Jesus Christ. And we ask it for Your honor and Your glory. Amen.

CHAPTER 17

The Differences Between Fear and Faith - 3

February 26, 2017

Review of Parts 1 and 2

Numbers chapter 13 begins with these words: “The Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Send thou men that they may search the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel. Of every tribe of their father shall you send a man, everyone a ruler among them.” The rest of the passage down to verse 16 lists the names of the individuals who were sent to spy out the land.

Since this is part three of a three-part message, let us review. Numbers chapters 13 and 14 are prime examples of the differences between faith and fear. Faith and fear are, in reality, opposites. If you are exercising faith, then you are not living in fear. If you are living in fear, then obviously you are not exercising faith. The Bible teaches us that perfect love casts out fear, but it also teaches us that faith will cast out fear.

In Mark chapter 4 and verse 40, when the disciples saw the storm on the sea, our Lord said to them, “Why are you so fearful? Have you no faith?” In other words, if you had faith, then you would not be fearful. Since you are fearful, it is obvious that you are not exercising faith. Faith is imperative to us, because Hebrews 11, verse 6 says, “But without faith it is impossible to please him.” For he that cometh to God must first believe that he is, and then second, that he is a rewarder of those that diligently seek him.

In the first part of this series, I dealt with one point: faith regards the promises of God, and fear disregards the promises of God. Fear basically despises the promises of God and even calls God a liar. Fear is the foundation of rebellion, because when one is in fear, he does not act; he simply reacts. The only possible outcome of a failure to obey is disobedience, and disobedience is, in essence, rebellion itself.

In the second message, I pointed out that faith respects the power of God, while fear disrespects the power of God. We could accurately say that fear does not believe God—not His promises or His power—because fear is indeed the opposite of faith. According to fear, God cannot do that which He has promised.

Fear denies the omnipotence of God—that God is all-powerful. It also denies His veracity and truthfulness. Joshua and Caleb were the only two of the twelve spies who spoke truthfully concerning the land. They said, “Look, we’re well able to go up and take this land. Let’s do it right now.” They not only believed God’s promise that He had given them the land; they believed that God would enable them to conquer it. But the ten spies said, “No, no, no. It’s the land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof, and it’s a bad land.”

They saw the children of Anak, the giants, and said, “No, no, we can’t do that. We were as grasshoppers in our sight, and so were we in their sight as well.” Fear always magnifies your enemies and obstacles. At the same time, while fear magnifies obstacles and enemies, it minimizes the strength you have. They said, “We are as grasshoppers.” In other words, all those people had to do was step on them and mash them, and that was all there was to it. They were totally discounting their own power. Israel at this point had over 600,000 men of war.

Moreover, they were totally discounting the power of God. Fear disregards not only the power of God, but also facts and evidences. They had brought back the fruit of the land. There it was in front of them. The people could see that it was indeed a land full of milk and honey, just as the Lord had promised.

But fear is unreasonable. You cannot reason with fear or argue with it. Fear does not listen to logic; it simply reacts. Fear declares that God is either not God, or that He is unable or unwilling to fulfill His promises. Fear forces us to turn from God and God's way to our own way. In fear, we do what we think is best under the circumstances rather than simply obeying God. Fear and faith are basically opposites.

Faith Rejoices in God's Providence

Introduction to Providence

Fear is the foundation for rebellion. The third and final point is this: faith rejoices in the providence of God, and fear ridicules the providence of God.

Providence may be defined as that continued exercise of divine energy, or the power of God, whereby the Creator preserves all of His creatures, is operative in all that comes to pass in the world, and directs everything to its appointed end.

Theological Definitions of Providence

The Westminster Shorter Catechism asks, "What is providence?" The answer is: "God's works of providence are His most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing of all His creatures and all their actions." God's providence includes the governing of all His creatures and all their actions.

The Philadelphia Baptist Confession of Faith answers providence this way: "God, the good Creator of all things in His infinite power and wisdom, doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures and things, from the greatest even to the least, by His most wise and holy providence, to the end for the which they were created according unto His infallible foreknowledge, and the free,

immutable counsel of His own will, to the praise of the glory of His wisdom, power, justice, infinite goodness, and mercy."

Providence and God's Sovereignty

When we are talking about God's providence, we are talking about whatever comes to pass in time and in history. We are also talking about an aspect of God's sovereignty, as well as an aspect of His omnipotence. If God was not sovereign and did not have all power, then He could not control everything and work everything out according to His own counsel and His own will.

Most of you could quote Romans 8:28: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are called according to His purpose." How then do we know that all things work together for good? We know that because God is sovereign, God is all-powerful, and God is in control. Regardless of what happens, we know that God is in absolute control.

No Luck, Chance, or Fate

If you understand divine providence, then you understand that Christians—and really anyone—are never in the grip of what we would call the blind forces of fate, chance, luck, and fortune. There is no such thing as luck, chance, fate, or fortune in a world ruled by God. You either have God's providence or you have luck, chance, fate, and fortune. I do not know about you, but I will take God's providence every time.

Everything that happens in this world and everything that happens to us is divinely planned. Each incident summons us to trust in the Lord, teaches us to obey Him, and calls us to rejoice in His work in bringing things to pass in our lives. If you understand divine providence, there is no such thing as an accident. There are only incidents.

God allows these things to happen for our good and His glory. Therefore, to despise God's providence is to despise God. When we bellyache, whine, and complain about our circumstances, we are basically attacking the providence of God. As we attack God's providence, we are actually attacking God Himself. Our attack

becomes rebellion; we find ourselves fighting against God, provoking and challenging Him.

We may say, "I have no problem believing that God is sovereign, omnipotent, and in control of everything." Yet even as Christians, we rejoice in what we call good or blessed providence and praise God, while refusing to praise Him when something bad or hurtful happens. When we judge good and bad, or good and hurtful, from our perspective, we are determining what is good and what is bad. In other words, we are placing our definition upon the work of God. Thus, we pass judgment upon God and upon His work.

Whenever we begin to bellyache and complain, we are saying, “Lord, it ought not to be like this. It shouldn’t be like this.” I laugh because I heard about one church that was praying against—I think it was a tavern and a gambling house close to the church. They were praying against it, and a tornado came by and totally wiped it off the map. The Christians were saying, “Praise the Lord, the Lord took care of that old liquor house and that gambling house.” Well, the next month, the church building burned down, and now they were saying the devil did it. Really? Really? If you believe that God is sovereign, the God who allowed that gambling house to be torn apart by a tornado is the same God who allowed that church building to be burned down as well.

You have to understand that there are things that happen to us, and things that happen in this world, that we may not understand, comprehend, or like, but that is immaterial. It is still the hand of God that brings things to pass, and He does so for His glory and our good. Faith, then, rejoices in God’s providence regardless of the situation and regardless of the circumstances.

Faith Rejoices in Providence

Hold Numbers 13; we are coming back there. Turn over to the book of Job, chapter 1, and look at verses 20 through 22. Job was what you and I would call a multi-millionaire, an extremely wealthy individual. In one day, Job went from a multi-millionaire to a pauper. In one day, he lost everything he had. In that same day, he lost ten children—all ten of his children—and all his cattle, camels, and sheep. He lost everything.

When Job found out that all of his children were dead and all of his animals were gone, look in Job 1, verse 20: “Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped, and said, Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither.”

"The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord. In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly." Can you fathom what Job must have been going through to have lost everything in one day, and yet he bowed and worshiped and blessed God? In all this, Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.

Here is another illustration. You would not like this providence, but consider what David did. David had sinned with Bathsheba; a child was conceived and born, and then God took the child. "And when David saw that his servants whispered, David perceived that the child was dead. Therefore David said unto his servants, Is the child dead? And they said, He is dead. Then David arose from the earth, and washed, and anointed himself, changed his apparel, and came into the house of the Lord, and worshipped."

Then he came to his own house, and when he required, they set bread before him, and he did eat. His servant asked, "What thing is this that thou hast done? Thou didst fast and weep for the child while it was alive, but when the child was dead, thou didst rise and eat bread." David answered, "While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept: for I said, Who can tell whether God will be gracious to me, that the child may live? But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast?"

"Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, he shall not return unto me." When David found out the child was dead, he arose and worshipped. David did not like the circumstance; he would have preferred it to have been different, but it was not different. And so he worshipped God regardless.

You remember Eli? God had a problem with Eli because he did not restrain his own sons, Hophni and Phinehas. God came to Samuel and told him exactly what He was going to do to Eli and his house. The next day, Eli called little Samuel and said, "You tell me

everything that God told you." Samuel said, "God is going to take the priesthood away from your family. And the iniquity which you and your sons have committed will never be purged with sacrifice." In other words, they were not going to be forgiven. "Moreover, God's going to kill both of your sons, Hophni and Phinehas, in one day."

In 1 Samuel 3, verse 18, Eli's response was, "It is the Lord. Let Him do what seemeth Him best." Isn't that amazing? Here was a man who had lost the priesthood, whose family had lost it, and whose sons were going to die. "It is the Lord. Let Him do what seemeth Him good."

Minute Providence Illustrated

Since we are talking about divine providence, look in Proverbs 16, verse 33: "The lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord." This demonstrates not only the providence of God, but also His absolute control and sovereignty over all things. The casting of lots, the rolling of dice, or any such thing seems casual to man. Yet the Bible tells us that the outcome is directed and determined by God's counsel and providence. It is not chance, luck, fate, or fortune. It is God's providence. Think of all the dice thrown and all the lots cast in this world. According to this verse, there was no randomness about them.

It was all at the disposal of God Himself. In 1 Samuel chapter 14, Saul, King Saul, had cursed everyone with a curse if they ate anything before the enemies were destroyed. Jonathan did not hear that. He took his rod, dipped it in some honey, touched it to his tongue, and his eyes were enlightened. The people told Jonathan, "Your daddy gave a curse." The army was at a standstill, and Saul wanted to know what had happened. He prayed in 1 Samuel chapter 14, verse 41: "Therefore Saul said unto the Lord God of Israel, Give a perfect lot. And Saul and Jonathan his son were taken, and the people escaped." The lot was cast between Saul, Jonathan, and the people, and Saul and Jonathan were taken. The lot was cast again, and Jonathan was taken.

Everyone knows that Judas went out and hanged himself. He was one of the twelve. In Acts chapter 1, the apostles said that one must be ordained as a witness with them of Christ's resurrection:

"Wherefore of these men which have accompanied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the same day that He was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of His resurrection."

Those were the qualifications for being an apostle. They appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, surnamed Justus, and Matthias. They prayed, "Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, show whither these two thou hast chosen, that he may take part of this ministering apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place." They gave forth their lots, and the lot fell upon Matthias, who was numbered with the eleven apostles. Matthias was chosen by lot. In the Old Testament, lots were cast.

Even the high priest had in his vest the Urim and the Thummim. When someone asked a question, he would put his hand in and pull out one. One was a yes, and the other was a no. In the New Testament, they cast lots. But we do not cast lots today, because we have the full, final, and complete revelation of God.

We have it all written out for us. All we need to do is read it, study it, and apply it, and we will understand God's perfect will. They did not have this book when they were casting lots. The soldiers even cast lots for the robe of Jesus Christ. But we do not cast lots today.

The point made in reading Proverbs 16:33 is that God is in control of all things, even the rolling of dice or the casting of lots. That is God's providential control. John Trapp, one of the old Puritans, said this on Proverbs 16:33: "This sentence at first seems light and unworthy of the place it holds in this book. But as every line in the Holy Bible is pure, precious, and profitable, so this sets forth a matter of very great moment."

In other words, the providence of God extends to the disposing of all things, including those regarded as merely contingent or casual. If you took a couple of dice, shook them, and threw them on a table, you would think that was something very casual. The outcome, you would think, would be contingent on how you held them and how

you rolled them. But Proverbs 16:33 says that the outcome is in the providence of God.

Matthew 10:29 gives another passage dealing with God's providential control. Our Lord says, "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father." A farthing was not much, and a sparrow is not very precious. There are multitudes of them. Yet it says, "...not one of them shall fall to the ground without your heavenly Father."

When you hear the phrase "fall to the ground," you automatically think of a little sparrow that has been shot or hurt and falls to the ground. That would certainly be included, but the word "fall" literally could be interpreted as "lights." A sparrow cannot even light on the ground without your heavenly Father.

If you have ever noticed sparrows, we have a bird feeder in the front of the house, and I had one behind our house. I would look at it out my office window and see all of these sparrows, up and down, up and down, up a thousand times an hour. Here is what this verse says: not one can light or fall on the ground without your heavenly Father. He controls it.

Look, if you would please, in verse 30. He goes farther: “But the very hairs of your head are numbered.” You cannot even lose a hair without the providence of God. When He says the very hairs of your head are numbered, God has to take better care of some folks than others. He has to watch out for Marshall. Me, I do not have many hairs. That is the way it goes.

But notice that He is talking about what you and I would call insignificant. When you brush or comb your hair, there are a few hairs there. They cannot even come out of your head apart from God’s sovereign providence.

Thomas Boston, an old Puritan, said this concerning Matthew 10:29: “Our Lord here is encouraging His disciples against all the troubles and distresses that they might meet within their way, and particularly against the fear of men, by the consideration of the providence of God, which reaches unto the meanest of things, sparrows and the hairs of your head. Sparrows are of a mean price and small value. And yet, as mean as they are, God preserves them,

guides and disposes all things concerning them, so that one of them cannot fall to the ground by shot or any other way while His sovereign ordering and disposal."

Faith understands that nothing happens apart from God's sovereign providence. Fear, on the other hand, despises and ridicules God's providence. Fear refuses to listen to God. Fear refuses to obey God. Fear provokes God. Fear refuses to believe even that which it sees, and fear deprives us of God's blessings. Fear is the foundation of rebellion.

In Numbers 14, look at verses 22 and 23. Look what God says in verse 22: "Because all those men which have seen my glory and my miracles, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tempted me now these ten times, and have not hearkened unto my voice, surely they shall not see the land which I swear to their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoke me see it." God says these people tempted Him ten times.

Then, in verse 23, He says that they provoked Him. God says that they tempted Him ten times. Ten is the number of completeness. That's why we have the Ten Commandments. God is telling us that He is fed up with His people, their wickedness, and their rebellion; therefore, He is going to destroy them.

Some commentators say that the number ten here is a certain number given for an uncertain amount. They say that we do not really know the number of times they tempted and provoked God, and that God simply said ten because it is a number of completeness. However, if you go through the Bible and count how they tempted God twice at the sea in Exodus 14, twice concerning water in Exodus 15 and 17, twice concerning the manna in Exodus 16 and Numbers 11, twice concerning the quail in Exodus 16 and Numbers 11, once by the calf in Exodus 32, and once in the wilderness of Paran, Numbers 14, that amounts to ten times. Those are ten provocations or ten temptations. Fear provokes God. Fear basically despises God's providence.

Fear Ridicules Providence

In Numbers 14:1, we read: “And all the congregation lifted up their voice and cried, and the people wept that night. And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron. And the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt, or would God we had died in this wilderness. And wherefore hath the Lord brought us into this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? Were it not better for us to return into Egypt? And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt.”

Notice first that it is not merely the ten spies who are now despising God and God’s land. The fear they brought has been absorbed by the people. The whole congregation is weeping and crying, saying, in effect, “Woe is me; we are in an awful lot of trouble.”

Second, verse 2 says, “And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron.” How could the situation in which these people found themselves be the fault of Moses and Aaron? Stop and think about this. It was the spies who sinned and conveyed their fear. The people absorbed that fear and disobeyed God. Why, then, were they murmuring against Moses and Aaron? Certainly Moses and Aaron were their leaders and guides, but their murmuring showed insolence toward these leaders, base ingratitude toward God, fear, and defiance. Once you are absorbed with fear, you are not afraid to strike out at God or man. Usually, when you are afraid, you strike out at someone. Take a man who is drowning while someone dives in to rescue him. The rescuer must be exceedingly careful, because the drowning man, in fear, will often try to drown the one who comes to rescue him.

You have to be trained. These people were in fear, and therefore they were blame-shifting. It was Moses’ fault; it was Aaron’s fault. They were condemning and accusing someone. Usually, when someone moves in fear, the accusations, condemnation, and blame-shifting fall on someone who is absolutely, totally innocent.

Neither Moses nor Aaron could keep the people in faith or make them obey God. I cannot keep you in faith, make you believe, make

you obey, or keep your heart. Neither could they keep the hearts of these people. But fear is not afraid to condemn man, and it is certainly not afraid to condemn God.

"All the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron. And the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt, or would God that we had died in this wilderness." The Hebrew word for "would" can literally be translated, "all that it might be," "all I wish it could have been," "if only," or "would that." Can you believe this? They wished they had died in the land of Egypt. They would rather have died as slaves in great destitution, hated and despised, than live free. Then they said, "Would God we had died in this wilderness."

What were they talking about? In Numbers 11:1, when the people complained, it displeased the Lord. The Lord heard it, and His anger was kindled. The fire of the Lord burned among them and consumed those in the uttermost parts of the camp. The people cried unto Moses, and when Moses prayed unto the Lord, the fire was quenched. The people were bellyaching and complaining, and God sent fire and consumed them in His judgment and wrath. Yet they said, "Would God that we had died with them?"

How irrational can you be? How could anyone say, "I'd rather have died a slave in Egypt than live free, and I'd rather have died under the wrath and judgment of God and been burned to death than be alive right here in this wilderness"? Yet that is exactly what they were saying. I think I would refer to these people as fearful idiots. They had to be idiots to want to die under God's wrath and judgment or to live and die as slaves. That is bad, but it is not as bad as fear can make it.

In Numbers 14:3, they said, "Wherefore hath the Lord brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? Were it not better for us to return unto Egypt?" The Bible says in Proverbs 29:25, "...the fear of man bringeth a snare." They were ensnared. In fearing man, they did not fear God. They asked, "Wherefore hath the Lord brought us into this land?" They said God brought them there to fall by the sword, to make their wives and children a prey, and to kill them.

The insanity of their fear is demonstrated when they accuse God of deception and cruelty, as if He were betraying them to the Canaanite nations and leading them forth to slaughter. Their fear of their enemies led them to believe that God had deceived, betrayed, and confounded them by bringing them to their deaths.

They repaid all the miracles and mercies God had shown them by calling Him a wicked, cruel despot and tyrant. They were even calling Him a traitor.

We can sit here and say, “I am glad I am not like that.” Really? When we bellyache, complain, and whine that God does not love us because, if He did, He would not let such and such happen to us or to our family, what are we doing? We are doing exactly what these people did in Numbers 14. We accuse God of being a wicked, cruel despot and tyrant, of not loving us, and of doing this to destroy or hurt us. Like these unbelieving Israelites, we accuse God wrongfully and wickedly. They said, “God brought us out here to kill us.” He did not.

But that's what fear said. Fear is not afraid to condemn God. Fear is not afraid to challenge God. Fear is not afraid to blaspheme God.

Now, I want you to see the height of their impiety. Look at the latter part of verse 3: "Were it not better for us to return into Egypt?" And they said one to another, "Let us make a captain and let us return into Egypt." Here is a formal renunciation of the authority of Moses and their flat-out rebellion against God. You have to remember that in Egypt their lives were made bitter with rigor and suffering. God had provided for these people. He gave them manna. He gave them meat. The shoes of their feet did not wear out. Their clothes did not wear out.

And now they're saying, "We had it better off in Egypt under Pharaoh than we have it here under God. So what we need to do is we need to go back to Egypt. Let's appoint a captain and go back into captivity. Let's go back into slavery."

According to Nehemiah chapter 9, they did exactly what they said: "But they and our fathers dealt proudly and hardened their necks, and hearkened not to thy commandments, and refused to obey. Neither were mindful of thy wonders which thou didst among them,

but hardened their necks, and in their rebellion appointed a captain to return to their bondage. But thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and forsookest them not."

Fear as Foundation of Rebellion

They appointed a captain to return to their bondage. Fear refuses to obey. Fear refuses to be led by God's man. Fear refuses to recognize the office of authority. Moses was not going to take them back into Egypt. Neither was Aaron. And here's what fear says: "Fine. If you don't want to take us back into Egypt, we'll appoint someone who will. We don't have to listen to you. We'll do what we want to do."

Now, I want to call your attention to one truth that I have enunciated over and over in the last two messages. I told you that fear was the foundation of rebellion. Look at Nehemiah chapter 9, verse 16: "But they and our fathers dealt proudly," there's pride, "hardened their necks, hearkened not to thy commandments, refused to obey, neither were mindful of thy wonders that thou didst among them, but hardened their necks, and in their what? In their rebellion."

They refused to obey. They were not mindful of God's wonders, of God's miracles, of God's grace, or of God's mercies. They forgot all of them. “We're not interested in those. We're going to do what we want to do.” They hardened their necks, and in their rebellion, they appointed a captain to return to Egypt.

It was not only Nehemiah who pointed this out. Moses, the man of God, also pointed it out in Deuteronomy chapter 1, verse 22:

“And you came near unto me, every one of you, and said, We will send men before us, and they shall search out the land, and bring us word again by what way we must go up, and in what cities we shall come. And the saying pleased me well. And I took twelve men of you, one of a tribe, and they turned and went up into the mountain, and came into the valley of Eshcol, and searched it out. And they took the fruit of the land in their hands, and brought it down unto us, and brought us word again, and said, It is a good land which the Lord our God doth give us.

“Notwithstanding, you would not go up, but rebelled against the commandment of the Lord your God. And you murmured in your tents, and said, Because the Lord hated us, he hath brought us forth out of the land of Egypt, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us. Whither shall we go up? Our brethren have discouraged our hearts, saying, The people is greater and taller than we.”

"The cities are great and walled up to heaven, and moreover we have seen the sons of the Anakims there." What? Did you read that? Verse 26: "...notwithstanding," said Moses, "you would not go up, but rebelled against the Lord." Why would they not go up? Because of their fear. In their fear of the giants and of fighting them, they said, "We're not going to do it. We're just not going to do it." Fear is the foundation of rebellion. When you are fearful, you're not going to obey. You're going to do that which you think is going to save your hide, regardless of what God says. Fear is the foundation of rebellion.

Faith regards the promises of God; fear disregards them. Faith respects the power of God; fear disrespects the power of God. Faith rejoices in God's providence, whatever it is; fear ridicules God's providence. Fear is not afraid to blaspheme God.

Applications and Closing

I want to make just a couple of applications in closing. I believe there are three verses that you ought to memorize. If you haven't memorized them, you should do so. The first is 2 Timothy 1:7: "For God hath not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind." If you're afraid, if you're filled with fear, it did not come from God. It may come from your flesh, the world, or the devil, but it did not come from God.

The second is Isaiah 12:2: "Behold, God is my salvation. I will trust and not be afraid, for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song, and he also has become my salvation." I will trust and not be afraid. The third is Psalm 56:3: "What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee." If you're trusting in God, then the fear is going to be dispelled. I encourage you to memorize those three passages.

The second application is this: We need to be very careful what we wish for. These Israelites said, "Oh, I wish I'd died in Egypt. Oh, I wish I'd died in this wilderness." God said, "Okay, I'll fulfill that wish." For forty years, they died in the wilderness. You remember in Psalm 78 how they bellyached against God: "We're tired of this manna," although manna was perfect. "We want meat. We want meat." Guess what Psalm 78 says when God sent the quail?

He gave them the desires of their hearts, and while the meat was in their mouth, He slew the fattest of them. You better be careful what you wish for, because God may just allow you to have it.

The third application is this: God's providence must be bowed to and submitted to regardless of the circumstances. Since we're human, we're frail and weak, and there are things that are grievous to us. Some folks have lost a mate or spouse; some have lost children, brothers, and sisters. I just found out this week—I did not know the young lady personally, but I know the family—that a twenty-year-old in school in Colorado was raped and murdered by an eighteen-year-old boy. That's got to be difficult. That's got to be hard. Why would God allow something like that? The answer is for His own honor and glory, and ultimately for our good.

I may not understand it or be able to comprehend it, but I must believe that God is in absolute control, regardless of the circumstances or situation in my life. The easiest and quickest way out of a very trying circumstance is by yielding and submitting to God and giving Him the honor and glory. It's just like when Job lost everything that he had. He bowed and worshiped, and he said, "Blessed be the name of the Lord. The Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away." In all this, Job sinned not with his lips, nor charged God foolishly.

God is in control in our lives, in the lives of His people, and of everything, even the wicked. God is going to allow only that to come to pass which will glorify Him and ultimately be for our good. Whatever God brings in our lives is good. It may hurt, but it's still good because it's His providence.

