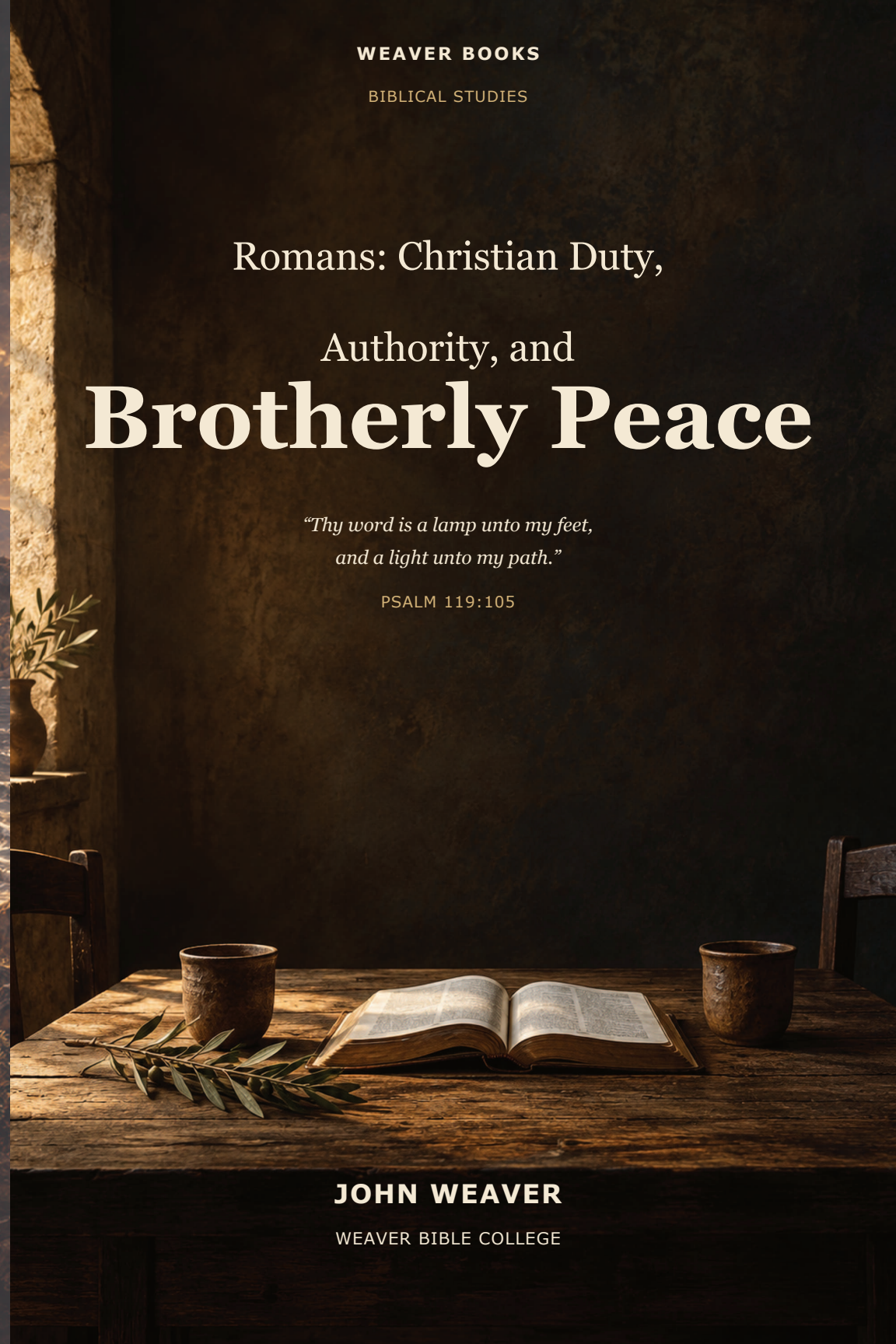
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BIBLICAL STUDIES

Romans: Christian Duty, Authority, and Brotherly Peace

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

PSALM 119:105



JOHN WEAVER

WEAVER BIBLE COLLEGE

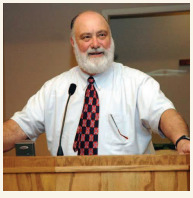
If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.

ROMANS 12:18

Christian duty is expressed in the way believers serve, receive one another, and respond to authority. This Romans-related collection considers the offering of the body to God, the testing of conduct, patience, and practical relationships. John Weaver connects these themes with the wider demands of biblical obedience and brotherly peace.

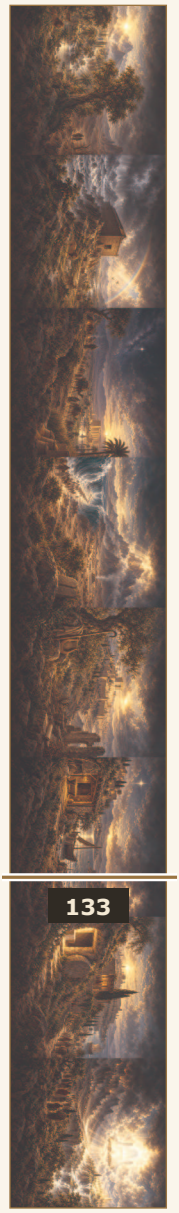
“We are to receive one another in this manner: not merely outwardly, but into one’s heart, home, self, and friendship, with open arms.”

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.



BOOK 133

WEAVER BOOKS

Romans: Christian Duty, Authority, and Brotherly Peace

New Testament Studies

John Weaver

Weaver Bible College

LIBRARY BOOK 133

Romans: Christian Duty, Authority, and Brotherly Peace

John Weaver

Weaver Books
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Edited from the sermon corpus of John Weaver.

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CHAPTER 1

The Angel of Marye's Heights

January 4, 2004

Introduction to the Message

This is an unusual message, not a standard expository message, but I trust it will be beneficial, a blessing, and an encouragement. The title is “The Angel of Marye's Heights.”

You may have no earthly idea what I am talking about, so let me give you a little background. After giving you a number of Scriptures, I will give you a true story that will illustrate those Scriptures. I have known about this story for a good while. Some time ago, I got a new book of individual stories that happened. Although I had previously read the story of the angel of Marye's Heights, there was one little fact I had overlooked. It stuck out in my mind and impressed me so much that I wanted to use it as an illustration for this truth.

The Command to Love Your Enemies

In Matthew 5:43–44, our Lord said, “Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to

them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you." He said, "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy." Then, "But I say unto you, Love your enemies." Those are amazing words: "Love your enemies." Immediately, when we read them, we have to ask ourselves, What in the world does it mean to love our enemies?

Very obviously, it does not mean that we would have warm, fuzzy feelings toward them. It certainly cannot mean that I have to cherish feelings of closeness and sentimentality toward one who is seeking to destroy my life, my family, or my property. So what does it mean to love your enemies? Lord willing, I want to give you several scriptural truths and then illustrate this truth with the life of Richard Kirkland.

Biblical Love Defined as Obedience

Now, I hope that everyone in this room remembers that I have often taught and declared that biblical love is not feelings. It is not sentimentality. It is not some abstract thing floating around in the universe in which we cannot lay hold upon. Let me put it to you very plainly. Scripture says in Romans 13 and verse 10 that love is the fulfilling of the law. So in case you have not gotten it, let me say it again. First and foremost, love is obedience. It is obedience to God and his word.

And scriptures are abundant in teaching this same truth. Very quickly, look in your Bibles to the book of John, chapter 14. John, chapter 14. And notice, if you would please, verse 21. John 14, verse 21. Look what our Lord says. John 14, verse 21. "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me."

Now note what he said. "He that hath My commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me." What is love? Love is obedience. "He that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him and will manifest Myself to him."

Now skip down to verse 24. "He that loveth Me not keepeth not My sayings." So Christ said, if you love Me, you will obey Me. If you do not love Me, you will disobey Me. That's pretty plain. Look in your Bibles to 1 John, back toward the Book of Revelation, 1 John. And you'll have 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, Jude, and then Revelation.

Look in 1 John 5 at verses 3 and 4. 1 John 5, verse 3, "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments, and His commandments are not grievous." Verse 2 is the verse I really wanted first. He says, "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments." So what is love? It's keeping His commandments. "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments and His commandments are not grievous." So love is obedience. It's obeying God's commandments. Go back to 1 John 2. And look, if you would please, at verse 3.

1 John 2 and verse 3. Here John says, "And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments." Now, note what he says. "We do know that we know him if we keep his commandments." How do I know that I know God? Well, the answer is, is my life one of obedience? Look in verse four. "He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him."

What is love based upon the Word of God? Love is obedience. He said, "This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments, and those commandments are not grievous." So first and foremost, love is obedience.

There is always a spirit of compassion involved, because we do not obey God in a vacuum. But it is our love and our regard for our Heavenly Father and His law that moves and motivates us to regard our enemies as He demands in His Word.

Context of Matthew 5: Correcting Pharisaical Misinterpretation

Our text was Matthew 5:43–44: "You have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you." I am dealing with the phrase "love your enemies." Scripture has already demonstrated that love is obedience to the law and that love is the fulfilling of the law. But our Lord, in Matthew 5, is correcting the misinterpretation and misapplication of the law of God by the Pharisees. The scribes and the Pharisees had constantly and continually perverted the law of God.

For example, in Matthew 5:27, our Lord says, "You have heard that it was said by them of old time, 'Thou shalt not commit adultery.'" Who are the "them of old time"? They are the scribes and Pharisees, who were supposedly teaching God's law. But He continues in verse 28: "But I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." You have heard it said by them, but I say unto you: here is what they teach, but here is the proper interpretation and application of the law.

The same pattern appears in verses 31 and 32: "It hath been said," but "I say unto you." Here is what they taught, but now I am telling you what the truth really is. Verse 33 likewise says, "Again, you have heard that it hath been said by them of old time."

Verse 34 says, “But I say unto you.” Here is what they taught; it was wrong. Christ was teaching what was right. Look in verse 38: “You have heard that it hath been said,” and verse 39: “But I say unto you.” Then, in our text, verse 43 says, “You have heard that it hath been said.” That is, this is what the scribes and the Pharisees taught. Then, in verse 44, Christ said, “But I say to you, love your enemies.”

What were the scribes and Pharisees teaching? They were teaching that it was quite acceptable and quite proper to hate your enemies. Yet nowhere in the law of God did the law demand that we hate our enemies. In fact, on the contrary, the law taught differently.

Old Testament Teaching on Treatment of Enemies

In Leviticus chapter 19, beginning with verse 17, God says, “Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart. Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbor, and not suffer sin upon him.” The neighbor does not necessarily have to be a brother. Then verse 18 says, “Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself: I am the Lord.” The law did not demand that we hate our enemies.

In verse 33 of the same chapter, He said, “And if a stranger sojourn with thee in your land, ye shall not vex him. But the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself; for ye were strangers in the land of

Egypt: I am the Lord your God." So once again, God's law is not teaching hatred of our enemies.

The Word of God is not demanding or declaring that we do not have any enemies. The Word of God does indeed declare that there are plenty of enemies, but God also declares our proper attitude toward those enemies. Exodus chapter 23, verses 4 and 5, says, "If thou meet thine enemy's ox or his ass going astray, thou shalt surely bring it back to him again. And if thou see the ass of him that hateth thee lying under his burden, and wouldest forbear to help him, thou shalt surely help with him."

Here is a man meeting his enemy's ass or his enemy's ox that has gotten out. God said, "You may not hide yourself, you must surely help to bring that animal back home again." If you see your enemy's animal lying under burden, maybe trying to deliver a young, God said you cannot hide yourself. You must help that animal.

In Proverbs 25:21, God said, "If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink. For thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the Lord shall reward thee." He repeats the instruction: "If thine enemy hunger, give him bread to eat. If he be thirsty, give him water to drink. For thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the Lord shall reward thee."

Then, in Proverbs 24:17-18, God says, "Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth: lest the Lord see it, and it displease him, and he turn away his wrath from him."

When your enemy falls, there should not necessarily be a proud, gloating disposition. God said, "Lest I see that pride and that gloating disposition, and I turn away my wrath from him." God is telling us there is certainly an attitude that we are to have toward our enemies. He says we are to love our enemies. He is not saying we do not have enemies, but we are to love them. This explains what it means to love your enemies.

Distinction Between Personal and Covenantal Enemies

Someone is going to object and say, "But Pastor, I read my Bible, too. And I remember reading in Psalm 139, especially verses 21 and 22, where David said, ‘Do not I hate them that hate thee, O Lord? Yea, I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies.’" David did say that. But are you listening? There is a difference between our private enemies and public enemies. There is a difference between my private enemy and a covenantal enemy of God. In Matthew chapter 5, he is not dealing with public or covenantal enemies; he is dealing with my personal enemies—individuals who have harmed me or are trying to injure me. It has nothing to do with those who are in rebellion and revolt against God. Yes, we could say with David there correctly, "Do not I hate them that hate thee, O Lord? Yea, I hate them with perfect hatred. I count them mine enemies."

So when God says to us in Matthew 5:44, "Love your enemies," Matthew 5:43 explains it: "You have heard that it hath been said, ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy.’" In other words, that was what the Pharisees taught, and it was wrong. "But I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you." Matthew 5:43–44 forbids what we would call personal animosity, vindictiveness, ill will, hatred, and any other wicked motive or disposition. Now, how do we know that we are not full of ill will, hatred, vindictiveness, and personal animosity toward our enemies?

The Angel of Marye's Heights

The answer is very simple. If our hearts are not full of vindictiveness and animosity, we will be able to pray for our enemies. We will be able to do good for them and bless them when they curse us. In other words, we will have a biblical attitude.

Romans 12: Overcoming Evil with Good

Romans 12:19 through 21 is a further explanation of Matthew 5:43 and 44. This passage is quoted once again from Proverbs 25. The Apostle Paul writes, “Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but

rather give place unto wrath." Why? "For it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord."

Notice what he says: "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves." In other words, do not get full of vindictiveness, vengefulness, or hatefulness. Why? Because vengeance belongs to the Lord. Then he says in verse 20, "Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head."

"Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." The question once again comes up: How do I know that I am not full of vindictiveness and vengeance? If I am able to feed my enemy when he is hungry and give him water to drink when he is thirsty, then I am not necessarily full of vindictiveness and vengeance. In so doing, I will heap coals of fire upon his head. In other words, what I am doing is rewarding good for evil.

Then he makes this amazing statement: "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." The way to overcome evil is by doing that which is right and biblical. If we reward evil for evil, then we are overcome with evil ourselves.

Historical Background of the Battle of Fredericksburg

The title of this message is "The Angel of Marye's Heights," because this is one of the clearest illustrations of Matthew 5:43 and 44 and Romans 12:19 through 21 that I have ever encountered. Before giving you the story of the Angel of Marye's Heights, I want to give you some of its background. The events surrounding the story took place at the Battle of Fredericksburg, Virginia, in December 1862.

The Union forces, the Yankee forces, were under General Ambrose E. Burnside. That is where we get the word "sideburns": he had those huge sideburns, and his name was Burnside, so it simply turned around. Burnside planned to attack Richmond, Virginia, by way of Fredericksburg, Virginia.

The Confederates happened to arrive first. General Nathan Bedford Forrest had a saying, a simple dictum: "Get there firstest with the mostest." That was what he always tried to do. They knew Burnside was coming, and the Confederates got there first. This

battle is one of the great landmarks of the entire war. They carefully selected their position and fortified it with a stone wall that was already there.

Then they built a crude road between two hilltops known as Willis and Marye's Hills. Collectively, they were known as Marye's Heights, the place where this battle took place.

The Army of Northern Virginia was under General Robert E. Lee, stationed along the Telegraph Road, also known as the Sunken Road, to the rear of Fredericksburg. The Union Army had to charge uphill to attack the Confederate positions. Involved in this defense were two seasoned Confederate generals, General Stonewall Jackson and General Joseph Kershaw.

General Burnside was the Yankee general, and Lincoln had placed him in charge for a specific reason. Lincoln was desperate for victory. Up until this time, most battles had been to the south, so the Union army was normally in disarray, morale was sagging, and the people of the North were generally disgruntled and discouraged. An election was coming up, and Lincoln literally demanded that Burnside do something and pressured him to win this battle. Burnside therefore desired a quick battle and victory, so he sent wave after wave of Union troops charging up the hill where the Confederates were hiding behind a stone wall.

The Slaughter of Union Troops

The Confederate sharpshooters were six ranks thick, not counting the artillery. The Yankees had to charge not only up a hill, but over 400 yards of open field. Sergeant Richard Kirkland was one of those Confederate men behind the stone wall. When the Yankees charged up the hill, one line would deliver its devastating fire straight into the ranks of the Yankee soldiers.

They would immediately step back, and the second rank of Confederate soldiers would come up and empty theirs. Then they would step back and reload while the next rank fired. Finally, six ranks were delivering devastating fire into 400 yards of open field, with nothing for the Yankees to hide behind—not counting the artillery. A minimum of 6,500 dead and dying Yankees lay on the

field. Estimates from men who were there range from 6,000 to 12,000 Yankee soldiers dead or dying. With each charge, a fresh line of Confederate riflemen would step up and fire while the others reloaded. The Yankees dropped like flies onto the frozen earth. Remember, this was December of 1862; literally, the Yankees were being mowed down.

General Kershaw was on horseback, riding behind his troops and encouraging them to hold their position at any cost. A few Yankee soldiers got within a few feet of the stone wall, but not one reached it. They were all cut down before they arrived. It was devastating fire.

Some of you men were in the service. I remember the first time, at boot camp, they took us out and showed us the field of fire. There was a BAR on one end and a BAR on the other, and the men had different, varying fields of fire. Every fifth bullet was a tracer—a red streak. For every red streak you saw, there were four that you did not see. I remember the first time I saw an eleven-man squad lay down a field of fire like that. My thoughts were, “Oh Lord, have mercy. How could anyone ever live through that?” All you saw was a solid sheet of red. The firepower is far greater today than it was 40 years ago, but imagine thousands upon thousands of Confederate soldiers, line upon line, firing their muzzleloaders into the faces of Yankees charging up the hill.

The Cries of the Wounded and Kirkland's Compassion

Above them, the artillery blasted down upon the attackers. Every time they sent a wave of men against the Confederate position, the attack failed, and thousands of Yankee soldiers collapsed on the field. No rescue attempt could be made because there were 400 yards of open field. No truce had been called, and General Ambrose was so stubborn that he would not call one to get his wounded off the field.

Then the sun set over Fredericksburg, and the temperature dropped below freezing. As the temperatures fell, snow began to fall on those dead and wounded Yankee soldiers. Let me give you one quote. Les Carroll, in his book, "On the Angel of Marye's Heights," writes this. By the way, for those who have ever shot muzzleloaders or seen cannon fire, the black smoke is horrendous.

"The thick smoke from the day-long battle mixed with the fog to form a gray, gloomy cloud over the battlefield. A dark mood fell on the battlefield with the night. The Confederate soldiers sat or lay crammed behind the stone wall, desperate to stay warm and alert to movements of the enemy. Just yards in front of them on the frozen plain, nine or ten thousand Federal soldiers lay dead or wounded.

"The injured Union boys were helpless and cold, in terrible pain and unable to get back to their lines. Their fellow soldiers could not come forward to help them. Night fell and the agonizing cries for water and warmth filled the air. The dreadful cries of the wounded Union soldiers continued throughout the morning. The lingering fog and smoke kept the battlefield dark and obscure. But the cries still found their way out of the fog."

Richard Kirkland listened with a heavy heart. I want to give you three eyewitness accounts, almost just simple one-liners. Lieutenant Frederick L. Hitchcock, one of the wounded of the 132nd Pennsylvania Infantry, said, "I gave my life up. The nervous strain was simply awful. The atmosphere seems surcharged with the most startling and frightful things, death, wounds, and appalling destruction everywhere." General Lafayette McLaws of Georgia said concerning the enemy, "They were repulsed with zeal and driven back with much loss on every occasion." Finally, Alexander Hunt of the 17th Georgia said, "All that day we watched the fruitless charges with their fearful slaughter until we were sick at heart. As I watched one line get swept away by one fearful blast from Kershaw's men behind the wall, I forgot they were enemies and only remembered that they were men."

"And it's hard to see brave men die in cold blood." Here's a Georgia boy who said, "We were just literally slaughtering them." Richard Kirkland was a Confederate soldier from Camden, South Carolina, a young man with deep southern values and a high regard for life. He was with the Second Carolina and had joined the Confederate Army to defend his beloved country. While he sat behind that stone wall, shivering in the cold with his fellow Confederates, he listened all night to the anguished cries of those wounded Yankees begging for water, warmth, and help. As the night grew colder, the cries grew more desperate. For Richard Kirkland, all

of a sudden, they weren't just Yankees. They were men. They had families. They were hurting. They needed help. Richard Kirkland simply could not bear their cries any longer.

Kirkland's Plea and Act of Mercy

So he left the stone wall and went up to the top of Marye's Heights, to the Stevens' house, where General Kershaw had his headquarters. There Sergeant Kirkland made a plea with the General. With the General's permission, he would take water to the wounded Union soldiers lying out on the battlefield. The General certainly was touched. From that window, when he was not on horseback, he had observed and directed the battle. He had watched 30,000 Yankees charge up that hill, with approximately 10,000 dead or wounded lying out in front of him. At first, he refused permission for Sergeant Kirkland to carry water. He told him Union sharpshooters would kill him immediately. If he allowed such a thing, he would be sending Sergeant Kirkland to instant death. Kirkland replied, "I cannot stand it." All night long, the Yankee wounded had been crying for water. "With your permission, sir," he said, "I'll succor them." The General explained that no truce existed between the two forces.

Sergeant Kirkland then requested the privilege of displaying a white handkerchief if he went over the wall to carry water to the soldiers, but the General would not allow it. "We cannot wave a white flag. They'll think it's either a surrender or we're demanding some type of truce." Finally, Sergeant Kirkland said, "With your permission, sir, I will cross the field unarmed and without the display of a white flag, climb over the parapet, and give those wounded Yankees water." The General simply could not resist this gracious and kind spirit. General Kershaw said, "Sergeant, the enemy is yonder behind those redoubts with guns ready to have you to forfeit your life."

