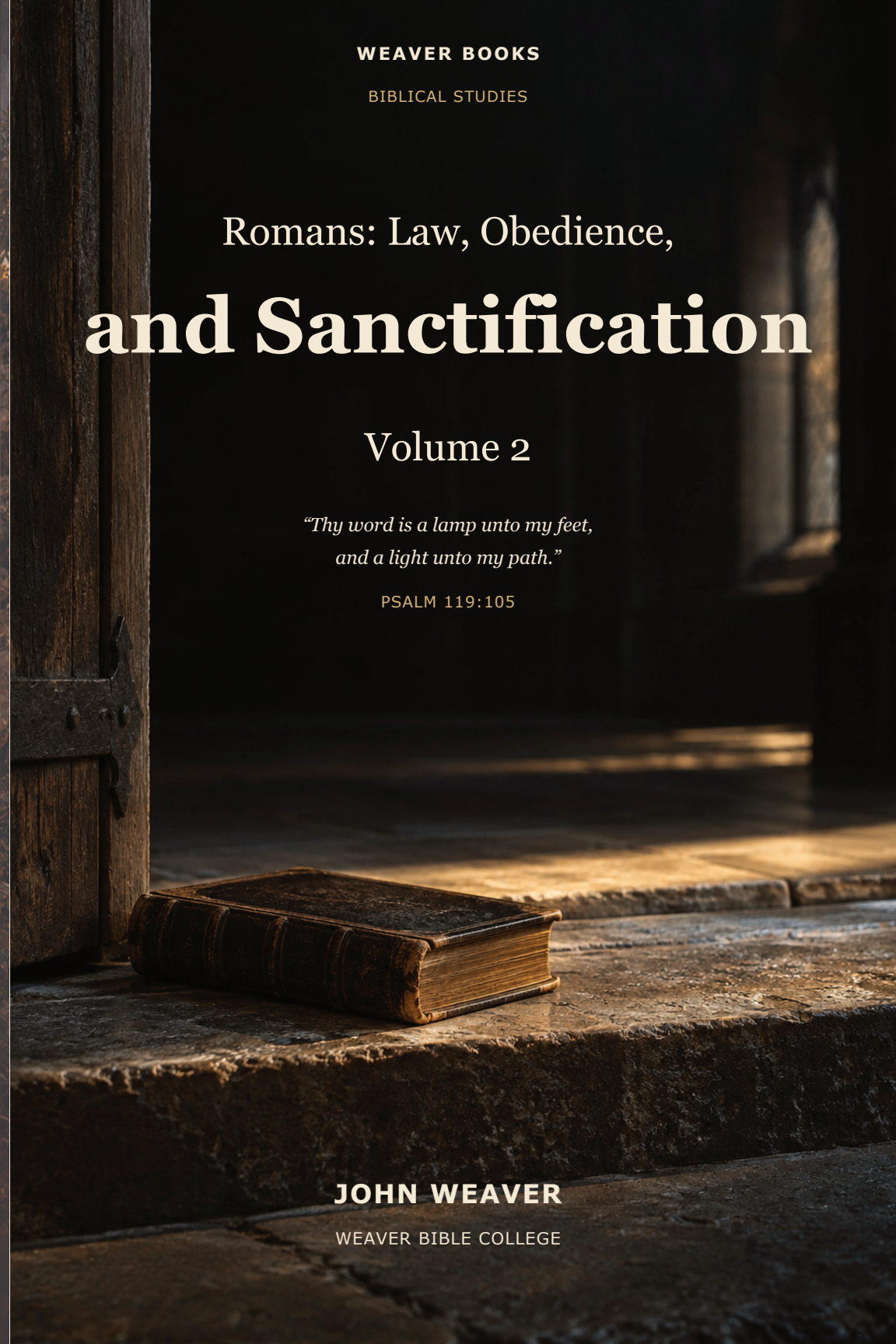


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Volume 2

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

PSALM 119:105

JOHN WEAVER

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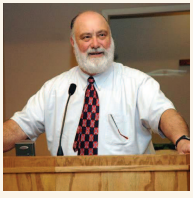
Be ye holy; for I am holy.

1 PETER 1:16, EXCERPT

John Weaver considers law, obedience, and sanctification through Romans and related Scriptures. These messages examine the relationship between a profession of faith and the conduct of Christian life, calling readers to consider holiness in concrete terms. Volume 2 is one of two volumes; the complete chapter sequence is preserved across the set. This volume contains corrected chapters 22-41.

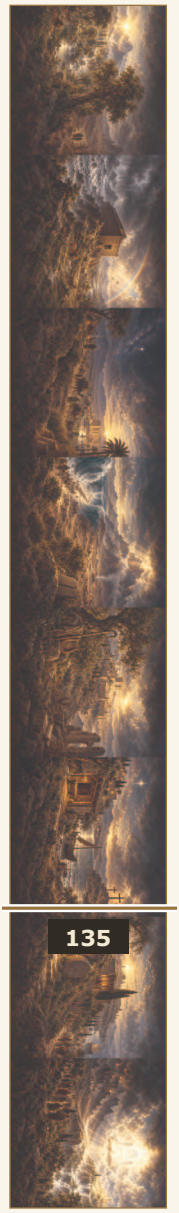
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Volume 2

Corrected chapters 22-41

John Weaver

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Romans: Law, Obedience, and Sanctification

Volume 2

John Weaver

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Edited from the sermon corpus of John Weaver.

Corrected review edition - October 4, 2026. Repeated full sermons have been consolidated; chapter numbers, contents, indexes, and study-guide reading ranges follow this corrected edition. Original transcript variants remain preserved in the editorial archive. Final editorial and publisher approval is still required. This is Volume 2 of two, covering corrected chapters 22-41. Both volumes use one matching study guide.

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CHAPTER 22

Walking With The Lord - Part 7 - Learning Christ

Part One

April 8, 2016

Introduction and Context

Our text today is Ephesians 4:20-21. Since we dealt with verses 17 through 19 last week, let us read verses 17 through 21: “This I say therefore and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart, who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But ye have not so learned Christ. If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus.”

We have been dealing with Walking with the Lord for the last six weeks. We cannot walk with the Lord until we learn to walk before the Lord. We must walk in faith, according to Hebrews 11:6. We then

looked at Ephesians 4:1-7, where Paul teaches us how to walk worthily of the vocation to which we have been called. We are to walk in lowliness, meekness, and longsuffering, forbearing one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Last week we began with verse 17, where Paul demands and commands that we walk differently—not as other Gentiles, or other nations, walk. The word vanity refers not only to uselessness and worthlessness, but also to idolatry and perverseness. He explains that vanity in verse 18: "Having the understanding darkened." I told you about judicial darkening, retributive darkening, and natural darkening in response to sin.

They are alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart. Being past feeling means there is no consciousness, no sense of shame or remorse. They have become calloused and have given themselves over to lasciviousness—to nakedness, wantonness, and lustfulness—to work all uncleanness with greediness. Then he says in verse 20, "But ye have not so learned Christ."

The apostle Paul teaches us that we have to walk differently from the unsaved. We are not to be like the ungodly in any way, because the ungodly do not know Jesus Christ. What, then, makes us different? First and foremost, the answer must be the grace of God in our lives.

The Apostle Paul asks several questions in 1 Corinthians chapter 4 and verse 7: "For who maketh thee to differ one from another?" Then he asks, "What hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory or boast as if thou hadst not received it?" He is saying that God made us to differ, and everything that we have is from God.

I met a young man this—in fact, he is still at the house. He is a very talented young man, intellectually, physically, and he just got a full scholarship, not only because of his athletic ability but because of his intellectuality. As Grandpa was bragging on him at dinner today, the young man said, "Grandpa, you need to hush. You gonna give me a big head." I looked at him and said, "Son, the only thing

you can do is say, ‘Thank God for my intellect, for my abilities,’ because He gave you everything. And if you try to say, ‘It’s me,’ then you’re sinning, and that’s pride.” The proper response when someone brags on you is simply to say, “I am what I am by the grace of God.”

The Necessity of Learning Christ

Certainly, first and foremost, we are what we are by the grace of God. We must also confess that the grace of God that leads us to salvation leads us into obedience. First Peter 1:2 says, “Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father through sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience.” The very God who saves us brings us unto obedience. Obedience not only implies learning; it requires and demands learning. You cannot obey what you do not know, someone you do not know, an order you never knew had been issued, or a commandment you never knew had been issued. Obedience requires learning.