Let's pray. Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we thank You for Your love, grace, and mercy. Lord, we must admit and confess that

thou art sovereign, thou art omnipotent, thou art in control. Lord, we trust Thee. We do not trust luck, chance, fate, or fortune. We trust Thy divine providence and bow to Thee. We do not want to be like these wicked people and ridicule Your providence.

We rejoice because we know that you're too loving to be unkind and too wise to make a mistake. Help us to be holy and godly. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask. Amen.

CHAPTER 18

Easily Enslaved

January 12, 2017

SCRIPTURE READING - Exodus 1:7-14 (KJV)

"And the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty; and the land was filled with them. Now there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph. And he said unto his people, Behold, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we: Come on, let us deal wisely with them; lest they multiply, and it come to pass, that, when there falleth out any war, they join also unto our enemies, and fight against us, and so get them up out of the land. Therefore they did set over them taskmasters to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh treasure cities, Pithom and Rameses. But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were grieved because of the children of Israel. And the Egyptians made the children of Israel to serve with rigour: And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage, in morter, and in brick, and in all manner of service in the field: all their service, wherein they made them serve, was with rigour."

Introduction: The Reality of Slavery and the Question of Easy Enslavement

> Slavery has existed in all ages, and every race has been enslaved at one time or another. If you listen to the leftists and liberals today, the only slavery you will hear about is black slavery. They bring that up in order to produce guilt, and then harp on what they call white privilege. The truth is that a multitude of white people have been enslaved, just like other races. In fact, there is an entire book titled They Were White and They Were Slaves. Not only white people have been enslaved; so have Indians and every other race. Black sociologist, author, and columnist Thomas Sowell said, "Blacks were not enslaved because they were black, but because they were available. Slavery has existed in the world for thousands of years. Whites enslaved other whites in Europe, and for centuries before the first black was brought into the Western Hemisphere. Asians also enslaved Europeans. Asians enslaved other Asians. Africans enslaved other Africans, and indeed, even today in North Africa, blacks continue to enslave blacks."

It is not my intent in this message to deal with the fact or reality of slavery, nor am I interested in presenting a history of slavery, as I have done before in other messages. But as I was reading through Exodus recently, the thought came to me how easily the Israelites were enslaved, and how easily a people may be enslaved. Israel was enslaved by the Egyptians, and apparently, from reading Exodus chapter 1, it was very easily accomplished. The question that struck my mind was this: How could they be so easily enslaved? In like manner, we could ask, What has happened in America? Why are we as a people so subservient and so unwilling to stand up for our rights, our liberty, and our freedom?

The Offense of Truth and Christian Fear

How is it that even Christians have reached the point where they are afraid to speak the truth because they might offend someone? The truth of the matter is that the Word of God already offends. Truth offends. The Apostle Paul said in Galatians 5:11, “And I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? then is the

offence of the cross ceased." There is an offence in the Gospel, and there is an offence in preaching and teaching the truth.

In 1 Peter 2:8, the Bible tells us that to unbelievers, Jesus Christ is "a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient." In 1 Peter chapter 2, beginning with verse 6, the Bible says, "Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded." Verse 6 refers to the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the chief corner stone, the elect Messiah, and He is precious.

Now look at verse 7: "Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed."

SCRIPTURE READING - Exodus 1:7-14 (KJV)

To those who believe, Jesus Christ is precious. The Word of God is precious. The Gospel is precious. But to those who are disobedient, who do not believe, Jesus Christ is a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence. So why in the world would Christians be afraid of offending someone when the truth is already offensive? When Jesus Christ is preached and presented clearly in the Scripture, it is indeed offensive to those who disbelieve. Obviously, we are, in one sense of the word, almost in the same position the Israelites were in Egypt. Why are Americans today like they are, or why are professing Christians like they are? The answer is because we are just like the Israelites were in Egypt.

Look in Exodus chapter 1, verses 7 through 14. "And the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty; and the land was filled with them."

"Now there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph. And he said unto his people, Behold, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we: Come on, let

> us deal wisely with them; lest they multiply, and it come to pass, that, when there falleth out any war, they join also unto our enemies, and fight against us, and so get them up out of the land."
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> "Therefore they did set over them taskmasters to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh treasure cities, Pithom and Rameses. But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were grieved because of the children of Israel." Now here is what we need to ponder: If the Israelites had multiplied and waxed exceeding mighty, and according to Pharaoh's own testimony they were more and mightier than his people,

How could they be so easily enslaved? Why would they have submitted to slavery? Why would they not have fought and resisted? How in the world could a people like this be overcome so easily? Let us go back and explain some things before answering those questions.

In Genesis 15:13-14, God told Abram that his posterity would be a stranger in a strange land for four hundred years and would be afflicted. Genesis 15:13 says, “And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years;” Verse 14 continues: “And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance.”

God's Foreordination and Secondary Causes

Although Abraham was told that his seed would be a stranger in a strange land and would serve that land, he was not told the circumstances under which his posterity would be dominated and enslaved. We must understand that there are always cause-and-effect relationships. It is true that God appointed and ordained that the Israelites be in Egypt for four hundred years, but there are also cause-and-effect relationships.

Consider Jesus Christ. Everyone understands that He was foreordained, predetermined, premeditated by God, and

predestinated to die as the sacrifice, substitute, and surety for His people. 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.”

There was not one thing done to Jesus Christ that was not already ordained by God the Father. Everything about Him was predestined, predetermined, and foreordained before the world began. Yet God used means, or what we would call secondary causes: the kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against His Christ. Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together.

In Acts chapter 2, Peter preached on the day of Pentecost: “Him,” that is, Jesus Christ, “being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.” Was Jesus Christ foreordained to suffer and die? The answer is yes.

But notice that God used wicked people to accomplish His will. Those who crucified Jesus Christ did not say, “I think I am going to fulfill God’s eternal decree. I am going to crucify His Son.” No. They crucified Jesus Christ because they hated Him, despised Him, and refused Him. In fact, the Bible says in John 19 that Pilate knew they had delivered Him for envy. God foreordained Jesus Christ to be crucified, and then He used the means—that is, the wickedness and sins of the people—to accomplish His purpose.

In the same way, God also foreordained that Israel be in Egypt for four hundred years, but there are causes and effects, and we have to look at those. The very first thing to point out is verse 8: “Now there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph.” How could anyone forget Joseph? Joseph saved the Egyptians, and he also saved many others. Certainly, Joseph’s legacy continues even today, and not only among those who believe the Bible. There are monuments and inscriptions bearing his name even today in the land of Egypt. Yet the Bible says, “Now there arose up a new king

over Egypt, which knew not Joseph." Albert Barnes, in his commentary, says, "A new king" is a phrase not found elsewhere.

It is understood by most commentators to imply that he did not succeed his predecessor in the natural order of descent and inheritance. He arose up over Egypt, occupying the land, as it would seem, on different terms from the king whose place he took, either by usurpation or conquest.

So when we read, "There arose up a new king over Egypt," we are probably speaking of someone who was not an Egyptian but who had control over Egypt. Acts chapter 7 bears this out in the New Testament. Verses 17 and 18 say, "But when the time of the promise drew nigh, which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt, Till another king arose, which knew not Joseph."

The interesting word here is "another." There are two Greek words translated in our Bibles as "another." The very first is the little Greek word allos, spelled A-L-L-O-S, which means "another of the same kind." The second is heteros, which means "another of a different kind." We speak of a heterosexual marriage, a marriage between a man and a woman—two different kinds. Here the word is heteros: "Till another king arose," another of a different kind, "which knew not Joseph."

It was not necessarily an Egyptian who was on the throne at this particular time. It was inevitably and undoubtedly someone who came to the throne by conquest. Isaiah 52:4 gives us this interesting passage: "For thus saith the Lord GOD, My people went down aforetime into Egypt to sojourn there; and the Assyrian oppressed them without cause." They went down to sojourn in Egypt, and the Assyrian oppressed them without cause. Egypt had undoubtedly been conquered by an outsider. Of course, we know that Egypt had been defeated in a multitude of battles. The passage says that "the Assyrian oppressed them without cause."

The Babylonians, the Assyrians, and the Persians all had the same empire and all ruled from the same region. For instance, in 2 Kings 23 and verse 29, the king of Babylon is called the king of Assyria because the Babylonian Empire had conquered that territory. The

Scripture says, "In his days Pharaoh-nechoh king of Egypt went up against the king of Assyria to the river Euphrates: and king Josiah went against him; and he slew him at Megiddo, when he had seen him." So Pharaoh-nechoh of Egypt, who was fighting against the king of Assyria, slew Josiah, who was the king of Judah. Josiah was a good king as well.

Likewise, Ezra 6 and verse 22 says, "And kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy: for the LORD had made them joyful, and turned the heart of the king of Assyria unto them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel." We know it was Darius and Cyrus who did this, and they were Persians, but they were called the king of Assyria because they had conquered that territory.

So here you have a new king who arose, who knew not Joseph. Undoubtedly, he was either an Assyrian, a Babylonian, or a Persian. He did not recognize Joseph, appreciate him, or care about him. Verse 9 says, "And he said unto his people, Behold, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we."

At the Exodus, the children of Israel amounted to about two million people. In fact, there were six hundred thousand men capable of fighting—the Bible numbers that—besides the women and the children. So there were about two million Israelites who left Egypt at the Exodus. But how many people lived in Egypt? Far more than two million. Here is a man speaking to his people and saying, "Behold, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we"—really? Stop and think about this.

In other words, it is evidently someone different than the Egyptians. Look in verse 10: “Come on, let us deal wisely with them; lest they multiply, and it come to pass, that, when there falleth out any war, they join also unto our enemies, and fight against us, and so get them up out of the land.” He is talking to his people and speaks of “our enemies.” Stop and think about this: if there were 600,000 men of fighting age, and they merely joined with the Egyptians, there would certainly have been a tremendous revolt. But if an outside nation came and they joined with that outside nation, then that nation would have an inside base because the children of Israel were already in the land of Egypt.

So, in all probability, this king that knew not Joseph was not an Egyptian. He ruled over Egypt, and Egypt had been conquered by him, but he did not know Joseph.

Here was a people who were easily enslaved. How could they be so easily enslaved? Look again at verse 10: “Come on, let us deal wisely with them; lest they multiply.” The new Pharaoh did not want any more Israelites. He was going to stop them from multiplying. How do you stop a people from multiplying? Today we have many different ways—abortion, vaccination, birth control, and all kinds of things. Back then, they probably did not necessarily have vaccination and birth control. But verse 11 explains how they were going to make them cease multiplying: “Therefore they did set over them taskmasters to afflict them with their burdens.”

The First Cause: Extreme Taxation

Two words explain the first scheme for easily enslaving any people, just as the Israelites were easily enslaved: extreme taxation. If you look again at verse 11, “Therefore they did set over them taskmasters.” One of the problems we have when reading Scripture is that we impose upon it our concept or understanding rather than searching out what it really means.

When you and I think of a taskmaster, we think of someone standing over us with a whip or a gun, saying, "You do this or else." But the interesting thing is that the word taskmasters literally means "masters of tribute." These were men of rank, governmental officials rather than common overseers. They laid taxes and tribute upon the people, demanded payment, and saw that it was paid. In fact, the taskmasters had officers working under them. Exodus 5:10 says, "And the taskmasters of the people went out, and their officers, and they spake to the people, saying, Thus saith Pharaoh, I will not give you straw."

These taskmasters were men who said, "You will pay this much in taxes, or give this tribute, or else." The result was that the people's money was exhausted. When they had no money with which to pay, they had to labor to work out the debt they owed in tribute.

The system in Egypt was so rigged that they could never get out of debt or pay off all the taxes and tribute, much like it is today. In fact, let me show you how easily enslaved these people were. Exodus 5:10-12 records: "And the taskmasters of the people went out, and their officers, and they spake to the people, saying, Thus saith Pharaoh, I will not give you straw. Go ye, get you straw where ye can find it: yet not ought of your work shall be diminished. So the people were scattered abroad throughout all the land of Egypt to gather stubble instead of straw."

Now I have a question. When I read that, I would think, "Oh, wait a minute. If I were scattered throughout Egypt searching for straw, why could I not simply keep walking? Why could I not take my family and say, 'We are going to look for straw,' and get out of the land?" The Bible does not say that any of them did so. All they were interested in doing was trying to pay their taxes and tribute. One would think about leaving the land, just getting out, but they remained occupied with satisfying the demands placed upon them. Matthew Poole said that the taskmasters were "masters of tribute, who were to exact from them the tribute required, which was both money and labor."

"...that their purses might be exhausted by the one, and their strength by the other, and their spirits by both." Thus the object was to afflict, oppress, and humble these people by taking everything they had and forcing them to work—not necessarily with someone standing over them with a whip, but because otherwise they might lose their lives or be thrown into a dungeon.

The emphasis was this: You will spend your time working, paying your taxes and tribute, and you will not have time to think about how to escape or alleviate your situation. You certainly will not have time to procreate, because we will keep you busy. John Gill, the great Baptist commentator, said, "This was the first scheme proposed and agreed on, and was to appoint taskmasters over them, or princes, or masters of tribute, commissioners of taxes, who had the power to lay heavy taxes upon them, and obliged them to pay them, which were very burdensome, and so afflictive to their minds, and tended to diminish their wealth and riches, and obliged them to harder labor in order to pay them, and so every way controlled." That certainly is

a scheme, and undoubtedly it has been used through the ages, because it is still being used today to enslave people.

Think about your parents and grandparents. When I was a boy, my father worked, while my mother stayed home, kept house, and raised the children. My grandmothers did the same. Today, excessive taxation and the hidden tax of inflation require both husband and wife to work just to eke out an existence—not to have a lot, but simply to exist.

The attitude of the average American, and sadly of the average Christian, is, "We can't afford to have any more children." When you study all the taxes Americans pay, you now have to work through July before you can begin working for yourself, because the first six months of the year are basically given to paying the taxes heaped upon us. Like the Israelites, Americans do not have time to think, read, or take care of the children they have.

They were so stressed and distressed, and that is exactly the way it goes. We, too, have taskmasters: supervisors, agents, auditors, assessors, and collectors to make sure that we work hard enough to build a new governmental school building, a new stadium, or even a new courthouse. This was the first scheme, but thankfully, in the providence of God, it did not work.

Look in verse 12: "But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were grieved because of the children of Israel." So the first method to easily enslave people is simply extreme taxation. I do not know if you remember the message I preached years ago on biblical money and inflation. If you took the money from 1900 and compared it to 1960, and then after 1964, when the silver and gold were no more, and brought it up to today, if you had $1,000 in 1900, you would need something like $100,000 today to buy the same amount that $1,000 would buy in those days. The average new house was $2,000, and you could buy a brand-new car for $600. I am simply saying: extreme and excessive taxation.

The Second Cause: Abundant Prosperity

The second cause of enslavement here is what I am going to call abundant prosperity. Let me explain that. Turn in your Bibles to

Genesis 47. Here is where Jacob and his children came into the land. I want you to see what happens when they get into the land. Pharaoh spoke to Joseph in verse 5, saying, “Thy father and thy brethren are come unto thee.” Now watch what he says in verse 6: “The land of Egypt is before thee; in the best of the land make thy father and brethren to dwell; in the land of Goshen let them dwell.”

"And if thou knowest any men of activity among them, then make them rulers over my cattle." Notice: "in the best of the land," "in the land of Goshen," that is where you are going to dwell. Any of your brethren who are men of activity, make them rulers over my cattle—in other words, supervisors. They would not necessarily look after the cattle themselves, but would be over those who did. Thus, just as they came into the land, they had a position of importance, and probably were well paid as well.

Look at verse 11: "And Joseph placed his father and his brethren, and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had commanded." Then skip down to verse 27: "And Israel dwelt in the land of Egypt, in the country of Goshen; and they had possessions therein, and grew, and multiplied exceedingly."

Initially, there was prosperity. But prosperity may be a blessing, and it may also be a curse. One of its problems is simple: once we become prosperous, we begin to think that we have it made. We tend to think that we will always be prosperous, that we will never suffer, and that we will never do without.

David undoubtedly thought the same thing. He had been a sheep master caring for his father's sheep, and then he entered the palace and was promoted to head of all the soldiers. David said in Psalm 30:6, "And in my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved." Yet he was moved. Saul chased him as a flea and as a partridge in the wilderness, and he had to suffer and do without.

He was in the cold and in the heat. The tendency in prosperity is to think and act improperly and poorly. Proverbs 1:32 says, “For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them.” I know of an individual who received a million-dollar settlement, and one year later he was broke. He lost

everything he had and went through a million dollars in a year. The prosperity of fools shall destroy them.

Moreover, when we are prosperous, there is a tendency to become independent of God and refuse to listen to Him. We tend to think that we do not need Him, or we ignore Him and refuse to hear Him. Jeremiah 22:21 says, “I spake unto thee in thy prosperity; but thou saidst, I will not hear. This hath been thy manner from thy youth, that thou obeyedst not my voice.” God said, “I have spoken to you in your prosperity.” But what did you say? You said, “I will not hear.”

The American people, and unhappily most Christian people, are like these Israelites, somehow tending to think that we will always be prosperous, never be in adversity, and never suffer. We may be prosperous one year, but not the next, or prosperous for one decade, but not the next. Ask yourself, where are the companies like Pan Am Airways, Radio Shack, E.F. Hutton, Kodak, and the multitude of other companies that, when we were young, were multi-million-dollar companies? Now they are not even in existence.

Ecclesiastes 7:14 says, “In the day of prosperity be joyful, 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.” If you have a day of prosperity, be joyful, but know there is a day of adversity coming. God is setting them against each other so that you will know it is not in you; it is all in Him. Do you realize it is possible to be so far removed from prosperity that you even forget what it was like?

Jeremiah watched Jerusalem destroyed. He watched his people slaughtered and enslaved, the walls torn down, and the temple destroyed. He said in Lamentations 3:17, “And thou hast removed my soul far off from peace: I forgat prosperity.” He said, in effect, I could not even imagine it anymore. Here is the truth: prosperity tends to soften us.

If we are prosperous, we do not do the work; we hire it done. When we are prosperous, we tend to lose our strength, our skills, and our knowledge. How many of you could do what our pioneer forefathers did? How many of you could do what your grandparents did—living without electricity or air conditioning, sometimes in a

one-room or two-room house, going to the spring and bringing up water? Just stop and think.

We have had it made in this country for years. When the day of prosperity is over and the day of adversity is here, we will find out that prosperity sometimes was not our friend if we did not act wisely during the time of prosperity. There is a third reason why Israel was so easily enslaved. Not only were they excessively taxed, and not only were they prosperous and unwise, but they had simply lost their fighting spirit. They did not have the ability or the desire to resist. They had given in, given up, and given out.

The Third Cause: Loss of Fighting Spirit

Now consider the Scriptures in light of Israel of old and where we are today. In Exodus 13, God was bringing the children of Israel out of the land. The Bible says, "And it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God led them not through the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said, Lest peradventure the people repent when they see war, and they return to Egypt: But God led the people about, through the way of the wilderness of the Red sea: and the children of Israel went up harnessed out of the land of Egypt."

There was a short route to Canaan through the Philistines, but God did not take them that way, "lest they see war, and they return to Egypt." Isn't that amazing? The Bible says God brought them up "harnessed" out of the land. The word "harnessed" is a military term. It literally means "in ranks of five." He let them march out in a military manner, slowly trying to teach them.

But these people did not have a fighting spirit at all. God had brought them to the land of Canaan, and Moses sent twelve spies to search out the land. Only two brought back a good report. Numbers 13:27 says, "And they told him, and said, We came unto the land whither thou sentest us, and surely it floweth with milk and honey; and this is the fruit of it. Nevertheless the people be strong that dwell in the land, and the cities are walled, and very great."

"Moreover we saw the children of Anak there. The Amalekites dwell in the land of the south: and the Hittites, and the Jebusites,

and the Amorites, dwell in the mountains: and the Canaanites dwell by the sea, and by the coast of Jordan. And Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it. But the men that went up with him said, We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we. And they brought up an evil report of the land which they had searched unto the children of Israel, saying, The land, through which we have gone to search it, is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we saw in it are men of a great stature. And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants."

"And we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight." Twelve men were sent out. Two, Joshua and Caleb, came back with a good report and were ready to fight. The ten out of the twelve were not ready to fight. They did not have a fighting spirit. Their attitude is shown in Numbers 14:1: "And all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night."

"And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron: and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness! And wherefore hath the LORD brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? were it not better for us to return into Egypt? And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt."

Here were a people so afraid to fight, and who had lost such a fighting spirit, that they were willing to go back and be enslaved just to keep from fighting. If you are unwilling to fight for liberty and freedom, you will surely be enslaved. If you do not know how to fight, or if you do not have the weapons to fight with, you will surely be enslaved.

First Samuel chapter 13 shows how the Philistines had conquered and dominated the Israelites. "Now there was no smith found throughout all the land of Israel: for the Philistines said, Lest the Hebrews make them swords or spears: But all the Israelites went down to the Philistines, to sharpen every man his share, and his coulter, and his axe, and his mattock." They had a file for their tools,

“and to sharpen the goads.” Then, in the day of battle, “there was neither sword nor spear found in the hand of any of the people that were with Saul and Jonathan.” Only Saul and Jonathan, the king and the prince, had a spear and a sword in the whole Hebrew army.

Once you give up your weapons, you are enslaved—it is just that simple. If you do not have a fighting spirit, you will be enslaved. If you do not know how to fight, you will be enslaved. If you think that a fighting spirit is not necessary, or that it is undesirable, then you must ask: Why did God leave some of His enemies in the land of Canaan?

Judges chapter 3 gives the answer: “Now these are the nations which the LORD left, to prove Israel by them, even as many of Israel as had not known all the wars of Canaan.” Some had not fought; they had been born after the conquest of Canaan and knew nothing about fighting. The passage continues, “Only that the generations of the children of Israel might know, to teach them war, at the least such as before knew nothing thereof.” God left some enemies in the land so that His people would know how to fight and be taught war. Here is a simple truth: If we really and truly desire liberty and freedom, we must cherish a fighting spirit and be ready and able to fight.

The Necessity of a Fighting Spirit in the Spiritual Realm

Now the same is true in the spiritual realm. A Christian should know how to fight against sin, Satan, the world, and fleshly lusts, lest he be ensnared and overcome. The Bible says in Romans 6:16, "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?" To whomever you yield yourself, you are his servant. Peter said it like this in 2 Peter 2:19: "For of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage." Of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought into bondage.

We do not understand real liberty and freedom because we do not understand real bondage and servitude. If you had ever been in real bondage and servitude, or figured out that you were in it, you might learn what real liberty and freedom is. It is like the saying, "A war is

when your government tells you who your enemies are. A revolution is when you figure it out for yourself."

If you do not cherish a fighting spirit, you are going to be enslaved. The best slaves are those who think they are free when they are not. Ask the average American today, "Are you free?" The answer will be yes. Then begin to list all the taxes, licenses, regulations, and everything needed just to exist. No. If we want to be free, we must understand that the government is a plantation on which we all live, and prepare to be free of its doles and wiles.

Conclusion: Vigilance Against Modern Enslavement

I tell people that when the war of northern aggression ended in 1865, slavery was not abolished. They merely enlarged the plantation, and now we are all slaves. If we want to be free, we must understand that excessive taxation is a means of enslavement. We must also be wary of prosperity and use it wisely, without being overcome and ensnared by it.

And we must always cherish a biblical, godly fighting spirit. Paul told Timothy, “Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life.” Near death, in 2 Timothy chapter 4, he said, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course.” He fought to the end. If we do not cherish a biblical, godly fighting spirit, we will always be enslaved. How easily the Israelites were enslaved; just think how easily Americans are enslaved, and how easily all these other countries are enslaved—little by little, until you are hooked. Then you never think about wandering off the plantation, because you think you are in charge when you are not.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank You for Your Word, for Your truth. We pray You would teach us, that You would build us up in the most holy faith. Help us to live for Thee. In Jesus Christ, Amen.

CHAPTER 19

Holiness and Obedience

November 7, 2019

On Interstate 75, I was doing ten and fifteen miles an hour. I saw so many people in the ditch on each side of the road going home. Every now and then, somebody would pass me doing thirty or forty, and then I would pass them farther up the road because they were in the ditch. I am thankful that I live in South Georgia. I have a good friend who lives up in Michigan, and he texted me, saying, “Fifteen to twenty degrees and snow, snow, snow.” I said, “That’s why I live in the South.”