"But if you will, go and may God protect you." Kirkland understood that the attempt would be entirely at his own risk. He assumed full responsibility for his life; when he went over that wall, he was literally taking his life into his hands. He put down his weapons, gathered as many canteens as he could, filled them with

water from the well at the Stevens' house, and raced out to the battlefield.

As he jumped over the wall and began running to the wounded Yankee soldiers, Union sharpshooters immediately opened fire. If you were a Yankee sharpshooter and saw a Confederate running across an open battlefield, especially with dead and dying Yankee soldiers all around, what would you think?

I can tell you what they thought. In all probability, they thought he was robbing the dead, and so they began to shoot at him. Thankfully, they missed. Finally, a Yankee officer saw that he was unarmed and had only canteens. He shouted, "Cease fire. Don't shoot that man. He's too brave to die."

The Union sharpshooters ceased firing as they watched Sergeant Kirkland, the lone figure on the battlefield. They could not believe their eyes. Kirkland took each wounded Yankee, put his head in his lap, and poured water down his thirsting throat.

Not only that, for those who had blankets, he covered them with their own. Then he gently straightened their twisted, broken, mangled limbs. He went from one Yankee to the other. When the wounded soldiers saw Sergeant Kirkland helping the other men, trembling hands rose in the air: “I’m here. I’m alive. Come help me.” Other men cried and begged for help and water. One dying soldier thrust a letter into Richard’s hands and, with his dying breath, requested that it be sent home after he died. Another gave Sergeant Kirkland a watch box and asked that it be returned to his girlfriend. “Please, sir, keep the watch for yourself, but just send the watch box back to my girl.” Throughout the entire morning, he made trip after trip from the battlefield to the well, filling and refilling the canteens, and then returning to give water to those thirsty, dying Yankees.

Aftermath and Legacy of Richard Kirkland

When he had completed his mission, he took his place behind the wall with his weapons in hand. Both sides had watched in awe. Then both sides broke out in loud cheers and applause, and both called Sergeant Kirkland the angel of Marye’s Heights. Here was a man giving water to his enemies.

A few months later, Richard Kirkland was killed at the Battle of Chickamauga. The way he was killed was evidently in line with his character, for he was killed while defending two other Confederate soldiers and enabling them to escape from an ambush. He gave his life so that his fellow compatriots might live. Before he died, another Confederate soldier took Richard Kirkland's head and laid it in his lap. His last words were, "Tell Pa I died right. I died at my post." It was on September 20, 1863, that Richard Kirkland was mortally wounded at Chickamauga.

His body was placed under the spreading trees in the Quaker Cemetery in Camden, South Carolina. Their large headstone reads: "Richard Kirkland, CSA. At Fredericksburg, he risked his life to carry water to wounded and dying enemies. At the Battle of Chickamauga, laid down his life for his country. 1843 to 1863." Part of the inscription reads, "If thine enemy thirsts, give him to drink."

Today, in Fredericksburg, Virginia, a street is named after Richard Kirkland. More than 110 years after the war ended, he was nominated for the highest honor available to Confederate soldiers, the Confederate Medal of Honor. This was dated August 17, 1977, and presented a month later to South Carolina Governor James B. Edwards. An artist painted another portrait of Richard Kirkland's compassion, entitled "The Angel of Marye's Heights." That picture hangs today in the Capitol in Columbia, South Carolina.

Let me tell you the amazing fact that I had overlooked: Sergeant Richard Kirkland, when he risked his life to carry water to his fallen enemies, was only nineteen years of age. Can you imagine a young man of nineteen today doing such a thing? Can you imagine the compassion, character, and devotion that indwelled that young man? Is there not a huge disparity between the young people of 140 years ago and the young people of today? Where are today's Richard Kirklands—our young people with compassion, character, and devotion to that which is right and holy?

Even more horrifying than the disparity between the young people of 140 years ago and those of today is the disparity between the parents of 140 years ago and the parents of today. It is not merely, Where are today's Richard Kirklands? It is, Where are today's parents who teach the Richard Kirklands? Where are the

parents with the character, compassion, devotion, righteousness, faith, and ability to pass those convictions down to their children?

Richard Kirkland was what he was because he was trained and taught by his parents. One author stated concerning Sergeant Richard Kirkland, “It needs only to be added since the bravest or the tenderest and the loving or the daring that Sergeant Kirkland so greatly distinguished himself at Gettysburg that he was promoted for conspicuous gallantry and that he fell on the victorious field of Chickamauga bravely doing his duty.”

“But he will be known in the annals of war as the hero of Fredericksburg. And he had but a short time before found Christ in the camp. I doubt not that he now wears a bright crown bestowed by him who promises that a cup of cold water given in the right spirit shall not lose its reward.” Our Lord said in Matthew 10:42, “And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward.”

Richard Kirkland risked his life to carry water to his wounded and dying enemies. That water may have quenched their thirst temporarily, but certainly not permanently. Do you remember what our Lord said in John 4 to the woman at the well? He said, "Woman, if thou knewest who it was that spoke unto thee, thou wouldest have asked of me living water. And I would have given it to thee." She said, "Sir, give me this water." Our Lord said, "Whosoever drinketh of this water," speaking of the water of the well, "shall thirst again. But whosoever drinketh of the water of life that I shall give him shall never thirst. But the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

Here is my point: Richard Kirkland risked his life to give water to men for which they would thirst again, and we are not even willing to sacrifice to give the living water of life, for which men will never thirst again. Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ alone, is the water of life.

How do we love our enemies? The answer is simple: by acting biblically and scripturally toward them. I have no problem with killing an enemy when an enemy deserves to be killed. I have no problem defending my life or the life of someone else. But there is a

vast difference between killing one's enemies, especially when that enemy is trying to take one's life, and torturing someone just to torture him.

How do we act biblically toward our enemies? How do we love them? By acting toward them the way God declares. If my life or property is not in danger, I am to do good to those who hate me and bless those who persecute me. That does not mean I do not defend myself or my property. But it does mean this: if I defend my life and if I defend my property,

I do so with a clean and pure heart, one that is not full of vindictiveness, hatred, vengeance, and ill will. You say, "Would you kill someone who's trying to take your life?" In a heartbeat, because of what the Bible teaches. The Bible teaches, "Thou shalt not kill." What's the positive of the negative? The positive is, "Thou shalt preserve life," which means I have a duty and obligation to preserve life, including my own. If I allowed you to kill me, then I'd be guilty of self-murder at the hands of someone else. I must do whatever is necessary to protect my life. But if I kill you in defending my life, I will not do so from a heart of vindictiveness, anger, or ill will. I will not kill you simply because you need killing; I will do it without anger or upset.

If that is true in the broadest sense of the word—and it is—consider the petty personal things in our lives, when we let our enemies manipulate and control us because we do not keep our hearts right. Proverbs 4:23 says, "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." If I keep my heart, my actions will be right. If I do not keep my heart, my actions will always be wrong. We love our enemies, not by being warm and fuzzy toward them, nor by denying their existence, wickedness, or evilness, but by refusing to be overcome with their wickedness. What we do, we do from a pure heart and in obedience to our Heavenly Father.

Let's pray. Father, we are so thankful today for Jesus Christ, and for the life of Sergeant Richard Kirkland. What a tremendous testimony: a young man who put into practice the truth of Thy Word, "If your enemy hunger, feed him. If he thirst, give him water." Help us, Lord, never to be overcome with evil, but to overcome evil

with good. Give us pure hearts, right motives, and godly lives. In Thy name we pray, Amen.

CHAPTER 2

William Thomas Overby

September 3, 2006

Introduction and the Duty of Honor

I want to bring a study today in the life and death of a soldier, and you will understand why simply because this is the month of September and our Labor Day picnic. I hope this message will be a blessing and an incentive to stand fast for righteousness' sake.

In Romans chapter 13, verse 7, the Bible says, “Render therefore to all their dues, tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.” God requires us to give honor to whom honor is due. I want to bring you a study on the life and death of William Thomas Overby. Most of you probably never heard that name. He was indeed a Confederate hero and a winner of the Confederate Medal of Honor.

The Concept of Honor and Its Loss

The Bible teaches us in Proverbs 29:23 that a man's pride shall bring him low, but honor shall uphold the humble in spirit. In fact, God is saying that honor will sustain us, uphold us, and preserve us even in

the most trying circumstances. Whatever your temptation, whatever your circumstances, and whatever your situation, you have the duty, the right, the privilege, and the honor to act like a Christian and glorify Jesus Christ in whatever your circumstances really are.

One of our problems today is that we have lost the concept of honor. We have lost it in our marriages, in our homes, and in the workplace. In fact, there are very few today who really understand what honor is all about. As men, we should always live honorably. As Christian men, we must live honorably. If we are ever going to recover the concept of honor, we must understand how it was carried on by our forefathers. Once again, the Bible tells us that honor is that which will sustain and uphold the humble in spirit.

Background of the Confederate Medal of Honor

During the War of Northern Aggression, the Confederate Medal of Honor never came into existence. There were some disagreements, but primarily the reason was finances. The Confederate states were so poor and so broken that they could not really afford to have those Medals of Honor.

On July 1, 1896, General Stephen Dill Lee, then one of the surviving Confederate officers, met with Confederate veterans in Richmond, Virginia. He encouraged them to present and preserve the memory of the Confederate soldiers, as well as their valor and honor. The sons of Confederate veterans took that responsibility upon themselves, determined always to make sure the Confederates were honored as they should have been.

In 1977, the first Confederate soldier to receive, posthumously, a Confederate Medal of Honor was Private Sam Davis of the Coleman Scouts. Since that time, numerous others have also been awarded the Confederate Medal of Honor posthumously. In fact, that Medal of Honor is given to those who went above and beyond the call of duty. One of the men who received it was Private William Thomas Overby.

Overby's Service with Mosby's Rangers

Overby has been called the Nathan Hale of the Confederacy. You remember that Nathan Hale, during the Revolutionary War, said, “I regret that I have but one life to give for my country.” Overby has also been called, and you will understand why shortly, the hero of Black Friday. Black Friday, of course, was September 23, 1864, and you will understand shortly why it was called Black Friday.

Overby rode with the famous—and, for some folks, infamous—John Singleton Mosby. In fact, he was one of Mosby’s Rangers. William Thomas Overby was a Georgian and part of Company D of the 43rd Battalion of the Virginia Cavalry, Army of Northern Virginia, the Confederate States of America. He was born in Dunwoody, Virginia, in 1837. When he was two years old, his family moved to Coweta County, North Georgia—Sharpsburg, Noonan, that area. He was the son of a very successful Coweta County planter.

He joined the Confederacy in 1861 and was assigned to Company A of the 7th Infantry. At Second Manassas, he received a wound and had to go to a hospital. Since Second Manassas was in Virginia, he was in a Virginia hospital. After he recovered, or even while recovering, he served as a nurse in the Confederate hospital for eighteen months. After he was fully recovered, at twenty-seven years of age, he joined Mosby’s Rangers, Company D. You remember John Singleton Mosby; I have a picture of him in my office if you would like to see him.

John Singleton Mosby was known as the Gray Ghost of the Confederacy. He had a very exciting career and was one of those few men who was really feared by the Bluecoats. He was a master tactician and a master guerrilla fighter. His men rode lightning-fast horses and, instead of carrying the cavalry sabers most men carried, threw them down and carried a minimum of two revolvers. Some carried two, some four, and some six.

Mosby probably never had over 800 men under his command at one time, but he was such a tremendous tactician that he seemed to be everywhere at once. He would hit and withdraw, hit and withdraw, keeping the Union forces in confusion and upheaval. His

men would attack and just as quickly disappear into the thick timber. Union men reached the point where they would rather charge into battle than remain in the area where Mosby and his men were patrolling. They said they felt more comfortable and safer in battle than around Mosby and his men.

Captain George Sanford of the 1st United States Cavalry said, “No party of less than 50 men was safe a mile from camp. The loss of men, animals, and supplies was enormous.” You have to stop and think about that. He said parties of over 50 were necessary to feel safe because of Mosby and his Rangers.

Grant's Orders and Unbiblical Warfare

United States General Ulysses S. Grant had issued orders to his chief operative, General Armstrong Custer. You will remember that name. Grant declared an all-out war on Mosby and his men, as well as civilians, Negroes, animals, and creation. Listen to the order he issued to Custer. He said, “Eat out Virginia clear and clean as far as they go, so that crows flying over it for the balance of the season will have to carry their own provisions with them. Destroy and carry off the crops, animals, Negroes, and all men under 50 years of age capable of bearing arms. In this way you'll get many of Mosby's men.”

Isn't that an amazing order from General U.S. Grant? But that was not all. Secondly, Grant said, “When any of Mosby's men are caught, hang them without trial.” Remember that any soldier captured in uniform was entitled to be treated as a prisoner of war.

General Grant issued an order to General Custer: “You eat them out, you clean them out, you carry off blacks, livestock, kill anything and everything, and any of Mosby’s men you catch, you hang them instantly.” General Custer followed Grant’s orders so closely that he received the nickname Attila the Hun. He cared nothing for the southern soldier, civilians, animals, blacks, or crops. He destroyed anything and everything that was in front of him.

Let me point out something I have mentioned previously. In light of these actions, note how unbiblical the Union was toward the

South. One of the principles of warfare is simply this: you do not harm civilians or innocent people.

Look at 1 Samuel chapter 15 and verse 6. God had told Saul to wipe out the Amalekites. As Saul went to war against the Amalekites, the Kenites were in his way. King Saul said unto the Kenites, “Go, depart, and 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.

God had not told Saul to make war with the Kenites; he was only to make war with the Amalekites. Saul was to get innocent people out of the way so they would not be hurt. General Grant, General Ewing, General Sheridan, General Sherman, and all those men cared little about hurting civilians or innocent people.

Moreover, Grant gave orders to destroy all crops. He said to destroy the crop so completely that if a crow flew over the valley, it would have to carry its own provisions. But look at Deuteronomy chapter 20, verses 19 and 20, and what God says concerning biblical warfare: “When thou shalt besiege a city a long time, and making war against it to take it, thou shalt not destroy the trees thereof by forcing an axe against them. For thou mayst eat of them, and thou shalt not cut them down, for the tree of the field is a man's life, to employ them in the siege. Only the trees which thou knowest that they be not trees for meat, thou shalt destroy and cut them down. Thou shalt build bulwarks against the city that maketh war with thee, until it be subdued.” Now look what God said.

God said that if you are going to use a tree in the siege, you must make sure it is not a tree used for food. No fruit trees. You cannot simply make war against creation. If you are going to cut down a tree, cut down one that is not used for food. The principle is that you do not make war against creation.

You will find that General Grant, General Custer, and all of these men were not only making war against civilians and innocent individuals; they were making war against creation as well, which God forbids.

The Trap and Capture on Black Friday

Custer and his troops were extremely fearful of Mosby and his men. The federal troops were the instigators of the terror in the valley, and it was General Grant who gave the order to root out and destroy everything. General Mosby was injured and taken out of commission for a little while to recover.

General Custer learned about this and decided that he was going to set a trap and catch most of Mosby's Rangers. He sent an ambulance to Front Royal, Virginia, on September 23, 1864, supported by only about two hundred cavalrymen. Think about this for a moment: here was an ambulance with only two hundred men guarding it.

Mosby, of course, was laid up, but one of his captains, Sam Chapman, saw the train. He figured that with his one hundred men and the element of surprise, he could capture the entire ambulance train and probably many of the soldiers. He told Captain Walter Franklin to take forty-five of his men and attack the front of the train, while Chapman took the remainder and attacked the rear. They were to attack simultaneously, throw the Union soldiers into absolute chaos and confusion, and, in the rout, capture the train and the soldiers as well.

The attack commenced. But as Chapman reached the rear of the train, he saw hundreds of bluecoats in the distance and realized that it was a trap. While they were fighting the two hundred they could see, they were unaware of the hundreds they could not see. Chapman began screaming at Captain Franklin to call off his men, retreat, and get out of there.

Franklin had already attacked and was whipping the Union soldiers. When Chapman called for him to cease the attack, Franklin called back, “Why, Sam, we've whipped them.” Chapman hollered back, “It's a trap. You're fighting a brigade and not just two hundred men.”

When Franklin suddenly looked up and saw all the other federal soldiers coming, he began disengaging his men and telling them to retreat and escape as best they could.

In the first few minutes of the fight, Tom Moss, one of Mosby's Rangers, was so intent on fighting that he was emptying his revolvers into the Union cavalry when, all of a sudden, he felt a hand on his shoulder. It was Captain Franklin. He said, “You've got to get out of here or we're going to all die.” Tom Moss looked around and saw that he and the captain were the only two Confederates fighting; the rest had already fled. He turned his horse and began to flee with them.

As they fled, he noticed a number of Mosby's Rangers escaping through a hole in the fence. He also saw that some Rangers had already been captured by Union men and were being guarded. Tom and a few other men reloaded their revolvers and charged the Union soldiers holding the Rangers captive. They emptied their revolvers again, then used them as clubs, beating the soldiers over the head. The Rangers reached out, caught the weapons the Union soldiers had dropped, and began using those weapons to fight the Union soldiers themselves.

Tom Moss caught the reins of a captured horse, threw them to William Thomas Overby, and said, “Get on and get out of here.” By this time, the Bluecoats were swarming them. Overby tried to mount but was recaptured. He and five others could not escape and were captured.

There was a lieutenant among the Union soldiers named Charles McMaster. He had seen the fight and the flight, and knew the path Mosby's Rangers were taking to escape. He led a number of his men around the melee and positioned himself on what he believed was their only way of escape.

Sure enough, Sam Chapman and his men came upon Lieutenant McMaster. Seeing that they were outnumbered and that the way was blocked, Chapman told his men, “Shoot your way through. Get through any way you can.” That is exactly what they did. They literally shot their way through all those Federal soldiers. Before they were finished, more than a dozen Federal soldiers lay dead or dying on the ground.

Execution of Overby and Carter

McMaster stood very bravely but was soon shot from his horse. As he fell, undoubtedly he was shot several more times and trampled by Confederate horses as they escaped. William Thomas Overby and five other Rangers had been captured. Probably it would not have been so bad for them.

Had it not been for Lieutenant McMaster, there might have been no account of what happened. As he lay dying, he told one of his men that he had tried to surrender, and that the Confederates had shot him in cold blood.

Now, stop and think about this. His men were blocking the only way of escape, and Captain Chapman said, "Shoot your way through." It was either them or us, so to speak. Interestingly enough, none of the other Union soldiers tried to surrender. They had Mosby's Rangers outnumbered. Why should they surrender? Only McMaster was said to have tried. In all probability, this was a hypothetical situation. He probably did not try to surrender; or, if he did, it was too late. Everybody was shooting, the horses were trampling over him, and they were gone. It was just that quick.

But here is what happened. Once that story was told to one Union soldier, it was repeated over and over, embellished and enlarged. By the time Overby and the five Rangers got back to the city where they were being taken captive, blood was boiling. Union soldiers were crying for vengeance. Screams, shouts, and death threats were in every mouth. By the time the Confederate soldiers got into Front Royal, a Union regimental band struck up the dead march.

The citizens of Front Royal began running inside, locking their doors and shutting their windows. They knew the scene was not only going to be ugly, but violent, because the Union soldiers were out of control and crying for vengeance. Bloodlust was evident. Two of Mosby's men who had been captured, Lucian Love and David L. Jones, were simply gunned down in a churchyard and left to bleed to death. A third man, Thomas Anderson, was taken to an elm tree and executed by a firing squad.

Remember, there were no trials for these men. They had been captured in uniform, which meant they were prisoners of war. Three

of the five had now been executed, leaving William Thomas Overby and Carter in their grasp. These two rightly assumed that they too would soon be executed without trial. Obviously, they were not going to be treated as prisoners of war, and no rights would be afforded them. They were pushed, shoved, kicked, slapped, and beaten, and finally brought to Petty's wagon yard. Then the murderous intent of the Union soldiers was quelled only because they were trying to extract information from the two men.

What they wanted was this: "Where is Colonel Mosby? Where is the rest of his men? When are you to meet again? We will spare your lives if you will just tell us where Colonel Mosby is." Carter was so overcome with fear and dread because he knew he was going to be killed anyhow. All he could basically do was weep. He knew the other men were going to kill him, and he had just witnessed his compatriots being shot as well.

At this particular time, the regimental band struck up another song. The title of it was "Love Not, The One You Love May Die." Once they began to play that, they played it over and over and over. The Bluecoats kept demanding, "Where is Colonel Mosby?" Overby looked at them and boldly said, "We cannot tell you that."

They then took Overby and Carter to a walnut tree. They threw ropes around the limb and said, "You will either tell us or we'll hang you here." Overby said, "I told you once. I'll tell you again, we cannot tell you that." Again, they made demands for information, and Overby just stood—rather, I should say, stood defiantly. He refused to answer.

One eyewitness, Dr. R.C. Buck, said this: "Overby was standing there with his hat off, his wavy black hair floating in the breeze. I never saw a finer specimen of manhood. He looked like a knight of old." Another eyewitness said, "Well, do I remember the picture? Overby with head erect, defiant, and Carter overcome with weeping."

Years later, still another eyewitness, Mrs. Sally Davis Roy, who was a child in 1864, still remembered the terror. She said, "I remember the dark days of 1864. It is photographed in my memory." Still another eyewitness said of Carter and Overby, "They bore themselves like heroes."

And listen to what Dr. R.C. Buck said about General Custer. Listen carefully; I'm going to bring this up again later. Dr. R.C. Buck said concerning General Custer, “While I was looking at them, General Custer at the head of his division rode by. He was dressed in a splendid suit of silk velvet, his saddle bow bound in silver and gold. He was distinguished looking with his yellow locks resting upon his shoulders.” So note now that General Custer was there and was doing something else just momentarily, which you will find out.