The Greek word for a disciple is mathetes, which literally means a learner, a pupil, or disciple. He says in verse 20, "But you have not so learned Christ." Has the thought of learning Jesus Christ ever really entered into your mind? Have you ever really considered the necessity of learning Christ? Has the meaning of the word Christian ever passed through your mind? The word Christian literally means to be Christ-like or to be a disciple or a follower of Jesus Christ. We are told that the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch in Acts chapter 11, verse 26. How in the world could one consider himself a follower or disciple of Jesus Christ if he is not like Jesus Christ?

The Problem of Superficial Christianity

Think about the situation that we are in in America. All one has to do to ascertain whether or not we understand the truth of learning Christ is to look around at the average church and at the average professing Christian. Truly, it is almost impossible today to tell the difference between the average professing Christian and an unsaved worldling. Professing Christians look like, dress like, act like, and even talk like the unsaved. We attend the same movies, watch the

same TV programs, vote for the same unsaved candidates, and are easily and quickly duped when it comes to biblical and spiritual knowledge. The average professing Christian automatically assumes that, just because someone says they are a Christian, they are, regardless of how they live.

J. C. Ryle said it like this: "If you show me a man deliberately living an unholy and licentious life and yet boasting that his sins are forgiven, I answer he is under a ruinous delusion and is not forgiven at all. I would not believe he is forgiven if an angel from heaven affirmed it. And I charge you not to believe it too. Pardon of sin and love of sin are like oil and water. They never go together."

All who are washed in the blood of Jesus Christ are also sanctified by the Spirit of Christ. That certainly is true.

I understand that there are weak Christians, ignorant Christians, foolish Christians, and baby Christians. Unhappily, most remain in those states. So you have to ask, What in the world is wrong with Christianity? Why is it that we never progress, never get out of weak-kneed, baby, or shallow Christianity? Why do most never progress?

If someone is saved—and I mean genuinely saved—the truth is that they never really learn Christ. They may know Him in a saving manner, but they have never genuinely learned Christ. You look around and must acknowledge that the average professing Christian is unlike Christ in a multitude of ways.

I have always been amazed at how many hours professing Christians can spend in church and how many sermons they can hear, yet end up knowing so little and being so ignorant of biblical truths. The answer is that they never really listen, and they never really learn Jesus Christ. They may know Him savingly in one sense of the word, but they do not truly know Him.

Knowing Christ vs. Knowing About Christ

Consider the conversation between Jesus Christ, Thomas, and Philip in John 14, and pay close attention to the question Christ asked Philip. 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. And whither I go, you know, and the way you know."

Thomas saith unto him, "Lord, we know not whither thou goest; how can we know the way?" Jesus answered and said unto him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh unto the Father but by me."

"If you had known me, you should have known my Father also. And from henceforth you know him and have seen him." Philip saith unto him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us." Jesus saith unto him, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet thou hast not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, 'Show us the Father'?"

Philip had personally walked with Jesus Christ for three years, enjoying intimate fellowship with Him. Yet our Lord said, "Have I been so long time with you and yet you have not known me?" If Philip could live with the Lord and walk with Him for three years, seeing Him every day, are we not much more ignorant, without that personal, intimate relationship? The truth of the matter is that most people really do not know Jesus Christ.

Look back in your Bibles to Ephesians 4. In verse 20, he says, "But you have not so learned Christ." Verse 21 says, "If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus."

Paul is giving us an astounding and amazing truth: we must learn Jesus Christ. We are not to live as do the heathen. If someone lives in a heathenish lifestyle, it is evidence that he does not know Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ does not teach us to live ungodly lives, in vanity and ignorance, rebellion, or disobedience. If we know anything about Jesus Christ, we know that He is the holy, harmless, sinless Son of God. We also know that He is the most submissive Servant to the Father, obedient in all things, and our example in everything.

John Calvin said it like this, speaking of the difference between verses 17–19 and verses 20–21: "He, that is Paul, now draws a contrast of a Christian life so as to make it evident how utterly inconsistent it is with the character of a godly man to defile himself

with the abominations of the Gentiles. Because the Gentiles walk in darkness, therefore they do not distinguish between right and wrong. But those on whom the truth of God shines ought to live in a different manner."

That those to whom the vanity of the senses is a rule of life should yield themselves up to base lusts is not surprising. But the doctrine of Christ teaches us to renounce our natural dispositions. He whose life differs not from that of the unbelievers has learned nothing of Jesus Christ. For the knowledge of Christ cannot be separated from the mortification of the flesh. The word mortified simply means to make dead. That is why we hear of morticians.

The same grace of God that saves us teaches us to mortify our flesh. John Calvin made this statement, and Titus 2 gives the scriptural statement concerning it. Look at Titus 2:11: "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared unto all men." It is the grace of God that brings salvation. According to verse 12, the grace of God that brings salvation teaches us something: "Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, looking for that blessed hope and glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior, Jesus Christ."

Isn't that amazing? The grace of God that brings salvation teaches us that we are to live differently. It teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world. Now you remember that Paul, who wrote the book of Ephesians,

Paul also wrote the book of Philippians. Paul said this in Philippians 3, verses 10 and 11: "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death, if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead." The Apostle Paul is teaching us that to know Jesus Christ is far more than simply knowing facts about Him. It is far more than an intellectual knowledge concerning Him. To know Jesus Christ means that we are to be made conformable unto Him in life and in death.

Since we are commanded to learn Christ, the question has to be asked: How well are we to learn Christ? To what extent are we to learn Christ? We could also ask, What is the evidence that we are learning Christ? That question will be answered from the Bible. The answer is found in the Scriptures.

The Extent of Learning Christ

Look in your Bibles at 1 John chapter 4, verse 17. You want to know how well we are to learn Christ? What is the extent of our learning of Jesus Christ? The Bible says, "Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world."

Did you hear what John said? If you want to be bold in the day of judgment, that which is going to give you boldness is this: As He is, so are we in this world. In other words, our life, our character, and our conduct are to be Christlike. As He is, so are we in this world.

Consider exactly what this means. Look in Romans 8, verse 29. The Scripture says, "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren." The Bible says that He predestinated us to be conformed to the image of His Son.

The Greek word for conformed here is summorphos, and it literally means to be conformed unto, to be fashioned like unto, to have the same form or the same likeness. What the word actually means is to be pressed into the same mold.

Years ago Alice used to make our butter. We had a butter churn, one of those old wooden churns, and we would just turn that butter. When it got thick enough, she would pour it into a butter mold and put that mold in the refrigerator. Once it hardened, she would dump the butter onto a plate, and it was perfectly conformed to that mold. That is exactly what he is talking about in being conformed to Jesus Christ.

In reality, we are to be duplicates of Jesus Christ in this world—in obedience, submission, character, conduct, and holiness—so that we can say, like Christ to the Father in John 8, verse 29, "For I always do those things that please him." Would it not be absolutely

wonderful if you and I were able truthfully to say, “We always do those things which please Him”? That is what conformity means. As He is, so are we in this world.

Christ as Lesson and Teacher

Go back to Ephesians chapter 4 and look at verses 20 and 21 again. He says, “But you have not so learned Christ. If so be that you have heard him and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus.” Here is what you must grasp today: Jesus Christ is the lesson. We must learn Christ. He is not only the lesson; He is the teacher. He says, “If you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus.” We must learn to look at Jesus Christ not only as our lesson but also as our teacher. We are not simply learning about Christ; we are learning from Christ.

There is a big difference. In order to learn Christ, we must take our seat in the position of learners, students, followers, and disciples.

If you look at the word learned in verse 20—“But you have not so learned Christ”—you remember that the Greek word mathetes is the word for a disciple, pupil, or learner. The interesting thing is that the word learned here is the verb manthano, which literally means to learn as a disciple or pupil. It means to learn, to be apprised of, to increase one's knowledge, to be increased in knowledge, to hear, to be informed, to learn by practice and use, and listen.