I thought of something, and I know some of you are as old as I am, and some probably older. When I was a boy, we lived in an old farmhouse with a tin roof. I used to tease people and say, “When I was a boy, my mother carpeted our bathroom. She liked it so much, she ran it all the way into the house.” Of course, we did not have showers back then. In the summertime, especially when it rained like this, the eave where all the water came off was where I had my shower. I would get out under that eave and just shower, and that was the greatest thing in the world.

You cannot do that up here, though—not in the cold, anyhow. I am thankful for the Lord's grace and mercy, allowing us to live as we do. I want you to open your Bibles tonight to 1 Peter, chapter 1. There are a lot of messages I want to preach, and I may end up tomorrow night combining two messages to share the other things I want to share with you. But I want you to look tonight.

Holiness and Obedience

The message is going to be very simple, but I hope very straightforward. I pray that it will be extremely helpful as well.

Peter writes, "Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ as obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lust of your ignorance, but as he which is called you is holy. So be ye holy in all manner of conversation."

I could begin by asking, Do you have a desire to be holy, or do you have an inclination to be holy? I could also ask this question: Do you understand the essence of holiness? One of the complaints that I have heard from Christians all over the country is that they have failed in holiness. I have heard people say, "I've tried to live a holy life, but I ended up miserably failing."

Introduction: The Challenge of Holiness

I would turn around and ask, Do you even know what holiness is? Sometimes they would at least hit in the right direction, but most of the time they would confess that they really had no idea. So the question would have to be asked: How in the world could you live a holy life if you really do not understand holiness, or if you really do not understand the essence of holiness? We do not even understand the beginning of it, much less the ending of it as well. And then, when you consider the fact that by nature—in our flesh, in our minds, and in our desires—we actually recoil at the thought of holiness, the difficulty becomes even clearer.

We are talking about holiness, but the Bible says in Galatians 5:16–17, "This I say then, walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill

the lusts of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth or fighteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh."

These are contrary, the one to the other, so that you cannot do the things that you would. We need to mark this down in our minds: we are never, ever going to live a holy life, and we are never, ever going to be holy as long as we are fulfilling the lusts and desires of our flesh.

When I talk about the lusts and desires of our flesh, I am referring to that which is contrary to God and contrary to the Word of God. Certainly, we live in the flesh, and God, in His grace and mercy, allows us to enjoy things in our flesh. He allows us to enjoy life, food, family, friends, and many other things. But when we are talking about the flesh, we are talking specifically about those things that are absolutely contrary to God. You are never, ever going to be holy as long as you are pleasing your flesh. Why? Because the flesh is fighting against that which is holy, and the spirit is fighting against that which is fleshly.

That is why the Bible says in Colossians 1:10, "that you might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God." You are not going to walk pleasing unto the Lord as long as you are walking in the flesh. You are not going to walk pleasing to the Lord as long as you are walking in ignorance. We can either please the Lord or please ourselves.

And I must remind you of this: when we choose to please our flesh, when we choose to please ourselves, we are violating the first commandment because we are placing ourselves above God. The Bible says, "Thou shalt have no other gods above me." So it is indeed idolatry.

Looking back at our text in 1 Peter 1:16, we find a very plain command: "Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy." The command is that you and I are to be holy. When we consider it, there are really and truly only two alternatives: we can be obedient or disobedient; obedient or rebellious. That is it. There is no other alternative. He commands us to be holy, for He is holy, saith the Lord.

I have preached a series of messages on holiness from 2 Corinthians 6 and 7, dealing particularly with 2 Corinthians 7:1: "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." The verse begins, "Having therefore these promises," so we must ask ourselves, What promises? We have to go back to 2 Corinthians 6 to find them. Having these promises, then, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. I also preached a series of three messages on this text, on personal holiness.

Then I got to thinking for some time about this passage. I wanted to take this text and reduce it to where you and I could not only grasp and understand it, but also apply it in our lives on a daily basis. I wanted to condense all those messages I had preached on holiness so that this truth would be available to each of us in our own mind and understanding.

Psalm 4:3 is intimately connected with what I am talking about tonight, and it should excite each one of us to personal holiness. Look at what he says: "But know that the Lord has set apart him that is godly for himself. The Lord will hear when I call unto him." Isn't that amazing? Here is something you must know as a child of God: "The Lord has set apart him that is godly for himself." Let me give you a couple of things in this passage.

First of all, you need to consider the fact that God sets apart him that is godly for himself. The word "sets apart" literally is from the Hebrew palal, which means to distinguish, to make distinct, to mark out, and to separate and to set apart. So God distinguishes, marks out, and sets apart those that are godly for himself.

Secondly, in this verse, the Hebrew word for godly is the word chasid, which literally means godly, or holy, or saintly. Whenever you talk about a holy man, you are talking about a godly man. When you talk about a godly man, you are talking about a holy man. Either way, you are talking about a saint, because a saint is supposed to be holy and godly. If God is holy—and He is—He said, "Be ye therefore holy as I am holy." So a godly man must necessarily be holy.

Thirdly, in this text, the Bible says that God has set apart him that is godly for himself. In other words, here is a distinguished group, a distinguished class, someone placed in a very unique position. God has set him apart for himself. That is why David said in the latter part of that verse, “Therefore, the Lord will hear when I call upon him.” Yes, God is going to hear, because God has set him apart for himself.

When I was in school many, many moons back, there was always someone in the class whom the rest referred to as the teacher's pet. Have you ever heard that phrase? Most of the students, and I remember this quite well, would be envious of the one marked out as the teacher's pet. We never stopped to realize that the reason that individual was called the teacher's pet was because he always did the homework, always had the answer, always studied, and always did what he was supposed to do. The rest of us did not do that.

The teacher naturally gave him something extra and special because he obeyed. It was just that simple. I do not know about you, but I would really like to be in that class where God says, “I'm putting you here for myself. I'm separating you. I'm making you distinct. I'm setting you apart as a special pet, if you would please, because you obey me.” That is when David said, “God's going to hear when I call upon him.”

Let me say this very clearly: in order to be holy, one must first be regenerated and converted. There are not going to be any Pharisees, hypocrites, or unsaved church members who are going to be holy. You might have some hypocrites, Pharisees, and unsaved church members who are moral and kind and possess perhaps a certain degree of uprightness, but they can never, ever be holy apart from the act of regeneration and conversion by the grace of God. Anyone who is not genuinely converted and regenerated will never, ever be holy.

What in the world are we going to talk about when we talk about holiness and obedience? Peter tells us in 1 Peter, once we are saved, regenerated, and converted, exactly how we are to be holy. He also tells us how we are to grow in holiness. The fact of the matter is that we should be more holy each day. We should grow in grace each day.

We should be more holy this week than we were last week, and more holy this month than we were last month.

Now look in your Bibles, if you would, please, to 1 Peter 1 again, because I want to share this with you tonight, and I hope the Lord will impress it upon your mind. Look at verse 13. Peter writes: “Wherefore, gird up the loins of your mind, be sober and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

Holiness Begins in the Mind

Holiness begins in the mind. That may shock you, but holiness begins in the mind. That is why he says, “Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind.” Everything begins in the mind. Your mind controls your attitude, your actions, and your conduct. Some of you have seen the website and maybe even heard Alex Jones on InfoWars, but he had a slogan, a motto; he called it this: “There’s a war for your mind.” Well, that may be true in the political field, and sure it is, but it is especially true in the spiritual field and in the spiritual realm. Everything begins in the mind.

The Word of God teaches very clearly in Proverbs 23:7, “As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.” Several years ago, I preached a message on keeping the heart. The Bible says in Proverbs 4:23, “Keep thy heart with all diligence for out of it are the issues of life.”

I am not going to repeat that message, but I am going to tell you what I told you then: when God says, “Keep thy heart with all diligence,” he is referring to your mind, because in the Bible your heart is your mind. The very first time the word heart is found in the Bible is Genesis 6:5: “When God saw the imaginations of man's heart was only evil continually.” The heart can imagine, and if the heart can imagine, that means the heart can think, basically. The heart can also speak. In Genesis 27:41, the Bible tells us that Esau said in his heart, “The days of mourning for my father will soon be over. Then I'll kill my brother Jacob.”

So the heart can speak. In Proverbs 5:12, the heart could either receive or despise instruction. In Matthew 5:27, the heart is intimately connected with the eyes, for our Lord said, “Whosoever

looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." In Daniel chapter 4, the heart was the mind, because God said to Nebuchadnezzar, "Let his heart be changed from a man's and let a beast's heart be given unto him." After seven years, when he was restored, he said, "My reasoning returned unto me." So the heart then is the mind.

I told you all that simply to say this: when Peter said, "Gird up the loins of your mind," he was essentially saying, gird up the loins of your heart, because keeping the heart and keeping the mind are basically the same thing. What does he mean when he says, "Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind"? You would have to be an oriental, or at least have to know oriental history.

Because back in Bible days, men and women both wore long robes. When a man wanted to run, or when he was going to do some heavy work and hard exertion, he would take that robe and gird it up under his belt. You cannot run in a robe. If you are going to run or do something very difficult, you have to get that robe out of the way.

Here is what Peter is saying: Get your mind in gear. Gird up that mind. Get it ready to think, ready to act, and ready to follow through with what I am saying. Gird up the loins of your mind. Why does holiness begin in the mind? Let me show you. Hold 1 Peter, but look back in your Bibles to the book of Colossians, chapter 1. Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians. Look in Colossians, chapter 1, and notice verse 21. Here is why it begins in the mind.

The Mind as the Battleground

The answer is very simple. It is because that is where we are, particularly the enemies of God. Colossians 1:21 says, "And you that were sometimes alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled." We were enemies in our minds.

If you would turn back very quickly to Ephesians, chapter 2—Galatians, Ephesians—and notice verse 3. In fact, let us read verse 1 just to show you that he is talking to Christians. He said, "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins." So you have been quickened and saved. "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, that is, our conduct, in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others." Then, when you skip down to verse 17 of chapter 4, Ephesians 4:17, he says, "This I say therefore and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind," that is, the uselessness, worthlessness, and wickedness of their mind.

The reason holiness starts in the mind is because that is where we were primarily the enemies of God. May I remind you about Adam? When Adam rebelled against God, he first rebelled in his mind. Your actions always stem from your thoughts, from your thinking. Adam thought incorrectly, unbiblically, and wickedly, and therefore he acted biblically. Every sin begins in the mind. Every act of holiness begins in the mind. Every attitude of holiness begins in the mind. Everything begins in the mind because the mind is the battleground. Whoever or whatever controls your mind controls your life. It is very simple.

The world wants to brainwash you, and God wants to brainwash you. The only problem is that one is wicked—the world—and the other is godly and holy. The mind is indeed the battleground.

Renewing the Mind

Now, the difficult part of girding up the loins of the mind is that we like our thoughts. We like the way we think. Consider Proverbs 3:5–7. These are verses that you probably can quote, but I want you to think of them in light of what I am telling you. Everything begins in the mind. I could quote them, but I want you to see this: "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart and lean not to thine own understanding." Do not trust your own judgment. "In all thy ways acknowledge him and he shall direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes. Fear the Lord and depart from evil."

He says, "Be not wise in thine own eyes." Do not think you have the answer. Do not think you know it all. Do not think that you are right. "Lean not to thine own understanding." In all your ways, you must acknowledge Him: He is wisdom incarnate; He knows what is

right; He knows what is best. I will guarantee that you have said at one time or another in your life, “Well, I know what’s best for my life,” or, “I know what’s best for me.” In reality, you do not. This is why it says, “Do not lean to your own understanding. Do not be wise in your own eyes.”

In Isaiah 55, verse 7, he 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; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

Do you realize it is the thoughts that mark out your way? If you are going to turn from your way, you have to turn from the way of thinking that leads you in that way. Therefore, he goes on to say, “My thoughts are higher than your thoughts, and my ways are higher than your ways, saith the Lord.”

If we are going to learn to think biblically, to think scripturally, we have to learn not to lean to our own understanding. We have to learn not to be wise in our own way. We must also learn that there is a vast difference—the difference between heaven and earth—between God’s thoughts and our thoughts, and God’s way and our way. If we want to walk in God’s way, we must learn to think the way God would have us to think. There is no other way than walking in the flesh and walking in our way.

So we are either going to be obedient or disobedient. Everyone understands that when we are converted, initially we must forsake our way and forsake our thoughts. If we do not, we are not converted. We have not turned, repented, or changed. But once we have been converted, after rejecting our thoughts and our way, we must continue to do that and choose His thoughts and His ways.

And the difference, as he pointed out, is the difference between heaven and earth. Here is the difficulty for proud human nature: to say, “I’m foolish. I really don’t know. I really don’t have the understanding.” How many of us would be willing to say like Solomon, “I’m but a child. I don’t have sense enough to come out of

the rain"? That is basically what Solomon said. Do you realize that it is our proud, arrogant heart that does not want to admit that we really and truly do not have the answers? We really and truly do not know what is right without God.

Now I want to show you the emphasis on this in the New Testament. Romans 12, verses 1 and 2, is a very prominent passage, one that you can probably quote, but I want you to see it in light of what I am trying to teach you. Holiness begins in the mind. Paul writes, "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies, a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." It is not unreasonable; it is reasonable. And then he says, "And be not conformed to this world." Do not be pressed into the mold of the world, but be transformed "by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

In order for you to have your bodies presented unto God as a living sacrifice, you must have a renewed mind. If your mind is not renewed, you are going to be conformed to this world. It is that simple. The Bible says in Ephesians 4 and verse 23, "And be renewed in the spirit of your mind." Isn't that amazing?

When you get to the book of Colossians, chapter 3, verses 9 and 10, he says, "Lie not one to another, seeing that you 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." So here is a renewed knowledge that only comes from a renewed mind.

Philippians 2 and verse 5 says, "Let this mind be in you, which also was in Christ Jesus." We have to learn to think the way Jesus Christ thought. When you look at Philippians 2, verses 5 through 11, you find that the mind of Christ, first of all, is a humble mind. He humbled himself.

That is what the Bible says. It is not only a humble mind, but a submissive mind, because Christ came and submitted Himself to the will of His Father. He said, "Let this mind be in you." In 1 Peter 4:1, we read, "Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind." Over and over in the

New Testament, we are commanded to have the same mind that Jesus Christ had.

Bringing Every Thought Captive

Now I do want you to turn to 2 Corinthians chapter 10. I want you to see this. I am sure that you can quote it, but I want you to see it in light of what I am teaching you. Notice 2 Corinthians chapter 10, beginning there with verse 5. In fact, let us read verse 3. We will begin with verse 3, 2 Corinthians 10, verse 3: "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds." Now, this spiritual weapon that we have is mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds. What is your stronghold? It is your mind. "Casting down imaginations and every high thing or literally every high thought that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." We must have our every thought in obedience to Jesus Christ.

The most difficult thing for you and I is to come up and say, "Lord, I know what I think. But my thoughts are not always right. They're not always scriptural. They're not always biblical. And so, Lord, I want to find out what you think and what you say, and I want to do what you say." Holiness begins in the mind.

So when Peter says, "Gird up the loins of your mind," he is essentially saying that you bring every thought that you have into captivity to Jesus Christ. You have to learn to think the way Christ thought. You have to learn to think the way God tells you to think. He says, "Gird up the loins of your mind. Be sober."

When he commands us in this passage to be sober, this word has absolutely nothing to do with alcohol or drunkenness. The Greek word here is nepho, which literally is translated four times in our Bibles as sober and two times as watch. What the word means is that we are to have a calm and collected spirit, and that we are to be temperate and circumspect in ordering our thoughts according to the Word of God. Think seriously. Think accurately. Think biblically. That's what he's saying.

And then he says, “and hope to the end.” In other words, if you are thinking right, and if you’re doing what is right, obviously the end is going to turn out right as well. We’re to hope to the end; that is, we’re to look forward to the completed and perfect will of God in our lives. So here’s another question that you have to ask: If we’re going to gird up the loins of our minds and think the way God thinks, how do we know what God thinks? And you know the answer to that.

Knowing God's Thoughts Through His Word

It is revealed in His Word. Colossians 3:16 says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, singing and admonishing one another in Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." What does it mean for the word of Christ to dwell in you richly? When you have a thought and wonder whether it is right or wrong, you ought immediately to have Scripture come to your mind that lets you know.

Most people never read their Bible. Most Christians hardly ever read their Bible. You say, how can they be a Christian and not do that? There are people in this room who have not read their Bible today, and probably have not read it this week except for being here in church. How will you ever know what the Bible teaches if you do not read it and reread it?

When God saved me years ago and called me to preach, I had a hunger to know the Scripture. I wanted to know the Bible, so I put myself on a reading schedule. I read through the Old Testament every month and the New Testament every week, and I did it over and over. I was not watching TV; there were many things I was not doing. I was simply reading the Scripture and seeking to understand it. Ever since then, I read the Bible through and begin reading it through again. That does not count my own studying; it is only my reading. How are you ever going to know the Scripture if you do not read it? Someone says, "Well, I've never been to college. I've never been to a Bible college." You may learn about the Bible in Bible college, but the only way you can learn the Bible is to read and study it yourself.

You are never going to know what God says and what God thinks unless you know the Word of God. When our minds are renewed and

our thoughts are biblical, our actions will be holy. Thoughts produce actions. The will is activated by that which we believe. David said, "I believe, therefore have I spoken."

Holiness Ends in Obedience

Holiness begins in the mind. Once you have your mind right, see what is next. In 1 Peter 1, verse 13, he says, "Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end, for the grace that is brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." Holiness that began in the mind, with right thinking, holiness ends in obedience. Verse 14 says, "As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lust of your ignorance."

As you read the Bible, have you ever noticed that there are children of obedience and children of disobedience? In Ephesians 2 and verse 2, we read, "Wherein in times 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." In Colossians 3 and verse 6, he said, "For which things sake the wrath of God cometh upon the children of disobedience."

If there are children of disobedience, there are children of obedience. That is why he said, "as obedient children." An obedient child is one that hears and submits and obeys. Delayed obedience is disobedience.

I read an illustration years ago that I have never forgotten. A little boy was out playing with his friends, and his mother called him and said, "Johnny, supper is ready." He kept playing. A few minutes later, she called again, "Johnny, supper is ready." He kept on playing. The third time, she said, "Johnny, your supper is ready." One little kid said, "Johnny, don't you hear your mother?" He said, "Yes. But I don't have to obey her until she puts her mean voice on."

She had trained him to disobey. Delayed obedience is disobedience. "Well, I'll read my Bible tomorrow. I'll pray next week. I'll do what God tells me to next month." Delayed obedience is disobedience.

The Greek word for obedience here literally means obedience, compliance, and submission. It refers to someone who hearkens and

hears the counsel, the warnings, and the commands, and then acts upon them. Samuel is an excellent example. When the Lord spoke to Samuel, he thought Eli was calling him. God said, "Samuel, Samuel." Samuel jumped up and ran to Eli: "Eli, what is it that you want?" Eli said, "I didn't call you. Go back and lie down." The second time, the same thing.

The third time, Samuel ran to Eli and said, "Surely you did call me." Eli realized that God was calling the boy and said, "You go back and lie down. And when he calls again, you say, 'Speak, Lord, your servant heareth.'" That's obedience. When God speaks, we hear and obey. An obedient child hears and responds submissively. There is no rebellion, no complaints, and no whining—just obedience.

We know the Word of God and the will of God. When we know in our minds what God has commanded, then we must obey. The Apostle Paul, in Romans 1:9, talked about serving the Lord in his spirit. Certainly, we must have our spirits involved in serving the Lord, but it was not his spirit carrying him all around the Roman Empire; it was his body. The spirit motivated the body. When we have our minds right, our thoughts and spirits motivate our bodies to serve Him.

If we are obedient children, look in your Bibles at verse 14: "As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lust of your ignorance." In other words, our pattern is no longer the way we used to live and what we used to do. Our pattern is now the Word of God. An obedient child is not going to fashion himself according to his former lusts.

I am thankful that the word "former" is in there, because that means we have repented and changed. We are no longer like we used to be, and we are not even thinking that way. We do not want to have our bodies that way. If we are obedient children, we are not going to fashion ourselves the way we used to. The best of God's children have had their times of lust and ignorance, and times when that was the scheme of their whole lives.

We sing “Amazing Grace,” and John Newton was an old, sorry drunkard, slave trader, and wicked as he could be. Yet God saved him. Some of the greatest men and women we admire today in

Christian circles have been wicked, vile reprobates before God saved them. Each of us was the same way. We may not have been drunkards, but we had our sins. The truth of the matter is that the Bible tells us that we once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience. Among them we also had our conversation in times past, fulfilling the lusts of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature the enemies of God.

We were like that. Therefore, he says, you are not fashioning yourself today like you used to be. We talk about our lusts, and usually when you hear the word lust, it is associated with sexual sins. It does not necessarily have to be associated with sexual sins. The word lust is a very simple word, epithumia in the Greek. Thumos means passion or desire. Epi is a preposition, upon. Your lust is whatever you put your passions or desires upon.

It does not matter if it is a car, a woman, money, or a house. Whatever you place your desire and passion upon, that is your lust. You can have the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life as well. An obedient child is not ever going to fashion himself according to the former lusts of his ignorance.

That is why I said in Ephesians four that we are not to walk in the vanity of our minds as the Gentiles, or as heathen, walk. We no longer desire that; we are not going to fashion ourselves like that. One of the verses that I really love is found in Psalm 25 and verse seven, where David said, “Lord, remember not the sins of my youth.” When I read that, my mind went back to some of the sins of my youth. I remembered them, and I prayed, “Lord, like David, remember not the sins of my youth.” Then I had to add, “And the sins of my middle age and the sins of my old age.” Because we are sinners. But we are not fashioning our lives after those things, even though we sin. That is why he said, “As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts of your ignorance.” And let me encourage you with this: when he says “fashion,” you remember that word?

Back in Romans 12:2, when he said, “be not conformed to this world,” the word “conformed” in Romans 12:2 and the word “fashioned” in 1 Peter 1:14 happen to be exactly the same word. So he

said, Do not be conforming yourselves according to these former lust in your ignorance. Do not be ignorant, and do not do what you used to do.

"But be ye holy, for I am holy, saith the Lord." If we learn to think right, it ought to end up in holiness. Listen carefully. It is impossible to be holy and disobedient at the same time. If you are holy, you are obedient. If you are disobedient, you are unholy. There is no such thing as a holy disobedience.

We know that we have been called to be likened to our Father: "Be ye holy for I am holy." You cannot separate holiness and obedience. Do not separate what God has put together. We must know Him, know His Word, know His will, submit, and obey.

We must learn to think biblically in order to act biblically. Our thoughts must precede our action; thought always precedes conduct. If you cannot think right, you cannot act right. If you cannot know what God's will is in your mind, you are not going to do God's will with your body. Holiness and obedience go together, and whoever or whatever controls the mind controls the body. When you try to separate holiness and obedience, you know what you end up with? Phariseeism.

Our Lord condemned the Pharisees over and over because of their hypocrisy. They were claiming to be holy, when they were totally and completely unholy because they were disobedient.

Conclusion: Conformity to Christ

Holiness is conformity to Jesus Christ and His Word. You cannot be holy unless it begins in your mind, because in your mind you must think of Jesus Christ and you must think of His Word. In John 8:29 our Lord said, "And he that sent me is with me. The Father hath not left me alone, for I do always those things that please Him."

Would you like to do always those things that please the Father? If you want to walk pleasing unto Him, you must learn to gird up the loins of your mind and not fashion yourself according to the former lusts of your ignorance, but walk according to His Word and His will. "I do always those things that please Him." I think of that verse. I think of my sins. And I think, Oh God, if I could just do that for one

day, for one hour, for one month, for one year—just do those things that please You. That is holiness. That is obedience. Never separate what God has joined together.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank You for Your Word. Lord, help us to understand how important our minds really are and how important, Lord, it is to read and study Your Word, to know it, to apply it, and to live it. We cannot act holily unless we think biblically. Give us grace, Lord, that we may serve Thee acceptably with reverence and godly fear. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 20

Do You Acknowledge God?

October 5, 2017

Introduction: The Question of Acknowledgment

Proverbs 3:5-6 says, “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart and lean not to thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct thy paths.” These are, I suppose, two of the most quoted Scriptures out of the Bible. The question is, do you acknowledge God?

Scripture says, “In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths.” If I were to ask the average Christian, or if I just really asked anyone, do you acknowledge God? most everyone, even non-Christians, would answer, yes. The reason they would give a positive response is because each one would probably say, “I believe that God exists.” Of course, the unsaved would go so far as to say that at least God was the Creator, and that would probably be as far as they would yield.