Overby and Carter still refused to divulge the information being demanded of them. They were promised over and over their lives if they would only tell where Colonel Mosby was. They said, “Tell us where Mosby is and live.” Overby simply looked at them with the absolute look of defiance, overcome with anger. They took Overby and Carter, with the ropes around their necks, and threw them on horses.

One last time, they said, “Tell us where Mosby is and live.” Overby, speaking not only defiantly but prophetically, said, “Mosby will hang ten of you for every one of us.” Then they slapped the horses, and there Overby and Carter were hanged. They were still abused, but before Custer’s troops left that day, they placed a placard around their necks which read, “Such is the fate of all of Mosby’s gang.” Thus you have Black Friday, September 23, 1864.

Murder of Henry Rhodes and Mosby's Retaliation

But Black Friday is not quite over just yet, because another Ranger was captured by the name of Henry C. Rhodes. Philip Sheridan, the immediate commander over General Custer, who was under General Grant, had warned Custer about Mosby and especially about how quickly he responded to such things. Sheridan said to Custer, “If the Rebs should ever lay you by the heels, they’ll string you up directly.” Custer watched everything without an ounce of care, concern, or compassion. In fact, he sat on his horse watching the hangings while he munched on a branch of damson plums. Custer was soon to find out exactly what Sheridan meant.

Before that day was over, they took Henry C. Rhodes, a seventeen-year-old schoolboy, and dragged him with a horse through the town square. By the time he reached the square, he was

unconscious; some of his friends hardly recognized him because he had been so mistreated. His own mother recognized him. She ran out, threw her arms around him, and begged for his life. She pleaded that he was her only support, that he was just a child—only seventeen—and asked them to spare her son.

The Union soldiers rudely and crudely tore her arms away from her son, then dragged him farther into the field, where one Union soldier volunteered to dispatch him. Henry C. Rhodes, seventeen, was ordered to stand up. He had just regained consciousness; he was dazed and confused. When he stood, the Union soldier emptied his revolver into him.

There were several eyewitnesses. One said, “Rhodes was dragged in plain sight of his agonized relatives to the open field north of our town, where one man volunteered to do the killing and ordered the helpless day’s prisoner to stand up in front of him while he emptied his pistol into him.” Sue Richardson, another eyewitness, watched in horror. She said, “We could see the crowd assembled around him. Then we had the pain of seeing the stock, cattle, and horses passing around him before his body could be recovered. His poor mother is almost crazy.” Again, Dr. R.C.

Buck said, “I saw this fight, and from a distance I saw the killing of Rhodes, who was a friend and a playmate of mine.” Colonel Mosby received the news of Black Friday. He regretted the loss of his men, but resolved to make things right, and he quickly set about making Overby’s prophecy come true.

On November 6, he had captured seven of General Custer’s cavalry, and thus those seven were executed. Then Colonel Mosby wrote General Sheridan: “Since the murder of my men”—that is, Overby, Carter, Love, Jones, and Rhodes—“not less than 700 prisoners, including many officers of high rank, captured from your army by this command, by most being these men, have been forwarded to Richmond. But the execution of my purpose of retaliation was deferred in order as far as possible to confine its operation to the men of Custer and Powell.”

He had captured over 700 soldiers and officers, but he sent them to Richmond as prisoners of war. He waited until he got Custer’s

men. It was Custer who murdered his men, and when Custer's men came into his sights, he took care of them. Accordingly, on the sixth instance, seven of their men were, by his orders, executed. "Hereafter, any prisoners falling into my hands will be treated with a kindness due to their condition unless some new act of barbarity shall compel me reluctantly to adopt a course of policy repulsive to humanity."

Isn't that amazing? General Sheridan and General Custer understood Mosby's determination, and thus their torture and mistreatment of Confederate prisoners in the valley ceased. Mosby's only reason for responding was what they had done to his men; he would not do that anymore unless they acted cruelly toward his men. Interestingly enough, Sheridan and Custer got the message.

Overby's Legacy and Burial

William Thomas Overby was a soldier who remained steadfast to the end. He demonstrated courage, bravery, and devotion. He refused to save his life at the expense of his friends. Consequently, his valor and courage were recognized, and he was posthumously awarded the Confederate Medal of Honor. The medal is now on display in the Carnegie House, headquarters of the Newton, Coweta County Historical Society. The Georgia soldier was not left in Virginia. After 132 years in a Virginia grave, his body was brought to Oak Hill Cemetery in Noonan, Georgia, and he was given a hero's burial on January 5, 1997.

Applications: Sowing and Reaping, Impact on Others, Readiness for Death

Here are some applications. I hope you have been thinking. Here is a perfect illustration of Galatians 6:7–8: "Be not deceived, God is not mocked. Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. He that soweth of the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption. He that soweth of the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting."

There is another principle in James 2. Everyone knows Galatians 6:7–8, but this verse in James is not as well known. Let us put these truths together. Remember this: all history is God's history. Nothing happens by accident. There is a connecting dot to anything and

everything that happens. James 2:13 says, “For he shall have judgment without mercy, who showed no mercy. And mercy rejoices against judgment.” Look at the first half of that verse. What does God say? If you do not show any mercy, you will get judgment without mercy.

Do you remember what Dr. R.C. Buck testified? He testified that Custer was riding his fancy horse with a silver and gold bow on the saddle horn. He was dressed in that silk velvet uniform, eating a bunch of damson plums and caring nothing for what was going on—caring nothing. Judgment was being executed on Mosby’s men without mercy. Just a few years later, at Little Bighorn, Sitting Bull and the Sioux Nation executed judgment upon Custer and his men without mercy. Custer learned a very valuable lesson too late. Nothing happens by accident.

There is another application. Romans 14:7 says, “For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself.” We have to remember that whatever we do affects other people, and whatever we say affects other people. I am sure those men on September 23, 1864, who were torturing and murdering Confederate soldiers who should have been treated as prisoners of war never imagined that seven of their men would ultimately be executed because of their actions. You don’t reap what you sow, folks; you reap more than you sow. You and I cannot approve of, engage in, or commit acts that are wicked and wrong without it somehow, someway affecting our friends, our family, our church, our state, and even our nation. Biblical illustrations of that could be given over and over.

None of us live to ourselves, and none of us die to ourselves. What we do affects other people.

Let me give you a third application, and I want you to think about this. William Thomas Overby did not wake up September the 23rd, 1864, and say to himself, “Well, this is a good day for hanging. I think I’ll be hanged today.” No, that thought never entered into his mind. He probably never even thought about dying that day.

You know, folks, none of us know what a day may bring forth. Likewise, neither do we know the time, the day, or the hour of our

death. Therefore, God commands us to be ready. No man is ready to live until he is ready to die.

You know what the Bible says in 2 Corinthians 6:2? God says, "For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succored thee. Behold, now is the time. Behold, now is the day of salvation." We are commanded by God to repent of our sins and believe in Jesus Christ as He is fully and freely offered in the Gospel. This day, this hour, is the time to seek Christ.

Overby probably never thought about dying that morning when he woke up. But before the day was over, he was dead. Now is the time to seek Christ. Now is the time to repent. Now is the time to receive Jesus Christ as he's freely and fully offered in the Gospels.

William Thomas Overby was indeed a Confederate hero, and he did indeed receive the Confederate Medal of Honor. But he left us many lessons, from which we should profit not only through his life, but through his death.

Father, we do ask in the name of Jesus Christ that You would help us. May we indeed give honor to whom honor is due, and may we learn from the life and death of William Thomas Overby. Give us grace, Lord, that we may have courage and valor, and give us grace, Lord, that we may live honorably, holily, and godly. May we bring our lives into conformity to Your Word, and may we glorify Thee. In the name of Jesus Christ we ask and pray, Amen.

CHAPTER 3

How to Present Your Body to the Lord

December 16, 2007

Practical Christianity

Introduction: The Question of Practical Christianity

Romans chapter 12, beginning with verse 1 and reading through verse 2, is a passage that all of us should know really and truly by heart: “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” Have you ever wondered what it really means to present your body as a living sacrifice?

Think about that just for a moment. What does that really and truly mean, and how does it apply to you? If you understand that you are responsible to make the Word of God applicable to you, the next question that should come to your mind is, How in the world do I

present my body? When you ask questions like these, you are entering into the realm of what is known as practical Christianity.

Doctrine is absolutely necessary. Doctrine is wonderful and marvelous, but unless it is applied, it is absolutely, totally useless. It does not matter how much truth one knows if he does not apply the truth. Interestingly, when you look at the book of Romans, it is divided basically into two sections: doctrinal and practical. The first eleven chapters are doctrinal. Chapters 12 through 16 are considered the practical applications of the doctrine taught in the first eleven chapters.

Doctrine Precedes Duty

If you understand that chapters 12 through 16 are the application of chapters 1 through 11, then you understand this principle: our duty is always based upon doctrine. You know your duty because you know doctrine. Stop and think about all of the useless, unbiblical activity that goes on today under the guise and name of Christianity. You know what the Apostle Paul refers to that as in 1 Corinthians 3? He calls it wood, hay, and stubble—worthless.

In Romans chapter 10 and verse 2, the Apostle Paul condemns those who have a zeal without knowledge. You can have zeal, but if you do not have knowledge, your zeal is practically worthless; it is misguided and misdirected. There are too many people today who act unbiblically. Usually, when they act unbiblically, they blame their unbiblical and ungodly conduct on the leading of the Spirit. I do not doubt that a spirit led them, but I can assure you it was not the Holy Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit never, ever leads anyone to violate the Word of God.

We must know doctrine so that we are not deceived, and we must know doctrine so that we know our duty. We cannot content ourselves with doctrine alone. In chapters 1 through 11, the Apostle Paul has taught marvelous doctrine: the doctrine of depravity, justification by faith alone, predestination, election, glorification, and the substitutionary work of Jesus Christ.

Now look at verse 1 of chapter 12. In light of that, he says, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you

present your bodies a living sacrifice." What mercies is the Apostle Paul talking about? The answer is those mercies that have been presented in chapters 1 through 11, the mercies just mentioned. In light of this doctrine, says the Apostle Paul, it is your duty to present your body a living sacrifice.

The Apostle uses an unusual word in verse 1: "I beseech." The word is parakaleo in the Greek, and it is used for one of the names of the Holy Spirit. He is called the Paraclete. Para is a preposition meaning "alongside of," and kaleo means "I call." Thus parakaleo means literally, "I call alongside of to help." The Holy Spirit is the Paraclete, the One called alongside to help us.

But in this instance, Paul is not using the word as a reference to the Holy Spirit. He is using it to mean to beseech, exhort, admonish, encourage, and instruct. In light of that, Paul is asking you, beseeching you, to present your bodies a living sacrifice. He is admonishing each of us to apply the doctrine he has taught us. Let me show you very quickly, without going into this in detail right now, how Paul is admonishing each of us to apply that doctrine. In verse 1 of Romans chapter 12, we have the duty of public and private worship by presenting our bodies a living sacrifice. Look in verse 2.

"And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." Thus we have the duty of conforming our minds to Christ by being transformed, rather than conforming our minds to the world. Verse 3 says, "For I say through the grace given unto me to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith." We have the duty of soberly assessing our gifts before God, and not being heady, arrogant, or high-minded.

What do I mean by a sober assessment of gifts? Suppose I announce that I firmly believe God has called me to a ministry of music and that next week I am going to sing for you for a solid hour. How many of you would come? Everybody in this room knows that I cannot sing. I cannot carry a tune in a bucket. Yet I could say that I believe God has given me a ministry of music. Why would I say

something like that? I do not have any of the gifts; I cannot even play a radio very well.

This is what Paul is saying: many have thought that because they wanted or desired a gift, evidently they must have it. That is not true. You have a duty to assess yourself soberly. Look in verse 4. We have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office. We must assess those gifts soberly in light of the fact that we are a body, and not every member has the same gift or the same action. The apostle covers this in 1 Corinthians chapters 12 through 14. What if the whole body were a tongue? Where were the eye? What if the whole body were an eye? Where were the feet? You have to have different members of the body. In chapter 12, verse 5, he says, "So we being many are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another."

He emphasizes that. In verses 6 through 8, we have the duty of exercising whatever gift God gives us according to Scripture: "Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministry; or he that teacheth on teaching; or he that exhorteth on exhortation; or he that giveth, let him

“Do it with simplicity; he that ruleth with diligence; and he that showeth mercy with cheerfulness.” In other words, it does not matter what gift God has given you; you must exercise that gift according to Scripture.

A young man recently asked me about Romans chapter 12, especially verse eight. He told me that he believed he had a gift and ministry of giving. I said, “That’s wonderful. But let me caution you: you must exercise that gift according to the Word of God.” He asked what I meant. I said, “Here’s some bum sitting on the street corner, with red eyes from an all-night drunk, begging for money to eat. Are you going to feed him?” He said, “Probably.”

I said, “Wait a minute. What does the Scripture say?” Second Thessalonians 2 says, “If any will not work, neither should he eat.” Why would I buy him food if he is not going to work, or if he drinks up whatever he works for? In the Old Testament, especially

Deuteronomy 19, God says concerning certain individuals, "Thine eye shall not pity them." There are some people toward whom we are not to be merciful because, in that sense of the word, they do not merit mercy. Even concerning the murderer, God says, "Thine eye shall not pity him, but he shall surely be put to death." You do not feel sorry for a murderer when he is put to death. Whatever gift God gives us, we are to exercise that gift according to Scripture.

Now, I am not interested in looking at all of Romans chapter 12, but I want to call your attention to verse one: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service."

The Duty Stated and Implied

Although Paul is beseeching us, the word present has great implications. First, it implies that we are the Lord's and belong to Him. This epistle is addressed to believers, to those regenerated and converted by the grace of God. We are the ones who have experienced His electing, predestinating grace; we are the ones justified by faith and converted. Therefore, we have the obligation to serve Him.

Secondly, there is the implication that we know our duty, but sometimes are reticent to do it. Paul said, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God." If people were not reticent to present their bodies a living sacrifice, why would Paul have to beg, beseech, and exhort us to do it? Some people do not understand their duty because they do not understand doctrine.

There are some who will not present their bodies because they are simply unappreciative of what God has done for them. There is also the lure of conformity to the world. God says, No, no, I beseech you that you present your body.

Third, there is the implication that God demands that we be holy and consecrated before offering our bodies to Him. Turn to Malachi chapter 1, and look at verse 13. He is condemning these wicked people: "Behold, you said also, behold, what a weariness is it that is serving God? And you have snuffed it, saith the Lord of hosts. And

you brought that which was torn, and the lame, and the sick. Thus you brought an offering. Now look what God asks. Should I accept this of your hands, saith the Lord? But cursed be the deceiver, which hath in his flock a male, and voweth, and sacrificeth unto the Lord a corrupt thing. For I am a great king, saith the Lord of hosts, and my name is dreadful among the heathen." God said, "I'm a great king. I'm a holy, righteous, godly king."

Why in the world would you bring me something that is unholy, something that is unworthy of me? Therefore, there is the implication that we are going to present our bodies unto Him, and that we should be holy as we do so.

Let me give you what John Calvin says on Romans 12 and verse 1. He says, first, that our body ought to be offered a sacrifice unto God, by which he implies we are not our own, but have entirely passed over so as to become the property of God, which cannot be except we renounce ourselves and thus deny ourselves. Then, secondly, by adding two adjectives, he shows what sort of sacrifice this ought to be.

By calling it living, he intimates that we are sacrificed to the Lord for this end: that our former life being destroyed in us, we may be raised up to a new life. By the term holy, he points out that which necessarily belongs to a sacrifice already noticed, for a victim is then only approved when it has been previously made holy. By the third word, acceptable, he reminds us that our life is framed aright when this sacrifice is so made as to be pleasing to God. He brings to us at the same time no common consolation, for he teaches us that our work is pleasing and acceptable unto God when we devote ourselves to purity and holiness.

So the third implication is that God demands that we be holy. The fourth implication is that the presenting of our bodies is not an unreasonable service. You know, I have often heard people, especially older children, talk to their parents and argue with them when their parents refuse them permission to do something. They say, "Oh, come on, Dad, be reasonable." Do you realize the word reasonable here is really the word logical? The Apostle Paul says, Look, if you understand the mercies of God, if you understand what

God has done for you, then this is your logical service. It is only reasonable that you serve Him.

He gave all that he had for you. So it is logical now that you give all that you have for Him.

The fifth implication is that the presenting of our bodies declares our recognition that we owe the Lord service and worship. We owe Him. In 1 Corinthians 6:19, Paul asks, "What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which you have of God, and you are not your own? For you are bought with a price. Therefore, glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's." Notice what he says: you are not your own. You are bought with a price. Who owns us? God does—body, soul, and spirit.

In 1 Corinthians 7:23, Paul says, "You're bought with a price. Be not ye the servants of men." We are not to serve men; we are to serve Christ.

A Living Sacrifice: Dead to Sin, Alive to God

Now think about Romans 12:1: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice." A living sacrifice. When you hear those two words, living sacrifice, it seems as if they contradict each other. Normally they would, because when you read in the Old Testament about all those sacrifices, what happened to them? They were put to death. When you come to the New Testament, the sacrifices also were put to death.

Now consider what Peter says concerning Christ in 1 Peter 1:18-19: "Forasmuch as you know, you were not redeemed with corruptible things of silver and gold from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." You were redeemed not with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation or conduct received by tradition, but with the precious blood of Christ. That is what redeemed you.

The Duty Stated and Illustrated

The point I am trying to make is this: Jesus Christ gave Himself in death that we might live unto God. He died that we need not die. He died to give us life. Since He has bought us, we owe Him everything we are. We belong to Him. He does not demand our death now. Rather, what He demands is our life—a living sacrifice. Instead of putting us to death, He wants us to live unto Him. Christ died that we might live, so the implication is that we now owe Him to be a living sacrifice.

This is the duty stated and illustrated. I still want to answer this question: What does it mean to present your body? The Apostle Paul said, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your body." How in the world do you present your body? What does that mean?

The word present is from the Greek word parahistemi. Para is a preposition which means alongside of. Histemi is a verb which means to stand. So parahistemi literally means to stand along the side. When you present your body, it means to place oneself at the disposal of another: to stand beside, to stand near, to stand present, to stand ready, or to yield oneself.

Let me explain this in several ways. First of all, the simple way. Look back in your Bibles to Psalm 103, and notice verse 20. The word present means to stand alongside of, to stand ready, and to stand to yield. I do not see how anyone could read that verse in Romans 12 and not think of this verse. Speaking about the angels, the Bible says, "Bless the Lord, ye His angels, that excel in strength, that do His commandments, hearkening unto the voice of His word."

Picture God seated upon His throne, with all of His angels, these created beings, standing there and presenting themselves, ready and willing at any moment to obey God. They hearken to His word. He sends them, and they obey.

This is only an illustration, and an imperfect illustration, because angels do not have bodies. Hebrews 1:14 says, "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be the heirs of salvation?"

Now, it is true that whenever an angel has been manifested in the Bible, he was always manifested in the form of a man. So excuse me for violating your tradition at this time of year, but little babies do not become angels when they die. There are no women angels in the Bible. Let me burst another traditional thought: angels do not have wings. God is spirit. Does God have wings? Of course not. God does not need wings. He is spirit. Angels are spirit beings; they do not need wings.

Let me tell you something else. Let me tell you another reason why I know that angels do not have wings. I can quote the verse, but I want you to see it. This may shock you, but here it is. Look in your Bibles to the book of Hebrews, chapter 13, verse 2. Watch this now. This will challenge the normal concept of angels. Usually, when we think of an angel, we think of someone in a long, flowing white garment, with big wings sticking out, a halo about his head, and all this kind of thing. But look what the Bible says: "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares."

What does that mean? If somebody knocks on my door and I open it, and there stands somebody in a long, flowing white garment, with wings sticking out of his back and a halo around his head, he ain't getting in my house. I do not know him. Every time an angel appeared in the Bible, he appeared as a man. It is just that simple. You could not tell him from anyone else.

The angels stand before God, hearkening unto His voice. As they present their bodies, there are no timeouts, no neutral territory, and no lazy days. They are always ready, yielding themselves eagerly to obey Him. They are incessantly waiting upon the Lord, wanting to do His bidding and serve Him.

When God says, "Present your bodies unto the Lord," there is a strong illustration and implication that we say, "Lord, here am I, use me." But understand this: when we say, "Here am I, Lord, please use me," it is not simply that we check in every now and then and offer our bodies for service. If we really present our bodies, it is a constant and continual service.

How do we constantly and continually present our bodies a living sacrifice? Turn to Romans chapter 6. I want you to follow the truth. I am trying to show you what it means to present your body a living sacrifice constantly. Romans 6:11 says, "Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin, but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you, for ye are not under the law, but under grace."

"What then? Shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid. Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness." Presenting the body means yielding ourselves to God as those alive from the dead and refusing sin's dominion. We become servants of the one whom we obey.

He says, "Likewise, reckon ye yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin." Let me tell you what the word dead means. The word dead means dead. The Greek word is necros; it is where we get our word necrotic, necrophiliac. It means dead. Likewise, reckon ye yourselves dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God—zoe is the Greek word. The word zoe literally means full of vigor and power, efficacious. It means to have a vital power extended unto the soul. You reckon yourself dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God. Now what in the world happens when you present your body a living sacrifice, reckoning yourself dead indeed unto sin? Why?

Because Christ has already died for us. He has commanded that we be a living sacrifice. Look in verse 12 of Romans 6: "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof." God did not say, Let not sin be in your body. Sin is there. He said, Let not sin therefore reign in your body. The kingship

of sin has been destroyed by King Jesus. Sin may tempt us, entice us, and seduce us, but it does not and cannot reign over us.

Illustrations of Presenting the Body

It does not have the right to command us. When sin raises its ugly head in my body and says, You go do so and so, I say, Not me. You are not my master. I belong to another.

Have you ever read that passage in Pilgrim's Progress where Pilgrim meets Apollyon? Apollyon, the devil, asks him, "What country are you from?" Pilgrim tells him. "By that I perceive that you're one of my subjects." Pilgrim answers, "Well, I used to be, but I've lent myself out to another, to one King Jesus." Apollyon replies that he understands, that many who profess to be his subjects often give him the slip and come back to him, and promises Pilgrim all that his country affords if he will return. Pilgrim says, "How can I do that without being considered a traitor? I cannot and I will not go back."