This means to be in the habit of it, or to be made accustomed to it. The rest of this chapter is about this word. Its importance can be seen in that it occurs twenty-five times in the New Testament. Its emphasis is not simply upon imparting knowledge, but upon awakening a thorough and complete commitment of oneself to Jesus Christ. Remember Matthew 11:29: “Take my yoke upon you and learn of me. And ye shall find rest unto your souls.” He did not say, “Learn about me,” but “Learn of me.” The little preposition means to learn out of or from Jesus Christ. Thus, Jesus Christ is not only the lesson; Jesus Christ is the teacher. We are not merely learning facts about Christ; we are actually learning Christ.

The Mark of True Discipleship

Now consider John 8:30–31, where our Lord speaks about a disciple learning Christ. “As he spake these words, many believed on him.” Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed on him, “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed.” A disciple is not only one who learns of, from, and out of Christ, but one who continues in what he has learned.

I have had people tell me over the years, “So-and-so used to be a Christian, but he fell away.” Really? The proof that you have ever savingly believed is that you continue in faith. The proof that you have ever savingly repented is that you continue in repentance. The truth that you have ever savingly believed the Word is that you continue in the Word. When you try to tell me, “So-and-so used to be a Christian, but he is no longer a Christian,”

John said, “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for had they been of us, no doubt they would have continued with us.” So the proof that a man is ever really and genuinely saved is that he continues in that salvation. Our Lord is saying that if a man is ever really, truly, and genuinely His disciple, he will continue.

Jesus said in verse 31, “If you continue in my word, then are you my disciples indeed.” I wish you would underline the word indeed, at least in your mind. That word literally means absolutely, most certainly, surely, truthfully, in reality, indeed. If you want to know who is really a genuine disciple, it is those who continue in His Word. A genuine and true disciple holds on to the truth of Jesus Christ and continues in that truth. He does not give it up. He follows the admonition of Proverbs 23:23, where the Word of God commands us to buy the truth and sell it not.

The full sense of learning and being a disciple of Jesus Christ is that we receive Christ, His work, and His Word in every area of our lives. In other words, His truth affects everything about us: our money, our marriage, our morals, our manners, everything.

Look at verse 21 of Ephesians chapter 4. Paul says, “If so be that you have heard him and have been taught, as the truth is in Jesus.” Paul, in an effort to excite their attention and earnestness even more, not only tells the Ephesians that they had heard Christ, but employs

an even stronger expression, stating that they had been taught by Him: “If so be that you have heard him and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus.” He tells these Ephesians, “You’ve heard Christ, you’ve been taught by Christ.”

We are talking about learning Christ and being taught by Christ. Consider John 10:23: “And Jesus walked in the temple in Solomon’s porch.”

Then came the Jews round about him and said unto him, “How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, the Anointed One, the Messiah, tell us plainly.” Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you believe not. The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me. But you believe not, because you are not of my sheep. As I said unto you, ‘My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. And I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father which gave them me is greater than all, and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one.’”

I cannot read this passage without thinking about a sermon I heard years ago. I was traveling home from Ohio or Indiana somewhere. It was one or two o'clock in the morning. Alice was not with me because all the kids were small and she stayed with them. I had the radio on, trying to stay awake, and finally found some preaching. There was no black preacher, and I said, “Well, at least he'll keep me awake.” He was preaching from John chapter 10.

I never will forget what he said, and I still appreciate it. In that old gruff voice, he said, “Jesus Christ says that if you believe in him, you're in his hand and he is in God the Father's hand. ‘No man can pluck you out of my hand.’ So if you be right there, God the Father's not gonna pluck you out of his hand, God the Son's not gonna pluck you out of his hand, and God the Spirit's not gonna pluck you out of his hand.” Then he paused and said, “And come to think of it, them's only three that can do any plucking anyhow.”

That's true. But look exactly at what our Lord said. In John 10 and verse 27, He said, “My sheep hear my voice.” Then He said, “I know

them, and they follow me.” Our Lord's sheep hear His voice, He knows them, and His sheep follow Him.

In verse 3 of John chapter 10, He says, “To him that is Christ, the true Shepherd, the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice. And he calls his own sheep by name and he leadeth them out.” So here is the question: Have you heard Jesus Christ? Do you follow Him?

Have you been taught by him? You see, Jesus Christ only teaches truth. Obviously, if you hold error and heresy and falsehood, you have not heard him nor been taught by him.

Now the Greek word for heard is the Greek word akouo, and it means more than just simple hearing or hearkening. It literally means to give audience unto, to attend and consider what is being said. It means to give ear to a teacher, to hear or to perceive by the ear that which is announced in one's presence. It also has the implication of comprehension and understanding. In other words, you not only hear what is being said, you understand it. You comprehend it. You perceive it.

Taught by God in Old and New Testaments

But do you realize that even in the Old Testament the mark of a true believer was that of being taught by God and receiving his words? Job 36, verse 22 exclaims, "Behold, God exalteth by his power: who teacheth like him?" Obviously God is the great teacher. No one teaches like him, very effectively. I am showing you that learning of God has been the mark of a true believer even in the Old Testament. Deuteronomy 33, verse 1, "And this is the blessing wherewith Moses the man of God blessed the children of Israel before his death."

And he said, 'The Lord came from Sinai, and rose up from Mount Seir unto them; he shined forth from Mount Paran, and he came with ten thousands of saints: from his right hand went a fiery law for them.' Watch verse three. 'Yea, he loved the people; all his saints are in thy hand: and they sat down at thy feet; every one shall receive of thy words.'" What did the saints do? They sat down at his feet. Do you realize, even in the New Testament, the disciples always sat at the feet of the teacher? Did you realize that?

And this is what the Bible is saying. They sat down.

Now, I want you to turn, if you would, to John chapter 6 because I'm just showing you that not only in the Old Testament, but also in the New Testament the mark of a true disciple and a true believer is that of having been taught by God. Notice if you would in John chapter 6 and let's read verses 44 and 45. John 6, verse 44, tremendous truth. John 6, verse 44, our Lord says, "No man can come unto me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day." Now can is a term of ability, may is a term of permission. So he says no man can come unto me, no man has the ability to come savingly to Jesus Christ unless he is drawn by the Father. That's what verse 44 says. "No man can come unto me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him." And by the way, the word is draw, not drag. God doesn't drag anybody, he draws us. How does he draw us? Look in verse 45.

"It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall be all taught of God.' Now watch, every man therefore that hath heard and hath learned of the Father cometh unto me." How do men get to Jesus Christ? They hear from the Father, and they learn from the Father. Hmm.

Now notice what our Lord says. "It is written in the prophets." Well, where is it written in the prophets? Well, go back in your Bibles to Isaiah 54. Then we'll go to Jeremiah 31. Notice Isaiah 54. Notice if you would please verse 13. Isaiah 54 and verse 13. Here the Word of God says, "And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of thy children." All thy children shall be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the peace of thy children. Now look in Jeremiah chapter 31 and verse 34. Jeremiah 31, verse 34. In fact, you could really begin with—I'd like to read all the passage but look in verse 33. "But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord;

“I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord’: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: and I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sins no more.” That is why our Lord said in John 6:45, “It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall be all taught of God.’” God still teaches His people.

It is amazing how the Apostle uses this language, and we read it most of the time and overlook it: “But as touching brotherly love, ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another.” Isn’t that amazing? Have you ever noticed an instant bond between Christians?

By the way, do you know why the fish is considered a Christian symbol? They run in schools. That is a good answer—not the right answer, but a good answer. Suppose Steve and I are walking toward each other, he from the south and I from the north. I do not know him, and he does not know me. If I happen to be a Christian and want to know whether he is a Christian, I would draw half of a fish on the ground. If he is a Christian, he will come up and draw the other side, perhaps putting a dot there.

Why the fish? The Greek word for fish is Ichthys. That comes from the Greek letters: Iesous, Christos, Theou, Uios, Soter—Jesus Christ, God’s Son, Savior. That is the acronym that came from Ichthys, the fish. So they would be saying, “Look, we are Christians,” and there would be an immediate bond between them. You notice that because he said, “You are taught of God to love one another.”

In 2 Timothy 3:14–15, the Apostle Paul tells Timothy, “But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them.” Notice that he says, “continue,” as in John 8:31. He learned these things from the Lord—not necessarily from Paul, although God may have used Paul as a teacher. Paul continues, “And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” Timothy had known the holy Scriptures from childhood. They are able to make him wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. You need to continue in the things that you have learned, knowing of whom you learned them; and you learned them from the holy scriptures.