They do not know Him, they do not love Him, and they do not trust Him, yet they would, in that sense of the word, actually acknowledge Him. Christians would go a little further. They would

say, “He is not only the Creator; He is the Sustainer, the Preserver, and the Savior. He alone is salvation.” Christians would probably go a little farther in what you and I would call an acknowledgment of God.

But one of the problems that we have with our language is that oftentimes we really do not define our terms, or the words that we use. The word acknowledge can be used in a number of different ways. For instance, when I speak to someone, like I just spoke to Richard, I have acknowledged his presence. I know he is in the room, and I acknowledged him.

Defining Acknowledgment

When I answer a letter, I am acknowledging its receipt. I can also acknowledge a favor by expressing my thanks and gratitude. Oftentimes we use the word acknowledge simply by mental assent. We can acknowledge something and mentally assent to it by nodding our heads; we do not have to say a word. Sometimes, even legally, unless you object, silence is counted as an acknowledgment.

We have to define our terms when talking about acknowledgment. When I asked, “Do you acknowledge God?” and gave that as the title of this message, it was indeed a loaded question. While most Christians would certainly answer in the affirmative, in reality most truly do not acknowledge Him. The word acknowledge means more than simply recognizing someone or acknowledging their presence. It means that you also recognize and submit to their authority and claims. When you look at the word acknowledge in verse 6, “in all thy ways acknowledge Him,” the Hebrew word is Yadah, which literally means to know, perceive, recognize, confess, to know by experience, and clearly to recognize and submit to divine and sovereign authority.

If you do not recognize or submit to His authority and rule, no matter what you confess or profess, in reality you are not acknowledging Him. Failure to submit to Him is in reality a denial of Him. If I am not submitting to Him, if I am not bowing to His sovereign authority and power, in reality I am not acknowledging Him.

Our Lord said it best in John 14 and verse 15: “If you love Me you will keep My commandments.” He also gave the reverse in verse 24: “He that loveth Me not keepeth not My sayings.” If we love Him, we will obey Him; if we do not love Him, we will not obey Him. That is why He said in Luke 6 and verse 46, “Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say unto you?” The word Lord is the Greek word kurios, which literally means boss, owner, master, sovereign. Why are you calling Me boss or sovereign if you are not going to obey Me?

Proverbs 3:5–6 are probably two of the most quoted verses in the entire Bible. Many Christians have chosen these two verses as what they would refer to as their life verses. Unhappily, I am afraid that this passage is not really understood by many Christians. There is a vast difference between quoting a passage and obeying a passage, and a vast difference between simply being able to quote it and applying the truth of that passage.

Look at Proverbs 1:1–5 so that you can see the purpose for which the book of Proverbs was written. “The Proverbs of Solomon the son of David king of Israel,” now here is why he wrote it: “To know wisdom and instruction, to perceive the words of understanding, to receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, judgment, and equity, to give subtlety to the simple, and to the young man knowledge and discretion, a wise man will hear and will increase in learning, and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsel.”

He wrote it that you might know wisdom and instruction, perceive the words of understanding, receive instruction and wisdom, and give subtlety to the simple, as well as knowledge and discretion to the young man. Then he ends with this: “A wise man will hear and will increase in learning, and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels.” Wisdom, instruction, understanding, and knowledge are all useless unless they are applied. That is why he said a wise man will hear and increase in learning. A man of understanding, of course, will be the man who attains unto wise counsels.

The question that has to be asked is this: How do we acknowledge God? More specifically, how do we acknowledge God in the context of Proverbs 3:5–6? The emphasis in the first four verses of Proverbs

3 is upon obedience. He says, “My son, forget not My law, but let thine heart keep My commandments.”

“For a length of days and long life and peace shall they add to thee. Let not mercy and truth forsake thee. Bind them about thy neck, and write them upon the table of thy heart. So shalt thou find favor and good understanding in the sight of God and man.” If you forget not, but keep God’s law, and if you do not forsake mercy and truth, then obviously you are applying them in your life. You are obedient.

Acknowledging God Personally

To acknowledge God means that you are submissive to divine authority. That is, you recognize and acknowledge that God does indeed have the absolute right to tell you how to live. He has the absolute right to tell you what to do, what to say, what to think, and how to act. So, when He tells us, “in all thy ways acknowledge Him,” how do we acknowledge God in the context of Proverbs chapter 3?

Acknowledging God Personally: Trusting with All the Heart

I am going to give you four thoughts, and I am going to show them to you. First of all, we must acknowledge Him personally. If we acknowledge Him personally and biblically, it means then, in verse 5, that we will trust in the Lord with all of our hearts. The Hebrew word for trust here actually means to be bold in. It means to be confident in. It means to be secure in. So the word then has implications. If we really and truly trust in the Lord with all of our heart—which would be our mind and our understanding—then we do not need to look to anyone else or anything else, or trust anything else. It means then that God is the absolute soul and only object of our confidence, our trust, our security, and our hope. Positively, this means that we trust in the Lord with all of our heart and that we are acknowledging Him as the only true source of help, blessing, and salvation.

We are not trusting in any creature, either great or small. We are not trusting in man. In fact, man cannot help us. There is an interesting verse that occurs twice in the book of Psalms. The first

time it occurs is Psalm 60 and verse 11. There the psalmist says, "Give us help from trouble: for vain is the help of man." Isn't that interesting? "Give us help from trouble," pleading to God for help, "for vain"—useless, worthless—"is the help of man." Then, in Psalm 108, verse 12, the psalmist says the exact same thing: "Give us help from trouble: for vain is the help of man."

So let me show you something. Hold Proverbs chapter 3, but look back in your Bibles to Psalm 118. Look at verses 8 and 9. Interestingly, Psalm 118, verse 8, is the middle verse in the Bible. Verse 9 is the one that follows. I am going to show you what the middle verse in the Bible says.

Psalm 118, verse 8, says, "It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man." The next verse says, "It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes." It is better to trust Him than to trust in man, and better to trust Him than to trust in governments. Governments cannot help us; man cannot help us. The Bible says, "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart." If you are trusting in the Lord with all of your heart, there is no room to trust anything or anyone else.

This is the marrow of the issue. It is impossible to trust God with all of our hearts if we are trusting someone else or something else. There are so many people who try to trust in God and then in something else as well.

One of the black men I was raised with had a family that lived on our farms for years and years. He was nine months younger than I am. He got all my clothes and all my toys. Father called him son half the time because he and I were raised together. His mother and father worked on the farm all the time. When John was grown, I was talking with him one day, with some other friends, and we got to talking about God and the Scriptures. I said, "In a world ruled by God there is no room for luck, chance, fate, or fortune."

It is divine providence and divine providence alone. One of the men looked at John and asked, "Do you believe in luck?" John said, "Mm-hmm, I believes in both of them." You cannot believe in God's providence and luck too; it is impossible. But people try to say, "I

really and truly trust God and believe in God and in something else as well."

The Bible says in Psalm 20:7, "Some trust in horses, some trust in chariots, but we will remember the name of our Lord." Think about that. Then Psalm 62:10 says, "Trust not in oppression, and become not vain in robbery: if riches increase, set not your heart upon them." In 1 Timothy 6:17 he says, "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 has given us richly all things to enjoy."

I can hear someone say, especially a Christian, "Brother, we are smart enough not to trust in chariots, horses, oppression, or riches." That is wonderful, but here is my question: Are you smart enough not to trust in your own smartness? For he said, "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart and lean not to thine own understanding."

The word understanding here refers to one's wisdom, knowledge, and faculties. The truth is that because of our depravity, we have the tendency, disposition, and propensity to lean upon ourselves, what we know, and what we can do. Stop and think how often you have used, or heard others use, expressions such as these: "In my opinion," "The way I see it," "The way I understand it," "Let me explain my point of view," or "I just know what I know, and I will have to go with what I know." What are we saying? We are saying, "My understanding is supreme, and this is what I am going to go with." But Scripture says, "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart and lean not to thine own understanding."

How in the world can you be trusting in the Lord with all of your heart if you think you know what is best, and if you think that you have the power and the wisdom to work things out? The truth of the matter is that most people do what they think is best, but what they determine is best is that which will bring them the most pleasure and happiness at the moment. Seldom do we actually lean upon the Lord and say, "I think this and I believe this, but God says this, and I'm going to refuse my understanding and obey God." How seldom do we do anything like that.

How many times have you and I done what we thought best, and once we had done it, gotten ourselves in trouble, only to say, "If I had

known this beforehand, I just would not have done it"? Well, of course. Let me make a statement, and you can take exception with me, but I'm going to show it to you from Scripture: It's not in man to direct his paths. We do not have the wisdom; we do not have omniscience. The truth is, we do not have the wisdom or the strength, and we are actually putting ourselves under a curse when we trust in our own strength and flesh.

In Jeremiah chapter 17, beginning with verse 5, look what the Scripture says: "Thus saith the Lord, Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, whose heart departeth from the Lord." If you are trusting in flesh, you are trusting in your own understanding; your heart is already departed from the Lord. Here is the curse upon him: "For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh, but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land and not inhabited."

Then he says, "Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh."

Jeremiah says, "But her leaf shall be green, and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit." Then he says, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Who can know it? I, the Lord, search the heart. I try the reins, even to give to every man according to his ways, and according to the his doing." If you are leaning to your own understanding, you are departing from the Lord. "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart and lean not to thine own understanding."

Quoting John Gill, he says, "Trust in him at all times in times of affliction temptation and darkness there's a great deal of reason for it all power and strength are in him to help his love grace and mercy move him to it always the same. The consideration of what He has done for others that have trusted in Him, and for ourselves in time past, should induce and encourage us to it. And also the happiness of those that trust in Him, who enjoy peace and safety, and His displeasure at those that show any diffidence to Him or distrust Him. Trust in Jehovah the Son, in His person for acceptance, and in His righteousness for justification, in His blood for pardon, in His

fullness for supply, in His power for protection and preservation, and Him alone for salvation and eternal life. Trust in Jehovah the Spirit to carry on and finish the work of grace upon the heart, of which a saint may be confident that where it is begun it will be completed. And this trust in the Father, Son, and Spirit should be with all the heart, cordial and sincere."

The phrase denotes not so much the strength of faith as its sincerity. It signifies a faith that is unfeigned, unhypocritical. It is not merely saying or professing that a man believes and trusts in the Lord; it is with the heart and with the whole heart that he believes unto righteousness, if he believes aright. If we are going to acknowledge God, then we must acknowledge Him personally as the one worthy of all trust, and trust in Him with all our hearts.

Secondly, in Proverbs chapter 3, we must acknowledge Him primarily. If we acknowledge God biblically, we acknowledge Him in all our ways: "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart and lean not to thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths." Acknowledging God in all our ways does not mean that we acknowledge Him only on Sunday morning or Sunday night.

Acknowledging God Primarily: In All Your Ways

There is a term that each of you should understand: the reduction of Christianity. All that means is that, in our day and time, Christianity has been reduced to the church building. People go to church on Sunday and act pious, holy, and sanctimonious. They say, "We are wonderful Christians, and we are going to worship God," and they do this or that. Then they leave that building, and for the six days of the week they live the way they want to live. They do what they want to do. No, God says, "Acknowledge him in all thy ways."

The reduction of Christianity means that you are acting like a pagan, like the Syrians. You remember how King Ahab had defeated the Syrians. He fought them on the hills. So the Syrians gathered together, as recorded in 1 Kings 20:28, and said, "The reason they whipped us at time was their God is the God of the hills, but he's not the God of the valleys. So let's fight against them in the valley and surely we will prevail." Then, in 1 Kings 20:28, the prophet of God

came. They had again said, “I’m gonna give them into your hand because they have said that I’m the God of the hills, but I’m not the God of the valley.”

In other words, when we reduce Christianity to the church, we are saying that He may be God in the church, but He is not God in our lives, in our homes, in our business, or everywhere else. It is a false philosophy.

When the Bible says, “In all thy ways acknowledge Him,” the Hebrew word for “ways” is derek. It literally means not just a road, path, or journey, but all our habits, customs, manner of life, and course of life. If we acknowledge Him in all our ways, we acknowledge Him in whatever we are doing, wherever we are. The Apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 10:31, “Whatever you do, whatever you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” Think about this. Probably each one of us would pray before we eat and thank God for the food. Sometimes you can pray afterward. Deuteronomy teaches, “After thou hast eaten and are full, then thou shalt thank the Lord thy God.” Whether you pray before or after, we still thank God for the food.

How many of us actually eat and drink for the honor and glory of God? Stop and think about that. Romans 15:7 says, “Wherefore receive ye one another, receive you one another as Christ also received us to the glory of God.” There is a biblical way to receive each other in the Lord, and when we do not receive each other biblically, we are not honoring and glorifying God. This is what he means when he says that we are to acknowledge Him in all our ways, whatever we are doing.

Adam Clarke said it like this: “Begin, continue, and end every work, purpose, and device with God. Earnestly pray for His direction at the commencement. Look for His continual support in the progress, and so begin and continue that all may terminate for his glory, and then it will be certainly for thy good, for we never honor God without serving ourselves.”

Self-sufficiency and self-dependence have been the ruin of mankind ever since the fall of Adam. The grand sin of the human race is its continual endeavor to live independently of God, to be

without God in the world. True religion consists in considering God the fountain of all good and expecting all good from Him. The grand sin of mankind is that we try to live independently of God.

"In all thy ways acknowledge him and he shall direct thy path." Do you want God to direct your path? It is not in man to direct his path. You may say, "I'm smart enough; I can do it." No, you cannot. Jeremiah 10:23 says, "O Lord I know that the way of man is not in himself, it is not in man to direct his paths." The reason it is not in man to direct his paths is that we do not have omniscience. We do not know. Jeremiah put it right on us. Psalm 37:23 says, "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord and He delighted in His way."

In 1 Samuel 2:9 the Bible says, "He will keep the feet of His saints, and the wicked shall be in silent darkness, for by strength shall no man prevail." If God keeps our feet, no man will prevail by strength. If you followed human reasoning and logic, and were gambling in that day, you would probably have bet that Goliath would have creamed David. But he did not, because by man's strength no one will prevail.

What did he say in the book of Zechariah? "Not by might nor power, but by my Spirit saith the Lord of hosts." It is not in man to direct his ways. Therefore, if we are going to acknowledge God, we must acknowledge Him not only personally, but primarily. The Puritan John Trapp said it like this: "Ask counsel at his mouth. Aim at his glory."

"Be evermore in his presence and in the light of his countenance." Then he says, "It is reported of a worthy divine of Scotland, I need to name him, that he did even eat and drink and sleep eternal life. This is to walk with God, this is to live by faith, this is to see him that is invisible, this is to go the upper way, even the way of light that is above to the wise, that he may depart from hell beneath."

If we acknowledge God in all our ways, we acknowledge Him in all our habits, customs, manner of life, conduct, attitude, and action. Proverbs 3:6 says, "In all thy ways acknowledge him and he shall direct thy paths." Verses 7 and 8 add, "Be not wise in thine own eyes, fear the Lord, and depart from evil. It shall be health of thy navel, and marrow of thy bones."

"Be not wise in thine own eyes, and fear the Lord." If you are not acknowledging God in all your ways, what are you saying? "I don't need Him. I am smart enough to figure this thing out. I am wise in my own eyes." Basically, you are leaning again to your own understanding.

If you are acknowledging Him in all your ways, you are refusing to be wise in your own eyes. That means you are fearing the Lord and departing from evil. May I remind you that it is God who defines evil? The problem today is that so many people say, "I'm God. I define my own terms. I know what is evil and what is not evil. I determine what is evil and what is good." That is man playing God. God is the One who determines evil, and true wisdom is to depart from evil. Man's depravity by nature does not want to fear the Lord and depart from evil.

Let me show you. Look back in your Bibles to Job 28 and verse 28. It is right before the book of Psalms; you have the book of Job. Look at what the Scripture says. Do you want to know what it means to really have understanding? Now, in Proverbs 3, watch this carefully. Job 28:28 says, "And unto man he said, Behold the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding." You cannot profess to have understanding unless you are departing from evil. Proverbs 3:7 says, "Be not wise in thine own eyes. Fear the Lord, depart from evil." Then it says, "It shall be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones."

In other words, blessings always follow obedience. Always. And health and blessings are just some of those blessings—health and life. I hope you try to thank God each day for the life that He has given you and for the health that He has given you. Some of us may be in worse shape than others. But the truth is, probably everyone in this room is in far better shape physically than most people. Just stop and think about that.

So we must acknowledge Him personally. We must acknowledge Him primarily.

Now, look in Proverbs chapter 3. Here is the third thing: if we are going to acknowledge God, we must acknowledge Him practically. That is, we honor Him with the firstfruits of our increase. In verses 9

and 10, He said, "Honor the Lord with thy substance and with the firstfruits of all thine increase. So shall thy barns be filled with plenty and thy presses shall burst out with new wine."

Acknowledging God Practically: Honoring with Firstfruits

In this passage, he is actually talking about tithing. Now, let me explain something. When we tithe, we acknowledge and confess that God has not only created everything, but that God owns everything and He controls everything. We are also confessing and acknowledging that we cannot outgive God, and whatever we give to Him He first gave to us. The Apostle Paul asked this question in Romans 11, verse 35: "Or who hath first given to him and it shall be recompensed unto him again?" God said, if you could show Me one person that first gave to Me, I will pay him back.

And you remember there in 1 Chronicles 29, when David and all the people were sacrificing and gave all that silver and gold and precious stones for the building of the temple, David said it like this in verse 16: "O Lord our God, all this store we have prepared to build Thee in house for Thine holy name cometh of Thine own hand and is Thine own." So he said, we cannot give anything back to You that You have not already given to us.

Now I want to show you something. He said, "Honor the Lord with thy substance and with the firstfruits of all thine increase." Here is the result if you do that. If you are acknowledging God practically, He said, "So shall thy barns be filled with plenty and thy presses shall burst out with new wine."

Interestingly, throughout Scripture God says that failure to tithe and give Him His offerings is theft. It is robbing God. Malachi 3:8 asks, “Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me.” The answer is yes. God says, “Ye have robbed me,” but they ask, “Wherein have we robbed thee?” The answer is, “In tithes and offerings.” It is bad to rob and steal from a man; it is even worse to steal from God. But look what happens when you steal from God: “Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation.”

It was not merely an individual matter, although they did it individually, because nations are made up of individuals. Then, in verse 10, He says, “Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.” God says that if you obey, honor Him, and acknowledge Him with your tithes and offerings, He will pour out a blessing so great that you will not be able to receive it. In other words, your barns will be full, as Proverbs 3 says.

Why does God say that failure to tithe is theft, that it is robbing God? The answer is this: a tithe is nothing less than that attacks by God for the use of His earth. God is the Creator; God is the owner. God has allowed us to live, move, and have our being, and to enjoy His life and His earth. Consequently, even the unsaved are basically required to tithe. They will not do so; I understand that. But they still use God's earth, and therefore they are responsible to honor God. If you had a vacant house and someone moved into it without your knowledge or permission and used it, possibly even abused it,

SCRIPTURE READING - Deuteronomy 26:12-19 (KJV)

> If a renter refused to pay rent, would you not say that was theft? Well, it is the same thing with God. God is the Creator. He is the owner of all things, and He is the one who has given us richly all things to enjoy.
>
> Tithing is also a particular way to acknowledge God and to avouch that you belong to Him. Look in Deuteronomy 26, beginning with verse 12. The year of tithing in the Old Testament was the third year; you remember, it was an agricultural economy.
>
> “When thou hast made an end of tithing, all the tithes of thine increase, in the third year, which is the year of tithing, and hast given it unto the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, that they may eat within thy gates, and be filled, then thou shalt say before the Lord thy God, I have brought away the hallowed things out of mine house, and also have given them unto the Levites, and to the stranger, and to the fatherless, and to the widow, according to all thy commandments which thou

> hast commanded me. I have not transgressed thy commandments, neither have I forgotten them.
>
> "I have not eaten thereof in my mourning, neither have I taken away aught thereof of any unclean use, nor given aught thereof for the dead. But I have hearkened to the voice of the Lord my God, and have done according to all that thou hast commanded me.
>
> "Look down from thy holy habitation from heaven, and bless thy people Israel, and the land which thou givest us, as thou swearest unto our fathers, a land that floweth with milk and honey. This day the Lord thy God hath commanded thee to do these statutes and judgments. Thou shalt therefore keep and do them with all thine heart with all my soul."
>
> "Thou hast avouched the Lord this day to be thy God and to walk in his ways and to keep his statutes and his commandments and his judgments, and to hearken to his voice," and "the Lord hath avouched thee this day to be his peculiar people, as he hath promised thee, and that thou shouldest keep all his commandments."

Acknowledging God as Father

Deuteronomy 26 indicates very clearly and distinctly that there is a covenantal bond between those who tithe and God. It is not merely that we are covenantally bound to Him by virtue of our creation and the fact that we are His creatures, but that we have been redeemed. When we obey Him in this particular area, we are avouching, declaring, and positively saying that He is our God. God says, when you do this and obey Me, I am avouching; I am positively declaring that you are My people.

That is why, in Proverbs chapter 3, when he speaks of acknowledging God in all thy ways, he says, "Honor the Lord with thy substance and with the firstfruits of all thine increase. So shall thy barns be filled with plenty and thy presses burst with new wines." Proverbs 28 and verse 25 says, "He that is of a proud heart stirreth up strife, but he that putteth his trust in the Lord shall be made fat."

That is why the barns are filled with plenty, the wine presses are bursting with new wine, the windows of heaven are opened, and a blessing is poured out so that you are not able to receive it. You cannot contain it all.

Acknowledging God Paternally: Accepting Discipline

Fourthly, if you look also in Proverbs 3, verses 11 and 12, we have to acknowledge Him personally, primarily, and practically. Now we must acknowledge His paternity. We acknowledge Him paternally. He is our Father, and He has the absolute right to discipline and chasten us: "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, neither be weary of his correction. For whom the Lord loveth, he correcteth, even as a father the son in whom he delighteth."

God disciplines and chastens us in various ways, usually by word or warning. As long as God speaks and warns, we are happy with that. But what happens when we do not heed His words or hear His warnings? Usually, that is when He has to pick up a two-by-four and really get our attention. He has done that in our lives oftentimes. However, here is what God is saying.

When He does chasten us, when He does discipline us, we cannot despise that chastening. Neither can we be weary of it. I remember as a boy when my daddy would often whip me. He would bring a big switch or sometimes the leather shaving strap and say, “This is going to hurt me more than it does you.” I used to think, What a horrible time to lie. I know it is going to hurt; it is not going to be Daddy. But I understood when I had children of my own and had to discipline them. We are not to despise that chastening, and we are not to grow weary of it.

In Hebrews chapter 12, he quotes from Proverbs chapter 3 and enlarges upon it: “And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children. My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when the heart rebuked of him. For whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons. For what son is he whom the father chasteth not? But if ye be without chastisement, who of all are partakers, then are ye bastards and not sons.”

“Furthermore, we have had fathers of our flesh who corrected us, and we gave them reverence. Shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of spirits, and live? For they, that is these earthly fathers, verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure, but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seems to be joyous, but grievous. Nevertheless afterward it yielded the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.”

I assure you that all the whippings I got as a boy I never enjoyed. They were always grievous to me. But after I grew up, I looked back and was thankful for every one. I am thankful that my father loved me enough to discipline me, chasten me, and teach me. I am also thankful that I did not get as many as I really deserved.

This is what God is saying: whenever He disciplines us, it is always for our profit, that we might be made partakers of His holiness and that it might yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness. God's chastening is always successful. The results are always there. Oftentimes, we have whipped our children and had to turn around and whip them again for the same thing. In other words, our chasing was not really successful. But when God chastens, it is always successful. It always works.

He tells us in verse 6, "For whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." Then verse 7 says, "If you endure chastening, God dealeth you with sons." And then he asks, "For what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?" There are no perfect Christians, just like there are no perfect children. Each of us has to be disciplined, Chasen in some shape form or fashion and to some degree.

Most of you know Alice and I had identical twin girls. I had to whip those twins like you would not believe. I do not know how many times I whipped them. One would always egg on the other. One would get straightened out, and the other would mess up; then the one who got straightened out would mess up. It was always one or the other. But Rebecca, my baby daughter, I may have whipped her twice in her entire life. I never really had to chase in her. Why?