Apollyon says, "Well, you betrayed me, and I'm ready to forgive you." "No," says Pilgrim, "I shall not go back. Jesus Christ is my King, and I bow to Him." So we are free from the kingship of sin.

What does it mean to present your body a living sacrifice? What does it mean to count yourself dead indeed unto sin? "Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin, but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God."

I have one body, but many members: my eyes, my ears, my hands, my feet, and my heart. To present your body a living sacrifice means doing so constantly and continually, by reckoning yourself dead indeed unto sin and alive unto God.

Paul gives an illustration: "For as, here's an illustration, for as you have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity, that's before you were converted, even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness." Before you were saved, before you were converted, you served sin willingly, readily, quickly, lovingly, and with wholehearted service. You used

your hands, your feet, your eyes—everything—to satisfy the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life.

Now God says that, as you gave your whole body to serving sin, now that you have been converted, you give your whole body to serving righteousness. With everything that you have, you present your body as one that is alive from the dead. In other words, you are alive in Christ, and you are dead to sin.

This is still Paul's argument. He has given us illustrations of what it means to present our body a living sacrifice by reckoning ourselves dead indeed unto sin and alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. In 1 Corinthians 6, beginning with verse 13, he writes, “Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats. But God shall destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.”

Whoa, stop right there. Why did God make your body? It was not for fornication. It was not for impurity. It was not for wickedness. He made your body for Himself.

Paul continues: “And God hath both raised up the Lord and will also raise up us by his own power. Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them the members of a harlot? God forbid. What? Know ye not that he who is joined to a harlot is one body? For two, saith he, shall be one flesh. But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit. Now look, flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body. But he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body.”

Now let me ask you a question. I want you to think about this. In the context of verses 13 through 20, Paul is talking about fornication, sexual impurity, unclean living, and unclean thoughts. Yet right smack dab in the middle of it, he mentions the resurrection. After he says, “Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body,” he says, “And God hath both raised up the Lord and will also raise up us by his own power.” Then he goes back to talking about fornication again.

Why in the world would the Apostle Paul mention the resurrection right smack dab in the middle of a discussion on fornication? The answer is this: He is teaching us how to present our

body a living sacrifice. He is teaching us what it means to reckon ourselves dead indeed unto sin and alive unto God.

Consider what John Calvin said about this verse, especially 1 Corinthians 6:14. He writes that Paul shows, from Christ's condition, how unseemly fornication is for a Christian man. Christ having been received up in heavenly glory, what has He in common with the pollutions of the world?

Calvin identifies two things in these words. First, it is unseemly and unlawful that our body, which is consecrated to Christ, should be profaned by fornication, since Christ Himself was raised from the dead that He might enter into possession of His heavenly glory. Second, it is a base thing to prostitute our body to earthly pollutions while it is destined to be a partaker, along with Christ, of a blessed immortality and heavenly glory. Christ was raised from the dead, and death has no more dominion over Him. How inconsistent, then, for a professing Christian to engage in such pollution! Why? First, our bodies are not our own. But secondly, our bodies are destined to be with Christ. We are part of His body.

Paul gives us, in 1 Corinthians 6 and Romans 6, a real-life illustration of what it means to present our body a living sacrifice. He shows us what it means not to be conformed to this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. I was once walking downtown with Pastor McCurry; this actually happened while he wanted to show me one of the parks in Atlanta. We parked our car, stepped out, and had not been out of the car thirty seconds when two ladies of the evening, though it was daylight, approached us and offered their services. We smiled and said, "No, thank you. We're not only Christians; we're pastors." He then went on down the road.

It is not always that simple. You are not always with someone else who will sustain, support, and help you. But this is what it means to present your body a living sacrifice. Whether we are talking about fornication, lust, covetousness, hatred, ill will, or any sin you can imagine—any sin in your life or any sin with which you are tempted—when temptation comes, you say, "No. I have died to sin in Christ. I reckon myself dead indeed unto sin."

I will not do that. I will not have that. I will not entertain that thought or think of that. Instead, I am presenting my body, a living sacrifice unto God. He has saved me. He has raised me from the dead. I am His. I will obey His commandments and not the lust of my flesh and the lust of my eyes and the pride of life and the temptations of the devil.

No matter how appetizing the temptation is, you say, No, I will not do it. What are you doing in that instance? You are presenting your body a living sacrifice. You are sacrificing the sins and the pleasures of this world and of the flesh, that you might be holy unto the Lord.

A number of years ago I preached a series of eight messages from this passage on sanctification and sexual impurity. I am certainly not going to repeat those messages, but I do want to show you what the Apostle Paul is talking about. In 1 Thessalonians 4, beginning at verse 3, God says, "For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that you should abstain from fornication, that every one of you should know how to possess his vessel, that is, his body, in sanctification and honor, not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles who know not God."

"For this is the will of God, even your sanctification." In other words, He wants you to be holy. He wants you to be godly. One of the ways that you are holy and godly is that you abstain from fornication. When the temptation is there, you say, No, I will not do that. I will obey God and not sin. I will obey his word and not the lust of my flesh.

Then he says that every one of you should know how to possess his vessel, his body, in sanctification and honor. You do not do it the way the Gentiles do it, that is, the unsaved, in the lust of their concupiscence. And then he says in verse 6, "That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter," he is talking about fornication still, "because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified."

Look at this conclusion: “For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness.” This is the will of God, even your sanctification: that you abstain from fornication, sexual impurity,

sexual lust, whatever. You abstain from all of that. He wants you to know how to possess your vessel in sanctification and honor.

This would be true in any circumstance, in any situation. He says that you must not defraud a brother in the matter. What does that mean? If I tried to hit on Janet and succeeded in doing so, I have defrauded Henry and Alice. In other words, it is sin, wickedness, and vileness. You are taking something from another that does not belong to you. “The Lord is the avenger of such, as we have forewarned you and testified.” If you act wickedly, you are going to be judged.

Here is why we should know how to possess our vessels in sanctification and honor: “For God hath called us not unto uncleanness, but unto holiness.” “He that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given us his Holy Spirit.” When we do not know how to possess our vessel in sanctification and honor, when we are not holy, and when we give in to sin and wickedness, we are despising God and His Word.

What does it mean to present your body a living sacrifice? It means that whatever area you are tempted in, when that temptation comes, you say, “No. I will not do that because God has said.” Then you quote the Scripture, and by God’s grace choose to obey Him. You are presenting your body a living sacrifice.

The Whole Man: Spirit, Soul, and Body

How important are our bodies? Think about that for a moment. You know these bodies are going to return to dust, but how important are our bodies? Let me remind you of something and show you two errors. The first error is thinking that having your body in the right place at the right time is worshiping God.

What do I mean by that? Do you remember that passage in John 4 where the Bible says in verse 24, "God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." Just because you came into this building, sat down, and have been present here for an hour, does that really mean that you worship God? No. It means your body was in the right place at the right time, but it does not necessarily follow that you worshiped God. He that worshipeth

God must worship him in spirit and in truth. You must not only worship him in the Holy Spirit, but in your spirit. Your spirit must give and glorify God.

There are so many today who will go into a church building, sit and listen to a sermonette, sing a few songs, put a couple of quarters in the offering, and go out thinking they have worshiped God. They have not worshiped God. If we worship God, it is not just that our bodies must be in the right place. We must worship Him in our minds, with our spirit. We must love Him. We must give Him the honor and the glory due unto His name.

Let me remind you of Isaiah 29:13. Our Lord quotes this passage in Matthew 15 and Mark 7: "Wherefore the Lord saith, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men." Notice what God says. These people honor me with their mouths and lips, but their hearts are far from me. Is it sufficient to come into a building, listen to a sermonette, and go your way? The answer is no. Your heart, your spirit, and your mind must be engaged.

Now, let me give you the other side of the coin. Consider people who say, "I've just been praising the Lord all day long. I go to church and worship and sing and praise, and my mind is engaged on Him." But then they walk out of the doors and never even think of the Lord or His Word until the following Sunday.

How important is your body? In Romans 1:9, Paul says, “For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers.” Was Paul serving God spiritually? Yes. Was his spirit worshiping and obeying God? Yes.

But was it just Paul’s spirit running all over the Roman Empire preaching and teaching? Was it? No. It was Paul’s body. The spirit motivated him, but it was the body that took him where he needed to be to preach and teach. In other words, these two things must go together. We must worship God in our spirit, but we must still present our bodies, for our bodies carry us, contain our spirit, and

exemplify whether we are truly reckoning ourselves dead indeed unto sin and alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

John Gill said of Romans 12:1, "that you present your bodies, not barely that part of them commonly so called, for this is not to be understood of a mere presentation of the body in public worship, for though this ought to be, yet not without the heart engaged therein, otherwise bodily exercise will be of no avail, nor of a bare abstinence from grosser sins done in the body and against it, and which defile and dishonor it, much less a maceration and keeping under the body by watchings, fastings, and still less an offering of the body at death in a way of martyrdom, though this ought to be cheerfully complied with when called for, but by their bodies are meant themselves, their whole souls and bodies, all the powers and faculties of their souls and members of their bodies, and the presenting of them designs a devoting of them with all readiness and willingness to the service of God for his honor and glory."

When you present your body a living sacrifice, it is the whole man: the whole body, everything that you are—spirit, soul, and body.

There is a negative aspect of presenting your body a living sacrifice. When you are tempted with sin in any way, you reckon yourself dead indeed unto sin and alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The Positive Aspect: Adding Godly Attributes

But there is a positive side as well. If you are presenting your body to the Lord, you are not simply abstaining from sin; you are adding biblical attributes and characteristics to your life. Romans 12, beginning at verse 9, deals with this: "Let love be without dissimulation," or hypocrisy. "Abhor that which is evil. Cleave to that which is good."

If you are presenting your body a living sacrifice, you are loving biblically, abhorring that which is evil, and cleaving to that which is good. "Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love, in honour preferring one another." You are not only abstaining from sin and gross wickedness; you are also learning to be kindly

affectioned one to another, in honour preferring one another. Watch verse 11.

"Not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." If I am presenting my body a living sacrifice, whatever I do, whether I am weeding a garden, digging a ditch, or doing anything else, I am doing it faithfully as unto the Lord. I am not slothful in business; I am fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. Romans 12:12 says, "Rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing instant in prayer." Verse 13 adds, "Distributing to the necessity of saints, given to hospitality."

You can read the rest of this chapter and see that it tells you what you are to be doing positively if you are presenting your body a living sacrifice. It is not merely the negative aspect. On the one hand, we know that we are presenting our bodies if we are abstaining from sin. On the other hand, we know that we are presenting our bodies if we are adding those attributes and characteristics that God demands.

Conclusion: Renewing the Mind

Now, go back to Romans 12:1-2: "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, logical service. And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." Only those who renew their minds will present their bodies a living sacrifice. If your mind is not renewed, you will be conformed to the world. Paul is telling you not only to abstain from sin, but also to add positively those attributes and characteristics demanded in Scripture. Renew your mind and present your body.

The reason there is so little real, genuine, biblical presentation of our bodies in Christianity today is that very few renew their minds daily, constantly, and continually. Your responsibility as a child of God is to present your body, the totality of it, and to live for Him, since He died for you. He does not call us to die except to sin and self. We live unto Him by obeying His Word.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we ask for your blessing and your help and your grace. Would you pray, Father, for these that

have been mentioned specifically on the prayer list today? I think of Sandra Crider and her needs, Lord, and for Jane Shifford, for Kathy Chandler, Mrs. Rhodes, Lord, Penny, others who have been named. Lord, we pray and ask that you would speak to their hearts. I pray for my own self and my own needs, Lord, physically, that you would help me. Help us, Lord, as Christians, to learn to present our bodies a living sacrifice. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

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CHAPTER 4

Christian Protocol

April 8, 2018

Introduction and Reading of Romans 15:1-7

Romans 15:1–7 says, “We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification. For even Christ pleased not himself, but as it is written, the reproaches of them that reproach thee fell on me. For whatsoever things were written before time were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope. Now the God of patience and consolation grants you to be like-minded one toward another according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherefore, receive you one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God.” Verse 8 adds, “Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers.”

The Meaning of 'Receive' (Proslambano)

Verse 7 says, “Wherefore, receive you one another as Christ also received us to the glory of God.” We are commanded in verse 7 to receive one another even as Christ received us for the glory of God. This command is given according to Christ Jesus, so that we may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The word “received” is actually the Greek word proslambano. Pros is a preposition which means “to” or “toward,” and lambano means “to receive” or “to take.” Thus, the word “receive” means to receive into one’s heart, to receive into one’s home, to receive into one’s self, to receive into friendship, and literally, to receive with open arms.

Moreover, the word “receive” is in the imperative mode, which means it is a command. We have therefore been commanded to receive one another as Christ also received us to the glory of God. We are to receive one another in this manner: not merely outwardly, but into one’s heart, home, self, and friendship, with open arms. This receiving is to be reciprocal and also mutual.

Doctrine and Application in Romans

In the context of Romans chapter 15, the Apostle Paul is dealing with a practical application from his previous doctrinal teaching. Our duty is always based upon doctrine. What Paul makes in this passage is an application based on the doctrine he has taught previously. You can look at the book of Romans like this: Romans 1–11 is doctrinal. When you get to Romans chapter 12 through chapter 16, it is practical. In other words, it is an application of everything that the Apostle has taught in the first eleven chapters. When you look at Romans chapter 15, verses 1 through 7—in fact, really and truly, the entire chapter—you cannot help but notice that there is a protocol here demanded and commanded.

Definition of Protocol

If you look up the word “protocol” in an average dictionary, even an online dictionary, you would find this definition: the official procedure, or system of rules, governing affairs of state or diplomatic occasions, and the accepted or established code of

procedure or behavior in any group, organization, or situation. When you hear the word “protocol,” it not only has a governmental application, but it also has a very practical application, because it is the accepted or established code of procedure or behavior in any group, organization, or situation.

The online dictionary went on to say that the word “protocol” is taken from the late Middle English, denoting “the original record of an agreement forming the legal authority for future dealings relating to it.” When you stop and think about that, how accurate it really is, because the Scriptures are our original record of agreement, forming the legal authority for all future dealings relating to it. The Scriptures tell us how to live and how not to live. The Scriptures tell us how to treat each other. There is a Christian protocol, and the Apostle Paul in Romans chapter 15 is demanding that we observe it and practice it, since it has legally binding authority upon all Christians.

The Bible basically is our treaty. We were rebels against God, but through the Lord Jesus Christ, peace was made with God the Father. That is why the Bible says in Romans 5 and verse 1, “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” The Bible, then, is our treaty in the sense that God now tells us, as surrendered rebels, how we are to live and how we are not to live.

He teaches us how to worship Him, how to relate to Him, and how to relate to our brethren as well. So it deals basically with the proper relationships, not only with God, but with each other as well. In Romans 15:7, the Apostle Paul says, “Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God.”

Receiving is something that we do not normally consider. We understand what a receiving line is at a wedding, a funeral, or on special occasions, such as when someone has a retirement party and everybody comes by to shake his hand and wish him well. But we have never really considered what it means to receive each other.

Obligation (Verse 1)

Before explaining verse 7, I want to work my way down, beginning with verse 1 and going all the way through verse 6 until we reach

verse 7. In verse 1, the Apostle Paul says, “We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak and not to please ourselves.” Verse 1 speaks of obligation. “We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak and not to please ourselves.” In Romans chapter 15, Paul is continuing his argument from chapter 14. The apostle is pursuing his exhortation to mutual affection and forbearance, notwithstanding their different sentiments.

The strong are the brethren who know doctrine, understand truth, and understand practical application. The weak, according to Romans chapter 14 and also Romans chapter 15, are those who still hold scruples, are not clear on certain issues, and do not possess the understanding of the strong. There is a difference in the Bible between the strong and the weak. Thus, in verse 1, the strong are obligated to bear the weaknesses of the weak.

In this obligation, undoubtedly, there are times when it goes against the flesh. But the Scripture tells us that we are not to please ourselves; we are to obey God. When Paul says, “We that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak and not to please ourselves,” the word “receive” in verse 7 is the same exact word as in chapter 14, verse 1: “Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations.” Look at it. It is exactly the same word: proslambano.

It is also in the imperative mode. What we have, then, are two direct commands from God: we are to receive even the weak in the faith, but not to doubtful disputations; and, in Romans 15:7, we are to receive one another even as Christ received us, to the glory of God. It does not matter if someone does not have perfect understanding, or if he holds scruples that we do not hold and that we see as childish and immature. He tells us that we are to receive one another. Verse 1, therefore, is nothing but pure obligation.

Edification (Verse 2)

“We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak and not to please ourselves.” The word “please” will be considered further, but notice verse 2. Verse 1 speaks of obligation; verse 2 speaks of edification: “Let every one of us please his neighbour for

his good to edification." The word "please" obviously does not mean to cater to everyone's whim and demand. If someone came to your house asking for one thing after another, and you did not have it, it would be ridiculous to say that you were supposed to please him. The word does not mean to cater to everyone's whim and demand. "Please" is the Greek word aresko, which means to strive to please, or, further, to accommodate oneself to the opinions, desires, and interests of others.

Romans 14:1 clarifies this: "Him that is weak in the faith receive you," but not to doubtful disputations. In other words, you are not to get into arguments or knockdown drag-outs. You are not to ridicule, dispute with, or argue with a weaker brother. You may disagree with him; you may think he is childish or immature; but you are certainly not to engage him in a knockdown drag-out. Rather, "Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification."

The word "neighbor" here is the word plesion in the Greek. It signifies a neighbor, a friend, or anyone with whom we are concerned. Our accommodation is not compromise; it is to be for his good. Look at verse two again: "Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good." The word "good" is agathos, and it is used in many ways in the Bible. In this context, it clearly means for his benefit, blessing, advantage, and favor. Thus, the verse means, "Let every one of us please his neighbor for his advantage, his blessing, and his favor."

This is clarified by the latter phrase, "to edification." To edify means to build up and strengthen. If you are pleasing your neighbor for good, to his edification, you are not arguing with him, fussing with him, or dividing with him. You are trying to promote his Christian growth in wisdom, piety, happiness, and holiness. In other words, you are doing everything you can to help him and nothing to hurt him. You have an obligation in verse one, and edification in verse two. The goal of fulfilling our obligation is to edify each other.

Participation in Christ's Example (Verse 3)

In verse three of Romans 15, we have an illustration that should lead us to participation. We have obligation, edification, and now participation. "For even Christ pleased not himself, but as it is

written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me." The word "pleased" in verse three, "for even Christ pleased not himself," is exactly the same word found in verses one and two. Christ pleased not himself; He accepted the Father's will.

Remember the prayer He prayed in the garden in Matthew 26:42: "O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done." Christ did not please Himself.

When Romans 15:3 says, "as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me," it is taken from Psalm 69:9. The Word of God says, "For the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up; and the reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me."

Before I explain that, consider Albert Barnes's comments on verse 3, where he points out five things concerning how Christ did not please Himself. First, Christ came to do the will, or desire, of God in undertaking the work of salvation. It was God's will, agreeable to the divine purposes; and the Mediator, the Lord Jesus, did not consult His own happiness and honor in heaven, but cheerfully came to do God's will.

Barnes gives numerous Scriptures: Psalm 40:7–8, Hebrews 10:4–10, and Philippians 2:6. Consider also verse 5: "Let this mind be in you which also is in Christ Jesus, who thought it not proper to be with God that made himself of no reputation," and then Barnes continues further down. John 17 verse 5 likewise confirms this truth. Christ undertook to do the will of God, without even consulting Himself. He did not consult His own happiness or honor.

Christ made it His great object on earth to do the will of God, to finish the work which God had given Him to do, and not to seek His own comfort and enjoyment. He expressly affirmed this in John 6:38 and John 5:30: "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me." Thus, He was not seeking to please Himself.

He was willing to endure whatever trials and pains the will of God might demand, neither seeking to avoid them nor shrinking from them. Our Lord never drew back; He never flinched at obeying the will of God. In His life, He did not seek personal comfort, wealth, friends, or honors. He denied Himself to promote the welfare of others. He was poor that they might be rich. He was in lonely places

that He might seek out the needy and provide for them. He did not seek to preserve His own life. When the appointed time came to die, He gave Himself up freely.

There may be another idea which the Apostle had here. Jesus Christ bore with patience the ignorance, blindness, erroneous views, and ambitious projects of His disciples. He showed kindness to them when they were in error and was not harsh, censorious, or unkind when they were filled with vain projects of ambition, perverted His words, or were dull of apprehension. So, says the Apostle, we ought to do in relationship to our brethren.

When we stop and think about Christ not pleasing Himself in all of these ways, and probably in a multitude of more ways, it is evidence that Christ did not please Himself. What He was concerned with was the will of God. “The reproaches of them that reproach thee fell on me.” Reproaches speak of calumnies, censures, harsh, inappropriate speeches, hateful words, deeds, and actions exhibited toward the Father. All of these fell upon Jesus Christ. Those who vilified God and hated His government exacted their hatred and malice upon Jesus Christ.

That is why the Bible said He was delivered into their will. They did unto Jesus Christ as they pleased. They ridiculed Him, mocked Him, hated Him, despised Him, and crucified Him. Why? Because He is God incarnate, the God-Man, God in the flesh. All of their hatred toward the one true, living God, whom they could not see or touch, fell upon the Lord Jesus Christ, who was in their presence and with whom they could get their hands upon.

When people hate God, they cannot strike out at Him; they strike out at His people, or at someone whose image is in them of God. That is why murder is so hateful and onerous. It is not simply an attack upon man; it is an attack upon the image of God. Obviously, Jesus Christ did not please Himself. He bore all these reproaches, and they all fell upon Him.

Hebrews 12 says, “Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily beset us. Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of

our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds."