The Truth in Jesus and Opposition to Error

Paul again tells us about some things that we have learned in Romans 16:17–18: “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which ye have

learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple." Notice that: "I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned." He tells us to mark them and avoid them because they do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.

When we learn Jesus Christ, we learn that Jesus Christ is truth. We learn that His Word is truth. His doctrine is truth. Anything and everything contrary to Jesus Christ is error, false, and antichrist. Let me show you. In 1 John 2:22, John says, "Who is a liar?"

He that denieth that Jesus is the Christ, that is, the Messiah, the Anointed One, is antichrist, for he denieth the Father and the Son. John the apostle says anyone who denies that Jesus is the Messiah is a liar. If you deny the Father and the Son, that they are one, you are not only a liar, you are an antichrist. That is not very good company to be in.

John says, "Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world." He says very clearly that anyone who does not confess or believe that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. The Apostle John and the Apostle Paul oftentimes struck at the Gnostics.

The word Gnostic is from the Greek word ginosko, which means "I know." The Gnostics thought that you attained salvation by knowledge, intellectual knowledge. We get our English word agnostic by putting an "a" in front of ginosko. An agnostic is a man who says, "I don't know." He does not know whether he knows anything or not.

One group of the Gnostics was known as the Docetics, from the Greek word dokeo, which means "to appear." They tried to say that Jesus Christ was not real, but an apparition. He merely appeared to be, because they thought everything physical was sinful—the world,

dirt, birds, everything. They said, "How can Jesus Christ be flesh without being sinful?" Thus they claimed He was a divine apparition. That is why, when John begins John chapter 1, he says, "That which we have seen, that which we have heard, that which our hands have felt."

He is not a ghost or an apparition. He is real and genuine. John is saying that anyone who says Jesus Christ is not the Messiah is a liar and antichrist. Anyone who says that the Father and the Son are not one is antichrist and a liar. Likewise, anyone who says that Jesus Christ is not come in the flesh is a liar and antichrist. Second John 1:7 says, “For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.”

The Apostle Paul, in Galatians 2:5, speaks of the truth of the gospel. Let me put it like this: Jesus Christ is truth. Jesus Christ is the gospel. Without Him there is no good news. A denial of the gospel is a denial of Jesus Christ, and a denial of Jesus Christ is a denial of salvation. Once you deny Jesus Christ, you have denied salvation and the gospel. There is no hope apart from Jesus Christ.

Our Lord said, “Everyone that has heard and learned of the Father comes to him.” In Ephesians 4:21, He said, “You've not only heard him, but you have learned from him, as the truth is in Jesus.” How, then, does God teach us? How do we learn? We learn through His Word and by His Spirit as that Word is expounded, explained, and applied.

How God Teaches Us

When the Word of God is being taught, the Lord opens our hearts, just as He opened the heart of Lydia in Acts 16. The Bible says, “He opened her heart, with the result that she attended unto the things which were spoken by Paul.” He opens our understanding exactly as He opened the understanding of the two on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24. They said, “Did not our hearts burn within us, as he spake to us by the wayside?” Later, Luke 24 says, “Then opened he the understanding of all his disciples, so that they might understand the word of God.”

God enlightens our minds that we may see light. Psalm 36:9 says, “For with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light.” He also gives us pastors who will feed us with wisdom and understanding according to His heart, as Jeremiah 3:15 says, “And I will give thee pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding.”

So the whole point is this: when we hear Christ and are taught by Christ, He teaches us to think and to be obedient. Let me show you. If you ever heard Frank Kersey, you always hear him say the word muse means to think, and the word muse is in the Bible. You put an “a,” or an alpha, in front of it, and amuse means “not think” because it negates. That is why television is called amusement. You do not have to think. That is when you go to amusement parks: you do not have to think.

What I want to show you is this: If we are ever taught by Jesus Christ, He teaches us to think. In 1 Peter 1:13, he says, “Gird up the loins of your mind.” What does he say? Get ready. You are going to have to do some thinking, some studying, some meditating, and some contemplating. “Gird up the loins of your mind. Be sober and hope to the end for the grace of God, or for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts of your ignorance—but as he which hath called you is holy—so be ye holy in all manner of conversation or conduct, because it is written, “Be ye holy; for I am holy.” He tells us that we have to gird up the loins of our minds and cannot fashion ourselves according to the former lusts of our ignorance. We are now to fashion ourselves according to Him who hath called us, who is holy. Therefore, we are to be holy as He is holy.

Applications and Call to Holiness

Let me make a couple of applications. First, consider the fact that when we went through Scripture today, it taught us that all of His sheep, all of His elect, and all of His people shall be taught of the Lord. When many professing Christians are not being taught, are not progressing in the Christian profession, and are not becoming more and more holy, godly, obedient, and submissive, you have to wonder

if they are really sheep. Our Lord said, “My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me.” The true sheep always follow the shepherd.

Do you remember what he said to those Pharisees in John 10, verse 26? He said, “You believe not, because you're not of my sheep.” Then he said, “My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me.” The evidence that we are true sheep is that we follow the shepherd.

Here is the second application. Someone may offer an objection and say, “But I am really one of his sheep. I am just not a good student or an obedient child.” Really? Hebrews chapter 12 teaches that if we are his child and we sin, he chastens us. If an individual can sin and get away with it, never be chastened, he does not belong to God. Hebrews 12 says, “If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.” When someone says, “Well, I'm just lazy and worldly and not a good student,” if you are really his sheep, he is going to whip the living daylights out of you and whip you in line. And you know what the Bible says in Hebrews chapter 12?

"Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." In other words, God's chastening always works. If someone says, "Well, I'm really a sheep. I'm just not a good student, and I'm not very obedient, and I want to do my own thing," I have one other question: explain 1 John 2:4, where God says, "He that saith, 'I know him,' and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him."

We are not perfect, and we will not be perfect in this life, but we must learn Jesus Christ if we are His sheep and His children. We hear His voice, study His Word, fellowship with His people, and grow in grace and knowledge because He teaches us. We hear Him, and we follow Him. We must learn Jesus Christ. How do we do that?

Conclusion and Preview of Next Week

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we ask for Your love, grace, and mercy. We pray that You would indeed teach us and help us, Lord, to learn Thee, not just learn about Thee. That is good, but, Lord, to learn Thee, to be holy, godly, obedient, and submissive, and to bring our lives into conformity to Your Word. In the name of Jesus Christ we ask and pray, Amen.

CHAPTER 23

Truths from the Life of Jonah - Jonah Series

Part One of Four

July 14, 2024

Truths from the Life of Jonah

Introduction to the Jonah Series

Open your Bibles to the book of Jonah, chapter 1. You will find the little book of Jonah right after Obadiah and right before Micah. Lord willing, I am going to be preaching four messages on this book. If you want to get a little head start, read Jonah for the next several weeks, and you will pretty well come up with a lot of truth, I am sure.

The title of the message today is Truths from the Life of Jonah. Jonah chapter 1, beginning with verse 1, says: Now the word of the Lord came unto Jonah, the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it, for their wickedness is come up before me. But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the

presence of the Lord, and went down to Joppa, and he found a ship going to Tarshish.

So he paid the fare thereof and went down into it to go with the men into Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. But the Lord sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken. Then the mariners were afraid and cried every man unto his god, and cast forth the wares that were in the ship into the sea to lighten it of them. But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship, and he lay and was fast asleep. So the shipmaster came to him and said unto him, What meanest thou, O sleeper? Arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not.

And they said every one to his fellow, Come, and let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil is upon us. So they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah. Then said they unto him, Tell us, we pray thee, for whose cause this evil is upon us? What is thine occupation? And whence comest thou? What is thy country? And of what people art thou?

And he said unto them, I am an Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land. Then were the men exceedingly afraid, and said unto him, Why hast thou done this? For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the Lord, because he had told them. Then said they unto him, What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us? For the sea wrought, and was tempestuous. And he said unto them, Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you.

For I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you. Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring it to the land; but they could not: for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous against them. Wherefore they cried unto the Lord, and said, We beseech thee, O Lord, we beseech thee, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood: for thou, O Lord, hast done as it pleased thee. So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging. Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the Lord, and made vows. Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

The Profitability of the Old Testament

A few years back, I brought two messages entitled Old Testament Principles and New Testament Truths. My aim was to demonstrate that we have one Bible, not two Bibles. I have repeatedly said that the Old Testament is just as much the Word of God as the New Testament. In fact, the Apostle Paul wrote 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, throughly furnished unto all good works.”