All I had to do was look at her heart, and she would melt and say, "Daddy, I'm sorry. I apologize. I will not do this anymore." And she would not. The point is this: God does not have to beat us to death to chase in us. He could, and some of us are hard-headed enough that we probably need it. But every one of us will be chastened in some degree or another.

Look very closely at verse 8. He says, "But if you be without chastisement, who are of all are partakers, then are you bastards and not sons." What is a bastard? It is a child whom the father did not want, does not recognize, will have nothing to do with, will not discipline, and will not chasten.

God only chastens His own. If someone who professes to be a Christian can sin consistently and constantly and never be chastened, he is not a Christian. If you can sin and get by with it, you are not saved. That is all there is to it, because God will chasten His own.

When I chastened my children, I tried to do so as early and as quickly as I caught their sin. If I waited, it would get worse, and I understood that. Certainly God understands it as well. I have heard people say, "I was saved forty years ago, but I have been a drunkard and a whoremonger and all this for the last forty years, but I am saved." No, you cannot sin and get by with it if you belong to God. He disciplines us for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness, and when He has finished with us, it will yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness.

We have to acknowledge Him as our Father, acknowledge His paternity in us, and acknowledge that He has the absolute right to discipline and chasten us when we do wrong. Let me tie this together with two quick applications. I began this message with the question, Do you acknowledge God? If you want to know whether you genuinely, truly, and sincerely acknowledge God in your life, here are some questions you need to ask yourself.

Application: Self-Examination Questions

Do you trust Him with all of your heart? Do you lean to your own understanding, or do you seek His counsel, His wisdom, and His

direction in His words? Do you ask Him to direct your paths? Do you think that you know it all and are wise enough to run your own life? Do you trust your judgment more than His? Are you departing from evil, or are you indulging in it?

Are you obeying or disobeying? Do you tithe? Do you trust God with your finances? Do you understand that everything you have, He gave you? Someone may object, “But I worked for it. I earned it.” Yes, I understand that. But who gave you life, breath, strength, ability, and reasoning faculties? Who enabled you to accrue whatever you accrued?

Do you receive His correction and chastisement cheerfully, or do you grow weary with His correction? Has His discipline made you more holy, righteous, and obedient? I know that no one looks forward to a whipping. I never did, and I still do not. But I had rather be whipped, chastened, and disciplined by a loving, heavenly Father than be judged by a stern, righteous, just Judge. I would much rather get what I do not deserve than what I do deserve.

Remember the middle verse of the Bible and the one that follows: Psalm 118, verses 8 and 9: “It’s better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man. It’s better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes.” Man will always fail us. I do not care how much we love each other; we will always fail. Steve could ask me to do something, and I could say, “Yes, Steve, I will do it,” then go home and forget or neglect it. I have failed, though I did not intentionally do it. Governments have failed many times. It is foolish to trust in man and in governments. But Jesus Christ never fails. He is the perfect, sinless, holy, harmless Son of God, and we need to trust in Him. “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not to thine own understanding.”

"In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths." We have to make sure that wherever we are, whatever we're doing, we're acknowledging Him. For He alone is omniscient and can direct our lives and order our steps.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank You for Your Word and truth. And Lord, we do pray that You'd help us to acknowledge Thee in every area of our lives. Give us grace,

Lord, that we may stop and think of what Thy will and Thy Word and Thy way is, and order our lives accordingly. Give us grace to serve Thee acceptably with reverence and godly fear. In Thy name we pray, amen.

CHAPTER 21

Have You Said Your Goodbyes to God?

December 15, 2019

SCRIPTURE READING - Hosea 9:1-17 (KJV)

Introduction: The Pain of Goodbyes and God's Departure

> Rejoice not, O Israel, for joy, as other people, for thou hast gone a-whoring from thy God. Thou hast loved a reward upon every corn floor. The floor and the winepress shall not feed them, and the new wine shall fail in her.
>
> They shall not dwell in the Lord's land, Ephraim shall return to Egypt, and they shall eat unclean things in Assyria. They shall not offer wine offerings to the LORD, neither shall they be pleasing unto him. Their sacrifices shall be unto them as the bread of mourners. All that eat thereof shall be polluted, for their bread for their soul shall not come into the house of the LORD. What will you do in the solemn day and in the day of the feast of the LORD?

> 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, and thorns shall be in their tabernacles. The days of visitation are come, the days of recompense are come, Israel shall know it. The prophet is a fool, the spiritual man is mad for the multitude of thine iniquity and the great hatred. The watchman of Ephraim was with my God, but the prophet is a snare of a fowler in all of his ways, and hatred in the house of his God. They have deeply corrupted themselves as in the days of Gibeah. Therefore he will remember their iniquity, and he will visit their sins. I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness.
>
> I saw your fathers as the first ripe in the fig tree at her first time. But they went to Baal Peor and separated themselves into that shame, and their abominations were according as they loved. As for Ephraim, their glory shall fly away like a bird, from the birth, and from the womb, and from the conception. Though they bring up their children, yet will I bereave them that there shall not be a man left.
>
> Yea, woe also unto them when I depart from them. Ephraim, as I saw Tyrus, is planted in a pleasant place. But Ephraim shall bring forth his children to the murderer. Give them, O Lord, what wilt thou give? Give them a miscarrying wound and dry breasts. All their wickedness is in Gilgal. For there I hated them. For the wickedness of their doings I will drive them out of mine house.

"I will love them no more. All their princes are revolters. Ephraim is smitten, their root is dried up. They shall bear no fruit, yea, though they bring forth, yet will I slay even the beloved fruit of their womb. My God will cast them away, because they did not hearken unto him, that they shall be wanderers among the nations." The title is, "Have You Said Your Goodbyes to God?"

I found it interesting and amusing that we often teach our children how to say bye-bye. The smallest child usually can wave and say bye-bye, and every parent is delighted when the little child can do that. They always like to demonstrate it and show it to you as well.

I remember our two oldest grandchildren, now 31 years of age, when they were about two. Alice and I took them to the store because they wanted cow boots. They couldn't even say cowboy boots. Our plan was to try on those boots, come back later, and buy them because we really didn't have—I had 20 bucks, and we needed some groceries. We put the boots on them and let them walk around a little bit. Alice took them back off, put them in the box, and we marked them and placed them in a special place so we could return and pick them up later.

As I picked Casey up and Alice picked Renee up, we were walking out of the store. Casey looked back at those boots and said, "Bye-bye, cow boots." I told Alice, "Get them. We'll go hungry. Don't worry about it." If he had pitched a fit, he would never have gotten those boots and would have received a spanking as well, but it was that little, pathetic voice. He really wanted those cow boots.

I usually use this as an illustration. I'll pass an outlet store, shopping center, or a store where Alice shops, with absolutely no intention of stopping. As I pass by, I'll look at Alice and say, "Bye-bye, outlet center," because I'm not about to stop.

But leaving family and friends is a very difficult task. I've been hugged, kissed, and embraced numerous times by family and friends who are leaving, and I've done the same thing myself. Just yesterday, as we left Pastor McCurry's funeral, we hugged the family members three, four, or five times before we left, and they did the same to us. It is very difficult when you have close friends and good family.

Oftentimes, when people drive off, you stand there waving until they are totally and completely out of sight. But when you stop and think about it, there are some people you really like to see come, yet you are sometimes more delighted to see them leave as well. There is a very pertinent verse concerning that in the Bible. Proverbs 25:17 says, "Withdraw thy foot from thy neighbor's house, lest he grow weary of thee and so hate thee." The ideal according to Scripture is this: there is a time to visit and a time to leave. You need to leave when you are always welcome to come back. You want to leave as a welcomed guest.

The reason I am saying all of that is that, in Hosea chapter 9, God is casting out an unwelcome guest, and that unwelcome guest happens to be His own covenant people. They have forsaken Him, and now He is forsaking them. They have abused, misused, perverted, and rejected Him, His graciousness, and His person as a host and provider, and now He is going to send them away. He does not simply send them away; He also casts them out. The Bible tells us that He also departs from them.

Look at verse 12: "...though they bring up their children, yet will I bereave them, that there shall not be a man left. Yea, woe also unto them when I depart from them." Then, in verse 15: "...all their wickedness is in Gilgal, for there I hated them, for the wickedness of their doing I will drive them out of mine house." Verse 16 says, "I will love them no more, all their princes are revolters." Verse 17 says, "...My God will cast them away, because they did not hearken unto Him."

Have you ever really thought about what it is like to be cast away from God and His graciousness? Have you ever considered what it would be like in a society, in a nation, when God totally forsakes the people and the nation and departs from them? When you read Hosea chapter 9, you will find that God's departure is the foundation and completion of their misery. It is the last step in their misery and the loss of all their hope. They had departed from God, and now God is departing from them.

If you would hold Hosea 9, but look back to Hosea 7, and begin reading with verse 13. Look what God says: "...Woe unto them, for they have fled from Me."

“Destruction unto them, because they have transgressed against Me. Though I have redeemed them, yet they have spoken lies against Me. And they have not cried unto Me with their heart when they howled upon their beds. They assemble themselves for corn and wine, and they rebel against Me. Though I abound and strengthen their arms, yet do they imagine mischief against Me. They return, but not to the Most High. They are like a deceitful bow. Their princes shall fall by the sword for the rage of their tongue. This shall be their derision in the land of Egypt.”

God's Warning and the Consequences of Forsaking Him

Now, Israel had been warned. God specifically told them in advance that if they forsook Him, that He would forsake them. The Lord said unto Moses:

"And the Lord said unto Moses, Behold, thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, and this people will rise up and go a-whoring after the gods of the strangers of the land, whether they go to be among them, and will forsake me, and break my covenant which I have made with them. Then mine anger shall be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them, and I will hide my face from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and troubles shall befall them, so that they will say in that day, Are not these evils come upon us, because our God is not among us?"

"And I will surely hide my face in that day, for all the evils which they shall have wrought, in that they are turned unto other gods." Then in Deuteronomy 32:20 he says this again: "And he said, I will hide my face from them, I will see what their end shall be, for they are a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith."

He said, "I will hide my face from them, and I will see what their end shall be." Let me paraphrase this: God said, "I'm going to hide Myself from you. I'm going to withdraw, to depart, and I'll see what your end is going to be. I'll see how you fare without Me and without My blessings." In other words, He knows that they are going to be destroyed. He is saying, "You have departed from Me; now I am going to depart from you."

I suppose that one of the greatest judgments an individual, a family, a church, a society, a people, or a nation could ever face is when God leaves us alone. Have you ever really considered the implications of when God departs from us? Have you considered the implications when God casts us off and casts us out? Here is the general question: When God departs, when He withdraws Himself, when He hides His face, what do we lose?

Losing God's Manifest Presence

I'm going to give you four things. First of all, we lose His presence. Very obviously, if God withdraws Himself and departs, we lose His presence. If Gary got up, walked out of this room, and never came back, we would have lost his presence; he would no longer be among us.

I can hear a question arising in your minds: "But I know that God is omnipresent. If God is omnipresent, how can I lose His presence?" First, let me explain omnipresence, because sometimes there is confusion concerning it. A lot of people think that part of God is in China, part in Africa, part in Mongolia, part in the United States, and part in the United Kingdom; they put all these parts together and end up with one God. No, that is pure heresy. The presence of God means that God is everywhere at one time in the totality of His person. There is never a place where God is not in the totality of His person. Let me explain the omnipresence of God before I explain how we lose His presence.

Psalm 139 shows not only God's omnipresence, but also His omniscience. God's omniscience means He is all-knowing; He is omniscient. There is not one thing God does not know. He even knows our thoughts before we think them.

David says, "O Lord, Thou hast searched me and known me." "Thou knowest my down-sitting and mine up-rising." Thou knowest when I sit down and when I get up. "Thou understandest my thought afar off." In the book of Ezekiel, God says, "I know thy thoughts, every one of them, before they enter into your mind."

"He compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, Thou knowest it altogether."

"Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid Thine hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me. It is high; I cannot attain unto it." The first six verses deal with God's omniscience; verses seven through twelve deal with His omnipresence. David asks, "Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit, or whither shall I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there."

"If I make my bed in hell, behold, Thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me, even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from Thee, but the night shineth as the day. The darkness and the light are both alike unto Thee."

What he is saying is, I cannot get away from God. God is not only omniscient; God is omnipresent. If God is omnipresent, how do we lose His presence? What we lose is His manifest presence.

Consider Jonah, chapter 1: "Now the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before me. But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. And he went down to Joppa, and he found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD."

Then, in verse 10: "Then were the men exceedingly afraid, and said unto him, Why hast thou done this? For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the Lord, because he had told them."

How can Jonah flee from the presence of the Lord if God is omnipresent? He was fleeing from the temple where God peculiarly and particularly manifested Himself. He was getting away from the temple.

As you read through the Bible, the patriarchs did not simply go around building altars. They built altars only on two occasions: when God commanded an altar to be built, or where God had particularly and peculiarly revealed Himself. Consider this principle in Genesis, chapter 13.

In Genesis chapter 13, notice what the Bible says concerning Abram. “But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly. And the Lord said unto Abram after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes and look from the place where thou art northward, southward, eastward, and westward. For all the land which thou seest to thee will I give it, and to thy seed forever. And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth, so that if a

man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed be numbered. Arise, walk through the land, and the length of it, and the breadth of it, for I will give it unto thee. Then Abram removed his tent, and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre, which is in Hebron, and built there an altar unto the Lord." God had revealed Himself. God had manifested Himself.

In Genesis chapter 22, God told him to go offer his son, his only son Isaac. "And they came to the place which God had told him of, and Abram built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood." In other words, God ordained this altar, and so obviously he built it in obedience to God.

In Genesis chapter 35, Jacob was fleeing from his brother Esau. He laid down, and then God revealed Himself to Jacob. The Bible says, "And He built there an altar, and called the place El Bethel, the house of God. Because there God appeared unto him when he fled from the face of his brother." You did not simply go around building an altar anywhere you wanted to build an altar. You had to build where God either commanded or where God appeared in a particular way.

Moses built an altar in Exodus 17, verse 15, and called it Jehovah Nissi. That was where God sovereignly, powerfully, and providentially delivered them from their enemies as well. While it is clearly and obviously truthful that God is omnipresent, it is also clearly and obviously truthful and evident that there are, and have been, places in the Old Testament where God particularly and peculiarly manifested Himself. The tabernacle and the temple were such places, because the Shekinah glory came down. The question then has to be asked: Is there a place in the New Testament where God peculiarly and particularly reveals Himself?

And the answer is yes. It happens to be the church. Notice the context in Matthew 18: "Moreover, if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone. If he shall hear thee, thou shalt gain thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established."

"And if he neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church. But if he neglect to hear the church, let it be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican." Now we are talking about the church.

"Verily I say unto you, whatsoever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven. And whatsoever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. And again I say unto you, that if any two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father who is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them."

This context has to do with church discipline, and with two or three gathering together in His name, even exercising church discipline. There is, therefore, a peculiar and particular place in the New Testament where God reveals and manifests Himself, just as there was in the Old Testament.

When God casts away a people, there is no longer a manifest presence of God. The only thing left is coldness, emptiness, and death. God cannot be found when He departs.

Proverbs 1:28 says, "They shall call upon Me, but I will not answer. They shall seek Me early, but they shall not find Me." When God departs, you can seek all you want, but you will not find Him. You can cry all you want, but God will not hear. Hosea 5:6 says, "They shall go with their flocks and with their herds to seek the Lord, but they shall not find Him."

He has withdrawn Himself from them. When God withdraws, hides His face, or departs, it is impossible to find Him. Our Lord said it like this in John 7:34 to those Pharisees: "You shall seek Me and shall not find Me, and where I am, thither you cannot come." He said the same thing in John 8:21: "Then Jesus said to them, I go My way and you shall seek Me and you shall die in your sins. Whither I go, you cannot come." It does not matter what you offer or sacrifice; when God departs, He is not going to listen.

If you look back to Hosea 9:4–5, it says: "They shall not offer wine offerings to the Lord, neither shall they be pleasing unto Him. Their sacrifices shall be unto them as the bread of mourners. All that eat thereof shall be polluted, for their bread for their souls shall not

come into the house of the Lord." Then God asks, "What will you do in the solemn day and in the day of the Feast of the Lord?" How can you offer something to Me when I am not accepting it, when I am not even there? I have departed. I have withdrawn.

We have never really stopped to consider the implications of the departure of God from a people or to understand what happens when God withdraws Himself. If you would know what it is like to lose the presence of God, look around at our churches. You will find them cold, calloused, confused, contorted, and comfortless. He has left us to ourselves. Now we have plays, programs, entertainments, and musicals, but we no longer have the power and presence of God.

We can no longer say, as the Apostle Peter did in Acts 3:6 to the man begging for alms, "Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have, I give unto thee in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." There was the power and presence of God. You go to the average church today, and there is no awesomeness, no sense of the presence or power of God.

Losing God's Provision

We lose His presence, His manifest presence, when God departs. That is not all. If you look back in Hosea chapter 9, we also lose His provision. In verse 2, He says, "...the floor and the winepress shall not feed them, and the new wine shall fail in her." In other words, whatever you have stocked up, the grain floor is not going to feed you, and the winepress is not going to satisfy you.

In verse 6, He says, "...for lo, they are gone, because of the destruction. Egypt shall gather them up, Memphis shall bury them, the pleasant places for their silver, nettles shall possess them, and thorns shall be in their tabernacles." All of their gardens and everything else that would be precious is now nothing more than thorns and nettles. Let me ask you a question: Why should God continue to bless a disobedient people who hate Him and despise Him?

Hold Hosea, and turn back to Jeremiah chapter 5. Here is what we do: We take everything that God gives us and abuse it, pervert it,

and misuse it. Notice the question God asks in verse 7: "How shall I pardon thee for this?"

"Thy children have forsaken me, and sworn by them that are no gods. Now watch. When I fed them to the full, that is, when I provided for them, when I gave them everything they needed, everything they wanted, when I fed them to the full, what did they do? Then they committed adultery and assembled themselves by troops in the harlot's houses. They were as fed horses in the morning. Everyone neighed after his neighbor's wife. Shall I not visit for these things, saith the Lord? Shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?"

Then verse 21: "Hear now this, O foolish people, and without understanding, which have eyes and see not, which have ears and hear not. Fear you not me, saith the Lord? Will you 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 they cannot prevail. Though they roar, yet they cannot pass over it. But this people have a revolting and rebellious heart. They are revolted and gone, neither say they in their heart. Let us now fear the Lord our God, that giveth rain, both the former and the latter in his season."

"He reserveth and doth the appointed weeks of harvest. Your iniquities have turned away these things, the rain, the harvest, and your sins have withholden good things from you."

The Bible tells us that God is gracious and kind, blessing the just and the unjust alike in a very general way. Rain falls upon the just and unjust, the saved and unsaved; His sun shines on both, and God feeds, in some degree, the unsaved just as He does the saved. But there is a difference when a people supposed to be a covenant people blatantly, openly, publicly, and willingly sin and rebel against God.

SCRIPTURE READING - Amos 4:6-12; Isaiah 3:1 (KJV)

Listen to what God said in Isaiah 3:1: "The Lord of hosts doth take away from Jerusalem and from Judah the stay and the staff, the whole stay of bread, and the whole staff of water." What's God saying? You're going to starve.

You read in the Bible how many times there was famine in the cities. When Jerusalem fell, women were killing, cooking, and eating their own children. That's what the Bible says. Read it in the book of Lamentations. God said, "I'm going to take it away."

Why would God continue to give provisions to someone who does not want them, does not appreciate them, and does not care for them, except to take them, use them for idols, and use them for sin? Look in Amos chapter 4, beginning with verse 6. God said, "And I also have given you cleanness of teeth in your cities, and want of bread in all your places."

"Yet have you not returned unto me, saith the LORD?"

There is where God is withholding His provision. "And I also have withholden the rain from you, when there was yet three months to the harvest. And I caused it to rain upon one city, and caused it not to rain upon another city. One piece was rained upon, and the piece whereupon it rained not withered. So two or three cities wandered into one city to drink water, but they were not satisfied. Yet have you not returned unto me, saith the Lord?"

So God has sent famine and drought. "I have smitten you with blasting and mildew. When your gardens and your vineyards and your fig trees and your olive trees increased, the palmerworm devoured them. Yet have you not returned unto me, saith the Lord. I have sent among you the pestilence after the manner of Egypt."

"Your young men have I slain with a sword, and have taken away your horses. I have made the stink of your camps to come up into your nostrils. Yet have you not returned unto Me, saith the Lord? I have overthrown some of you as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and you were as a firebrand plucked out of the burning. Yet have you not returned unto Me, saith the Lord? Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel, because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God."

What is he telling us? When God departs, He either withholds or diminishes our provisions. You cannot have the gift without the

giver. When the giver leaves, He leaves with His gifts. Rain, fruitful seasons, and His blessings in providing for us are all gifts of God.

If your spouse committed adultery—not just once, but consistently and constantly—and ran off and deserted you, would you continue to support that spouse? Would you say, "Well, I think I'm going to just give her $5,000 a month anyhow"? Really? I would not. I would not even support a child like that. What makes you think that a holy, righteous, sovereign God is going to support a people who hate Him, despise Him, and refuse Him? Just as one would cast out an unfaithful spouse, so God likewise will cast out an unfaithful people.

Look at Hosea 9:3: "...they shall not dwell in the LORD's land." God says, "This is My land. I brought you into it. You are despising Me. I'm kicking you out. You are not going to dwell in the LORD's land." That is why He says in verse 17, "...My God shall cast them away," and in verse 15, "...I will drive them out of mine house." They are not merely cast out of His land; they are driven out of His house.

Losing God's Protection

So we lose His presence and His provision. Thirdly, we lose His protection. 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." Once God judges—especially here, as He is speaking about Israel—there is no hope for recovery or return. Their secret and safe places will be covered with nettles and thorns. They will die in a strange land; they will be dung upon the face of the earth.

They will not be protected from disease, destruction, or death. They will die. We need to learn this important lesson: If God does not protect us, we are not protected. I do not care how many weapons you have or how good you are with them; if God does not protect you, you are not protected.

We can boast that we have the greatest military in the world. The greatest military in the world is nothing if God does not protect us. Psalm 127, verse 1, 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." So if God does not protect us, we're not protected.

Jeremiah 8, verses 2 and 3, speaks of the bones of the wicked: "And they shall spread them before the sun and the moon and all the hosts of heaven, whom they have loved, and whom they have served, and after whom they have walked, and whom they have sought, and whom they have worshipped. They shall not be gathered, nor be buried. They shall be for dung upon the face of the earth. And death shall be chosen rather than life by all the residue of them that remain, of this evil family which remain in all the places which have driven them, saith the Lord of hosts." God said, "I'm going to let them die exactly where they are."

Losing God's Prophecy and Preaching

So, what do we lose when God departs? We lose His presence. We lose His provision. We lose His protection. And one last thing: we lose His prophecy, or His preaching. What do I mean? Hosea 9, verses 7 and 8, says, "The days of visitation are come. The days of recompense are come. Israel shall know it." And here is how he is going to know it: "The prophet is a fool. The spiritual man is mad for the multitude of thine iniquity and the great hatred. The watchman of Ephraim was with my God, but the prophet is a snare of a fowler in all his ways, and hatred in the house of his God."

Let me spell this out in plain old English. Once the Word of God is gone, there is no hope. If the prophet is a fool and the spiritual man is mad, what hope is there of finding or hearing truth? The prophet himself, according to verse 8, becomes a snare because he truly hates God and the house of God as well. There is no one to teach, proclaim, or declare the truth. Without truth, you cannot have repentance or faith. Romans 10:17 says, "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." If there is no Word of God being preached or taught, there will be no repentance, no faith, and no hope.

Let me remind you of two truths—actually, one truth in two parts. When Ahab and Jezebel were upon the throne in Israel, God was judging Israel and sent a drought for three and a half years. What

did God do with Elijah? He took him out of the land, and a little widow woman sustained him outside the boundaries of Israel.

The physical drought was nothing more than a physical picture of a spiritual reality, because the prophet of God was not there. There was no preaching or declaration; there was only judgment. No rain came until God sent the prophet back into the land. When God removes His preachers, it is a sign of judgment, because there will be no declaration of truth. But when it came to Jeremiah, Judah, and Jerusalem, God did not remove Jeremiah from the land as He had Elijah. He left Jeremiah in the land.