Jesus Christ endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. In the illustration that we have in Romans 15 in verse 3, there is a call to participation. First Peter chapter 2 in verse 21 says, "For even hereunto were ye called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow in his steps." So here is participation in verse 3. Christ pleased not himself, but the reproaches that fell upon God the Father fell upon the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you look back in verse 3, he says, "For even Christ pleased not himself, but"—look at this little phrase—"as it is written." That one little phrase should lead us to confirmation, in the sense that we know that the word of God is true. That which was written in the Old Testament is confirmed in the New Testament. Nothing has changed because God and his word are immutable. He says, "as it is written," and the quote comes from Psalm 69 and verse nine.

Inspiration of Scripture (Verse 4)

In verse 1, you have obligation. In verse 2, you have edification. In verse 3, you have participation. When you get to verse 4, you now have inspiration. "For whatsoever things were written aforetime"—that is, the Old Testament—"were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope."

"For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." Everything that was written in the Old Testament was written for us. When you try to denigrate, deny, or destroy the Old Testament, you are trying to destroy the Bible, because we do not have two Bibles; we have one Bible.

The Apostle Paul takes what happened to Israel in the Old Testament and applies it to the Corinthian church in the New Testament. He says in verse 1, "Moreover, brethren, I would not that

you should be ignorant, how that all of our fathers were under the cloud and all passed through the sea and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea."

"And did all eat that same spiritual meat, and did all drink the same spiritual drink, for they drank of that spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ. But with many of them God was not well pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness."

Paul says in verse 6, "Now these things were our examples to the intent we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them. As it is written, the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of the serpents. Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer." Then verse 11 says, "Now all these things happened to them for examples, and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore, let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

In verses 6 and 11, the Apostle Paul is saying that everything that happened to Israel in the Old Testament happened for our understanding. It applies to us. They were our examples of what we should not be doing. Whatever you find in the Old Testament does indeed have an application to us today, especially that which happened to Israel.

We are told specifically in 2 Timothy 3, verses 16 and 17, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished in every good work." All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable. There is nothing unprofitable in the Bible.

Many times we do not like to read the genealogies because we cannot pronounce many of the names. We see one father after another and wonder how we can pronounce them. But all those names are significant. Names meant something in the Bible. They may not mean much today, but they meant something in the Bible.

I have often thought, laughingly, that I would hate to get to heaven and have some saint walk up to me and say, "Well, don't you know me?" I would answer, "No." He might say, "Well, my name's written in the Bible. Did you ever read my name?" And I would say, "Well, I couldn't pronounce your name." He would reply, "Well, that's immaterial. We can read."

Everything is for our benefit. In Romans 15, verse 1, you have obligation; in verse 2, edification; in verse 3, participation; and in verse 4, inspiration.

Supplication for Like-Mindedness (Verses 5-6)

In verses 5 and 6, Paul makes a prayer request: “Now the God of patience and consolation grant you or give to you to be like-minded one toward another according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” He prays specifically that the God of patience and consolation would give us the gift of being like-minded.

Put this in the context of Romans 15:1: “We that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak and not to please ourselves.” God dealt with each of us patiently and lovingly and brought us into His truth slowly, surely, and steadily. We did not come into Christianity full-grown, with complete and total understanding. We were not scholars. God was very patient with us, teaching us, revealing His truth through His Word, and illuminating our minds that we might understand it.

Albert Barnes said, “The God who is himself long-suffering, who bears patiently with the errors and faults of his children, who can give patience, may he give you of his spirit that you may bear patiently the infirmities and errors of each other. The example of God here who bears long with his children, and is not angry soon at their offenses, is a strong argument why Christians should bear with each other.”

If God bears long and patiently with our infirmities, we ought to bear with each other. In the immediate context, to be like-minded means that we think the same way regarding our obligation to edification in verses 1 and 2. It means that we take the time, are

patient, and study until we arrive at the same mind. Having the same mind cannot be forced, demanded, or coerced. Truth cannot be force-fed.

When verse 5 says, “Now, the God of patience and consolation grants you to be like-minded one toward another, according to Christ Jesus,” the phrase “according to Christ Jesus” refers to His example and His spirit. Our Lord was patient with us; therefore, we should be patient with each other.

An interesting observation concerns the Greek word for “like-minded”: homothumadon. This unusual word is translated “with one accord” eleven times and “one mind” once. It may also be understood as having one passion. One author says that this unique Greek word, used in ten of its twelve New Testament occurrences in Acts, helps us understand the uniqueness of the Christian community.

Homothumadon is a compound of two words meaning to rush along and in unison. The image is almost musical. A number of notes are sounded which, while different, harmonize in pitch and tone. As the instruments of a great concert are directed by a concertmaster, so the Holy Spirit blends together the lives of the members of Christ’s Church. If this great concert is taking place even in our disagreements, imagine what it will be like when we are truly all like-minded.

The Scriptures demand unity, not uniformity or conformity. Because we are different, we are one body with different members; the body does not have all the same members. We are all totally different. Yet over and over the Bible commands us to be of the same mind. In Romans 12:16, Paul says, “Be of the same mind one toward another,” and then, “Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate.”

"Be not wise in your own conceits." If you want to be like-minded, you cannot be tyrannical or demanding. You cannot say, "I'm the one who possesses all understanding and all truth." He said, "Do not be wise in your own conceits." In 1 Corinthians 1:10, the Apostle Paul wrote, "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no

divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." The only way we can be in the same mind and the same judgment is to study the Scriptures and ask the Holy Spirit of God to teach us. I have no right to come to you and say you will think this way. I'm not God.

I can't open your eyes or demand that of you. The Apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians 13:11, "Finally, brethren, farewell, be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace and the God of love and peace shall be with you." Ephesians 4:3 tells us that we are to endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Then Paul says in Philippians 2:2, "Fulfill ye my joy, be ye like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind."

So here is a question that you have to ask yourself: Why should we patiently put up with the weaknesses of believers and seek to edify them rather than censure, malign, and condemn them? The answer is given to us in verse 6: "That you may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." One mind produces one mouth, and one mouth produces one motive. When we think alike, we speak alike, say the same things, and become passionate about one motive: to glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. "Wherefore, receive ye one another" that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. So we have this protocol that's about to come up.

Christian Protocol

The Command to Receive One Another (Verse 7)

Once Paul has laid out his doctrine, he begins making his application. He speaks of obligation, edification, participation, and inspiration, and then comes to supplication, praying that God would make us all like-minded. In verse 7, he comes to his application: “Wherefore, receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God.” Here is Christian protocol, Christian reception, and the beginning of Christian fellowship, instruction, and edification: receive ye one another.

So the question must be asked: How do we do so? How do we receive someone whom we deem absolutely ignorant or erroneous, or someone whom we think is a pest or a nut? The flesh does not want to put up with some of the brethren. We are all different; I understand that. I used to say, “The more I’m around people, the more I love my animals.” I have changed that somewhat: “The more I’m around some Christian folks, the more I really love my animals now,” because of the arrogance and division. But how do we fulfill this command?

Look again at verse 7: “Wherefore receive ye one another as Christ also received us to the glory of God.” One of the most important words is “as.” That little word is the Greek word kathos. It is translated in our Bibles “even as” thirty-six times and “according to” one time. Thus, it literally means “just as,” “even as,” “in the same proportion,” and “in the same degree.” Literally, he is saying, “Wherefore receive ye one another just as Christ also received us to the glory of God.” Receive one another to the same degree and in the same proportion that Jesus Christ received us to the glory of God.

So here is my first question: How did Jesus Christ receive us to the glory of God? First of all, He received us as sinners. Look back in your Bibles to Romans chapter 5, verses 8 through 10. Look what the Scripture says: “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

"Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his son, much more being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life." As Romans 5:8 says, "But God commended his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Verse 10 continues, "For when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his son." Thus, when our Lord received us, he received us even though we were sinners and previous enemies of his Father.

There are no perfect Christians in this life. We may be perfect in Jesus Christ, but we are not perfect while we are in this flesh. Each of us is a sinner. We all have faults, failings, shortcomings, sins, and peculiarities. Yet, as Christ received us to the glory of God, even so we must learn to receive each other in the same manner and in the

same degree. Christ not only received us as sinners; He also received us in our ignorance and darkened minds.

Colossians 1:21 says, "And you that were sometimes alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled." We did not think rightly on every subject when we came to Jesus Christ. The lost are described in Ephesians 4:18: "Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart."

When Christ received us to the glory of God, He received us not only as sinners, but also in our ignorance. We did not know all truth. We were not scholars or theologians; we did not understand all doctrine. The truth is, we still do not understand all doctrine, and we never will in this life. We are still sinners, and to a certain degree there remains a veil, darkness, or fog upon our minds. We will understand perfectly only in eternity.

Therefore, we cannot make total positional agreement a standard for receiving one another. I cannot say to Reese, "Unless you believe the way I believe on eschatology, I don't have anything to do with you." Nor can I say, "Unless you believe as I believe on marriage, I'll have nothing to do with you." I cannot take my position, nor can you take yours, and demand that everyone agree with you. If they do not, you will not receive them. May I remind you?

God is sovereign in illumination, just as He is in salvation. He does not give the same light to all people, nor does He give the same amount of light at the same time. Our Lord gives us truth as we are able to hear and receive it. Mark 4:33 says, “And with many such parables spake he the word unto them as they were able to hear it.” You are not able to hear truth unless you have been prepared by the Holy Spirit to receive it. Our Lord received us not only as sinners; He received us in our ignorance as well.

I have changed my positions on many things over the years because God opened my eyes, taught me, and showed me. Moreover, Jesus Christ not only received us as enemies and in our ignorance; He received us willingly. He was not forced or coerced into receiving us. He received us for one reason: that the Father might be glorified.

“Wherefore, receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God.”

It is not a burden to receive the brethren, especially if you receive them for God’s honor and glory. If you receive a brother, no matter how much you disagree with him or dislike his peculiarities, and if he is a true believer in Jesus Christ, receiving him to the honor and glory of God will lead you to minister to and edify him. Jesus Christ received us to the glory of God, and look how graciously, patiently, lovingly, and kindly He has dealt with us.

Reasons for Failure and Importance of Reception

Why is it that we do not follow this Christian protocol? Why have we never really learned what it means to receive one another to God’s honor and glory? I have had people call me and say, “Brother Weaver, we’ve never met.”

"But I would like to come out and spend a few days with you." I have one family call and say, "We'd like to come out and spend a week with you," and they did, and we've been friends ever since. The point is this: one of the reasons that we do not exercise Christian protocol is our ignorance on the subject. We're simply unaware of it. However, this message ought to do away with our ignorance. Therefore, we no longer have that as an excuse, because we understand what Christian protocol is. The second reason we do not engage in Christian protocol is pride, arrogance, and a domineering spirit.

We don't want to teach or edify; we would rather dominate and subjugate. It is far easier for me to say, "Do as I say," than to explain to you and take the time to teach you. If you will read 3 John, you'll find that Diotrephes had this type of mentality. He did not want to receive the apostles, and anybody in the church who would receive them, he would kick out. He attacked them with malicious words.

There is a third reason why we do not exercise Christian protocol: a lack of realization and understanding concerning the importance of the subject. We do not realize the importance of what it really means to receive each other. In Matthew chapter 10, verses 40 and 41, our Lord told His disciples, "He that receiveth you receiveth me

and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me. He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward. And he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward."

Look at the positive: "He that receiveth you receiveth me." Our Lord was sending out His disciples. He said, "Whoever receives you receives me." Then He says, "He that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me," that is, God the Father.

The opposite is also true: he that receiveth not you receiveth not Jesus. And he that receiveth not Jesus receiveth not God the Father that sent Him.

Our Lord says in John 13:20, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.” Again, he repeats exactly the same truth. The Scripture makes this matter plain: to receive whomsoever Christ sends is to receive Christ, and to receive Christ is to receive the Father who sent Him. This shows the importance of receiving each other for the glory of God in Jesus Christ.

Matthew 25 gives us the familiar passage in which the sheep are on the right and the goats are on the left. I am trying to show you the importance of what it means to receive each other for the glory of God in Jesus Christ. Our Lord says, “Then shall the king say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”

“For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat. I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink. I was a stranger, and ye took me in. Naked, and ye clothed me. I was sick, and ye visited me. I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? Or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? Or naked, and clothed thee? And when saw we thee sick, and in prison came unto thee? And the king shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as you have done it unto the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto me.”

Christian Protocol

"Then shall he say unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat. I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink. I was a stranger, and ye took me not in. Naked, and ye clothed me not. Sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they answer also, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred or a thirst or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison and did not minister unto thee? Surely, Lord, we would if we had known it was you. Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily, I say unto you, inasmuch as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me."

Obviously, however we treat people reflects upon how we treat Jesus Christ. Hebrews 6:10 says, "For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love which you have showed toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints and do minister." We show love toward His name by learning to receive each other as Christ received us, to the glory of God.

Applications and Conclusion

This is a Christian protocol. It is wicked, wrong, and unbiblical simply to shun saints, pastors, and preachers because you disagree with them or do not adhere to their positions. If they are saints, if they are true believers in Jesus Christ, they are to be received, just as Christ received us, to the honor and glory of God.

We must also remember that sin is determined by the Word of God. It is not determined by our understandings or positions; it is determined by God's law. First John 3:4 says, "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law, for sin is the transgression of the law." If you do not hold a position contrary to God's law, it is not sin. If I disagree with your position, or you disagree with mine, and it is not a violation of God's law, it is not sin, no matter how much we disagree.

Even if a brother does sin, we still must admonish him and count him as a brother. The Apostle Paul wrote in 2 Thessalonians 3:14–16:

“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. Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace always by all means. The Lord be with you all.”

We will never have peace, unanimity of mind, and like-mindedness, nor closeness in Christian fellowship, until we learn to receive each other as Jesus Christ received us, to the glory of God. There is a Christian protocol, and God demands that we observe it, because it is a plain command: “Receive ye one another.”

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank You for Your Word. We pray that You would teach us and build us up in the most holy faith. May Thy name be honored and glorified. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask. Amen.

CHAPTER 5

Proving God and His Will

February 1, 2012

Introduction: The Audacity of Proving God

The Apostle Paul says, “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. And be not conformed to this world, but be you transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”

The title of this message, “Proving God and His Will,” would be an absolutely blasphemous thing to say and a blasphemous act to perform if the truth was not so clearly revealed in His Word. Who in the world would have the audacity to call God to task? Who would have the audacity to ask God simply to prove Himself?

You remember that the Apostle Paul, in Romans chapter 9, verse 20, said, “Nay, but O man, who art thou that replies against God? Shall the thing formed say unto him that formed it, why hast thou made me thus?” In other words, the thing formed has absolutely no right to complain or criticize the One who has done the forming.

God is God; therefore, He is the most absolute independent being that exists. God does not need to prove Himself, for God is fully aware of His capabilities. We must understand that God is absolutely sovereign. In His sovereignty, God is not accountable to, nor is He answerable to, anyone.

Moreover, God does not owe anyone an explanation for what He does or for what He commands. God is not only not accountable and not answerable; He does not owe anyone an explanation. Job 33:13 says, “Why dost thou strive against Him? For He giveth not account of any of His matters.” Why are you fighting against God? Why are you fussing and feuding with God?

God does not owe us any explanations. Thankfully, often times in His Word, God does indeed explain things for us. But it is His grace and His mercy that He does so. He does not owe us any explanation. God is so high, so exalted, so magnificent, so glorious, and so absolute. He is not obligated to anyone or anything.

Romans 11:33–36 demonstrates that no one can bring God into obligation to himself. Paul exclaims, "Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God, how unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past finding out."

"For who hath known the mind of the Lord?" The answer is no one. "Who has been his counselor?" Again, no one. "Or who is first given to him and it shall be recompensed unto him again?" No one can first give unto God. Then he says, "For of him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen."

If you cannot give God advice, counsel God, or inform God; if you cannot first give to God, certainly you cannot bring God into obligation to yourself. Why? God is absolutely sovereign. He is unaccountable and unanswerable to anyone but himself. Moreover, he does not owe an explanation to anyone.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon wrote: "There is no attribute more comforting to his children than that of God's sovereignty. Under the most adverse circumstances, in the most severe trials, they believe that sovereignty has ordained their afflictions, that sovereignty overrules them, and that sovereignty will sanctify them all."

"There is nothing for which the children ought more earnestly to contend than the doctrine of their master over all creation, the kingship of God over all the works of his own hands, the throne of God and his right to sit upon that throne. On the other hand, there is no doctrine more hated by worldlings, no truth of which they have made such a football as the great stupendous but yet most certain doctrine of the sovereignty of the infinite Jehovah. Men will allow God to be everywhere except on His throne. They will allow Him to be in His workshop to fashion the worlds and to make the stars. They will allow Him to be in His almonry to dispense His alms and bestow His bounties."

God Proves His People

Spurgeon said, “They will allow him to sustain the earth and bear up the pillars thereof, or light the lamps of heaven, or rule the waves of the ever-moving ocean. But when God ascends His throne, His creatures then gnash with their teeth. And we proclaim and enthrone God, and His right to do as He wills with His own, to dispose of His creatures as He thinks well, without consulting them in the matter. Then it is that we're hissed and execrated, and then it is that men turn a deaf ear to us, for God on his throne is not the God that they love, but it is the God upon the throne that we love to preach. It is God upon his throne whom we trust.”

God is God, as Spurgeon pointed out. Men may not like the doctrine of God's absolute sovereignty, but God is still God, and God is still sovereign. Since God is absolutely sovereign, He has the absolute right to test and try His people. He is the Master, the Lord, the Sovereign, the Ruler, the Creator, and the Potentate. He has the absolute right to test, to try, and to prove us in any way that He chooses.

God's Sovereignty and Right to Test His People

However, when we prove God, that is a different story. When we talk about proving God and His promises, we must tread lightly, so as not to presume upon God's sovereign rights and arrogantly think that He is at our command.

The word “prove,” in both the Hebrew and the Greek, basically means the same thing. It literally means to test, to try, to establish, to experience, or to find out by experience. Sometimes it is translated in our Bibles as “test,” “tempt,” or “temptation.” Anytime we find God in the Bible testing or tempting someone, it is always for that person's good.

Old Testament Examples of God Proving His People

Genesis 22:1 gives a leading illustration. “And it came to pass after these things that God did tempt Abraham, and he said unto him, Abraham, and he said, Behold, here I am.” Most people read that and think God was trying to tempt Abraham to do that which is wrong and wicked. But that is opposite of what the Scripture means. God was testing Abraham.

And the answer is no. The word literally means that God did test Abraham. God was proving Abraham.

Consider Joseph's brethren, who had sold him into Egypt and later came down to buy corn. Joseph knew his brethren, but they did not know him. He asked about their father, and they told him that they had a younger brother at home. Joseph told them that unless they brought their younger brother, he would sell them no more corn.

In Genesis 42, Joseph said unto them, "That is that that I have spoken to you saying you are spies." Then he told them, "Hereby you shall be proved. By the life of Pharaoh you shall not go forth hence except your younger brother come thither. Send one of you and let him fetch your brother and you shall be kept in prison that your words may be proved, whether there be any truth in you. Or else by the life of Pharaoh, surely you are spies."

Notice the expression, "Hereby you shall be proved," and again, "that your words may be proved." Joseph was saying, in effect, I am weighing the veracity of your words. I am proving whether or not you are speaking the truth and whether or not you are spies. So when God tested Abraham, He was proving Abraham.

Now turn to James chapter 1, because this must be understood in light of what has been said. Anytime God is said to tempt anyone, it

is always in reference to testing them. It is never, ever in reference to trying to get someone to sin. James says, "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God, for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man." Then, "But every man is tempted, this is to sin, 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."

In verse 13, "let no man say" refers to a temptation to sin. Yet in verse 12 we have the same word; notice how it is used.

He said, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation," that is, a trial or a test. "For when he is tried or tested, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised them that love him."

Now notice verse 13, where there is a change: "Let no man say when he is tempted"—tempted to sin—that he is tempted of God. Why? Do not let him say, "I am tempted of God," for God cannot be tempted of evil, neither tempteth he any man. Every man is tempted to sin when he is drawn away of his own lust. God does tempt men, but the word "tempt" in that instance means to test, to try, or to prove. It has nothing to do with trying to get someone to sin or violate his word.

Let me spell it out again. God does not tempt men to sin, rebel, or become disobedient. He does, however, test them to prove their mettle, their veracity, their character, and their faithfulness. Let us look in the book of Exodus at several passages in the Old Testament to show how the word "prove" is used.

This is in reference to the manna. Exodus 16:4 says, "Then said the Lord unto Moses, Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, that I may prove them whether they will walk in My law or no."

God was going to let the manna fall and allow the people to gather a certain amount each day in order to test whether they would walk in His law, whether He could trust them, and whether they would obey Him. Again, Exodus 20:20 says, "And Moses said unto the people, Fear not, for God has come to prove you," that is, to test you, "and that as fear may be before your face, that you sin not." God proved them in order that they might not sin.

So it is a testing. Everyone knows that the children of Israel wandered in the desert for forty years. God explains this temptation, this testing, in Deuteronomy 8:2: "And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments or no." Certainly, God already knows whether people will obey. God is omniscient; God knows everything. But we really do not know what we would do. I have heard people say, "Well, I can say one thing. If I was ever in that situation, I know what I would do." No, you do not. You really do not know what you would do until you get there.

God says it again in Deuteronomy 8:16: "Who fed thee in the wilderness with manna, which thy fathers do not, that he might humble thee, that he might prove thee," and notice, "to do thee good at thy latter end." Every time God proves, tests, or, as the word sometimes says, "tempts," it is always for their good.

The children of Israel were supposed to drive all the heathen out of the land, but they did not. In Judges 2:21–22, God says, "I also will not henceforth drive out any from before them of the nations which Joshua left when he died, that through them I may prove Israel, whether they will walk in the way of the Lord to walk therein as their fathers did keep it or not." God said, "I left these heathen around here to prove you, whether you're gonna go after them or whether you're going to obey me."