We may deduce several wonderful truths from these verses. First of all, Scripture tells us that all Scripture is God-breathed. The Greek word there is Theopneustos. It literally means exhaled from the mouth of God, or God-breathed, or God-exhaled. The truth of the matter is that all of Scripture came from the breath of God. That is why it is called the Word of God.

That is why it is referred to as the truth of God. You say, “I understand that the Bible was inspired,” and that is true. Men wrote the Bible, but they were men who were inspired. What is inspiration? Inspiration is a strong, conscious in-breathing of God into men, qualifying them to give utterance to the truth, so that the words which they wrote were and are indeed the very words of God.

Put another way, the Bible is just as much the Word of God as if God spoke every single word of it with His own lips. That is what it means when Scripture says it was God-breathed. You say, “But men wrote the Bible.” That has already been covered, but the Bible says in 2 Peter chapter 1, “For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” It was the Holy Ghost who inspired the words. It was the Holy Ghost who moved upon the men to pen these words, and they are indeed the very words of God Himself.

The second thing that we may deduce is this: when Paul wrote these verses, 2 Timothy 3, verses 16 and 17, he had primarily the Old Testament in mind, because the New Testament had not been completed at that time. These verses would also apply to any New Testament passages or books that had been completed by that

particular time. Primarily, when he wrote that, he had the Old Testament in mind.

Thirdly, and clearly, the Bible teaches us that all of God's Word is profitable. When he said, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable," that means the Old Testament is just as profitable as the New Testament. Those who ignore the Old Testament, who denigrate the Old Testament, who deny the Old Testament, are denying and depriving themselves of great truths, great promises, and great warnings, because the Old Testament is just as profitable as the New Testament.

Fourth, based upon 2 Timothy 3, verses 16 and 17, it is impossible for the man of God to be complete and thoroughly furnished unto all good works without the Old Testament. Scripture says, "All Scripture is inspired of God," and in verse 17, "that the man of God may be perfect." The Greek word for "perfect" is artios, which literally means one that is fit, one that is complete, one that is perfect, and one that is equipped for just about any and every possible use.

Without the Old Testament, it is impossible for a man to be equipped the way he should be. Scripture says that the man of God might be thoroughly furnished unto every good work. The Greek word is exartizo, meaning that which is complete and perfectly furnished. Therefore, the individual who ignores the Old Testament is not complete; he is not furnished. Any preacher who ignores the Old Testament is an incomplete preacher, and he is not furnished with everything that he possibly needs.

You cannot understand the New Testament apart from the Old Testament. An adage repeated for years is very true: The New, that is the New Testament, is in the Old concealed, and the Old is in the New revealed. That is certainly true, because you cannot understand the Old without the New, and the New is hidden in the Old as well.

The Historicity of Jonah and the Whale

Yes, I believe that Jonah was a real, living, historical person, and I believe that Jonah was swallowed by a whale, because the Bible does indeed teach that. In 2 Kings chapter 14, Jonah is spoken of not only as a real, living prophet, but as one who prophesied and whose

prophecy came to pass. In 2 Kings 14:25, the Bible says: “He restored the coast of Israel from the entering of Hamath unto the sea of the plain, according to the word of the Lord God of Israel, which he spake by the hand of his servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet, which was of Gath-Hepher.” Notice that Jonah is specifically named, his father is named, he is designated as a prophet, and even the city from which he originated, Gath-Hepher, is given.

Jonah then indeed was a real, living person. If you deny the historical personhood of Jonah, you are not only denying the truth of the Old Testament; you would also be denying the Lord Jesus Christ, because the Lord Jesus Christ himself testified to the person of Jonah and to that which happened to Jonah. In Matthew 12:40–41, our Lord recognized Jonah as a real, living individual and also testified to the very fact that Jonah was swallowed by a whale. Our Lord said, “For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here.”

Our Lord, then, is testifying not only to the personhood of Jonah, but to the preaching of Jonah, the fact that he went to Nineveh, and the fact that he was swallowed by a whale and stayed in the belly of the whale for three days and for three nights. These are the things to which our Lord himself testified.

Whales were known to the ancients. Before going back to Jonah chapter 1, look in the book of Job, right before the book of Psalms, at Job chapter 7 and verse 12. There you will find the question that Job asked: “Am I a sea, or a whale, that thou settest a watch over me?” Note that question: “Am I a sea, or a whale, that thou settest a watch over me?” Job 7 and verse 12. Job 7 verse 12.

There are some really interesting and astounding stories about men who were swallowed by whales. If you go to the Internet and type in “the men who were swallowed by whales,” you will find these stories. One of them happened in 1891 to a young man by the name of James Bartley, who was 21 years of age. He was a whaler, and somehow he fell overboard. The whale actually swallowed him, and

he spent 16 hours in the whale's belly before his mates were able to get the whale, kill the whale, cut the whale open, and rescue James Bartley.

A whaler ended up swallowed by a whale before his mates could get him out. When he was cut out of the whale's belly, after being in there sixteen hours, the whale's digestive juices had permanently bleached his skin a deathly white. He had lost his hair and was nearly blind. For two weeks he was delirious, and it was a month before he could tell how he had fallen into the whale's mouth, felt the huge teeth grate over him as he slid down the throat and into its stomach. I am not sure that I would want to be swallowed by a whale. I do not want to be swallowed by any sea creature.

If you look at Jonah chapter 1, I will tell you that this fish, or whale, that God prepared was a special fish or a special whale. The Bible says in Jonah 1:17, "Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights."

God had prepared this fish specifically to swallow Jonah. Jonah did not have his skin bleached or lose his hair. While he was in the whale's belly, he had his senses all about him because he knew where he was. When we get to Jonah chapter 2, he was praying and crying out, saying, "out of the belly of hell." He knew exactly where he was and what had happened. This fish was a special one prepared by God.

Jonah prayed unto the Lord his God out of the fish's belly, saying, “I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the Lord, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice.” Clearly, Jonah knew exactly what was going on when he was swallowed by the whale.

Jonah was basically a runaway prophet. He did not want to preach what God had sent him to preach. Jonah 1:1-2 says, “Now the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me.” Instead of obeying God, Jonah ran. He decided he was just going to leave the country. Verse 3 says, “But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord,

and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord."

Jonah's Disobedience and Flight

The first question we have to ask ourselves is this: Why did Jonah flee? God said, "Go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it. Their wickedness has come up before me." Jonah had only to go to Nineveh and preach. Instead, he went down to Joppa and got on a ship to Tarshish.

Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian Empire. The Assyrians were mortal enemies of the Israelites and had captured the ten northern tribes. They were cruel, wicked, horrible people. The Assyrians actually began crucifixion, though they did not crucify people as the Romans did. Inscriptions on steles record Assyrian kings bragging about how many people they had crucified and how many piles of heads they had made in front of cities.

The Assyrians sharpened a stake and planted it firmly in the ground, with the sharp end pointed upward. They stripped the man naked, and two men spread his legs, held him over the stake, and pulled him down. The stake went through the anus, up through the intestines, and stopped just before reaching the heart. The man would then writhe in pain for hours before he died.

When the Romans came along, they were not making crucifixion easier. It was actually crueler, because now a person would hang on the cross for several days in excruciating pain and anger. The Assyrians were mortal enemies of Israel, and Jonah considered them his enemies as well. He desired the wholesale destruction of Nineveh and everybody in it. He wanted them dead. At the end of the book of Jonah, we find that, even though he preached, he went out, made himself a booth on a little hill under a shade, and sat there to watch, hopefully, for God to destroy them all.

God knew that Jonah was angry. Jonah did not want Nineveh to repent. "But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry." When the people repented, it displeased him. He prayed unto the Lord, saying, "I pray thee, O Lord, was not this my saying,

when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil."

Jonah was saying, in effect, "God, I know You would give them repentance. I did not want them to repent, and I am angry and upset." Certainly Jonah knew that if the Assyrians lived, Israel would suffer. In one sense, Jonah was a patriot, in that he was willing for another nation to perish rather than the covenant people. Why did he flee? Because he did not want the Assyrians to repent. He wanted them killed.