He just shut his mouth. In Jeremiah 7:16, God told Jeremiah, "Pray not for this people." In Jeremiah 11:14, God told him again, "Pray not for this people." Jeremiah really wanted to pray for his people. So in Jeremiah 14:11, God said, "All right, Jeremiah, you want to pray, I'm going to let you pray for them. But you pray what I tell you to pray. And I'm telling you to pray for their destruction, because that's exactly what I'm going to do. I'm going to destroy them."

God took Elijah out of the land to give a picture of judgment. God left Jeremiah in the land; He just shut his mouth and gave him a picture of judgment. One of the ways we can really tell that America is under the judgment of God is the fact that so few are really preaching and teaching the Word of God. When the Word of God is not preached or taught, there cannot be any repentance or faith, because both come through hearing the Word of God.

It is the Holy Spirit that opens our eyes, ears, and hearts to receive and understand. But if there is no proclamation of the truth, there is no hope, none whatsoever. We have forgotten that passage in Isaiah 57, I think it is, verse 1: the righteous man perishes and the merciful man is taken away, none considering that he is taken away from the judgment to come.

A lot of times God does remove His preachers. I thought about that yesterday as I was preaching Pastor McCurry's funeral. I have been asked, and it has hit my mind innumerable times, what is going to happen when all of God's preachers are dead and gone, if God

does not raise up replacements? I'm simply saying, when there is no preaching, there is no hope.

We have reached the stage in America equal to Israel's stage in 1 Samuel 3:1: "And the child Samuel ministered unto Eli," and, listen carefully, "and the word of God was precious in those days." There was no open vision. The word vision refers to preaching. There was no open preaching, no public proclamation of the Word of God. What makes something valuable? Scarcity. That is why gold is more valuable than silver, silver more valuable than tin, and diamonds more valuable than copper. When the Word of God is rare—when you can really hear it taught, preached, and proclaimed in its purity—it is a scarce commodity.

And it becomes exceedingly precious. When God departs, He takes His preachers and His preaching with Him. We not only lose His presence; we lose His provision, His protection, and His preaching.

Applications: Saying Goodbye to God

Here is a second application: If there is no repentance, no return to Scripture, and only continual rebellion and disobedience, we had better be saying our goodbyes to God, for He will withdraw Himself. He will depart and will do exactly as He did in Hosea chapter 9.

If you are not saved, if you refuse to listen to the truth, and refuse to hear and heed the truth; if you have no desire whatsoever for truth, righteousness, and holiness, then you had better say your goodbye to God. Why? Consider 2 Thessalonians chapter 1, beginning with verse 6: "Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you. And to you who are troubled, rest with us. When the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power." So, the great judgment, according to verse 9, is to be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord.

So those who hate Him need to say goodbye while they can, because once He banishes them, it is for eternity. The greatest punishment that can befall any people in a society or nation is when God leaves us alone. When He leaves us to ourselves, departs, withdraws Himself, or hides His face, that is the worst judgment that can befall us, because the only thing left is death and destruction. Have you said your goodbyes to God? If there is no repentance, He will withdraw Himself.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to You this day. We thank You for Your Word, Your truth, and Your warnings, Lord. We do not want to lose Your presence, nor Your provision or protection or Your preaching. We want Thee, Lord. We ask for repentance and faith, not just as individuals, but as families, as a church, as a society, and as a nation. Thank You, Father, for all that You have done in manifesting Yourself. Jesus Christ is the greatest manifestation of God. He is God in the flesh, and to reject Him is to reject Thee. Give us grace that we may repent, believe Thee, serve Thee, and honor Thee in every area and aspect of our lives. In the name of Jesus Christ we ask and pray, Amen.

CHAPTER 22

The Thoughts of God

December 15, 2017

Introduction: The Incomprehensible Concept of God's Thoughts

Psalm 40, beginning with verse 1: “I waited patiently for the Lord, and He inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And He hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God. Many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord. Blessed is that man that maketh the Lord his trust, and respecteth not the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies. Many, O Lord my God, are Thy wonderful works which Thou hast done, and Thy thoughts which are to us-ward, they cannot be reckoned up in order unto Thee. If I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered.”

God is Spirit and Person

This title conveys an almost incomprehensible concept: the thoughts of God. According to John 4:24, God is Spirit. But although God is Spirit, He is also a person. Scripture reveals that God has all the

attributes of personhood. He speaks. He plans. He acts. He moves. He intends. He has names. He enters into relationships.

He has will and He has wisdom. God chose to describe Himself, or to reveal Himself, in terms associated with personality. When you read the Bible, you find personal pronouns that refer to God, such as He, Him, Himself, and His. As a person, He possesses what is known as self-consciousness. He is certainly aware of His being. He also possesses the power of self-determination. That is why we read in the Bible about His will, His purpose, and His eternal counsel.

Romans 11:33 says, “O the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!” The Bible speaks of God’s wisdom and God’s knowledge. Ephesians 1:11 says, “In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His will.”

God's Personality and Anthropomorphic Language

Here is God's wisdom, God's knowledge, and God's will. God is a person, and yet God is also pure spirit. There is no definition of God in the Bible, and there is a good reason for that: to define is to limit, and God is infinite. You cannot limit the Unlimitable. Our Lord said to the Samaritan woman in John 4, "God is spirit." Essentially, He is spirit, and all the qualities associated with pure spirit are necessarily found in God.

The fact that God is spirit excludes the idea that He has a body of some type, and it also excludes the idea that God is visible to the physical eye. People try to say, "Well, I saw God." No, you did not see God, because God is pure Spirit.

The fact that God is Spirit involves His personality. God as Spirit is an intelligent and moral being. When we ascribe personality to God, we mean that He is a reasonable being, capable of determining the course of His life. When anyone denies the personality of God, God is reduced to what you and I would call force and power—just a mere force or mere power. I am not a science fiction fan, and I never went to see either of the Star Wars movies, but I did hear or read where they would say, "May the force be with you." When you deny

the personality of God, all you are left with is a force or simply power.

But the Bible refers to God as a personal being. He is someone in whom men can trust, with whom we may converse, who enters into our experiences, helps us in all our difficulties, and fills our hearts with joy and gladness. So God is a person.

The one true and living God has revealed Himself in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Philadelphia Baptist Confession declares the person of God in the same way as the Westminster Confession of Faith. They both say exactly the same. Usually, statements in a confession of faith are supported by Scripture. I am not going to read all the Scriptures, but listen, because statements in a confession of faith usually have Scriptures that support everything said. Here is what the Philadelphia Baptist Confession of Faith says concerning God:

"The Lord our God is but one only living and true God, whose subsistence is in and of Himself, infinite in being and perfection, whose essence cannot be comprehended by any but Himself, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions, who only has immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto, who is immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, Almighty, in every way infinite, most holy, most wise, most free, most absolute, working all things according to the counsel of His own immutable and most righteous will, for His own glory, most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, and the rewarder of those that diligently seek Him, and withal most just and terrible in His judgments, hating all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty."

That is a summary of what is revealed concerning God in the Bible. We understand that God is spirit. Two things we have learned so far are that God is spirit and that God is a person. When you endeavor to comprehend the personhood of God, you also have to understand anthropomorphisms.

Scripture is filled with anthropomorphic language. You may ask, "How can the world understand it? I cannot even pronounce it." I usually tell people that every fifty-cent word can be broken down

into nickel words. Anthropomorphic can be broken down this way: anthropos is the Greek word for man. There is another word, aner, which means man and man only, but anthropos is a general term referring to men and women. Morphe is the Greek word for form. Anthropomorphic speaking simply means "man-form speaking," that is all. God has condescended to speak to us in language that we can understand. If God did not speak in our language, so to speak, we would never comprehend anything about Him. Therefore, whenever Scripture speaks of God as having a body or bodily parts, those are anthropomorphic expressions.

For instance, in Psalm 34:15, the Bible says this: "The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and His ears are open unto their cry." Now, if God is spirit, God does not need eyes and God does not have ears. Then you read in Proverbs 15:3, "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good." And then you come across a passage like Deuteronomy 26:8, where the Bible says, "And the Lord brought us forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with great terribleness, and with signs and with wonders." Well, God does not have a hand and God does not have an arm. So anytime you read a passage like that, those must be understood anthropomorphically. God is speaking in our language. A spirit does not need eyes. When the Bible speaks about God's eyes or God's ears, it is referring to His omniscience, where God sees all, knows all, and understands all. When you read about God's hand or God's arm, it is simply referring to God's power.

So God is a spirit, and yet God is a person. In Psalm 40 and verse 5, we see one of the great attributes of God's personhood. The Bible says, "Many, O Lord my God, are Thy wonderful works which Thou hast done, and Thy thoughts which are to us-ward. They cannot be reckoned up in order unto Thee. If I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered."

God's Works and Thoughts are Innumerable

Notice the first half of this verse. In the beginning, it talks about God's works: "Many, O Lord my God, are Thy wonderful works which Thou hast done." God's works are innumerable. They are uncountable. When we talk about the works of God, we normally

divide them into three simple classes: creation, providence, and redemption. But when you think about creation, you have a huge category. Providence includes huge categories, and redemption does as well. Although we summarize the works of God as creation, providence, and redemption, there are a multitude of other works included under those three categories.

Psalm 111:2 says, "The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein." The works of the Lord include everything in creation, everything in providence, and everything in redemption. Psalm 145:9—

Psalm 145:9-10 says, “The Lord is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works. All Thy works shall praise Thee, O Lord, and Thy saints shall bless Thee.” So when you think about the works of God, just stop and think how God feeds all of the animals. I've often thought about George Soros and how all of his money would be expended in one day if he tried to feed all the animals in the world, and yet God does it constantly and continually, besides feeding us as well. When you talk about God's works, they are multitudinous.

Now, it is not the first part of this verse that I want to consider, but the latter part of the verse. Psalm 40:5 says, “Many, O Lord my God, are Thy wonderful works which Thou hast done, and Thy thoughts which are to us-ward. They cannot be reckoned up in order unto Thee. If I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered.” We have already discussed the fact that God is a person and that attributes of personality are attributed to God. One of those attributes is that He thinks. He has thoughts.

Please note what David says in verse 5: “And Thy thoughts which are to us-ward, they cannot be reckoned up in order unto Thee. If I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered.” David is saying that the thoughts of God cannot be reckoned up in order unto Him. In other words, David is saying, “I cannot marshal them. I cannot align them. I cannot arrange them.” They are so diverse and so multitudinous. Moreover, David goes on to say that they cannot be numbered. It is humanly impossible to number all the grains of sand in the oceans all over the world. It is humanly impossible to number all the leaves of the trees. It is also

humanly impossible for you to number all of the stars. David is saying that it is also humanly impossible for me to number the thoughts of God.

God Thinks About Us Individually

Here is the whole point of this message, and I want to drive it home. Look at the latter part of verse 5: “And Thy thoughts which are to us-ward.” Has it ever crossed your mind that God thinks about us? Have you ever entertained the thought that God thinks about you—specifically, individually? Have you contemplated the fact that the sovereign God of heaven and earth condescends to think about you? Of all the millions and billions of people on this earth, God still thinks of us personally and individually.

I want that to sink in: God thinks about you individually. God is not simply concerned with upholding the universe by His power, which He does. He is not concerned merely with ordering His providence and feeding all the animals, which He does. God is also concerned about us as individuals, and His thoughts are to us-ward.

Hold Psalm 40 and turn to Psalm 113. There are only nine verses in this Psalm. Notice, beginning with verse 1: “Praise ye the Lord. Praise, O ye servants of the Lord. Praise the name of the Lord. Blessed be the name of the Lord from this time forth and forevermore. From the rising of the sun until the going down of the same, the Lord’s name is to be praised.”

Now watch verse 4: “The Lord is high above all nations, and His glory above the heavens.” So God is the sovereign, omnipotent God of the universe. He is over all the nations, and His glory is above the heavens. Now watch verse 5: “Who is like unto the Lord our God, who dwelleth on high, who humbleth Himself to behold the things that are in heaven and in the earth! He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the needy out of the dunghill, that He may set him with princes, even with the princes of His people. He maketh the barren woman to keep house, and to be a joyful mother of children. Praise ye the Lord.”

Now go back to verse 5: “Who is like unto the Lord our God, who dwelleth on high?” Note the next verse: “Who humbleth Himself to

behold the things that are in heaven and in the earth." Here is the marvelous condescension of God, who is ever blessed in and of Himself, who needs no one and absolutely nothing. Yet He humbles Himself and beholds the things not only in the heavens but also in the earth. More specifically, verse 7 says, "He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, He lifteth up the needy out of the dunghill." Verse 9 begins, "He maketh"

God not only beholds; He also intervenes in our lives. He knows each one of us and our needs. Years ago I preached a message from Psalm 113 entitled "The Humility of God." Think of all the people alive today in the entire world, and yet God thinks about us individually. God thinks about David, Lorraine, and Effie. To me, that is absolutely mind-boggling.

Hold Psalm 40, but turn in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 6. I want you to see our Lord's words in reference to the thoughts of God. In verses 7 and 8, our Lord says, "But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him."

Biblical Evidence of God's Personal Thoughts

Wait a minute: "Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him." It is true that God is sovereign and omniscient, but if He knows our needs, He must be thinking of us individually: "Gary needs this by tomorrow, and Steve needs this by next week." Then, in verse 31, He says, "Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? Or, What shall we drink? Or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things."

If God knows that we have needs, it is not only because He knows us, but because He thinks of us as well. Do you remember what the Apostle Paul said in Philippians 4:19? "But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." How can Paul say that? Because he understood that God not only knows us, but thinks about us.

That God thinks about us is an awesome thought. Psalm 40:5 says, “And Thy thoughts which are to us-ward, they cannot be reckoned up in order unto Thee. If I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered.” The first part of the verse speaks of the works of God. Charles Haddon Spurgeon wrote concerning the latter part:

“The divine thoughts march with the divine acts, for it is not according to God's wisdom to act without deliberation and counsel. All the divine thoughts are good and gracious towards His elect. God's thoughts of love are very many, very wonderful, and very practical. Muse on them, dear reader. No sweeter subject ever occupied your mind. God's thoughts of you are many; let not yours be few in return. They cannot be reckoned up in order unto Thee. Their sum is so great as to forbid a like analysis and numeration. Human minds fail to measure or to arrange in order the Lord's ways and thoughts, and it must always be so, for He has said, ‘As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts higher than your thoughts.’ No maze to lose oneself in like the labyrinth of love.”

How sweet to be outdone, overcome, and overwhelmed by the astonishing grace of the Lord our God! “If I would declare and speak of them”—and surely this should be the occupation of my tongue at all seasonable opportunities—“they are more than can be numbered,” far beyond all human arithmetic. They are multiplied thoughts from all eternity: thoughts of my fall, my restoration, my redemption, my conversion, my pardon, my upholding, my perfecting, and my eternal reward. The list is too long for writing, and the value of the mercies too great for estimation. Yet if we cannot show forth all the works of the Lord, let us not make this an excuse for silence, for our Lord, who is our best example, often spake of the tender thoughts of the great Father.

God thinks of us individually. David says in Psalm 40:17:

“But I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinketh upon me. Thou art my help and my deliverer; make no tarrying, O my God.” “I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinketh upon me.” Albert Barnes, in his commentary, said: “The Lord cares for me; He has not forgotten me. Man forsakes me, but He will not. Man leaves me to poverty and

sorrow, but He will not. How true this was of the Redeemer, that the Lord, the Father of mercies, thought on Him, that it is not needful now to say, nor can it be doubted, that in the heavy sorrows of His life, this was a source of habitual consolation.

"To others also, to all His friends, this is a source of unspeakable comfort—to be an object of the thoughts of God, to be had in His mind, to be constantly in His remembrance, to be certain that He will not forsake us in our trouble, to be assured in our own minds that One so great as God, the infinite and eternal One, will never cease to think on us, may well sustain us in all the trials of life. It matters little who does forsake us if He does not. It would be to little advantage to us who should think of us if He did not."

One of the greatest comforts for the child of God in all our tests, trials, and tribulations is that God thinks upon us. He knows everything about us. David said in Psalm 27:10, "When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up." Does God know when our father and our mother forsake us?

Of course He is sovereign. Of course He is omniscient; He knows everything. But the point David is making is this: "The Lord thinketh upon me. He knows my state. He sees everything about me." Has it ever dawned upon you that God thinks about you and every aspect of your life?

Look at Hebrews 6:10 in light of God's thoughts: "For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which ye have showed toward His name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister." He saw it. He thought about it. He remembers it. He holds it in His mind. He is not going to forget your work and your labor of love which ye have showed toward His name, in that ye have ministered to the saints and do minister. In other words, God thinks about how we serve Him. God holds that in His mind.

There is a passage in Nehemiah where Nehemiah has a prayer request, and it is unusual in one sense. You remember Nehemiah was the man who built the wall around Jerusalem, and he was the Tirshatha, that is, the governor, for twelve years. He not only built the wall, but he had to deal with those recalcitrant, rebellious individuals there. He faithfully served God and faithfully served the

people. In Nehemiah 5:19, here was his prayer request: “Think upon me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people.”

Implications: Offending God's Children and God's Faithfulness

Have you ever asked God to think upon you? Have you ever asked God to think upon you for your good, according to all that you have done for His people? That is what Nehemiah did: “Lord, think upon me for good. I’ve served You.” He is not bargaining with God. He is simply saying, “Lord, You take note and think upon me and help me. I need Your help.” It is true—very true—that God does indeed think about His people.

Psalm 105, beginning at verse 11, gives the context concerning Israel: “Saying, Unto thee will I give the land of Canaan, the lot of your inheritance: when they were but a few men in number; yea, very few, and strangers in it. When they went from one nation to another, from one kingdom to another people; He suffered no man to do them wrong: yea, He reproved kings for their sakes; saying, Touch not Mine anointed, and do My prophets no harm.” You remember how He reproved Abimelech because of Abram’s wife, Sarah. He also rebuked people because of Joseph. Just simply pointing out, God does indeed think upon His people.

May I remind you that in the book of Zechariah, chapter 2 and verse 8, He said, “He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of My eye,” and the apple is the pupil, the most tender spot in the eye. So, in light of this, consider Luke chapter 17, verses 1 and 2. The very fact that God thinks upon His people and considers whoever touches them to touch the apple of His eye should cause us to think seriously about what follows. I believe one of the greatest sins, perhaps even one of the worst sins, for an individual, whether that individual is a heathen or a Christian, is to attack and seek to destroy one of God’s children. Look what He said in Luke 17: “Then said He unto the disciples, It is impossible but that offenses will come: but woe unto him, through whom they come! It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones.”

To show that He is not speaking only about babies, He says, “Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him.” If simply offending or causing one to stumble is considered such a great sin that one would rather have a millstone around his neck and be cast into the depth of the sea, what in the world would be the consequences for someone who attacked and tried to destroy the character and life of one of His children? Stop and think about that. To offend means to cause someone to stumble. Everyone, stop to think about this.

Oftentimes Christians needlessly and wickedly attack each other. It is like the chickens: when one gets a little blood spot on him, the others will peck him until they kill him. A friend once said something I have never forgotten: “Christians are the only group that try to kill the walking wounded.”

Somebody gets down, and instead of trying to lift them up, we attack them worse and worse. What does the Bible say in Galatians 6? “If a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.”

Let me go further. If our Lord, the sovereign God of heaven and earth, considers it such a sin and offense to attack one of His adopted children, what do you think the Heavenly Father thinks about someone who attacks His only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ? The very fact that God thinks about us has tremendous implications.

Psalm 40: “And Thy thoughts which are to us-ward, they cannot be reckoned up in order unto Thee. If I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered.” God's thoughts toward us are personal. Moreover, they are frequent and multitudinous, consistent and constant—thoughts based upon His wisdom, love, mercy, and grace. Let me try to give you a good illustration. Look in your Bibles to Jeremiah 29. We're going to be reading about how Judah is to

After the seventy-year captivity in Babylon, the people would return to their own land. Jeremiah 29:10 says, "For thus saith the Lord, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit

you, and perform My good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place." Then God says, "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end."

Isn't that amazing? Though God judged those people and sent them into captivity, He says, "I still think about you, and I'm going to restore you, and My thoughts are thoughts of peace and not of evil." John Gill, the Baptist commentator, said that these were the purposes and resolutions of God's heart concerning their welfare, particularly their restoration to their own land. They were within Him and known to Him alone, remembered by Him and continuing with Him; therefore, they would be performed. The thoughts of His heart are to all generations. Men think and forget, so what they thought of comes to nothing, but this is not so with God. He has taken up thoughts of love, grace, and mercy concerning sinful men: their election in Christ, provision of every spiritual blessing, redemption and salvation by Christ, effectual calling, adoption, and eternal life.

God says, "I know the thoughts that I think toward you, thoughts of peace and not of evil. I'm going to give you an expected end." We may think, "I'm going to do that," and four or five hours later, the next day, or the next week realize, "I never did that." We thought about it, but forgot it. God does not do that. God remembers and does not forget. Psalm 33:11 says, "The counsel of the Lord standeth forever, the thoughts of His heart to all generations."

“Thy thoughts which are to us-ward.” Andrew Bonar said, “Many, O Lord”—meditate on what He who is the Word suggests: God’s thoughts toward us, the unnumbered multitude of His thoughts of love to us. The forests with their countless leaves, the grass on every plain and mountain of earth with its numberless blades, the sands on every shore of every river and ocean, the waves of every sea and the drops of every wave of every sea, and the stars of heaven—none of these, nor all combined, could afford an adequate idea of His thoughts toward us. There is no comparison to thee, nothing wherewith to help out a statement of the depth of love in every one of these thoughts. It is impossible for you and I even to comprehend the thoughts of God toward us.

Applications: Our Thoughts Toward God and Humility

If we really grasped this truth, depression would vanish. You would not be discouraged to think that the Eternal Sovereign God of Heaven and Earth thinks upon us individually.

We know that God thinks about us. What are our thoughts of God? When we think of God, do we think thoughts of love, obedience, submission, service, thankfulness, and gratitude? Do we consider, meditate on, value, and treasure the thoughts of God to us?

Psalm 139, verses 17 and 18, says: “How precious also are Thy thoughts unto me, O God! How great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with Thee.” David counted God’s thoughts of him precious and valuable. So how do we count the thoughts of God in our lives? Do we count them as precious, and what are our thoughts toward God?

The less we think of ourselves, the more God will think of us.

Now, how can I make such a statement? And the answer is, I can make it based on 1 Peter 5, verses 5-7, if you want to turn there, and just look and see what God says. 1 Peter 5, verses 5-7. 1 Peter 5, notice if you would please, beginning there with verse 5. Look what he says. I just made the statement, "The less we think of ourselves, the more God will think upon us." 1 Peter 5 verse 5: "Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time: casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you." So, the less we think of ourselves, the more God's going to think about us. The less we think of ourselves, the more dependent we will be upon Him.

If I remember correctly, in John chapter 15, our Lord said it like this: "Without Me ye can do" how much? Nothing. Nothing. And if we realize our helplessness and our powerlessness, we have to depend upon Him. And it would teach us to cast all our care upon Him. Why? "For He careth for you." Isn't that interesting? "He

careth for you," which indicates He's thinking about us. He cares about us. Wow. Every problem God cares about.

The more we think of Him, the more we'll put our trust in Him. The less we think of ourselves, the more we're unable to trust in ourselves. Here's the third one: we may glory in the fact the sovereign God of heaven and earth will not forget us. He will think about us. He will think upon us. I want you to turn to two passages. I want you to turn to Isaiah 49 verse 15.

You probably do not know that passage. The second one is Hebrews 13 verses 5 and 6. Just mark that passage, Hebrews 13 verses 5 and 6. We'll come back to that passage second. But go in your Bibles to Isaiah 49 and look in verse 15. Isaiah 49 verse 15. Watch carefully. Isaiah 49 verse 15: God asks, and it's a good question. "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb?" Well, most women can't forget their own child.

Some can forget because of their sin and rebellion. Yet God says, “They may forget, yet will I not forget thee.” God is not going to forget us. A mother, contrary to nature, may forget her own child, but God says, “I will never forget you.”

Hebrews 13:5–6 reads: “Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.”

In every circumstance, situation, test, trial, and tribulation, God will not forget us. He thinks about us, observes us, and knows our needs. He knows what we can take and what we cannot take. One of my favorite passages is 1 Corinthians 10:13: “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man.” Whatever affects Steve affects me; whatever affects me affects James; and whatever affects James affects Gary. “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able.” God will never put on us more than we can bear, “but will with the temptation

also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." He thinks upon us. He knows us.

David said: "And Thy thoughts which are to us-ward, they cannot be reckoned up in order unto Thee. If I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered."