Judges 3:1 says, "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." Verse 4 adds, "And they were to prove Israel by them, to know whether they would hearken unto the commandments of the Lord which He commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses."

In each of these verses, the Hebrew word is "nassal," which means to prove, to test, to try, to essay, to put to the test. The old English word "assay," A-S-S-A-Y, is used in several ways. In metallurgy, it means to analyze an ore or an alloy to determine the quantity of gold, silver, or other metal in it. It literally means to judge the quality of, assess, evaluate, or test something's strength. God was saying, "I'm leaving these Canaanites and Hivites in the land to test your

strength, to test your character as to whether or not you're going to obey me."

God Invites Us to Prove His Person and Promises

There are times when God's people not only need to be tested, but even ask to be tested. It is true that God knows what is in our hearts, but we do not know what is in our hearts. David prayed in Psalm 26: "Judge me, O Lord, for I've walked in mine integrity. I've trusted also in the Lord, therefore I shall not slide." Then he asked, "Examine me, O Lord, and prove me. Try my reins and my heart." David was asking God to prove him: "Lord, make sure that I'm genuine. Make sure of my character and of my willingness to obey You."

In Psalm 139, he prayed, "Search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts. And see if there be any wicked way in me and lead me in the way everlasting." What a prayer! There can be no argument against, no denial of, and no hesitation to admit that God does indeed have the right to try, to test, and to prove His people. He is the potter, and we are the clay. We are His creatures, at His command, and He may do with us as He wills and as He pleases, for He is God.

God does prove His people. Here is the second point, and I am going to spend most of my time here: God does invite us to prove His person and His promises. It would be blasphemous to think such a thought, or even more blasphemous to try to perform such an act, if God did not clearly and plainly invite us to prove Him and His promises.

God Invites Us to Prove Him: Malachi 3:10

A question must come to mind: If God has invited me to prove Himself and His promises, how do I prove God? How do I prove His promises? Do you want to know whether God is real and genuine? Do you want to know whether His Word is authentic and true? God says, "I'll tell you how that you can prove Me and prove My promises."

Malachi 3:10 is the classic verse in which God invites people to prove Him: "Bring you 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, "Bring you all the tithes in the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me herewith." You prove Him in this thing, says God, and see whether He will open the windows of heaven and pour out a blessing that there shall not be room enough to receive it.

Several comments should be made about this verse. First, when God says, "Prove me herewith," this is not a blasphemous challenging of God to do something that He has not ordained or promised. It is not a challenge to God to perform something outside His will. Second, this testing, or this proving, is by the command of God. Third, the way that He is to be proved, as the context demonstrates, is by our obedience. Fourth, we must understand that trust, or faith, is to be included in our obedience. Fifth, we must ascertain and understand the context in order really to know what it means to prove God.

In the context, Israel had sinned against God. How had she sinned against God? The answer is that she had failed to give Him the tithes that He demanded. A simple definition of a tithe is this: a tithe is God's tax for the use of His earth. That is very simple. Everyone is obligated to tithe, even unbelievers. They will not do so, but they are obligated to do so because they breathe God's air and use God's earth just as we do.

In giving a tithe, there is a recognition of God and His sovereignty.

SCRIPTURE READING - Deuteronomy 26:2, 16-19 (KJV)

Tithing as Acknowledgment of God's Sovereignty

> Deuteronomy 26 deals with tithing. Verse 2 shows that it deals with the tithe: "That thou shalt take the first of all the fruit of the earth, which thou shalt bring of thy land, that the Lord thy God giveth thee. Thou shalt put it in a basket and shalt go to the place which the Lord thy God shall choose. The place is named there. And thou shalt go into the priest that shall be in those days and say unto him, I profess this day unto the Lord thy God

> that I'm coming to this country, which the Lord swearing to our fathers for to give us."
>
> If you were to read all the way down, you would find that this passage then deals with giving of tithes. Verse 16 says, "This day, the Lord thy God has commanded thee to do these statutes and judgments," dealing with not only the tithe, but everything else, "thou shalt therefore keep and do them with all thy heart, with all thy soul." Now note what happens when you give a tithe, especially when you obey God. Verse 17 says, "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, to hearken unto 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. Now watch, and to make thee high, above all nations, which he hath made in praise, and in name, and in honor, that thou mayest be a holy people unto the Lord thy God, as he hath spoken."
>
> When you give tithes, when you obey God, you are avouching the Lord thy God to be your God. And in the next verse, He avouches us, as we render our tithes and as we obey Him, to be His people.

The Hebrew word for “avouched” literally means to say, declare, affirm, or profess in a solemn manner. When we tithe, what are we doing? We are saying, in a very solemn manner, that we recognize God as the one true and living God; that He is absolutely sovereign; and that He has given us everything we have. In giving Him His tax, we recognize that He is sovereign. We vouch that we recognize Him, bow to Him, and acknowledge that He is our God.

In Malachi 3:10, God tells Israel to “bring you all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith,” that is, prove Him in this thing: “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.”

Israel had refused to tithe unto God. Israel was refusing to avouch that God was her sovereign God. God’s complaint was, “Will a man

rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings." Then He says, "Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation."

When they refused to tithe, what were they doing? They were robbing God—not merely stealing God's tithe. God owns everything. He owns the cattle on a thousand hills; He created the world; and all the gold, silver, and diamonds are His. It is not money that God necessarily needs. He is saying, "I don't want necessarily just your money." That is part and parcel of it, yes, but He is saying, "I want the recognition. I want you to honor me as the sovereign God of heaven and earth." When you refuse to recognize Him, He says, "I'm going to curse you with a curse."

The result of robbing God is stated plainly: "You've robbed me." "You're cursed." Then God says, "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse ... and prove me now herewith." In effect, He asks, "Do you want to go on living like this? Do you like living in scarcity, want, and hunger? Do you think that I am unwilling or unable to bless you? Prove me, saith the Lord herewith."

That is, "You honor me, you obey me, and you see whether or not I will open the windows of heaven and pour out such a blessing upon you that you will not be able to receive it. Prove me in this, saith the Lord."

Proving God and His promises is related to obedience, not disobedience. The only thing that you can prove by your disobedience is the judgment of God. Proverbs 13:15 says, "the way of the transgressor is hard." So God is telling these people in the book of Malachi, "If you want to prove me, you want to prove that I exist, you want to prove that my promises are true, obey me." That is a simple way. Just do what I tell you, and you can have proof enough for yourself.

Romans 12:1-2 applies everything that we have learned: "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. And be not conformed to this world, but be you transformed by the renewing of your mind, that

you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

In Romans 12, verses 1 and 2, we are not judging God, challenging God, or endeavoring to manipulate Him. We are simply obeying Him in order to prove His will.

The Mercies of God

Prerequisites for Proving God's Will: Romans 12:1-2

The word “prove” means to test, to try, to establish, to demonstrate, or to find out by experience. Do you really want to know the will of God? Do you really want to obey and do the will of God? If you say yes, then you have to ask this question: How can you discern it? How can you test it? How can you know it? How can you prove it? How can you experience the will of God fully in your life?

According to Romans 12:1-2, not just anyone can prove God and His promises, nor can just anyone prove the will of God. There are prerequisites. We have already seen one of them in the Old Testament: obedience. That is what He said in Malachi 3:8-10.

If you really want to prove the will of God in your life, you must understand the mercies of God. Paul said, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God.” In context, the mercies of God are everything Paul taught from Romans 1 through Romans 11. If we understand the mercies of God, we must understand our depravity, our wickedness, and our sin. We must understand our election, salvation, reconciliation, calling, justification, sanctification, preservation, and glorification.

Each of these truths, and many more, is taught in Romans 1 through 11. Notice what Paul said: “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God.” If you do not understand the mercies of God, if you are unaware of them, how can Paul beseech you by them? What good is beseeching someone of these mercies if that person is totally ignorant of them?

Do you realize that ignorance only leads to apathy and destruction? If you are unaware of the abundant mercies of God bestowed upon us as believers, you are in no position to prove what

is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God. God's mercies are the starting point for proving God's will. We have to recognize the mercies of God. As I have quoted and preached many times, Lamentations 3 says, "It is the Lord's mercies that we're not consumed."

"Because his compassions, they fail not. They're new every morning. Great is thy faithfulness." The only reason you and I made it through the night is because of the mercies of God. So Paul is saying, "I'm beseeching you by the mercies of God." You've got to understand what God has done for you. That does not mean that you have to go to college, attend a Bible school, or become a theological scholar. It means that, in some degree, you must understand the abundant mercies God has given us through Jesus Christ, our Lord. You've got to grasp, in some measure, the grace of God in your life.

Second, in order to prove the will of God, you must be willing to present your body a living sacrifice. The word "present" commonly denotes bringing or presenting an animal or other sacrifice before an altar. It implies that the action is free and voluntary. There is indeed real, genuine freedom in Christ, and devoting ourselves to God is one of the freest acts we will ever perform, by His grace and mercy.

Paul says, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice." What are we to present? Our bodies. The word "bodies" represents our entire person. Everything that we are and everything that we have is to be given to God as a living sacrifice. If we present our bodies, we present ourselves, the totality of our being.

The Logical Service of Presenting Our Bodies

In the Old Testament, there was the whole burnt offering. Everything in that offering was fully consumed by the flames because it was fully given and devoted to God. That is what God wants from us: a whole burnt offering, except it is a whole living offering.

Why does the Apostle Paul say, "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies"? Why did he not say that you present your minds, your will, or your spirit?

How do you express your love for each other, your family, and your friends? How do you work, play, eat, drink, and minister? You do so through your body.

It is all with your body. Look back to Romans 1:9. Paul says, “For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers.” Notice: “For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit.” Wow.

Was it Paul's spirit that was running all over the Roman Empire preaching the gospel? No. It was his body. Yes, he served the Lord with his spirit, but the manifestation of that inward service was the outward manifestation of his body. It could not have been expressed outwardly without the body.

You could ask, “Well, Brother Weaver, is it possible for someone to hypocritically present their body as a place of service and really have no heart for God and no heart for the ministry?” Yes, it is possible temporarily. It is possible in the sense of John 12:43, when our Lord charged those Pharisees with loving the praise of man more than the praise of God. There can be a hypocritical presentation temporarily.

Remember what the Bible says in Jeremiah 17:9: “The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Who can know it?” The answer is obvious: only God can know it. But how do we know that the presentation of our body is not a hypocritical act? Look back at Romans 12:1. Paul said, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice.” Our presentation is to be a living sacrifice. What does that mean? It means our presentation of our bodies is to be a lifestyle. It is to be a world and life view, a constant and continual presentation of our bodies to the Lord.

Our Lord does not call upon us to die for Him. He may call us as a martyr later on, but generally He simply calls upon us to live for Him. A hypocrite may last temporarily, but a hypocrite is not going continually and constantly to do that which is repugnant to him and for which he has no heart. A hypocrite is always going to fall by the wayside.

It is true that the Apostle Paul said, “I die daily.” But by this he had reference to the mortification of his flesh, a continual turning from sin, that he might present his body unto the Lord. In Romans 12:1, he says, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.” This worldview and lifestyle, the presentation of our bodies, is to be one of holiness and spotlessness. We are to be holy and without blemish. Just as God demanded holiness of the Old Testament sacrifice, He demands that of the living sacrifice: that we be holy, godly, and sanctified.

Philippians 2:15 says, “That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world.” First Thessalonians 5:23 says, “The very God of peace sanctify you wholly,” or completely: “I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Second Peter 3:14 says, “Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.”

How do we present our bodies a living sacrifice? In holiness, in righteous, obedient living. Is a hypocrite going to do that constantly and continually? No. What God is demanding is a complete lifestyle, a total worldview. He says that we are to present our bodies a living sacrifice acceptable unto God. The word “acceptable” in the Greek literally means “well pleasing.” If you present your body a living sacrifice and live a holy, godly, obedient life, it will be well pleasing to God. The Apostle Paul makes clear that such a lifestyle, such a worldview, is the only reasonable one in light of God’s mercies extended to us. Nothing could be more consistent with reason than that the work of God should glorify Him.

We are not our own. We have been bought with a price. We are the property of the Lord—His by right of creation and His by right of redemption. It would be unreasonable for us to live wicked and ungodly lives.

The word "reasonable" is the Greek word "logikos," from which we get our English word "logical." Paul says that presenting our bodies to the Lord as a living sacrifice because of His mercy is the

only logical thing we can do. Follow Paul's logic in Romans 12:1. An understanding and comprehension of God's mercies should lead us to present our bodies a living sacrifice. If we present our bodies a living sacrifice, we understand that God requires holiness. Holiness is acceptable unto God. Therefore, to live a holy, obedient life is our only reasonable or logical service in light of what God has done for us.

Transformation by Renewing the Mind

In verse 2 he says, "And be not conformed to this world, but be you transformed by the renewing of your mind that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." Such a presentation of our bodies unto the Lord will enable us not to be conformed to this world, or this age. The word "conformed" literally means to be pressed into a mold. Some of you ladies have butter molds. When you make butter, you put it in that mold, and when it hardens, you take the mold off; it is exactly in the shape of the mold. The same is true of clay and anything else for which molds are used. Do not be pressed into the world's pattern.

Those who understand the mercies of God should have nothing but absolute contempt for the humanism, wickedness, and fashion of this age. When the Apostle John wrote in 1 John 2:15, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man loved the world, the love of the Father is not in him," he was not speaking of God's creation. He was speaking of the age of the world, the world system. We do not think like the world, act like the world, dress like the world, or live like the world. The world is not to dictate our fashions, attitudes, ideas, or understanding. The Word of God does that.

But it is not enough simply not to be conformed to the world. That is the negative. Every negative has a positive: we are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. The Greek word for "transform" is "metamorphos," from which we get our English word "metamorphosis."

The butterfly, you remember, goes through changes. It starts out as a cocoon, turns into a larval stage and caterpillar, and next thing you know, it is flying away. It is going through changes. The word is

sometimes translated as “transfigured” or “transformed.” You remember Jesus Christ was on the mount of transfiguration, and He was transfigured. He was metamorphosized in front of them. So he says, “It is not enough now just not to be conformed to this world. We must be transformed by the renewing of our minds.”

Now the word “renewed” in the Greek means a renewal, a renovation, a complete change for the better. As our minds are renewed, we learn to think like Christ and biblically. We have biblical attitudes and dispositions, and that biblical attitude and disposition affects our body, conduct, and actions.

Note the progression, very simply stated in Romans 12:1 and 2. Once you comprehend the mercies of God, that will lead you to present your body a living sacrifice. Once you present your body a living sacrifice, you understand that God is a holy God. Therefore, God requires holiness. As long as you obey Him, you understand that as well, pleasing or acceptable in His sight. In light of the fact that God has blessed you and given you mercies, it is your only reasonable or logical service.

That leads you not to be conformed to this world, but impresses upon you the absolute necessity of renewing your mind. Once you have understood the mercies of God, presented your body a living sacrifice, learned to obey, learned to be pleasing unto God, understood that it is your reasonable service, refused conformity to this world, and been transformed by the renewing of your mind, then and only then may you prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

The word “prove” has the implication of personal experience. If you want to personally experience the proving of the will of God in your life, you must understand Romans 12:1 and 2. John Calvin wrote:

“Here you have the purpose for which we must put on a new mind. That bidding adieu to our own counsels and desires, and those of all men, we may be attentive to the only will of God, the knowledge of which is true wisdom. But if the renovation of our mind is necessary, in order that we may prove what is the will of God, it is hence evident how opposed it is, that is our mind, by

nature to God. The epithets which are added are intended for the purpose of recommending God's will, that we may seek to know it with greater alacrity. In order to constrain our perverseness, it is indeed necessary that the true glory of justice and perfection should be ascribed to the will of God."

The world persuades itself that those works which it has devised are good. Paul exclaims that what is good and right must be ascertained from God's commandments. The world praises itself and takes delight in its own inventions, but Paul affirms that nothing pleases God except what He has commanded. In order to find perfection, the world slides from the Word of God into its own devices. Paul, by fixing perfection in the will of God, shows that if anyone passes over that mark, he is deluded by false imagination.

Conclusion: Proving God Through Obedience

When you go over and above and beyond the Word of God, you've gone too far. When you want to go over and above and beyond the Lord Jesus Christ, you've gone too far. Do we prove God and His will? The answer is by obedience: by giving ourselves to Him as a living sacrifice, living a holy life after we have comprehended His mercies, not conforming ourselves to this world, but having our minds transformed and submitting our minds to the Word of God. Then, and only then, are we in a position to prove what is that good and perfect and acceptable will of God.

What I've preached today—proving God and His Word—is not tempting God. It is a sin to tempt God. It is not challenging God, nor provoking God; those are sins of the highest degree. What I've preached is what God has said Himself: "Prove me now herewith." The way we prove God and His will is by obedience to His Word. If we genuinely, sincerely, and truly want the will of God in our lives proved, evidenced, and manifest, it can only be done by obedience. God said, "You just trust me and see if I won't open the windows of heaven and pour you out such a blessing you will not be able to contain it."

I sure would like to have to build bigger barns. I'd like to have the blessings of God in my life, and those blessings only come through obedience. Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee this

day. We thank You for Your love, Your truth, Your Word, and all of Your blessing to us. Lord, I pray that You would help us to prove Thee by obedience, to prove Thy will by obedience, that we may indeed have Your blessings upon our lives. It is a principle of Scripture that blessings follow obedience and curses follow disobedience. Make us holy and godly. In Thy name we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 6

How Do You Wish to be Received?

December 1, 2024

Introduction: The Question of Reception

Our Lord says, “Let not your heart be troubled. You believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions. If it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there you may be also.” We are going to read three verses, and you may think I will forget these verses after I get started, but I will not. How do you wish to be received? You will understand as I develop the message.

The question to begin with is this: Have you ever watched television when they are showing what you and I would call a reception at the White House? Foreign and domestic guests are received with much honor, recognition, and splendor. It is a big shindig and a big blowout, especially when foreign heads of state come to the White House, even though usually they are coming with a hat in hand, wanting some free money or something free anyhow.

But you have to understand that they are given a very posh welcome, and a big to-do is made over it.

The reason you have that is because of what is known as protocol. Protocol is the official procedure or system of rules governing affairs of state or diplomatic occasions. It happens to be the accepted and established code of procedure or behavior for any group, organization, or institution. Likewise, a reception is usually governed by rules of protocol.

Think not only about the White House, but also about Hollywood, especially when some big event such as the Oscars is taking place. You see all the movie stars and celebrities pulling up in limousines, the doors being opened, and them walking onto the red carpet to the claps and applause of hundreds of people. Of course, they are dressed in their finery and smiles, and it is simply a gala affair. There are rules and protocol even concerning that.

Christian Protocol from Romans 15:7

Now, the reason I am telling you this is because years ago, I preached a message from Romans chapter 15, which I entitled "Christian Protocol." If you have not heard that message, I would encourage you to hear it. If you have heard it and forgotten it, how are you going to listen to it? I am not going to preach that message today. However, I am going to take the truth from it because it applies to the entirely different message that I am preaching. Hold John 14, but look in your Bibles to Romans chapter 15. This is the text I used when I preached on Christian protocol, but I am going to take one verse so that I can show you its implication. In Romans 15:7, before I read that verse, notice that there are two Greek words used many times in the New Testament, and they are translated either "receive" or "received."

Those two Greek words, number one, is lambano, paralambano, and or dechomai. When you come to paralambano or dechomai, hear these words: they are very close in meaning, but they usually refer to someone who takes someone to himself, takes someone as a companion, takes someone by the hand, or takes and receives someone into the home. The corollary idea is kindness, sympathy, and compassion. These words mean to take someone to yourself or

to take someone into your home. This is not merely receiving someone in a general sense; it is taking that person to yourself, as a companion, by the hand, or into the home. That is the force of the word.

Romans 15:7 says, “Wherefore receive ye one another as Christ also received us to the glory of God.” The interesting thing is that he said, “receive ye one another.” The word for receive here is proslambano. Pros is a preposition meaning “to” or “toward,” and lambano means “to take.” Actually, what he is saying is this: take your brother and sister in Christ; take them to yourself.

That is, you take them into kindness, compassion, and instruction. Notice what he said in verse 7: “Wherefore, receive ye one another, even as Christ also received us to the glory of God.” Here is Christian protocol, Christian reception, and the beginning of Christian fellowship, instruction, and edification, because we are commanded to receive one another.

So here is the question: How do we receive each other? In the message on Christian protocol, I talk about that in quite detail. But let me point out exactly how we are to receive each other. “Wherefore, receive ye one another, even as Christ also received us to the glory of God.”

The little word “as” is vitally important. It happens to be the Greek word kathos. Kathos is translated in our Bibles as “even as” thirty-six times and as “according to” one time. With that understanding, verse 7 could be read this way: “Wherefore receive ye one another according to the way that Christ also received us to the glory of God.” So how do we learn from this verse? We have to ask: How did Christ receive us?

Christ Received Us as Sinners

I want to give you two thoughts before continuing with this message. The very first way that Christ received us is that He received us as sinners. Romans chapter 5, beginning with verse 8, says: “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were

enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life."

Notice again verse 8: "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners." Christ received us while we were yet sinners. He loved us while we were yet sinners. He reconciled us while we were yet sinners. Therefore, when he says, "receive ye one another, even as Christ also received us to the glory of God," he is saying that we are to receive each other in the same manner, in the same way, equal to and according to the way that Jesus Christ received us.

Now, let me point something out. This may shock some of you, but you need to be shocked. There are no perfect Christians, at least not in this life. Everyone is a sinner. Each Christian is indeed a sinner. We may be a saved sinner, but we are still sinners. That means we have our faults, our failings, our idiosyncrasies, and our peculiarities. There are things about some brethren that we do not like, and there are things about us that our brethren do not like.

That fact is immaterial, because Christ received us with all our imperfections, all our faults, all our failings, and all our sins. Now we are commanded to receive one another even as Christ also received us. We must learn to receive each other in the same degree and in the same manner that Jesus Christ received us.

There is a second truth, and this is the one I especially want to emphasize: Christ not only received us while we were yet sinners; Christ also received us when we were ignorant, and our minds were darkened and alienated from God.