The Impossibility of Fleeing God's Presence

A second question is this: Did Jonah actually believe he could flee from the presence of the Lord? God said, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me." Yet Jonah "rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord." The mariners later asked him, "Why hast thou done this?" for they knew that he fled from the presence of the Lord, because he had told them. Is it possible to flee from the presence of the Lord? The answer is no. Yet, in another sense, the answer could be yes, because Jonah was trying to do it.

No, it is impossible because of God's omnipresence. The omnipresence of God means that God is everywhere at one time in the totality of His being. Do not fall into error or heresy by imagining that part of God is in Russia, part of God is in England, part in China, part in America, part in Canada, and part in South America, so that all these parts together constitute God. No, that is heresy. That is blasphemy. The omnipresence of God means that God is everywhere at one time in the totality of His being.

Psalm 139 is a very important and beautiful psalm, one that you should read and even memorize. This Psalm speaks not only of God's omnipresence, but also of God's omniscience. David wrote, "O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off." David is saying, "Lord, you know when I sit down, you know when I rise up. You understand my thought afar off." In fact, in the book of Ezekiel, God says, "I know thy thoughts, every one of them,

even before they come into thy mind." Obviously, God does indeed know our thoughts. David continues, "Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it."

That refers to God's omniscience. Then David asks concerning God's omnipresence, "Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee."

The truth of the matter is that God is not only omniscient; God is omnipresent. There is not a thought in your mind that God does not know, and there is no place you can go to hide from Him. It is impossible to do things in the dark where God cannot see you or where God is not.

Mel Trotter was an old drunk whom God saved. He was such a horrible drunk that, on the way to the saloon, he stole the shoes off his baby and was going to trade them for a drink of whiskey. He passed a gospel meeting where they were singing psalms and hymns, and he went in just to get out of the cold and rest and get warm for a few minutes. He listened to a man preach, and God saved him and converted him gloriously.

Mel Trotter, of course, became a preacher. He became concerned about a lover's lane in that area, where young people went to park and fornicate. He would go down there and preach to them. Some would leave; others would laugh at him and pay him no attention. Finally, he got a neon sign, and all it was was an eyeball that flashed. Every time it flashed, it said, "Now, my God, see it's me. Now, my God, see it's me." Within a week, no one else would come back to lover's lane. This is what I mean: you cannot hide from God.

Since God is omniscient and knows everything, if you have something on your mind—some question, doubt, or sin—you might as well go ahead and confess it, because God already knows it anyhow. You cannot hide anything from Him, neither can you hide your presence from Him.

How, then, does the Bible tell us that Jonah was fleeing from the presence of God if it is impossible to flee from God's presence? Turn to two places in your Bible: first, 1 Kings chapter 8, verse 11, and then 2 Chronicles chapter 5. What Jonah was fleeing from was what you and I would call the manifest presence of God. Here is a good question: Where was God's manifest presence in the Old Testament? Where did God particularly and peculiarly manifest Himself?

He did so in the tabernacle, and He did so in the temple. When the temple was dedicated, Solomon prayed, and 1 Kings 8:11 says, "So that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud: for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of the Lord." In 2 Chronicles 5:14, we see essentially the same truth: "So that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud: for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of God."

Anytime in the Old Testament that you really wanted to worship God, you had to go either to the tabernacle or the temple. Why? Because that is where God particularly and peculiarly manifested Himself. What Jonah was doing, therefore, was fleeing from the temple. He was fleeing from the manifest presence of God.

Where does God particularly and peculiarly manifest Himself today, or where does He particularly and peculiarly manifest Himself in the New Testament? In our lives, that is true, but in our corporate meeting it would be the church. What did He say? "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

Maybe that is why many people do not want to come to church: they are running from God. They do not want to hear the preaching and teaching of the Word of God. They do not want to see or sense the manifest presence of God, and so they simply ignore it.

That is exactly what Jonah was doing. Jonah was getting out of Dodge; he was fleeing from the manifest presence of God. Another

thought is that Jonah could also have been fleeing from the commission God had given him. He was fleeing from his duty, obligation, and responsibility to go to Nineveh and preach what God had told him to preach. He was simply getting out of Dodge.

Evidently, Jonah believed that old saying, “out of sight, out of mind.” He thought that if he could get away from the manifest presence of God, then God would forget about sending him to Nineveh. It might work with us because we are so forgetful, but it does not work with the sovereign God of heaven and earth, who is omniscient and omnipresent. Jonah may have been thinking that if he left, God would get someone else to go to Nineveh, because he certainly did not want to go. Now look again at Jonah 1:3, because here is another truth: “But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.”

The Cost of Running from God

As best as I can tell from most sources, Tarshish would have been Spain. Some scholars say Jonah was not fleeing to Spain but to Tarsus, a city of Cilicia, from which the apostle Paul came—Saul of Tarsus. To be absolutely honest, I think Jonah was going to Spain. I think he was trying to get as far away from God as he possibly could. He wanted to get away from God's manifest presence and from his commission. Whether Tarshish was Spain or Tarsus, the city of Cilicia, that is not the point of verse three. Here is the point: “But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. And he went down to Joppa and he found a ship going to Tarshish.” Then, “So he paid the fare thereof.” He went down into the ship and paid the fare thereof.

Whenever you are running from God, it is going to cost you. Listen carefully. It is true that what God orders, He pays for. But when you try to run from God in God's will, begin to kick against the pricks, and become disobedient, then you pay.

Jonah's fare was probably small in the beginning. I do not know how much it cost him to get on that ship. But before God got through

with him, he found out that running from God was going to cost him more than he was willing to pay and more than he was able to pay. So anytime you run from God, you own, you own is what it amounts to. It does not pay to run from the will of God. The safest place for any child of God is right smack dab in the middle of God's will.

In Jonah chapter one, there are two things that God prepared for Jonah: a great wind and a great fish. The great wind brought terror to the mariners, but it did not bring terror to Jonah; he was fast asleep. “But the Lord sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken. Then the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god, and cast forth the wares that were in the ship into the sea, to lighten it of them. But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep.”

Jonah's Indifference and the Sailors' Concern

“So the shipmaster came to him, and said unto him, What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not.” Jonah was sleeping through the storm. He may have been asleep before the storm began; that is a possibility. But if he was, remember that the ship would have been rolling with the waves, while people were screaming and crying and all kinds of things were going on. He would have been sleeping through it all.

Evidently, he was absolutely unconcerned. All the wares of the ship had been dumped, and the sailors were screaming for their lives. Jonah had to be rebuked by heathen: “Awake thou sleeper. What are you doing? Are you insane? We’re about to die all of us and here you are down here asleep.” Then the shipmaster said, “and arise and call upon thy God.” Nowhere in this chapter, or anywhere in the book of Jonah, does it say that Jonah prayed during this experience with these mariners. He was called upon to pray, but nothing is recorded that he did pray. In other words, they said, “Look. All of our lives are in danger.”

Since Jonah was a believer in the one true and living God, and since he was a prophet and a preacher, would you not think that he would be concerned about the lives of these mariners? It is true that

they were heathen, but still, they were beings. I want you to learn this lesson right now: If you're not concerned about the many, you're not going to be concerned about the few.

I have no idea how many people were on this ship or how large it was. I'm sure there were probably 15 or 20 at a minimum. In the New Testament, the apostle Paul was on a ship with nearly 300—270-something, I think. It could have been that many on this one; I do not know. But what do I mean? If you're not concerned about the many, you're not concerned about the few. In Jonah chapter 4 and verse 11, God rebuked Jonah: "And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?" He said, "Jonah, I got 120,000 little babies that do not know the difference between their right hand and their left hand."

That does not count the older children, the teenagers, or the adults. That does not even include all the cattle or all the animals that were there. Many have said that probably Nineveh had about a million people in it. One hundred twenty thousand children could not discern the left hand from the right. Listen, if you are not concerned about a million people, you are not going to be concerned about fifteen or twenty.

It is kind of like what Joseph Stalin reportedly said: One or two murders is a tragedy; a million is a statistic. Nobody cares about that. That is what he is saying. Jonah is totally asleep. I find it interesting that Jonah was encouraged to pray, and yet we never read anything that he did pray. He evidently was at the point of not wanting to live, and he thought that somehow his death would cause God not to have mercy upon the Assyrians.