Contemplate this simple truth when you leave: God thinks of you and your needs, problems, trials, and tests because He is a personal God.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank You for Thy Word and for the thoughts of God. We are thankful that Thou dost not forget. We commit all our tests, trials, and problems unto Thee. Only You can work them out, for we are helpless and powerless. All things are possible in Thee, with Thee, and through Thee. As David said, "Give us help from trouble: for vain is the help of man." Encourage us, Lord, and help us have wonderful thoughts of Thee, because Thou dost think of us. May we glory in the fact that You will not forget us. In the name of Jesus Christ we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 23

The Sin of Evil Speaking

October 2, 2018

Introduction and Context

James 4:11-12 says, "Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law. But if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge. There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who art thou that judgest another?"

Originally I thought of titling this message "Christian Sins," but then I realized that I could not cover all the sins of Christians in a single message. I also thought of titling it "The Primary Sin of Preachers," since preachers are often guilty of the sin of evil speaking. But the truth is, evil speaking is a major sin, and it is not just preachers and teachers who commit it, but Christians in general as well.

Evil speaking is condemned not only as a violation of God's law; it is a form of blasphemously judging the law, and by implication the God who gave the law. None of us have really realized the gravity of this sin. Some time ago, while preaching another sermon, I quoted

James 4:11-12, and it struck me that there is more to this passage than meets the eye. When you stop and think about the sin of evil speaking, most of us have never really comprehended what it is.

As children, when we were called names by other people, we would often reply, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me." However, that is untrue. Names do hurt, especially when they are untrue or when others believe them, even when they are untrue. Have you ever stopped and thought about how quickly and readily we label our brethren? Anytime someone disagrees with us, believes something that we do not believe, or sees something that we do not see, we are very eager and ready to call them racist, bigots, heretics, stupid, dummy, ignoramus, and a host of other names as well. Have you ever really considered the sin of evil speaking, or thought about its essence, that of which it really consists?

If we saw the seriousness of this sin, we would learn to pray with David in Psalm 141:3, “Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips.” He was praying for God to watch his mouth and lips. In 1 Peter 2:1 we read, “Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings.” The Greek word for “evil speakings” in 1 Peter 2:1 and James 4:11 is katalalia. This sin includes backbiting, defamation, derogatory remarks, snide and silly sentiments, and every form of speaking that is evil, wicked, and destructive.

James chapter 3 brings us into chapter 4 by laying out the sins of the tongue: “For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body. Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth. Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.

"For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: but the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries?" The answer is no. Neither can a fountain yield both salt water and fresh.

James sets forth the fact that if anybody could control the tongue, they would really be a mature, or perfect, individual. He says, "In many things we offend all," but it is the tongue that is "set on fire of hell."

After speaking about the sins of the tongue and how wicked it is that with the same member we bless God and curse men who are made in the similitude of God, James distinguishes between what we would call hellish wisdom and heavenly wisdom.

He asks, "Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? Let him show out of a good conversation," that is, a good conduct, "his works with meekness of wisdom. But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work."

Notice that he speaks of bitter envying and strife. If this is in you, he says, "glory not, and lie not against the truth." Where do bitter envying, strife, heartache, wrath, anger, and all this come from? He says, "This wisdom descendeth not from above"—does it come from God?—"but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work." Everything comes from this hellish wisdom. James then speaks of heavenly wisdom: "But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace."

There is a vast difference between hellish wisdom and heavenly wisdom. Our tongue demonstrates from where we draw our wisdom, for it speaks either of strife and confusion or of peace, purity, gentleness, and the fruit of righteousness. This hellish wisdom produces the fightings and strife among us. Thus James 4 asks, “From whence come wars and fightings among you?” The answer is, “Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?”

The Duty Enjoined

James says, "Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts. Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." He then asks, "Do ye think that the Scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?"

So, he is talking about not only how we use our tongue, but the source of all hellish wisdom is usually manifest in our lives. That produces all kinds of fightings and all kinds of strife as well. If our enemies really understood how unbiblical, uncharitable, and unchristian we really were to each other, they would never attack us. They would just leave us alone, and we would destroy ourselves. They would not have to attack us.

The Duty Enjoined: Speak Not Evil

James 4:11 and 12 come right down in the midst of the Bible's teaching about how God resisteth the proud, but He giveth grace unto the humble. In verse 10 he says, "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He shall lift you up." One of the ways we humble ourselves is by not speaking evil of each other.

There are three things to see today. First of all, the duty enjoined. Notice verse 11. He says, "Speak not evil one of another, brethren." So we are commanded in James 4:11 not to speak evil one of another. It is a command, a present active imperative in the Greek. Which

means it is a command; therefore, it is a sin to violate this biblical command. Speak not evil one of another.

Now you have to ask yourself this question: Is this a new command? And the answer is no. Turn in your Bibles to Psalm 34 and look at verse 13. Psalm 34, verse 13, teaches basically the same truth that James 4:11 teaches. The Bible says, "Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile." Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile.

The Hebrew word for “evil” means that which is bad, evil, malignant, wicked, displeasing, grievous, and noisome. Then in verse 13 he says, “Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile.” The Hebrew word for “guile” is mirmah, referring to that which is deceitful, crafty, feigned, subtle, and treacherous. What James is telling us and setting us up for is James chapter 3: the tongue is a fatal evil, full of deadly poison, and kindles a great fire. If we restrain our tongues, we would save ourselves an awful lot of heartache and remorse.

Everyone in this room, every Christian, if they were honest, would confess that they wished a thousand times they had never said some things they had said. If they could take them back, they would. But it is impossible. Two proverbs clearly demonstrate this truth. Proverbs 13:3 says, “He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life: but he that openeth wide his lips shall have destruction.” Proverbs 21:23 says, “Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles.” God said that if you can keep your mouth and your tongue, you can keep your soul from troubles.

Now look in James 4:11. He says, “Speak not evil one of another.” What is the next word? “Brethren.” Have you ever noticed how Christians attack and vilify each other, seeking to ostracize, belittle, and destroy each other? Usually, when they do so, it is for self-elevation or out of pure ignorance and arrogance.

I want to give you a number of quotes for two reasons. First, I want you to see the historicity of the interpretation. The interpretation I am placing on James 4:11–12 is not new or original; it has been understood and interpreted this way for hundreds of years. Moreover, I want you to see the consistency of interpretations.

I will begin by quoting Matthew Henry. Speaking of James 4:11, "Speak not evil one of another, brethren," he says, "We are cautioned against the sin of evil speaking. Speak not evil one of another, brethren. The Greek word signifies speaking anything that may hurt or injure another."

Historical Consistency of Interpretation

We must not speak evil things of others, though they be true, unless we be called to it and there be some necessary occasion for it. Much less should we report evil things when they are false, or, for aught we know, they may be so. Our lips must be guided by the law of kindness as well as truth and justice. This, which Solomon makes a necessary part of the character of a virtuous woman—that she openeth her mouth with wisdom, and in her tongue is the law of kindness—must needs be a part of the character of every true Christian.

Speak not evil one of another, brethren. Since Christians are brethren, they should not defile or defame one another. It is required of us that we be tender of the good name of our brethren. Where we cannot speak well, we had better say nothing than to speak evil. We must not take pleasure in making known the faults of others, divulging things that are secret merely to expose them, making more of their known faults than they really deserve, and least of all making false stories and spreading things concerning them of which they are altogether innocent.

What is this but to raise the hatred and encourage the persecution of the world against those who are engaged in the same interest with ourselves, and therefore with whom we ourselves must stand or fall? Obviously, we have to stand or fall together; and if we report things that need not be reported, we damage those with whom we are united.

Just because something is true does not mean that you have to repeat it. Stop and think about that. Just because something is true does not mean that you have to repeat it. You and I have not really grasped the seriousness of the sin of evil speaking. I will be honest with you: when I started studying this, my eyes were opened as well.

I want you to follow me through a number of passages. I am going to give you five passages, and when I finish, I am going to tell you what these passages have in common. It may surprise you. Look, if you would, at Ephesians 4, verse 31. In this passage, the Apostle Paul is talking to Christians. He says, "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice." He tells you what to put off; then, in verse 32, he tells you what to put on. One of the things that we as Christians are to put off, to put far away from ourselves, is the sin of evil speaking.

Now turn over to 1 Peter chapter 4, and look, if you would please, at verse 4. 1 Peter chapter

In 1 Peter 4:4, we find a statement that unbelievers make concerning believers: “Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you.” In other words, if you do not join in with the wicked, in what they think and what they do, they are going to speak evil of you.

In 2 Peter 2:10, speaking of the unconverted, he says: “But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government. Presumptuous are they, selfwilled, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities.” There is that phrase, “speaking evil.” In verse 12 we read: “But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption.” Every one of these passages so far has to do with speaking evil.

One last passage is Jude 1:10: “But these speak evil of those things which they know not: but what they know naturally, as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves.” Again, “these speak evil.”

Ephesians 4:31 dealt with Christians; the rest of these verses basically deal with unbelievers. What is important about these five passages? What do these five passages have in common? Every time you read “evil speaking” or “speaking evil” in these five passages, it is from the Greek word blasphemia, from which we get our word “blasphemy.” This word is translated “blasphemy” sixteen times in our Bible, “railing” two times, and “evil speaking” nineteen times. But in these five passages it is blasphemy.

The word refers not only to slander, detraction, snide remarks, and speeches injurious to one's good name, but also to that which is impious, reproachful, and blasphemous, especially toward God and His divine majesty. Evil speaking, then, turns out to be blasphemous speaking. I want you to understand something; I am going to show this to you in the next point. Evil speaking also involves what you and I would call a judicial spirit. It is when we set ourselves up as judge so that we may pronounce a sentence upon our brother. There is another question I want you to ask and think about: How does evil speaking become blasphemous? How does evil speaking become blasphemy? We have seen the duty enjoined.

The Duty Explained

The Duty Explained: Evil Speaking Judges the Law

The duty is enjoined in James 4:11: "Speak not evil one of another, brethren." He explains it: "He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge." We have a duty, an obligation, and a responsibility not to speak evil concerning our brethren. When we speak evil concerning them, we sin against God. How? We become judge, jury, and executioner. We usurp the authority of God and speak evil of the law. The attitude of the one who speaks evil is that the law is insufficient, that it does not provide enough condemnation; therefore, we will remedy the situation in our own way.

We heap condemnation upon condemnation and do what we think is best instead of what the law of God says. Thus we become arrogant, demanding, domineering, tyrannical, and totalitarian. We say, "It's going to be our way or the highway."

John Calvin shows the historicity and consistency of this interpretation: "For hypocrisy is always presumptuous, and we are by nature hypocrites, fondly exalting ourselves by culminating others. There is also another disease innate in human nature: everyone would have all others to live according to his own will and fancy." In other words, we would have everybody else do what we think should be done, live the way we think they should live, and

think the way we believe they should think. We want to be the ones who settle everything. Calvin continues: “This presumption James suitably condemns in this passage, that is, because we dare to impose on our brethren our rule of life.”

He further writes: “He then takes detraction as including all the calumnies and suspicious works which flow from a malignant and perverted judgment. The evil of slandering takes a wide range. But here he properly refers to that kind of slandering which I have mentioned, that is, when we superciliously determine respecting the deeds and sayings of others, as though our own morosity were the law.” Morosity means that we make our own rule of life the law by which we determine the deeds and sayings of others.

It is actually from the word “morose,” which means sulky, bad-tempered, surly, grouchy, or sour. In other words, it is our assumption and grouchiness. “When we superciliously determine respecting the deeds and sayings of others, as though our own sulky bad attitude were the law, when we confidently condemn whatever does not please us.” I could look at Gary and say, “Don’t do that; that doesn’t please me.” But Gary is not obligated to please me; he is obligated to please God. We usually speak evil of somebody when they displease us, when they do what we do not think should be done, or when they hold a position that we do not think they should hold.

Calvin said, “That such presumption as he reproved is evident from the reason that is immediately added: ‘He that speaketh evil of, or defames his brother, speaketh evil of, or defames the law.’ He intimates that so much is taken away from the law as one claims of authority over his brethren. Detraction then against the law is opposed to that reverence with which it behooves us to regard it.” When we speak evil, we disregard God’s law, because we elevate ourselves as judges.

Matthew Henry goes further: “This is a heinous evil, because it is to forget our place, that we ought to be doers of the law. And it is to set up ourselves above it, as if we were to be judges of it. He that is guilty of the sin here cautioned against is not a doer of the law, but a judge. He assumes an office and a place that do not belong to him, and he will be sure to suffer for his presumption in the end.” Those

who are most ready to set themselves up as judges of the law generally fail most in their obedience to it. Those who judge others according to their own interpretation, understanding, and perception usually disobey the law the most.

John Gill, the great Baptist expositor, says this: “He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law. He that is a talebearer and backbites his brother, his fellow member, and detracts from his good name and character, and takes upon him to judge his heart and his state, as well as to condemn his actions, he speaks evil of the law, and judges and condemns that, if that forbids a thing that was lawful, even talebearing and detraction, or by speaking evil of him for a good thing he does, he blames and condemns the law, as though it commanded the thing which was evil. And by passing sentence upon his brother, he takes upon him the providence of the law, which is to accuse, charge, convict, pronounce guilty, and condemn.” Once we do this, we take the position of that which the law itself does.

This brings us to a similar passage in Matthew 7. We are talking about judgment, and Christ says, “Judge not, that ye be not judged.” Here He is referring to what we would call evil speaking or unjust judgment. John 7:24 tells us that we are to judge righteous judgment. Judging righteous judgment is judging according to Scripture, according to the law of God. Censorious, harsh, unjust judgment is judging people based upon our own understanding, our own likes, and our own dislikes.

Christ continues: “For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.” Remember the statement given earlier: “He that sets himself up as a judge of the law is usually the one who disobeys the law the most.” Then He asks, “And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?” He concludes, “Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.”

What he is condemning here in verse 1 is rash and censorious judgment that is unjust—a condemning, nitpicking, and unnecessary judgment. God says that if we take that attitude and do this, he will measure the same measure back to us. “For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.”

The implication is that we should deal with ourselves first, judging and confessing our own sins first and foremost. The truth is that most who speak evil of others and judge them unmercifully elevate themselves to Moses’ seat. What does that mean? In Matthew 23, our Lord condemns the scribes and Pharisees: “Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat.” How do we explain that?

“All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, and love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and greetings,” and so forth. Notice that they loved to sit in Moses’ seat. They liked to tell everybody else what to do, but would not do it themselves. They were arrogant, domineering, tyrannical, and demanding.

If you do not submit to them, then they get very, very upset. Let me give you another quote by John Calvin:

"Thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge. This sentence ought to be thus explained. When thou claimest for thyself a power to censure above the law of God, thou exemptest thyself from the duty of obeying the law. He then, who rashly judges his brother, shakes off the yoke of God, for he submits not to the common rule of life, that is, the law. It is then an argument from what is contrary, because the keeping of the law is wholly different from this arrogance which men ascribe to their conceit, the power and authority of the law. It hence follows that we then only keep the law when we wholly depend on its teachings alone and do not otherwise

distinguish between good and evil. For all the deeds and words of men ought to be regulated by it."

What does that mean? God is the one who determines what is good. God is the one who determines what is evil. It is not me. The Bible says in Romans chapter 3 that by the law is the knowledge of sin. Sin does not come by any other means but by the knowledge of the law. That is why 1 John 3:4 says, "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law." Sin is the transgression of the law.

So, Steve does something that displeases me, and I do not like it at all. It upsets me, and I jump on his case, tell him out of the carriage the cabbage, cuss him out, and turn him up one side and down the other—you know all those expressions. But what he has done is not a violation of God's law. Then he has not sinned against God; he has merely done something that displeased me. When I jump on him for that, I am putting myself in the place of a judge and speaking evil concerning him. In other words, it is the law that determines good and evil. It is the law that determines right and wrong. Let me give you one more quote before we go to the next point: Adam Clarke.

He that judges the brother speaketh evil of the law. The law condemns all evil speaking and detraction. He who is guilty of these and allows himself in these vices, in effect, judges and condemns the law. He considers it unworthy to be kept, and that it is no sin to break it. Thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge. Thou rejectest the law of God, and settest up thine own mischievous conduct as a rule of life; or by allowing this evil speaking and detraction, do intimate that the law that condemns them is improper, imperfect, or unjust, and therefore you have to add to the law.

That is like me saying, if I jumped on Gary and Gary said, “Wait a minute, I haven't violated the law. I haven't broken God's commandments,” and I said, “Well, there ought to be a commandment like that.” Really? Who am I to say something like that? In other words, I would be saying that God's law is insufficient, that God's law is not full and complete.

When we speak evil of our brethren, we are elevating ourselves to the position of judges. In doing so, we are denying that we have an

obligation ourselves to obey the law. In essence, we are condemning the law as ineffectual or insufficient, asserting that what this person needs is our judgment and our censorious attitude. It is usurping the power and position of God.

The Duty Enlarged: Usurping God's Prerogative

Consider James chapter 4: “Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge.” This is a very powerful passage, and it exposes much. Think of all the controversies in Christendom and all the controversies between brethren; they happen all the time.

Now note what he says: “There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?” We have seen the duty enjoined: speak not evil. We have seen the duty explained: when we speak evil, we become a judge and condemn God’s law. Now we should see the duty enlarged, because He teaches us, “There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy.” When we set ourselves up as judge, we usurp the power, position, and prerogative of God. Just as vengeance belongs to God, so does judgment. God is our judge. He is our lawgiver. He is our King. Remember Isaiah 33:22: “For the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our king; he will save us.” When you contemplate that there is one lawgiver who is able to save and destroy, how solemn is this to the conscience? One lawgiver and one judge, able to save and destroy.

How grave a rebuke is this to those of us who offend? That is why he asks, “But who art thou that judgest another?” You are not God. Grace and self-judgment alone can enable us to abhor this evil and cleave to that which is good. There is only one lawgiver and judge, God Almighty, who is able to save all those who obey Him and is also able to destroy all those who trample His will, His word, and His law under their feet. When a person takes it upon himself to straighten out his brethren, judge them, condemn them, and speak evil against them, he is not only censuring the law of God but usurping the right that belongs to God alone.

The Apostle Paul asks in Romans 14:4, “Who art thou that judgest another man’s servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand.” If James were my slave, and he satisfied and pleased me, I would be happy. But if Gary came along and said, “I do not like James. I do not like his attitude. I do not like the way he does things,” what difference would that make to me? I am happy with him. To his own master he stands or falls. He is not accountable or responsible to anyone else; he is accountable to God alone. God is able to make even the weakest man stand and to make the most ineffective individual very effective.

Now he asks in James 4:12, “Who art thou that judgest another?” It is the same question that the Apostle Paul asked. Albert Barnes says this: “Who art thou that judgest another? Who art thou, a weak, frail, and erring mortal, thyself accountable to that judge, that thou shouldest interfere and pronounce judgment on another, especially when he is doing only that which the judge permits him to do? There is nothing more decidedly condemned in the Scriptures than the habit of pronouncing a judgment on the motives and conduct of others. There is nothing in which we are more liable to err or to indulge in wrong feelings, and there is nothing which God claims more for Himself as His peculiar prerogative, which I will show you before I close.”

Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown say it like this: “Implying God alone is the lawgiver and therefore judge, since it is He alone who can execute His judgments. Our inability in this respect shows our presumption in trying to act as judges as though we were God. Who art thou? Listen carefully. The order in the Greek is emphatic: ‘But thou, who art thou that judgest another?’ How rashly arrogant in judging thy fellows, and wresting from God the office which belongs to Him over thee and to them alike.”

I hope you are beginning to see how evil speaking can become blasphemous. Because it is not just that we are judging a brother; we are also judging the law, and we are usurping the prerogative that belongs to God alone. That is blasphemy. One more quote from John Trapp, the old Puritan. He said, “What doest thou then, peeking into his place, that is, slipping into God’s place by censuring and

defaming another? Is it not this to be a pope in thine own cause, exalting myself above God, or at least appealing from Him to thyself?" Is it not this to be a pope in thine own cause?

Arthur W. Pink said, "One reason we don't like the Pope is because we want to be the Pope ourselves." That is exactly right. So evil speaking is blasphemy. Why is it blasphemy? Because it denigrates, denies, and denounces the law of God, and it steals the prerogative of God. Evil speaking makes us the judge and denies the right of God alone to judge His people.

Hebrews 10:30 says, "For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people." The Lord shall judge His people. It is God who has the absolute right to judge us. We are not to judge each other.

Practical Applications

Simply because we know something to be true does not mean that we should repeat it. I have talked to people over the years, and I know a lot of secrets. People have confided in me, and I have kept those secrets. I know things that are true about a lot of people, but I do not go telling them around or spreading them.

Years ago, I had a good friend who had a problem. He came to me, explained his problem, and I gave him some biblical counsel. A few weeks later, he and his family were at our house for supper. I was outside, and Alice was inside in the kitchen. This man slipped up beside her and whispered, "I suppose your husband has told you all about my problem." Alice looked at him and said, "I don't know what you're talking about. My husband never tells me anything that is involved in counseling."

Probably he was just checking me out. Had I told her something, he would probably never have confided in me again. But just because you know something does not mean that you have to repeat it. If you cannot be part of the solution, do not be part of the problem. Do not repeat things just to be repeating things. The Bible says in Leviticus chapter 19, verse 16, "Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people." You are not to be spreading rumors, gossiping,

or telling things that are true but that you have no business telling. Why would I tell something that I have no business telling? God says, “Don’t do that.”

Evil speaking and spreading these things is like hitting a skunk in the road with your car. That is bad in and of itself. But wait until ten or fifteen other cars hit that skunk and spread it all around; then it really gets bad. That is what talebearing and evil speaking are. The more it is done, the more it stinks. So, if you cannot be part of the solution, do not be part of the problem.

There is such a thing as biblical confrontation, biblical admonishment, and warning. We are commanded to confront each other nouthetically, to admonish each other, and to warn each other. But our admonition, warning, and confrontation has to be accomplished in biblical

God tells us how to do that and when to do that. Evil speaking is something totally different from biblical confrontation. We cannot take to ourselves the right and prerogative of judging our brethren simply because they might hold a different position, think differently, or act differently than we do. If others disobey and speak evil of you, do not retaliate in kind. Just because someone else violates the law of God and usurps God's prerogative does not give you the right to do so. I've had a lot of people speak evil of me.

My attitude is that my defense is of the Lord. I am going to live just to disprove them and expose their lies, and God in time will vindicate me. But let me point something out: just because someone disobeys God does not give you the right to do so. The Bible says in Proverbs 15:1, “A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.”

Years ago, I was at a Christian school where I served as chaplain. I had an office, and next to me was a woman named Barbara. Her sole job was to take care of irate parents. I had a lot of respect for that woman. I would hear men and women—husbands, wives, fathers, and mothers—come in screaming and hollering, extremely upset. As a man, I would want to jerk a knot in them. I would want to say, “Get out of here until you can come back and act like a decent individual.” That is the flesh. But do you know what Barbara would do?

The louder they got, the quieter she became. Before long she was speaking so low they could hardly hear her. Then they realized the great gap: they were screaming and hollering, while this woman was whispering. They became embarrassed, and she was able to say in a normal tone of voice, "I'm so sorry that you're upset, but if you'll have a seat, I'll be glad to work it out for you."

"A soft answer turneth away wrath, but grievous words stir up anger." Just because someone else does something wrong does not mean you have the right to do that. We cannot forget our Lord's warning in Matthew 7:1–2: "Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." Sooner or later, inevitably and invariably, if you judge rashly, unjustly, and censoriously, God will measure that right back to you.

The law of sowing and reaping has not been canceled. We still reap that which we sow. When we speak evil of our brethren, sooner or later someone will speak evil of us. We will understand the hurt we inflicted upon them by being hurt ourselves. So James tells us, "Speak not evil one of another." Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to you this night.

We thank you for your love, grace, mercy, goodness, and kindness. And Father, we confess and acknowledge, Lord, that we have spoken evil of each other in times past. We ask forgiveness. We ask that you help and keep our mouths and the door of our lips. Help us not to commit this sin. Help us, Lord, to honor thy law, obey thy law, and never steal your divine prerogative, for thou art the judge of thy people.