Christ Received Us in Our Ignorance

Stop and think about this. In Colossians 1:21, the Word of God says, "And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled." We were enemies in our minds. We were alienated from God, and yet now we have been reconciled.

When we come to Ephesians 4, I want to show you the context of the verse. I can quote it, but the context is important. Paul is writing to Christians: "This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye

henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk," that is, the unsaved, "in the vanity of their mind." He is telling these Ephesian Christians that they are not to walk the way the unsaved walk. Likewise, we are not to walk the way they walk in the vanity of their minds. What is the vanity of the mind? Look at verse 18.

"Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness." Now, pay special attention to verse 20: "But ye have not so learned Christ." So what that means is this: We have had wrong thinking, wrong attitudes, and vanity of thoughts all our lives. We learned these thinking habits when we were lost, when we were unsaved. We were enemies in our minds. Now we have to learn Christ. We have to learn the biblical way to think, the biblical way to meditate, and the biblical way to act. We have to learn what is right. But notice that He still speaks about alienation in the mind. We are not to walk the way the other Gentiles walk.

The Danger of Pride and Comparison

Now, let me tell you something about knowledge. The Bible tells us that knowledge puffeth up—1 Corinthians chapter 8 and verse 1. Suppose I had five earned doctorate degrees and looked at Brother Clay and said, "Do you have an earned doctorate?" He answered, "No, I don't have an earned doctorate." I replied, "I got five. And you just don't know what I know." What is that? That is pride, arrogance, and haughtiness. You see what I am saying? Unless knowledge is tempered with grace, mercy, and wisdom, it always tends to pride.

Now, let me show you. Turn in your Bibles to the book of Luke, chapter 18. I want to give you a good illustration. When I read this, you are probably going to think in your minds, "Well, what in the world has that got to do with what the pastor is teaching?" Let me show you. Look in your Bibles, Luke chapter 18, and begin reading with verse 10. Here is the Pharisee and the publican going to pray in the temple. Luke chapter 18, verse 10: "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."

What was the attitude of the Pharisee? It was one of pride, haughtiness, and arrogance. What was his error? He was comparing himself with men, not with the Word of God. He was comparing himself with another man.

The Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 10:12 said, "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."

If I compare myself to Steve, I could say, "I know more than Steve." Steve could answer, "That does not come true when it comes to mechanics." He has me on mechanics. I could compare myself to him and say, "I'm much better than Steve." Steve could look at me and say, "I'm much better than him because he doesn't know anything about mechanics." But Steve is not my standard, and I am not Steve's standard. The Word of God is our standard.

The Pharisee was full of pride and arrogance. He elevated himself by comparing himself with someone he deemed beneath him.

Now, what about the publican? The publican was a man of humility and sorrow. How do we know that? Because the Bible says he only smote himself on the breast. He would not even lift his eyes toward heaven. All he said was, "God, be merciful unto me, a sinner." The publican realized he had nothing. He deserved nothing. He was worth nothing in one sense of the word. The only thing he needed and wanted from God was mercy. Our Lord, of course, said this man went down to his house justified.

Now you say, "How in the world does the passage that you read agree with what you're trying to teach us about God? Our Lord

received us when we were ignorant, when we were stupid, when we didn't know anything." All you have to do is go back to Luke chapter 18, to the prayer of the Pharisee, and change just a few words. In verse 11, "The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself." By the way, he didn't pray with our Lord. He prayed with himself, and basically to himself, saying, "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." He is saying, "Yes, I've got it made."

Now, let's change a few words: "The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, ignorant, stupid, and unenlightened, and do not see that which I see, and understand that which I understand. I study twice of the week, and I read all the books that I possess."

You say, "You think that was his attitude?" I know it was. If you'll turn over to John chapter 7, beginning with verse 45, the Pharisees had sent officers to arrest Jesus Christ, and they failed to do so. They came back, and notice what happened: "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 answered them the Pharisees, Are ye also deceived? Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him?"

"But this people who knoweth not the law are cursed." Hear what they were saying: "Why have you not brought him?" "Never a man spake like this man." "Are you deceived? Are you ignorant? Are you stupid? What's wrong with you? None of the Pharisees have believed on him. And moreover, all the people that knoweth not this law are cursed." In other words, those who did not agree with them, believe as they believed, hold their traditions, or interpret as they interpreted were cursed. They were stupid, ignorant, unenlightened, and absolutely worthless. Here was the problem: they thought they knew, but they really did not know. Everything they held to was error and tradition.

The publican, however, knew himself to be a sinner. He would not even lift his eyes toward heaven, but said, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner."

Patience in Instructing the Ignorant

I would much rather be an ignorant, uneducated, unenlightened publican who received mercy from Jesus Christ than a highly educated, refined, and cultured Pharisee who was truly ignorant, doomed, and damned. When Christ received us, He received us not merely as sinners; He received us in our ignorance, when we did not really understand truth. It is true that we had to know something: we had to know that we were sinners, that Jesus Christ was God, that He was a Savior, and that He was the only way.

But as far as being theologians or scholars, none of us had read Berkhof's systematic theology or Hodge's systematic theology. When you and I were saved, we were absolutely, totally ignorant. We were not scholars, and we did not understand doctrine. Even though we have been saved all this time, we still do not understand a lot of doctrine. We will not understand everything until we get into glory, until we get into eternity.

We cannot make positional agreement a standard for receiving one another. Unhappily, there are a lot of preachers like this, as well as Christians. “Well, if you don't hold to the eschatology that I hold to, we have nothing in common.” I've been in churches where, if you did not believe, if you were not a dispensational premillennial in your eschatology, you were looked down on as absolutely stupid, cut off, and treated as dirt.

Not everybody sees the same amount of truth. God does not give everyone the same truth, nor does He give everyone the same amount of truth. Nor does God give truth to everyone at the same time.

Let me ask you: everybody in this room happens to be a parent. When your child was small, say three months old, did you feed your child a T-bone steak? Of course not. You fed the child milk. When the child finally developed, it was given soft food. The reason you did not feed that child meat was because the child was not able to receive it.

You know what the Bible says in Mark chapter 4 and verse 33? “And with many such parables spake he the word unto them, as they

were able to hear it." Our Lord knows exactly what we are able to receive.

I am not going to try to teach a three-month-old baby Berkhof's systematic theology. It would not do me any good. I have taught from the fourth grade all the way through college. I remember the first time I taught the fourth grade in our Christian school. I had a little history book, probably three-quarters of an inch thick, and thought, "Oh my soul, I'm going to be through with this in about a month. What am I going to do for the rest of the year?" I covered three chapters in the first week.

I gave a quiz, and everybody in the class failed. I had brilliant students, and the only conclusion I could come to was that it was not the students; it was the teacher. So I had to back up and start all over. It was monotonous for me because I had to break everything down, spell just about everything, and spoon-feed those fourth graders. The next time I gave a quiz, they all made hundreds.

So it was not the student; it was me, because I was trying to give them something too quickly and too much. Our Lord said, "No. I give it to you as you are able to hear it." Please understand this: there is another principle involved. Here is why not everybody is on the same plane—not everyone uses the means that God has ordained. The Apostle Paul said in 2 Timothy 2 and verse 7 to Timothy, "Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things." God does not just give understanding willy-nilly.

We do not go to bed stupid and wake up smart. He said, "Consider what I say." Some people consider; some study; some think; and some pray and ask God for understanding. Understanding is His gift. He has to give it. So here is a man who does not study, and here is a man who does study. Here is a man who does not ask for understanding, and here is a man who does ask for understanding. Who do you think God is going to give understanding to? Not the one who does not study and pray for it, but the one who does study and ask for it. There is always going to be a discrepancy because not everyone uses the means that God has ordained, nor will they use those means to the same degree. Stop and think about that.

Moreover, as I said earlier, our Lord gave truth as long as we were able to bear it. Here is the problem: when we get around a brother or sister who does not understand what we understand and does not possess the knowledge that we possess, we tend to look down upon them and say, "I just do not want to be bothered with this individual. Can you imagine all the ground I would have to cover just to bring this brother up to where I am?" It is easier for us to walk away or push them away. So when Christ received you, how did He receive you? He received you not only as a sinner, but when you were absolutely ignorant, when you knew absolutely nothing.

We have to remember this: we did not arrive at the truth that we now hold and possess overnight. We did not arrive at it in a week, a month, or a year. It took a long time for us to get to where we are, and yet we become impatient in trying to help and teach others because we now look down upon them as absolutely ignorant.

I have often said, "I'd rather preach to 10 people who want the truth than 10,000 who could care less." I have also been asked to go to other churches and be their pastor. I thought to myself, "Lord, have mercy. Do You realize where I would have to start and what it would take to bring people up to where the people I'm teaching today are?" Can you fathom the work?

Consider 2 Timothy 2:24-26. In context, Paul is talking about preachers, because Timothy was a preacher, and 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus are known as pastoral epistles. But the truth of the matter is that every Christian is a servant of the Lord. In this instance, he is speaking more particularly to preachers: "And the servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will."

Look again at verse 24: "And the servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient." It is human nature, and it is our flesh, that wants to look at someone and say, "What's wrong with you, dummy? Can't you see? Can't you hear? What's wrong with you?" But let me ask you a question: Did you understand truth the first time you heard it?

The answer is no—not by a long shot.

Here is the vital question. He said, “The servant of the Lord must be patient, apt to teach, patient,” and, “In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves.” Who wishes to spend time with a foolish, ignorant, hard-headed person who will not listen, has no desire to listen, and has no desire for truth?

The answer is hardly anyone, because trying to teach such a person is extremely hard, tedious, aggravating, and very unpleasant work. And yet the Bible says, “And the servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth.” In other words, God must work in their hearts, open their eyes, and enlighten their minds.

The problem today, not only among preachers but among Christians, is that we do not wish to teach and edify people. What we wish to do is dominate and subjugate: “Steve, don't ask me any questions. You just do what I tell you. You just believe what I tell you.” Have you ever heard someone say, “It's my way or the highway”? “If you don't like what I'm saying, get out.” That is not edification or instruction. That is domination and subjugation.

But I did not understand the things I understand in the first, second, or third year. It took time.

A Warning from Diotrephes

God is telling us that we have to be patient in instructing and edifying, even when we are talking about the weaker brethren.

Consider a clear illustration of someone who wishes to dominate and subjugate in 3 John. John is writing to the believers, and especially to the well-beloved Gaius. He says, “Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers; which have borne witness of thy charity before the church: whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well.” Here is a very gracious, kind pastor writing to a very gracious, kind church, and they are bringing their brethren on their way in a godly manner.

John is talking about those who are suffering and doing the work of God: “Because that for his name’s sake they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles,” that is, of the unsaved. Then he says, “We therefore ought to receive such,” there is that word receive, “that we might be fellowhelpers to the truth.”

But notice what follows: “I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church.” Here is a man who would not receive fellow believers; he would not even receive the Apostle John.

The Bible says Diotrephes “loveth to have the preeminence.” The word preeminence occurs only twice in the New Testament. The first time concerns Jesus Christ: “that in all things he might have the preeminence.” The second time is here. Diotrephes is willing to take the place of Christ. He is going to determine who is in the church and who is out of the church. In other words, he is going to dominate and subjugate. He is not going to teach, edify, or instruct.

Unhappily, that is where a lot of preachers are, where a lot of teachers are, and where a lot of Christians are: they simply do not take the time to instruct and edify.

Please remember this: when our Lord received us, He not only received us as sinners; He received us when we were absolutely ignorant as well. Now, there are some people whom we are not to receive. There are some people whom we do not count as brethren, whom we do not take into our home or entertain.

Those We Must Not Receive

If you look in 2nd John, verse 9, John says, “Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine,” that is, the doctrine of Christ, “receive him not into your

house, neither bid him God speed: for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds."

John is telling us that if someone does not heed to the doctrine of Christ—that Jesus Christ is God in the flesh—then we are not to receive him into our house, count him as a brother, or even say, "God bless you." Why? Because it is a grievous and blasphemous thing to deny the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Remember what our Lord said in John 5: "For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son." Why did God the Father commit all judgment to the Son? The answer is given in the next verse: "That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father."

"That all men should honour the Son, even as" means equally. If the Father is God, that means the Son is God. If you are going to honour the Father as the sovereign God of heaven and earth, then you must honour the Son as sovereign God of heaven and earth. "He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father." That is why in 2 John he said, "He that hath not the Son hath not the Father."

The Bible teaches us very clearly that Jesus Christ is God in the flesh. First Timothy 3:16 says, "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 controversy, great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh.

John 1:1-3 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made." The Word, the divine Logos of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, was with God, was God, and was in the beginning with God. If God is eternal, never having a beginning or an end, and the Son was with Him, He has to be God as well, because He never had a beginning and never had an end. All things were made by Him—that means creation, everything.

John 1:11-13 says, "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his

name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." Then, "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." There is the incarnation. "And we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." John bore witness of Him, and declared, "This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me." Of His fulness have all we received, "and grace for grace. For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ."

"No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." That is why there are some people we are not to receive: Jesus Christ is God, and if any man does not abide in that doctrine, he does not know God at all.

I am talking about reception, and I ask this question: What kind of reception do you want to receive? There are different kinds of receptions, and I suppose it depends upon the event. Mark 16:19 says, "So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God."

Can you imagine the glory, honor, and praise that was piled upon Jesus Christ, not only by the Father, but by all the angels? Jesus Christ had come to this earth, become incarnate, and conquered and defeated sin, death, and the devil. He had been buried, resurrected, and ascended into heaven to the praise of God the Father and of all the angels. He was now seated at the right hand of God. I would imagine there was quite a reception for the Son of God—for His perfect obedience to God's law and for His perfect sacrifice.

The Reception We Desire: Christ Receiving Us

There is another kind of reception that most people have never thought about, but I can assure you they do not want. In Matthew 22, beginning with verse 11, the king prepared a wedding feast for his son. In those times, when you went to a wedding, the host provided a wedding garment, and that garment had to be worn. The passage says, "And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: and he saith unto him,

Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless."

I have heard people say, "Well, when I see God, I'm going to give him a mouthful. I'm going to tell him." Really? I do not think so. This man was speechless, and that is the way every sinner is going to be. The Bible says, "And he was speechless."

Verse 13 says, "Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen." Those who reject the Son will be rejected by the Father. Those who despise the Son will be despised by the Father. Those who refuse the Son will be refused by the Father, and they will be cast into outer darkness.

Our Lord says in John chapter 14, "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions. If it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."

So the question is, how do you wish to be received? Our Lord said, "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you."

When I was a boy, there was an old gospel song, if you call it a gospel song, that would just say, "Build me a cabin in the corner of glory land." Everybody heard that song? "Just build me a cabin in the corner." Well, if the street is gold and the gates are pearl, I do not think a cabin is going to be quite right.

No, our Lord said, "in my Father's house are many mansions." So there are going to be mansions. Our Lord said in John 14, verse 3, "I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also."

Now turn in your Bibles to Acts chapter 7. When our Lord was resurrected and ascended into heaven, where did He go, and where was He placed? He sat where? At the right hand of God the Father. He was seated at the right hand of God the Father.

Look at Acts chapter 7, beginning with verse 54. Stephen is giving witness concerning Christ, and he is about to be martyred: "When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth. But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, and said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God."

"And they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord." Our Lord was seated, but now He is standing. Why was He standing? To receive one of His own. When we drop this old shell of a body, cross the river Jordan, and die, our Lord receives His own. You talk about reception.

Motivation for Faithful Service

Most of us would count it an honor to be received by an earthly king. An earthly king is nothing and no one. But to be received by the King of Kings, God himself, is marvelous. I not only want to be received by our Lord; I want to hear His words: “Well done, thou good and faithful servant: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”

John Flavel, a Puritan and one of the sweetest authors, wrote this concerning the ministry: “The labors of the ministry will exhaust the very marrow from your bones, hasten old age and death. They, God's preachers, are fitly compared to the toil of men in harvest, to the labors of a woman in travail, and to the agonies of a soldier in the extremity of a battle.” I can verify everything he says because I know it firsthand.

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

“How many truths have we to study? How many wiles of Satan and mysteries of corruption to detect? How many cases of conscience to resolve? Yea, we must fight in defense of the truths we

preach, as well as study them to paleness, and preach them in all, welcome pain-breast, aching backs, and trembling legs, if we can by all but approve ourselves Christ's faithful servants, and hear that joyful voice from his mouth, 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant,' all shall be well."

This astounds me. Flavel hit the nail on the head: "Indeed, it is not so much the expense of our labors as the loss of them that kill us. It is not with us as with other laborers. They find their work as they leave it. So do not we." If you are a carpenter building a house, you lay the foundation; once that concrete hardens, it remains as you left it.

You go back two days later, and you can begin erecting walls on it. If you do not finish erecting the walls, you go back two days later and pick up where you finish. You can keep doing that until three months elapse and finally get the house built. But it is not so with preachers. When you stop and think about this, when someone has been in church faithfully for thirty years and listened to real expositions of the Word of God, they should be scholars. They should be theologians. But the truth of the matter is, it is not like that.

Most people forget every lesson they hear, often by the time they get in the car to drive home. I have often wanted to preach a message one Sunday, preach the same message the next Sunday, and see how many could catch up on it and say, "Hey, he just preached that." You would be surprised. The point I am trying to make is that he is right. People hear something, they get convicted, seemingly, or they say, "I need to change that." Within twenty-four hours, they have forgotten all about it.

If the thought of being received by Jesus Christ does not excite you and motivate you to greater service, add one more thought. In Isaiah 53 and verse 11, the Scripture says, "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied." That verse has boggled my mind for years. Stop and think of the sinfulness that still exists in our lives, even as Christians. Even when you want to do right, pray to do right, and endeavor to be biblical in every area, your flesh comes up with stupid thoughts, vain ideas, and false pride. You think, "How did that happen? How did that come into my mind? I was not even thinking anywhere near that. It just popped into my mind." Yet here

we are, saved by the grace of God, and when our Lord receives us, He will be satisfied.

Can you imagine that our Lord's heart will be thrilled at receiving a sinful believer? It is astounding. Here is why He is going to receive us: "That you may be where I am." Wherever He is for eternity, we will be with Him. So how do you want to be received? Do you want to be received by our Lord and be the joy and rejoicing of His heart, or do you want to be received the other way and be cast out into outer darkness?

Applications: The Prodigal Son and Receiving Christ in One Another

The first application is the story of the prodigal son in Luke chapter 15. He received his inheritance, took the substance from his father, and went off and wasted it with riotous living. Finally, he spent all and came to naught. He was hired to feed hogs, and the Bible says he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat—not even real germ in the food. The kernel had already been eaten out, and the hogs were eating the husk, the shells. That was what he desired to eat.

Then he said to himself, "What a fool am I?" He said, "My father has plenty and enough to spare. I'll go back home to my father, and I'll say, 'Father, I'm not worthy to be called thy son. Make me as one of thy hired servants.'" When he came back home and the father saw him, the father went out to greet him. He said, "Father, I'm not worthy to be called thy son. Make me as one of thy hired servants." And what did the father do?

He said, "Bring hither the best robe, bring hither the ring of sonship, and kill the fatted calf. This my son who was lost is now found. He's now home." If that is any indication of the reception that we will have when we see our Lord, it would have to be an absolutely remarkable, wonderful reception—wonderful that we are absolutely at home.

One other application: Romans 15:7 says that we are to receive each other even as Christ received us. He received us while we were sinners, in our ignorance and in our stupidity. But there is another

thought. Our Lord said in Matthew chapter 10, verses 40 and 41, “He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me. He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet’s reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man’s reward.”

"He that receiveth you," He said, "receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me." Our Lord said exactly the same thing in John chapter 13, verse 20: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me; and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me." In other words, when you and I learn to receive each other as Christ received us to the glory of God, in one sense of the word, we are receiving Christ, and we are receiving the Father who sent Christ. Do you remember what our Lord said in Matthew chapter 25? "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

Receiving one another is in reality a way of receiving Christ and the Father. You remember He said in John chapter 14, "We will come unto you." How does He come to us? He comes to us by His Spirit, but also He comes to us in His people. For He said, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." So when we learn to receive one another, in the strictest sense of the word, we are learning to receive Christ. And when we receive Christ, we also receive the Father who sent Him. Isn't that astounding? Our Lord said, "If I go and prepare a place, I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."

That's the kind of reception that I want. Father, thank you again for the Lord Jesus Christ and for His grace and mercy to us. We pray, Father, that you would teach us to receive each other, to be patient with each other, and to edify each other. Help us to understand that everyone has a weakness, a frailty, and his own idiosyncrasies and peculiarities. May these things not separate us, but enable us to minister to each other and be a blessing to each other. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 7

The Source of Patience

December 1, 2024

Introduction: The Need for Patience

In Romans 15, beginning with verse 1, we read: “We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification. For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me. For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope. Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus.” Notice that we have read about patience a couple of times in this passage.

Each of us needs biblical patience. When we think of patience, we ought also to think of grace and mercy. Someone has rightly said that grace gives us what we do not deserve, while mercy keeps us from receiving what we do deserve. Patience enables God to hold off before he gives people exactly what they do deserve. We will be looking at patience and at long-suffering as well.

I confess that, in the strictest sense of the word, I am impatient. I suppose everyone is impatient, although mine is sometimes more frustration than impatience. Alice and I have lived long enough to know when things used to be different. Casey, when we were young, we could pull up to a filling station, or gas station, and someone would run out and ask, "Fill it up, sir." They would put in the gas, wash the windshield, check the oil, check the tires and the air in them, sometimes even vacuum something out and check the headlights—all when gas was twenty-five cents a gallon. When you compare the way things used to be with the way they are today, you understand service frustration.

Alice and I have told many people that, when we were teenagers, we could go into any department store in town and pick out three or four outfits. They would ask, "Which one do you want?" We might answer, "I'm not sure," and our parents probably did not make the choice either. Then they would say, "Would you like to take them out on approval?" We would say yes, and all they did was write your name down.