Now, I think this is a valid point based upon what follows. Look in verse 7: "And they said every one to his fellow, Come, and let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil is upon us. So they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah. Then said they unto him, Tell us, we pray thee, for whose cause this evil is upon us?"

"What is thine occupation? and whence comest thou? what is thy country? and of what people art thou? And he said unto them, I am

an Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land." Remember, they are having problems with the sea right now. "Then were the men exceedingly afraid, and said unto him, Why hast thou done this? For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the Lord, because he had told them."

"Then said they unto him, What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us? for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous. And he said unto them, Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you: for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you. Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring it to the land; but they could not: for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous against them."

There are two very important truths right here. The first is this: oftentimes, heathen folks are more concerned with life than those who profess to be the worshippers of the one true and living God. I find this absolutely astounding. Here is Jonah, who is supposed to be a preacher and a prophet, supposed to be interested in the will of God, in glorifying God, and in the lives of the people. Yet he is not even interested in helping save the lives of these mariners.

How are we going to stop this tempest? Jonah kind of smiles and says, "No, this is easy. Just pick me up, throw me in the sea, and everything will be calm unto you." Do you get the idea that Jonah was only willing to die, that he wanted to die? Look at verse 13. When he said, "If you want this tempest to go away, just pick me up and throw me into the sea," verse 13 says, "Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring it to the land; but they could not: for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous against them."

Did you see that? These men were heathen, and Jonah had absolutely no compassion or concern for them, yet they were concerned about him instead of simply picking him up and throwing him overboard, which would have been the easy way out. They rowed hard to bring the ship to land. They did everything they could to keep from throwing Jonah into the deep. It is strange to me that sometimes the heathen have more concern for life than the righteous. The easy thing would have been to pick him up and pitch him in, and he encouraged them to do it: "Throw me in and it'll cease."

No Man Lives or Dies to Himself

Here is the second truth, and I think it is very profound. Jonah is an excellent illustration and example of a New Testament truth. Romans 14:7 says, “For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself.” If you cannot see this clearly, then you need to have your sight, your hearing, and your heart checked. Whatever you do, whether good or bad, right or wrong, righteous or unrighteous, always affects other people, often people you do not even know. When Jonah fled from the presence of the Lord, he did not know these mariners, yet he caused the loss of all their wares, goods, and invested money, and almost caused the loss of their lives. Mark this down: whatever we do, good or bad, always affects someone else. You must remember this.

When you and I sin, we're only interested in ourselves—our lusts, our desires, and what pleases and satisfies us. We're not concerned with others or the effects of what we do upon their lives. Just this month, a week or so ago, there was a July the 4th celebration, and someone ran a car into the crowd. If I remember correctly, it was either a dozen killed or four or five killed and a dozen hurt. The man was drunk. When he was drinking, he wasn't concerned about other people; he was only concerned about himself.

Whenever we sin, we're absolutely, totally selfish. Think about the homes and families destroyed because of pornography, fornication, and adultery. We forget the impact our actions have upon other people. If I ran out on Alice, would that only affect my relationship with God, or would it also affect my relationship with her? What about our children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, friends, family, and the ministry? You follow what I'm saying?

It's impossible for you and me to act independently, in the sense that we never influence anyone else. We do. Usually whatever we do is bad, and it always affects someone else. The positive side is that we also have the privilege and blessing of living a holy, godly, obedient life and affecting the lives of others through righteousness. We cannot do one thing without affecting the lives of everyone else. It's just that simple.

God sent that wind, and, as verse 17 says, prepared a fish especially for Jonah: "Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights." Jonah probably thought that once they threw him into the sea, he was going to drown and it would all be over. Well, it didn't work out like that. Many people who commit suicide have thought that once they killed themselves, it would all be over. It is not. But we cannot do one thing without affecting the lives of others. Alice and I were going down a dirt road this past week to avoid a train that had stopped.

We passed an old home place, and I pointed out where a neighbor had shot and killed himself many years ago. I went to school with either his daughter or his niece; I do not remember which. After all these years, I remembered only that he had done it and how he did it. You always consider what effect it had on that young girl, because it happened in her house. I am simply saying, “No man liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself.” It is not all over.

Applications

Applications: Stay in God's Will and Recognize Your Influence

Are you a Jonah? Are you running from the will of God for your life? Are you paying your own way to get away from God, His will, and His Word? If you are a Jonah, and if you're running away from the will of God, then don't be surprised if God doesn't prepare something just for you, just like He did Jonah. God has a way of stopping us, arresting us, and bringing us back to our senses. I've often said, when God got through with Jonah, he might have smelled a lot like fish, but he felt a whole lot more like preaching.

When that whale spit him out, I believe he went running straight to Nineveh. The safest place to be is always right smack dab in the middle of the will of God for you and for your life. I'm thankful that I don't have to doubt the will of God for my life in that one sense of the word, because He called me to preach, and that's what I've been doing for 60 years. When I was a boy, I wanted to be a preacher. The only reason, Gary, was because they only worked on Wednesday and

Sunday, and you could play the rest of the week. How wrong was I on that one? How wrong?

And Alice, somehow when she was a little girl, thought she'd end up marrying a preacher. When she married me, she said, "Well, I guess that was all down the road." But then God saved us both and called me to preach, and that's where I am right now. I don't want to do anything else. That's all I ever want to do: preach and teach the Word of God. So we've got to find out God's will for our lives and stay right smack dab in the middle of it.

Whatever you do always affects others. Whether it's good or bad, right or wrong, righteous or unrighteous, you cannot escape the influence that you have on others. Whether it's your wife, your husband, your children, your grandchildren, your neighbors, or your friends, you cannot escape it. You're either going to be a blessing to them, or you're going to be a curse to them. Jonah teaches us that no man liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to thee this day. We thank you for your word. We thank you for your truth. We pray, Lord, that you would teach us and help us to make application to our lives. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 24

Walking With The Lord - Part 8 - Learning Christ

Part Two

April 8, 2016

Learning Christ

Introduction and Scripture Reading

In Ephesians chapter 4, beginning with verse 17, the Apostle writes: “This I say therefore and testify unto the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But ye have not so learned Christ; if so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus: that ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye

put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

"Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another. Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: neither give place to the devil. Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth. Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. 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."

Review of Previous Messages

We have dealt with how Enoch walked with the Lord and how God told Abram, "Walk thou before me, and be thou perfect." From Hebrews chapter 11, verses 5 and 6, we saw that the foundation is simply walking by faith, for without faith it is impossible to please God. In Ephesians chapter 4, we also looked at the Apostle Paul's command to walk worthily before the Lord. There are three messages there. Then we came to verse 17, where the Apostle tells us to walk differently, not as the unsaved walk. Last week I began dealing with verses 20 and 21 on learning Jesus Christ: "But ye have not so learned Christ."

In other words, we must learn Christ, but we do not learn Him in a way that teaches us to live in an ungodly manner. What Paul is doing in this passage is teaching us how not to live, how to live, and how to change our lives. In essence, he is teaching us how to learn Jesus Christ. He informs us clearly how to learn Christ, but also how to discern whether or not we have learned Christ or are learning Christ. Jesus Christ, of course, does not teach us to live an ungodly, unholy, and unethical life.

The World and the Believer

We may be in the world, but we are not of the world. In 1 John chapter 2, verses 15 through 17, our Lord said, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world." When He said, "Love not the world," He was not talking about His creation. He was talking about the world system, man, and his corruption. Listen to what He said: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." Then He explains it: "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever."

When he speaks of the world, he is talking about the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life—the realm of what we would call natural man, or unsaved man. The Apostle Paul said in Galatians 6:14, "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of Jesus Christ by whom I am crucified unto the world, and the world unto me."

Jesus Christ teaches us, then, not to love the world or the things that are in the world. In that same instance, He also teaches us that we have been crucified to the world, and the world to us.

Romans 8:13 teaches us about mortification. To mortify literally means to make dead or to count dead. He says, “But if you live after the flesh you shall die, but if you through the spirit do mortify the deeds of the body you shall live.” By the way, we get the word mortician from mortify; it means literally to make dead, or someone who works with the dead.

He says it like this in Colossians 3:5: “Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth.” And listen to what he calls our members: fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Isn’t that interesting, how he says these things are our members?

The question automatically arises: How do we know not to love the world, and how do we know to mortify the deeds of the body? The answer is very simple. Christ teaches us to love not the world,

and He teaches us to mortify the deeds of the body, because these truths are explicitly taught clearly in His Word.