We give ourselves unto thee. Help us to love thee and live for thee. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 24

The Pharisees Are Alive And Well

January 21, 2020

Introduction to the Parable and the Pharisees

Our Lord is speaking in Luke chapter 18, beginning with verse 9: “And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”

Historical Context of the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians

Pharisaism is alive and well. We tend to think that the Pharisees died out many, many years ago, but that certainly is not true. In fact, our Lord in the New Testament warned us of the leaven of the Pharisees. It was the Pharisees, along with the Sadducees and the Herodians, that led the attack against the Lord Jesus Christ. Later on, even the Apostle Paul and some of the other apostles did as well. The Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians always tried to entrap our Lord in his words, and then they tried to provoke him to get him to say things in order that they might charge him with some particular crime.

They were unrelenting, cruel, and vicious. In Matthew 16 and verse 1, the Bible says, “The Pharisees also with the Sadducees came, and tempting desired him that he would shew them a sign from heaven.” Here you have the Pharisees and the Sadducees together. In Mark 3 and verse 6, the Bible says, “And the Pharisees went forth, and straightway took counsel with the Herodians against him, how they might destroy him.” Here you have the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and Herodians. John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus Christ, did not mince words when he saw the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, for he said in Matthew 3 and verse 7, “But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?”

So he called them a bunch of serpents, a bunch of snakes. And he said, "Who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" Of course, later on our Lord tells us that they cannot escape the damnation as well. But if you will turn in your Bibles—hold Luke 18—but if you will turn to Matthew chapter 5 and verse 20, you'll see that our Lord certainly did not think too much of the Pharisees, and especially of their pretended righteousness. For in Matthew chapter 5 and verse 20, our Lord made this statement. Watch carefully, Matthew 5 verse 20. He said, "For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." You

have to remember that all the Pharisees had was merely external and physical.

Because of their misinterpretation of the word of God and the law of God, they thought as long as they had never stuck a knife in someone's heart, they were not guilty of murder, because they limited everything to the externals. And our Lord, of course, corrected all that. He said, "He that hateth his brother in his heart is guilty of murder" as well. But I want to point out that the Pharisees were considered the fundamentalists of the day in which Christ lived. And when I say the fundamentalists, I mean this.

At least they professed to believe the truth. They professed to believe the law. They did not really believe it, but they professed to believe it. They also believed in the resurrection. They also believed in angels and spirits. So the Pharisees would be counted the fundamentalists; the Sadducees would be counted the liberals. For instance, if you will turn in your Bibles to Acts chapter 23 and look at verse 8, and hold that passage because we'll look at a few more verses momentarily. But look at Acts 23 and verse 8, the Bible says, "For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both." So the Sadducees then were the ones who denied the bodily resurrection from the dead. They denied angels, they denied spirit beings, et cetera. The Pharisees would be considered the fundamentalists. The Sadducees would be considered the liberals.

And now you have the Herodians. The Herodians were basically a political party, even though they were made up of what you and I would call Hellenistic Jews, that is, Jews influenced by Greek culture and philosophy. The Herodians held political power. Most scholars believe that they were simply a political party supporting King Herod Antipas. The Herodians ruled Palestine from about 4 BC to AD 39. Herod was ruling over a certain portion of Palestine, but he had been appointed by the Roman emperor. The Herodians, then, were people who supported Herod. Directly and indirectly, they supported the Roman Empire because Herod was appointed by the Roman Empire. They were the ones who gave in to what you and I would call political expediency.

The Herodians controlled politics, the Sadducees controlled the temple, and the Pharisees controlled the people. Thus, political power, religious power, and popular power were all directed against the Lord Jesus Christ.

Each of these groups desired to maintain its own position and power. Consequently, they were against anyone or anything that would hinder or threaten their power at all. The Pharisees and Sadducees plotted against Jesus Christ. The Sanhedrin, composed of Pharisees and Sadducees, condemned Christ. The Roman government, of which Herod was a representative, crucified Jesus Christ.

Jesus' Condemnation of the Pharisees

In Acts chapter 23, verses 6 and 7, we see that the Pharisees and Sadducees were involved in the Sanhedrin: “But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question. And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude was divided.” Then verse 8 says, “For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both.” The apostle Paul used a little strategy in the council. When he saw that there were two conflicting groups, he said, “Well, look, I’m on this side.”

SCRIPTURE READING - Matthew 23:13-22 (KJV)

> And of course, he then got them fussing and feuding between themselves. But our Lord certainly did not consider the Pharisees to be biblical in any sense of the word. He also condemns the scribes. The scribes were those who were supposed to be transcribing Scripture, but usually these were transcribing the traditions of the elders and the interpretations rather than the Scripture.
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> “But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour

> widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves. Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor! Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold? And, Whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing; but whosoever sweareth by the gift that is upon it, he is guilty. Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift? Whoso therefore shall swear by the altar, sweareth by it, and by all things thereon. And whoso shall swear by the temple, sweareth by it, and by him that dwelleth therein. And he that shall swear by heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by him that sitteth thereon."

"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?"

Simply by reading that passage, you can understand that the Pharisees were wicked people. They were wicked in far more ways than one. Their theology was wrong. Their attitude was wrong. Their lives were wrong. Their applications were wrong. Even what they considered right was wrong. Everything about them was wrong. The Pharisees do not need, and should not, be emulated at all.

The Leaven of the Pharisees: Doctrine and Hypocrisy

Since everything about the Pharisees was wrong and condemned by Christ, why are there so many Pharisees in the church today? And why are there so many Pharisees in political circles today?

Years ago, I preached a message from Matthew 15 and Mark 7 entitled "Pharisaical Christians." I went through those passages and demonstrated how many professing Christians are nothing more than Pharisees. Maybe I need to preach that message again; I have not preached it in many years. Our Lord gave very serious warnings concerning the Pharisees. Look in Matthew chapter 16.

In Matthew 16:6, Jesus said unto His disciples, “Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.” He was telling His disciples that they needed to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. They began to reason that it was because they had brought no bread. But in verses 11 and 12, our Lord corrected their false reasoning: “How is it that ye do not understand that I spake it not to you concerning bread, that ye should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees? Then understood they how that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.” So now our Lord was condemning their doctrine—that is, their false teaching. It is called leaven, that which is wrong and wicked.

Luke 12:1 gives even more concerning the leaven of the Pharisees. Notice what he says: “In the mean time, when there were gathered together an innumerable multitude of people, insomuch that they trode one upon another, he began to say unto his disciples first of all, Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.” The leaven of the Pharisees is wrong doctrine and hypocrisy as well. We should never fall into the trap of Pharisaism with wrong doctrine, and we should never fall into the trap of Pharisaism with hypocrisy

as well. If you read Mark 7 and Matthew 15, you see what they did: they took their traditions, they took humanism, and they took what they had been taught, and placed it above the Word of God.

In fact, they asked our Lord, “Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread.” Our Lord answered, “Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?” In other words, they made the Word of God of none effect with their tradition. They placed their tradition above the Word of God.

Obviously, we have many Pharisees today who want to follow tradition more than anything else. I have always said tradition can be a blessing if it is biblical, but it can be a curse if it is unbiblical. Usually, most people do things because that is the way we have always done them. We could care less about truth.

The Pharisee's Prayer: Self-Righteousness and Contempt

But our Lord, in Luke chapter 18, reveals even more stunning details about Pharisees. As I have pointed out, they were not only wrong doctrinally, but they were hypocrites. They professed one thing and lived something totally and completely different. In this text, I want to talk about the Pharisee and the publican.

Verse 9 says, “And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.”

There are two things that always go together: trusting in yourself that you are righteous and despising others. If you hold yourself as the standard, believe you are number one, the apex and the height, then you will automatically despise everyone else, because no one else will measure up to your particular standards. These two things always go together.

The Pharisees were considered the fundamentalists of the day. The apostle Paul stated in Acts 26:5, “Which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.” Even the Pharisees had different

sects or divisions, and Paul said, “I was raised under the strictest sect of the Pharisees.”

Our Lord in this passage is talking about a Pharisee who goes up to pray. The Pharisees, as I said earlier, believed mostly in externals, in that which was physical. Paul was giving his list in Philippians chapter 3, where he said, “…touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.” Was the Apostle Paul blameless in touching the law? Of course not.

But according to his pharisaical interpretation, he would have said yes, because if they had not taken a knife and plunged it into someone’s heart, then they did not view themselves guilty of murder, et cetera. The Pharisees emphasized totally the externals.

Here is the Pharisee who goes up to pray, and the next one is the publican. The publicans were the most despised of all people. The Greek word for publican is derived from the word telones, which literally refers to a tax collector or a collector of tolls, one employed by, in this instance, the Roman government to collect taxes. The collectors as a class were detested and despised because not only of what they did, but also because of their greed and destruction of people.

Much like the IRS today, these tax collectors would do this: If the Roman government came to Steve and said, “Well, your taxes are 100 bucks,” and I were a tax collector, I would tell Steve, “Your taxes are 200 bucks.” I would be paid by the Roman government, and then steal 100 bucks from him. They were notorious thieves.

Do you remember when Zacchaeus got converted? He said, “…if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.” He had stolen as well. These people were hated; they were absolutely despised.

Here is a Pharisee on the one hand and a publican on the other. Luke 18:9 says, “And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others.” Our Lord is saying that the Pharisee is someone who trusts in himself. In other words, he has his own moral code, his own standard of righteousness, his own standard of holiness, and his own standard of perfection.

I can be as holy as I want to be, as long as you allow me to define holiness. I can be as righteous as I want to be, as long as I can define righteousness. I can jump flat-footed from the floor twenty feet straight up in the air, as long as you let me define twenty feet.

The Pharisees had their own standard, their own traditions, and their own interpretations, and they considered themselves absolutely right and righteous. Therefore, no one was allowed to disagree with them. If you disagreed with them, you were wrong, wicked, and evil; they were right.

The word righteous here is the Greek word dikaios, which means that which is righteous, just, and meet. The word righteous is used in different ways in Scripture, but in this instance it shows their unrighteousness. They said they were righteous, but in reality they were unrighteous. They trusted in themselves, their own moral code, their own interpretation, and their own traditions.

They believed, therefore, that they were accepted by God. They prided themselves on their knowledge, understanding, position, and virtue, whether that virtue was real or imagined. Our Lord was condemning not only their pride, arrogance, and haughtiness, but also the fact that they despised others who were not Pharisees—those who did not live as they lived, believe as they believed, or bow and submit to them.

The Pharisee believed that he was almost one of the untouchables, like those in India. Remember the time when the woman came to our Lord while He was sitting at a Pharisee's table. She began to weep, wash His feet with her tears, and dry them with her hair. The old Pharisee said, “This man cannot be of God. For if he were, he would not allow this woman to touch him. If he were really God, he would know what kind of woman this is.”

Our Lord said, “Simon, let me ask you a question.” One person owed him ten thousand dollars, and another owed him one dollar; he frankly forgave them both. Which one would love him most? Simon replied, “I suppose the one for whom I forgave the most.” He said, “You're right. And this woman whose sins are many are forgiven.” In other words, you love little because you think you sin

little. She loved much because she knew she was a great sinner and had been forgiven. So here are the Pharisees.

They despise anyone who does not live the way they live, act the way they act, and believe what they believe. If you want to see the absolute contempt that the Pharisees had for others, look again at verse 9: “And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others.”

The word despised is the Greek word exoutheneo, translated in our Bibles as “to despise.” But it means not only to despise, but to set at nought, to esteem the least, and to hold in contempt. Let me put it plainly. It means that you look at people and say they are no account, absolutely worthless, and useless. All you have for that individual is absolute contempt. That is exactly what this word meant. This Pharisee looked down at the publican and held him in great disdain and contempt as well.

The Pharisees not only had a holier-than-thou attitude; they also had a smarter-than-thou attitude. In other words, “We know and you don’t. We understand and you don’t.” Turn to John chapter 7. The Pharisees had sent the soldiers to arrest Christ, and they came back without Him. In verse 45, we read, “Then came the officers to the chief priests and Pharisees; and they said unto them, Why have ye not brought him?” The officers answered, “Never man spake like this man.” Then the Pharisees responded, “Are ye also deceived?”

Are you out of your mind? Are you crazy? Watch verse 48: “Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him? But this people who knoweth not the law are cursed.” Did you see what they said? “You don’t know what we know. If you knew what we knew, you would have arrested Him. If you believed like we believe, you would have brought Him back. Have any of the rulers or Pharisees believed? Of course not. The people who know not the law are cursed.” But that was not God’s law; it was their interpretation of God’s law.

Therefore, they assume this holier-than-thou, smarter-than-thou attitude, and anyone who disagrees with them is a cursed individual. I think of Job 12:2, which I quote often. Job's three insolent friends came to comfort him but ended up condemning him. Job said to his

friends, "No doubt but ye are the people, and wisdom shall die with you." In other words, you know it all, and when you are dead, it is all gone.

That was the Pharisees. They knew it all, and if you did not agree with them, you were a dumb, ignorant, cursed individual. It is just that simple.

Isaiah 65:5 gives us the attitude of a Pharisee: "Which say, Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou. These are a smoke in my nose, a fire that burneth all the day." They said, "Stand by thyself, don't come near me, I'm holier than you." This is what these people would do: "Look at me." That is why they prayed in public and gave in public. They wanted everybody to look at them and see how holy they really were.

In Luke 18, our Lord demonstrates the pharisaical attitude by showing the difference between the prayers of the Pharisee and the publican. In verses 11 and 12, here is the Pharisee's prayer: "The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess."

I like the wording: "The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself." He probably just prayed to himself. He may have been addressing God when he said, "God, I thank thee," but he just prayed. Here we see the pride of his heart and the justification of his own self in his self-righteousness. He pours out scorn and contempt for the publican and demonstrates his superiority: "I thank thee that I'm not as other men. I'm not unjust," but he was. "I'm not an extortioner," but he was. "I'm not an adulterer," but he was.

The Publican's Prayer: Humility and Repentance

“Or even as this publican.” Then he said, “I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.” Here is a man who prayed with himself. Probably he even stood by himself; he would not have been close to this publican. He was praying by himself and acknowledging his own self-righteousness.

It seems to me that this attitude is prevalent today. I know Christians who will not associate with other Christians because they do not believe exactly as they do. I know pastors who will not associate with other pastors because they disagree with them. They not only castigate them, but encourage others not to fellowship with them either. If that is not a pharisaical attitude, I do not know what in the world is.

It seems that the modern-day Pharisees, like the Pharisees of old, have forgotten some of the seven things God hates listed in Proverbs chapter 6. The last is "a false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren." Old John Trapp, the Puritan, summarized the Pharisee's prayer: "He shows not his want, but his worth, and stands not only upon his comparisons, but upon his disparisons."

"I am not as this publican." He declared not his wants, but his worth. "Lord, look at me, God. I'm just not like other men. And I do this and I do this and I do this." Albert Barnes says, "There was still in the prayer of the Pharisee an appearance of real religion. He did not profess to claim that he had made himself better than others. He was willing to acknowledge that God had done it for him and that he had a right to his gratitude for it. Hypocrites are often the most orthodox in opinion of any class of men."

"They know the truth and admit it. They use it frequently in their prayers and conversation. They will even persecute those who happen to differ from them in opinion and who may be really wrong. We're not to judge of the piety of men by the fact that they admit the truth or even that they use it often in their prayers. It is, however, not wrong to thank God that He's kept us from the gross sins which other men commit. But it should not be done in an ostentatious manner, nor should it be done forgetting still that we are great sinners and need pardon. These were the faults of the Pharisees."

Barnes is saying that it is not wrong for a man to be thankful that he is not engaged in the sins of others. I tell people I'm thankful that God has saved some dopeheads, drunkards, and whoremongers. But the same God that saves them can equally save those who have never committed those sins. You can be thankful that you do not engage in some of those sins.

I remember when I joined the military. I was seventeen years old, and my father had to sign for me. I had just gotten out of high school, and I was standing with him at the bus station, waiting to go to Fort Jackson, South Carolina. One of my father's friends—I do not know who he was, and I wish I did—found out where I was going. He looked at me and said, “Son, do you smoke?” I said, “No, sir.”

He said, “Do you drink?” I said, “No, sir.” He said, “Do you chase women?” I said, “No, sir.” He looked at me and said, “When you come out, you'll be doing all three.” Although I had been raised in church, I was really not saved until later on. I looked at him and said, “No, sir, not me.” God used that, I guess, to put a little glue in my backbone, because I never smoked. I have never had a beer in my entire life, nor have I even tasted one. I do not want one. And the only woman I chased, I caught, and I have kept her.

I can be thankful that I have not done any of those things, but that does not mean I am better than someone else. God sovereignly withheld me in those areas. I cannot look down on somebody who has done some of those things. I often think that Frank Kersey and I were born the same day and the same year, and that we had so much in common.

Frank and I have talked about this. Frank has had heart surgery, brain surgery, and all kinds of problems. I have never had a problem, period. God brought him through, and here is what I said: God sovereignly brought you through all of those things, and He has sovereignly kept me from going through all of those things. I am just as thankful that He brought you through them as I am that He kept me from them. We can be thankful that God has kept us from certain sins, but that does not make us any better or more righteous than someone else. We cannot despise them.

One author has said, “The essence of the Pharisee's prayer, if prayer it can be called, was not a confession of sin, nor an expression of need, but a thanksgiving, and this not for what God had done and had been for him, but for what he himself was. He was not like the rest of men, violent and corrupt, not even as the tax gatherer of whom he cannot speak without a tinge of contempt, ‘this publican,’ this tax collector.”

If you can comprehend the pharisaical mentality—if you understand their self-righteous attitude, their vehement contempt for anyone who disagrees with them, and their absolute disdain for those who refuse to bow to them, their whims, their ideas, and their opinions—then you have a perfect picture of a modern-day politically correct social justice warrior. Look at Antifa. Look at Black Lives Matter. Look at all of them; I do not care what color—black, white, pink, or purple. If it is social justice, listen: we may be for justice, but it is biblical justice, not someone's idea of what they consider justice to be.

Stop and think, if you would please. What has happened in this country all down through the ages is that there has been a group of individuals who thought they had an absolute right to tell everybody else how to live, what to do, what to think, and how to die. That is a social justice warrior. If you do not bow to their whims and ideas, you are considered the scum of the earth. I read the other day where a social justice warrior in California had a glass shard in his hand and threatened twice to kill a Trump supporter. A picture showed him grinning with an evil grin and the glass shard in his hand. Look at the people who have been spit on and hit. Why? Because someone has his own idea of justice, and if you disagree, you are the scum of the earth.

So here is the Pharisee. Now look down at the publican in verse 13: “And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.” Here is a vast difference between the Pharisee and the publican. The publican was a sinner, and he knew it. He knew that he did not deserve anything from God except justice, and he did not want that. He was so convicted of his own unworthiness and wickedness that he would not even lift his eyes to heaven, but smote himself on his breast, saying, “God be merciful to me a sinner.”

His attitude, actions, and prayer all indicated genuine repentance. Hold Luke 18, but look in your Bibles to Jeremiah chapter 31, verse 19. Here it is: “Surely after that I was turned, I repented;”

"And after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh: I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of

my youth." Once God turns us to repentance, and once we have repented and are instructed, we become sorrowful and grieved for our sins and ashamed. The publican is doing this. He is smiting his breast and saying, "God be merciful to me a sinner." The very fact that he does this expresses grief and sorrow for sin.

Albert Barnes says, "The prayer of the publican was totally different from that of the Pharisee. He made no boast of his own righteousness toward God or man. He felt that he was a sinner, and feeling it, was willing to acknowledge it. This is the kind of prayer that is acceptable to God. When we are willing to confess and forsake our sins, we shall find mercy. The publican was willing to do this in any place, in the presence of any persons, amid the multitudes of the temple, or alone. He felt most that God was a witness of his actions, and he was willing, therefore, to confess his sins before Him. While we should not seek to do this publicly, yet we should be willing at all times to confess our manifold transgressions to the end that we may obtain forgiveness of the same by God's infinite goodness and mercy."

"It is not dishonorable to make acknowledgment that we have done wrong. No man is so much dishonored as he who is a sinner and is not willing to confess it, as he who has done wrong and yet attempts to conceal the fault, thus adding hypocrisy to his other crimes as well."

There is a vast difference between the prayer of the Pharisee and the prayer of the publican, between their persons and their attitudes. The Pharisee is proud, haughty, arrogant, and condemns others in his superior attitude.

Applications: Avoiding Pharisaism Today

He believes he has the knowledge, the answer, and that he is right. And yet this publican is humble and repentant, displaying a sense of unworthiness, broken and contrite. The publican took the attitude of Jacob in Genesis 32 and verse 10, where Jacob prayed to God, "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant." That is true. Anyone who is a real, genuine Christian understands that we are not worthy of any of God's mercies. Anything and everything that we have, we have only

by the grace and mercy of God. Anything and everything we ever will be and ever will have is only by the grace and mercy of God.

Here this man is confessing and acknowledging it. I do not see how any real, genuine Christian can remain unhumbled. That does not mean that pride is eradicated from our hearts. Everyone struggles with pride. It is a root sin; there are no two ways about that. But a real, genuine Christian cannot say, "Well, I deserve this." The only thing we deserve is justice, and we do not want justice. The publican is the one who is forgiven, not the Pharisee.

If you are a genuine Christian, you cannot despise anyone. You may not like a person or agree with that person. There may be attitudes, attributes, or other things about that individual that you do not like. But you do not despise them. God made them, and you can teach them, rebuke them, or do whatever is necessary to help them; but you do not despise them, because every individual is created in the image of God, and God has a purpose for every individual. We can despise what people do, but we cannot despise them as individuals. We certainly cannot despise the brethren.

First John 3 and verse 14 says, "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death." One way we know that we are real, genuine Christians is that we love the brethren. Do I agree with all the brethren? No. Do I like everything all the brethren do? No. They do not like everything I do, and they do not agree with me. But we can still love each other and get along with each other.

We cannot be a Pharisee. Here are two things that our Lord wants us to be delivered from: a self-righteous attitude and despising others. In verse 14, concerning the publican, our Lord says, "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

Here is a biblical fact and a biblical truth: You exalt yourself, you will get knocked down. The Bible says, "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall," and also in James 4 and verse 6, "But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble." The word

resisteth means He fights against the proud. If you become an arrogant, haughty, heady, high-minded, prideful individual, God will knock the wind out of your sails.

If you want to be exalted, you humble yourself. I never will forget an illustration that I read years ago about an individual who had lived a Christian life many years. He said, "I often thought in my Christian life that God placed His best gifts on the high shelf. And the more we grew, the more we were able to reach those gifts. I discovered later that God's best gifts are on the lowest shelf. The more humble we are, the more gracious and beneficial those gifts."

Calvin said: "There are two faults at which Christ glances and which he intended to condemn: wicked confidence in ourselves, and the pride of despising the brethren, the one of which springs out of the other. It is impossible that he who deceives himself with vain confidence should not lift himself up above his brethren, nor is it wonderful that he should be so. For how should that man not despise his equals who vaults against God himself? Every man that is puffed up with self-confidence carries on an open war with God, to whom we cannot be reconciled in any other way than by denial of ourselves, that is, by laying aside all confidence in our own virtue and righteousness and relying on his mercy alone."

We need to pray that we are delivered from the attitude as well as the actions of modern-day social justice warriors, who are nothing more than Pharisees. There are Pharisees in the church, just as there are Pharisees in the political realm. In 3 John, we read about a man named Diotrephes. The Bible says that Diotrephes loved to have the preeminence. When the apostle John and some of the other brethren went there, Diotrephes refused to receive them and kicked many out of the church because they did not agree with him. He had control and was going to show them that he was the one.

Our Lord came as a servant. In Matthew 20:28, he said, "Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." In Luke 22:27, he asked, "For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth?"

"But I am among you as he that serveth." If we are going to take the attitude of the Lord Jesus Christ, we must have a servant's

attitude. The apostle Paul says, "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves." I should esteem Gary better than myself, Gary should esteem me better than himself, and we should esteem David and Francis better than ourselves. This is how we avoid the doctrine, hypocrisy, attitude, and actions of the Pharisees.

If we obey the word of God and bring our lives into conformity with it, we will never be Pharisees. But when we despise the brethren, consider ourselves smarter, more intelligent, or more righteous, and think everyone should bow to us, follow us, and do as we say, we are Pharisees. Social justice warriors wanting something other than that which God has ordained show that Phariseeism is alive and well in the church of Jesus Christ. We need to guard ourselves and make sure that we do not become one of them.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee this day. We thank Thee for Thy word and truth, and that Thou hast told us not to be self-righteous or despise the brethren. Thou hast told us that we should be holy and godly, with lives conformed to the Lord Jesus Christ. Give us grace that we may serve Thee acceptably with reverence and godly fear. In Thy name we pray, Amen.

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