Everybody knew everybody. What you took, you could take those clothes home, try them on, and let your parents see them. What you did not want, you took back; what you wanted, you kept. There were no charge cards and no charge accounts per se, but everybody knew everybody. When I was a teenager, a young man, if I wanted something while I was uptown and did not have any money, all I had to do was say, "Charge this to D.J. Weaver," and they would charge it to my dad and send him a bill for it. It was just that simple. I am simply saying that times have really changed, and it seems like the more they change, the more impatient we really become.

Biblical Commands to Be Patient

The Bible tells us in the book of Luke, chapter 8 and verse 15, that we are to bring forth fruit with patience. When you start thinking about a garden or crops, it takes a great deal of patience, because once you plant that seed, it has to come up. Once it comes up, it has to mature, and once it is mature, it has to produce the fruit. Then finally there is a harvest. He says that you and I are to bring forth fruit in our lives

with patience. We have to understand that fruit is not always going to fall into our hands immediately. There has to be patience in that.

The Bible commends us in 1 Timothy, chapter 6 and verse 11, to follow after patience. That is an interesting concept: follow after patience. In other words, we are to go in the way of patience. I love the one found in Hebrews 10 and verse 26: "Brethren, ye have need of patience." I certainly believe that is true. Each of us has need of patience, that is for sure. In Hebrews chapter 12 and verse 1, the Bible tells us to run the race with patience. How in the world do you run a race with patience? I remember when I was young, I used to run about two or three miles at one time. I knew one thing about running two miles: you could not start off at full breakneck speed and continue that way. You had to be steady, with a steady gait and a steady speed, and finally you would make it. So the Bible tells us that we are to run our race with patience.

The God of Patience

Romans 15:5 says, "Now the God of patience and consolation grants you to be like minded one toward another, according to Christ Jesus." I want you to note that God is called the God of patience. In verse 13, He is called the God of hope: "Now, the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace and believing, that you may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost." In verse 33, He says, "Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen." You have to know God as the God of patience. Before you can know Him as the God of hope, you have to know Him as the God of hope before you can ever know Him as the God of peace.

God as the God of Patience, Hope, and Peace

In the not too distant future, Lord willing, I am going to be preaching on this text in greater detail. I preached a message on this text many years ago, which I simply titled Christian Protocol. The next message I am going to preach is, "How do you wish to be received?" The Bible tells us how we are to receive one another and what that means. After he tells us that we must have patience, look in verse 6. After he talks about the God of patience, he says, "That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus

Christ." Then, "Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God." That is the text I will be using. Look also in verse 8: "Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers."

What you see in these few verses, first of all, is that in patience we are to have one mind. That is what he said: "That ye may with one mind." Here is how you get one mind: You study the Scriptures and submit to the Word of God. You are taught the Scriptures, and you submit to the teaching of the Word of God. In other words, if you have one mind, you think alike. That is what it amounts to: You have the same thoughts.

Years ago, when Alice and I were younger in our church, we had a family night once a month. We would always play the oldywed game, Diana—not the newlywed game, but the oldywed game. Did anybody ever see the newlywed game? We played the oldywed game. Finally, our people said, "Pastor, you and Alice can't play anymore," because we would always win.

They would ask questions about us, and we simply knew the answers. We had not been married all that long, but that was it. When you have one mind, you think alike. Notice what he said: "that ye may with one mind and one mouth." When you think the same way, you speak the same truths and the same thoughts. You cannot have one mouth without having one mind. It will take patience until we can have one mind so that we can have one mouth.

Now watch this. Here is the third thing in verse six: "that ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God," which is one motive, "even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." How many churches do you know that have one mind, one mouth, and one motive? Everything is done for God's honor and God's glory. How many families do you know like that?

Then notice not only one mind, one mouth, and one motive, but one mission. Verse eight says that Jesus Christ was "a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers." He goes on to say that the Gentiles might glorify

God. Therefore, we should have one mission: not only to glorify God, but to confirm the Scriptures in every area of our lives.

Learning Patience from the Sovereign God

That indeed takes patience. How do you get patience? Where do you get patience? How do you become patient? I can give you the answers; I cannot apply them, but I can certainly give them to you. You must apply them yourself.

First, we learn patience from the sovereign God. Back in Romans 15:5, he says, "Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Jesus Christ." Patience stems first and foremost from the sovereign God, who grants us consolation and that we should be like-minded.

Hold Romans 15 and turn to Colossians, chapter one. Let us begin at verse nine and read through verse eleven: Colossians one, verse nine.

For this cause, we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and desire that you might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, that you might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. We are strengthened with all might according to His glorious power unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness, giving thanks to the Father, which has made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. So he says in this prayer for the Colossian Christians that they might be strengthened with all might according to his glorious power unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness.

When we talk about learning patience from the sovereign God, remember Genesis chapter 6 and verse 5, where God saw that the imaginations of the hearts of the sons of men were only evil continually. The Bible said it grieved God, and God destroyed the world and sent the flood. But Noah found grace in the sight of the Lord. God saw the wickedness of man, and every thought of the imagination of his heart was only evil continually. Yet God waited 120 years before He sent the flood. You will find that in 2 Peter,

where Noah was a preacher of righteousness, and the Bible said that 120 years was given. God did destroy them, but He still waited 120 years before He did so.

Also consider Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboim, and the cities of the plain. When you read Genesis chapter 18, God comes to Abram and says, "I will not hide from Abram that which I am about to do." Lot had pitched his tent toward Sodom and was there, and God revealed that He was going to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. He said, "The cry of it has come up to me." How long God waited before He destroyed them, I do not know; the Bible does not tell us in that particular instance. But I do know that when God got Lot and his daughters out through those angels, God destroyed the city. Here is the patience of God. Alice and I have often talked about this. I told her this morning that I had read yesterday where some sixty-something-year-old man grabbed a little nine-year-old girl while her grandmother was in the bathroom. He grabbed this little nine-year-old girl and raped her twice.

Finally, the police were called. They pursued him, and he was killed in a car wreck. I said, "Good. That is fine with me." Alice and I wondered why God does not strike some people down instantly. Then we stopped to think: we are sinners as well, so why has God not struck us down instantly? God has been patient with us, and I will point that out further. I have already taken you through Jonah, but remember Nineveh: approximately how long did it exist after Jonah before God destroyed it? One hundred fifty years. God did destroy it.

You can read about it in Habakkuk and Nahum. But probably 150 years, because the people repented.

Now, there is an interesting thing. If you look in Genesis chapter 15, we are still talking about patience from the sovereignty of God. God had entered into a covenant with Abraham. In verse 13, "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." Why did Israel have to be in Egypt four hundred years? Here is the answer. God says in verse 14, "And also that nation whom they shall serve will I judge, and afterward they shall come out with a great substance. And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace. Thou shalt be buried in a good old age."

“But in the fourth generation, they shall come hither again, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full.” The Amorites were Canaanites; they dwelt in the land of Canaan. What did God do when He brought Israel out of Egypt? He put a sword in their hand and said, “Kill everyone.” The astounding thing is that God waited a hundred years before He destroyed them, and yet He did.

Look at the nation Israel. God said, even in the book of Numbers while they were in the wilderness, “These ten times have they provoked Me.” How many times did God say to Moses, “Step aside, that I may consume all of them in a moment, and I’ll make a greater nation out of you”? And yet there was a northern kingdom that went into captivity in 722 B.C.; Judah, the southern kingdom, went into captivity in 586 B.C. Finally, in 70 A.D., He destroyed the nation. Look at the time. The point I am trying to make is very simple: God is patient, and we should learn patience there.

I want you to apply this to each one of us. Look in Romans chapter 2, verses 4 and 5. This is an amazing passage. Look what he says in verse 2: “But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things. And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?”

Watch what people do, and we've done it as well. Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance. Then he says in verse five, but after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasures up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God. Now, I want you to look in verse four. He says, or despisest thou the riches of his goodness.

You know, there's a passage, I believe it's Psalm 105, I think, where the Bible says, oh, that the sons of men would praise the Lord for his goodness to the children of men. Three times in one Psalm. When you stop and think about the goodness of God to each one of us, he allows us to live. He gives us health, friends, and family. He supplies our needs. He feeds us. He allows us to breathe his air. What happens when we despise the riches of God's goodness? God does not instantly smite us, strike us down. Notice what happens: He forbears.

His forbearance comes into play. What happens then when his forbearance is taxed to the limit? Then comes in his longsuffering. I just finished a message this week, which I'll be preaching, hopefully, in the not-too-distant future. And I titled it, Friday is Not Always God's Payday. And it's not. But notice he said, the long-suffering of God comes in.

I think I remember the Greek word. I think it's makrothumia. But long-suffering is related to what we call being long nostrils. How does that work with being long suffering? For instance, when a man gets exceedingly angry, he breathes with great difficulty, with great hardness, and you can see his nostrils flare. When those nostrils are flaring, he's grabbing for more air. He's getting angry. He's ready to act. The problem is this: when someone has a long nose or a big nose, it's harder to detect a flare in the nostrils.

So when God's goodness is despised, his forbearance comes into play. When his forbearance is despised, his long suffering comes into play. People think, well, God's not going to do anything, but they just cannot discern the flare in the nostril because God is getting ready to do something. And he says what they're doing is they're treasuring up wrath upon themselves into the day of wrath.

I have quoted this passage many times. In fact, I try to quote it every day. I do not always succeed, but most of the time I do. When I wake up in the morning, I thank the Lord for allowing me to live through the night, and when I go to bed at night, I thank the Lord for allowing me to live through the day. The Bible tells us that we are to show forth His lovingkindness every morning and His faithfulness every night. The passage I am thinking about is Lamentations 3:22–23: “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.” So we are to learn patience, first of all, from the sovereign God.

Learning Patience from the Scriptures of God

I want you to look in your Bibles to Ephesians chapter 4. Here is our failing, I can assure you: usually, when we are impatient, we are impatient with each other. We are impatient with those we love because we know we can get away with it with them. That is what it

amounts to. You cannot be impatient with some people you do not know, because they may knock you down or slap you around. But those we love, we take advantage of. Look at Ephesians 4:31–32: “Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.” Now look at this. We are to let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, evil speaking, and malice be put away from us, and be kind to one another.

Years ago, I was preaching in Alabama. Before preaching that night, the pastor, his wife, and I were invited to one of the homes of his members for supper. The lady of the house had her hair done the way the antebellum ladies wore their hair. It was beautiful, with the ring cascading down. I simply said to her, “I really like your hair,” and I really did; it was an honest compliment. Her little boy, about eight or nine years old, said, “It ain't hers.” She turned red. I looked at him and said, “Now, son, whether she grew it or whether she bought it, it does belong to her.”

He said, “You should have seen the fight she had with Daddy over it.” The woman, trying to salvage the situation, said, “Now, son, you know Mama and Daddy don’t fight.” He said, “Oh, you should have heard them hollering at each other.” The more she tried to get out of it, the more she stepped into it—all because I complimented her on her hair. This is what I am talking about: we take advantage of each other because we know we can get away with it.

The children always tell on the parents, that is for sure. Patience, first and foremost, comes from the sovereign God.

Secondly, patience also comes from the Scriptures of God. Look in Romans chapter 15, verse 4: “For whatsoever things were written aforetime”—we are talking about the Old Testament—“were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.” Do you realize the Scriptures are designed to give us patience and hope?

Look in James chapter 1, verses 3 and 4: “Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.”

The trying of your faith worketh patience. Let patience have her perfect work, that you may be mature and complete, wanting nothing.

Now turn back to Romans chapter 5 and look at verse 1. "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." And not only so, "we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope: and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us."

When was the last time you gloried in tribulation? When was the last time you really enjoyed having financial difficulties, being sick, or having things go absolutely wrong in every area and every aspect?

This is what he is saying: patience teaches us to glory in tribulation. Why? Because tribulation is designed to give us more patience, patience is designed to give us more hope, and hope is designed to make us not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Many times, when we pray for patience, God sends us tribulation to produce patience. That is the way God works. He gives us patience, but we are to learn patience from the sovereign God and from the Scriptures of God.

Learning Patience from the Saints of God

Now, if you look back in Romans chapter 15, there is a third place from which we are to learn patience. You will find it in verse 2: we are to learn patience from the saints of God. He says, "Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good edification." Then, in verse 3, he tells us, "For even Christ pleased not himself," which I will discuss momentarily. We are to learn patience from the saints of God.

In light of that, turn in your Bibles to James, chapter 5, beginning at verse 7. He says, "Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he received the early and latter rain." Of course, in the Old Testament, in Canaan land, there was an early and latter rain related to the crops, and both were

needed. Anyone who grew a garden or crop had to have patience. James is using this illustration: “Be patient therefore, brethren.” In other words, things are not going to happen immediately. Verse 8 says, “Be ye also patient. Stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.”

James warns, “Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold the judge standing before the door.” He then directs us to the prophets: “Take, my brethren, the prophets who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering, affliction, and patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. You have heard of the patience of Job and have seen the end of the Lord, that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercies.”

He says, Take my brethren, the prophets, as an example of suffering, affliction, and patience. We could talk about Job; in fact, he is used in verse eleven. He says, “You have seen the end of the Lord.” The Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercies. Look, if you would, how God blessed and rewarded Job for being patient. I love that passage in Job chapter one. When Job lost all of his children and all of his possessions, the Bible says, “In all of this Job sinned not with his lips nor charged God foolishly.” Wow.

Think about Isaiah—what he suffered and how he was rejected by his own people. In Hebrews chapter eleven, the Bible speaks of some who were sawn asunder, and tradition says that this happened to Isaiah. They put him in a hollowed log, and then they sawed him in two while they were sawing the log.

Think about Jeremiah. Jeremiah is known as the weeping prophet. Look how they hated him. Look how they tried to kill him. Look how they imprisoned him and threw him into dungeons.

Take my brethren, the prophets. Think about Ezekiel.

Since we are talking about patience, look in verse seven: “Be patient therefore.” Now look in verse eight: “Be ye also patient.” Then, in verse nine: “Grudge not one against another, brethren.” Do you know what it is to grudge? Let me give you an illustration that you will not forget.

When I was a boy, I was raised on a farm. We had hogs as well as cows, mules, and chickens. A five-gallon bucket stayed on our back

porch. It was called the slop bucket. Any coffee not drunk at breakfast went into that bucket. Any toast or eggs not eaten went into it also. It was slop. At dinner, any piece of corn, cornbread, or whatever was not eaten went into the bucket. The same thing happened at supper. Every bit of liquid left over and every bit of food left over—food that had been nibbled on or was no longer usable—all of it went into that bucket.

Usually, by the end of the day, that five-gallon bucket was full of what we called slop. I would take it out to the hog pen, where there was a trough, and pour it in. All those big old hogs would come running as fast as they could. They would stick their nostrils and mouths into the slop, sucking it up.

All of a sudden, one of them would hit a piece of corn or something solid. He would take that solid piece of food, turn, and run. What did the rest of the hogs do? They chased him and tried to take it away from him. They would not keep drinking their slop and eating until they found something. Why did they chase him? Because they grudged what he had. They did not have it. “Grudge not one against another, brethren.”

I have seen people go through this. I have seen young people get married and say, “Why can’t we have a new car? Mom and Dad have a new car. Why can’t we have a big, fine house? Mom and Dad have a big, fine house. Why can’t we have new furniture? Mom and Daddy have new furniture.” Yes, Mom and Daddy may have all those things, but those young people do not understand that it took them fifty years to get them.

And so they run out and go in debt. Then everything goes to pot and falls into pieces because they begrudge what their parents or some older couple has, while they have nothing. This is what God is saying: You be patient until you find your own piece of corn in the slop. You work and you wait. This is what you learn patience from the saints of God.

Look at how they suffered, what they endured, and how God brought them out in the end. God is telling us plainly that we are to learn from the saints of God. If you would take the time to read Fox's Book of Martyrs, there are some interesting stories in it. One I read

years ago concerned an individual whose name I forget. They took sharp knives and flayed his skin, making cuts in his legs and throughout his body. Then they rubbed hard rock salt into the wounds. They told this wonderful Christian man, “Deny Christ and we will wash the salt out of your wounds.”

And you know what he said? “Salt on. For God's sake, salt on. I'm not going to deny Christ.” Polycarp, who was a disciple of the Apostle John, was called upon to deny Christ. He said, “Lo, these 86 years have I served him, and he's done me no wrong. Must I now be called upon to deny my Lord and Savior? I will not, and I cannot.” They tortured Polycarp, and he died rather quickly because of his advanced age of 86.

So God tells us in Romans chapter 15 that we are to learn patience from the sovereign God, from the Scriptures of God, and from the saints of God. And now, if you will look in your Bibles to Romans chapter 15, you will also find that we are to learn patience from the Spirit of God. Wow. Now think about this.

Learning Patience from the Saints of God

Learning Patience from the Spirit of God

Look at Mark chapter 10, verse 1, speaking of Jesus Christ: “And he arose from thence, and cometh into the coast of Judea by the farther side of Jordan.” Then we read, “And the people resort to him again.” Look at this: the same people. “The people resort to him again, and, as he was wont, he taught them again.” He taught the same people, possibly the same truths, again. We have a saying that repetition aids learning.

I had a dear friend who has been dead for many years. He asked me to explain something to him, and I did. About a day or so later, he asked me the same exact question again, and I answered it the same way the second time. A day or two later, he asked me the third time. I looked at him and said, “John, how many times do I have to answer that question for you? I’ve already answered it twice.” He looked at me and said, “I’m sorry. I guess I’m just stupid.” I told him, “John, you’re not stupid. You don’t owe me an apology. I owe you an apology. I’m going to answer it for you again. If you don’t

understand it, ask me again tomorrow, and the next day, and the next day, and the next day, until God opens your eyes. Just keep asking me."

This is what Christ was doing. Our Lord taught these same people again, possibly the same truth. This is why we are to learn patience from the saints of God.

Fourthly, we are to learn patience also from the Spirit of God. Let me ask you a question. We know the Holy Spirit of God is the agent of conviction, regeneration, and conversion. How many of you were converted the very first time the Holy Spirit convicted you? Nobody can really raise his hand, because you do not even know the first time the Spirit convicted you.

Patience from the Son of God

The Bible says, "God speaketh once, yea, twice, and man perceiveth it not." How many of you were converted the second time the Holy Spirit convicted you? Or the third time, the fourth, or the fifth? You do not really know. The truth is that when we were under conviction, most of the time we tried to ignore it. We tried to run from it and continue our lives as if nothing were happening.

What if the Holy Spirit had been convicting you repeatedly, and finally said, "I'm just not going to deal with you anymore"? Where would you be if that actually happened? It will not happen; it cannot happen. I am only pointing out the fact that He convicted us many times, while we were totally unaware of what was happening in our lives. I remember—and Alice may remember—that when the Lord got hold of me, I actually thought I was dying. I really did. I thought I was dying. It was so heavy that I could not believe it.

The point is that God the Holy Spirit continued to deal with us even when we were ignorant of His dealings, and even when we tried to smother Him. I am so thankful that the Spirit of God cannot be successfully resisted. He may be resisted, but not successfully. He continued to deal with us until He brought us to the end of ourselves; then we saw our sin, saw the Lord Jesus Christ, and He enabled us to come to Him by faith.

Learning Patience from the Son of God

Now, in Romans chapter 15, we come to the fifth place from which we are to learn patience. We are to learn patience from the sovereign God, the Scriptures of God, the saints of God, and the Spirit of God. In verse 3, we are to learn patience from the Son of God: “For even Christ pleased not himself; but as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me.” The Bible tells us in 1 Peter chapter 2, verses 21 through 25, that Christ is indeed our example. Turn to Matthew chapter 27. I want to read a few verses to show you something. Let us begin with verse 44.

Beginning with verse 36, we read: “And sitting down, they watched him there.” Jesus Christ is crucified, and they set up over his head this accusation written: “This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.” Then there were two thieves crucified with him, one on the right and another on the left. Those who passed by reviled him, wagging their heads and saying, “Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross.” Likewise, the chief priests, with the scribes and the elders, mocked him, saying, “He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God, and let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God.” The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth.

Jesus Christ had been wrongfully tried and wrongfully condemned. He had been flogged, beaten, and crucified. Now these people were walking up and down, mocking him, reviling him, and accusing him of being a false Messiah. They were saying, “Thou that destroyest the temple and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross.” Likewise, the chief priest said, “He saved others; he cannot save himself.” Here is what they were saying: “If you are the Son of God, come down, and we will believe you.”

He could have come down from that cross at any time he so pleased. But he endured all of this patiently. With that in mind, turn to Hebrews chapter 12, beginning with verse 1. This is absolutely astounding to me: “Wherefore, seeing we are compassed about with

so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us. Let us run with patience the race that is set before us."

Let us run the race with patience. Where do we learn patience? From the Son of God. "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." What did he say? "Let us run the race with patience."

What will make us patient? Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. He endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of God.

Conclusion: Application and Prayer

Most of us are like the woman who finally realized her impatience was sin. She began praying for patience: "Lord, I'm impatient. I know impatience is a sin, and I want patience—and I want it right now." That is the way we are. But we do not get patience right now. We receive patience from the sovereign God, the Scriptures of God, the saints of God, the Spirit of God, and the Son of God, because God is a God of all patience. If He has been so patient with us, we need to learn to be patient with one another.

I can stop and think back in my life: hundreds of times that I should have died or been killed, and was not. The only reason I am as old as I am is God's grace and mercy. God was gracious and merciful to me, and patient. We want Him to strike down all our enemies instantly, but not us. I assure you, if we are patient, we will see Him strike down all His enemies.

Psalm 58: "The righteous shall see the vengeance, and shall rejoice." Revelation 19 says the smoke of their torment ascended forever and ever, and the righteous said, "Hallelujah, glory to God." We need to learn patience, and can learn it only from these five sources: "Be ye patient; for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh."

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank Thee for Thy Word and truth, and ask, Lord, for Thy grace and mercy in our lives. In Jesus Christ's name, we pray. Amen.

Source Notes

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Chapter 6: How Do You Wish to be Received?
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Chapter 7: The Source of Patience
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