But an even more profound and provocative question would be this: How do we accomplish that? How do we accomplish in our lives not loving the world and mortifying the deeds of our body? Look closely at verse 21. He says in verse 20, "But you have not so learned Christ." Now verse 21: "If so be that you have heard Him and have been taught by Him as the truth is in Jesus."

At the end of verse 21 you have a colon, those two dots. One of the main functions of a colon is emphasis. He is basically saying, "If so be that you have heard Him and have been taught by Him as the truth is in Jesus," then the colon means, Hold on, wait a second, pay attention; the most important thing is about to follow.

The sentence begun in verse 20 does not end until verse 24. In verse 20, you have a semicolon, then a colon, then a semicolon, then a semicolon, and finally a period in verse 24. You have one sentence from verse 20 through verse 24.

Paul is going to teach us basically how to learn Christ—how to be a good student and a good disciple.

The Simplicity and Struggle of Learning Christ

Learning Christ is really simple. It is easy and practical to apply. Although learning Christ is simple, and although it is easy and practical to apply the truth, it is excruciatingly painful to our flesh. Our flesh will fight with every ounce of its fiber to stop us from learning Christ.

Galatians 5, verses 16 and 17, says, "Then I say, walk in the Spirit and you will not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit." The word lusteth there means fights against: "For the flesh fights against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh. And these are contrary the one to the other so that you cannot do the things that you would." The Apostle is telling us that here is our renewed Spirit, here is our flesh, and the flesh is fighting against the Spirit while the Spirit is fighting against the flesh. They are two contrary principles. We cannot do what we would; that is, we cannot

act naturally, because if we act naturally, we are acting according to the flesh.

Learning Jesus Christ is very simple, but our flesh will not lie as easily, submissively, and readily upon the altar as Isaac did. Our flesh is going to fight, scream, groan, moan, and wail. Let me show you how simple this really is by asking you some questions.

Answer them in your minds. How many of you go to sleep each night in your work clothes? How many of you get up each morning and go to work in your pajamas? When your work clothes get dirty—filthy, stinking dirty—and you have to go somewhere, how many of you simply put clean clothes over your dirty clothes? And when those clean clothes get dirty, do you just put more clean clothes on over them?

You keep doing that until all of a sudden you're like this, and you can't move and you can't function. You have so many clothes on. You say, "Brother, we were that silly." No, it's not silly. I'm proving a point. The point I'm trying to prove is this: it's something that you have done all of your life since you have been able to understand. When you get through working during the day and you're ready to go to bed, and when you take your bath, you put off your old clothes, your day clothes, and you put on your night clothes. When you get up to go to work in the morning, you put off your night clothes, and you put on your day clothes, or your work clothes. When you go somewhere and your clothes are dirty, you put off the dirty clothes, and you put on new clothes. I don't know if you've noticed this or not when I read Ephesians chapter 4, but if you read Ephesians chapter 4, and especially Colossians chapter 3, you're going to find two phrases that occur over and over: put off, put on, put off, put on.

What happens in the natural physical realm is also that which happens in the biblical and spiritual realm. So, I want you to notice Ephesians 4 and verse 21. He says, "If so be that you have heard Him, and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus," here's what our Lord teaches us: "that you put off concerning the former conversation or conduct of the old man which is corrupt according to the deceitful lust."

The Three-Step Process: Put Off, Be Renewed, Put On

I want you to notice that at the end of verse 22 you have a semicolon. At the end of verse 23, you have a semicolon. The function of a semicolon is to connect two related sentences. Thus, verse 22 and verse 23 are related, and they lead to the final truth that is mentioned in verse 24.

Here is what Paul is doing in verses 22, 23, and 24. He is giving us general instructions on how to learn Jesus Christ. From there he descends from the general to the particulars in verses 25-31. He encapsulates the principles for us in verses 22 through 24, and then he expands and illustrates those principles for us in verses 25 through 32.

In verse 22, Paul says that if you have been taught by Christ, you have been taught, first of all, to put off concerning the former conversation, the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lust. Our former conversation is simply our former conduct: how we lived, how we walked, and our lifestyle. Our former conduct, before we were saved, is nothing less than an expression of the old man, which is absolutely corrupt. Paul refers to our old sinful nature as the old man. The old man is what we were and what we are in Adam.

It deals with original sin, imputed sin, and what you and I would call actual sin. John Gill said it like this in talking about the old man: "By the old man is meant the corruption of nature, called a man because natural to men. It lives and dwells in them. It has spread itself over the whole man. It rules and governs in men and consists of various parts and members as a man does. It is called old because it is the poison of the old serpent with which man was infected by him from the beginning. It is derived from the first man that ever was. It is as old as the man is, in who it is, and it is likewise called so with respect to its duration and continuance. And in opposition to and contrary to distinction from the new man, or the principle of grace, it is called ours because continually to us it is in our nature, it cleaves to us, and abides in us."

The Old Man Crucified with Christ

Paul is talking about the old man. The reason we are enabled by the grace of God to put off the old man is because that old man, what we were in Adam, has been crucified with Christ. Romans 6:6 says, "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, and henceforth we should not serve sin." Here is something that we should know: our old man, what we were in Adam, has been crucified with Christ. We were crucified with Christ that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not be the servants or the slaves of sin.

Here is the application of this truth: "Likewise reckon, or count, or impute, likewise reckon you also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Now watch, let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in the lust 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 you are not under the law, that is as a means of justification, but are under grace." Reckon, count, or impute yourself to be dead indeed unto sin. Suppose a man is a drunk. He died a drunk, and he is lying in the casket dead. I walk up, take a fifth of whiskey, wave it in front of his face, and say, "Here you old boy, would you like to have a swig?" What is he going to say? What is he going to do? Nothing. He is dead. In other words, if you are dead, what does sin have to do with you? You have to reckon, count, and impute yourself dead indeed unto sin. On the other hand, you have to reckon, count, and impute yourself alive unto God through the Lord Jesus Christ. "Let not therefore sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey it in the lusts thereof."

He did not say, "Let not sin therefore be in your mortal bodies." Sin is in us. We are sinners. But sin is not to reign. Sin is not to have control. Sin is not our Lord. It does not have the authority to demand that we obey it if we are Christians. He said, "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body." Then he gives the practical application: "Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness

unto sin." In other words, we do not have to obey sin. "Yield yourselves unto God as those that are alive from the dead and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God." If we reckon ourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, and sin is not to reign in us, then we are to yield our bodies unto Jesus Christ through God our Heavenly Father.

The Deceitfulness of Sin

The Apostle Paul said it like this in Colossians 3:9: "Lie not one to another seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds." This old man, then, that has been crucified now has to be put off. Go back to Ephesians 4:22: "That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man which is corrupt according to the deceitful lust." Our former life as unsaved is described under the analogy not only of an old man, but of corruption. It is corrupt according to deceitful lusts.

Jeremiah 17:9 says, "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked: who can know it?" If we have a deceitful heart that is desperately wicked above all things, and we have deceitful lusts, what does that mean? It means that in an unsaved man there is no soundness, no common sense, and no rationality. There cannot possibly be in anyone motivated by a deceitful heart and deceitful lust. The unsaved by nature are governed by their passions and pleasures. Sin dominates them, rules over them, manipulates them, and seduces them. Sin always promises happiness, excitement, gratification, and pleasure, but it always produces death.

For instance, if you watch commercials on television and see a certain alcoholic beverage advertised, remember that sin is not alcohol. Sin is not in anything material; sin is in the human heart. Yet have you noticed that liquor advertisers never show an old drunk lying in the gutter, filthy and wallowing in his own vomit? They always show a beautiful young woman and a handsome young man sitting, sipping, and having a grand old time. The implication is, "If you want to be happy and successful, just sip our liquor, and that is the way it will work out."

It is the same when you see all the trash on television, on the soap operas, and all this kind of thing, with somebody slipping around on

his wife or some woman slipping around on her husband. They never show you the divorces, the broken homes, and the children. Sin deceives.

Let me put it to you like this. In James 1:13–15, the Bible says, "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man." But every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. And when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed. When something on the outside promises to fulfill a desire on the inside, I am being enticed; I am being seduced.

Here is an easy way to explain it. I go fishing, and there is a rock ledge with a big old bass safe in the water underneath it. I cannot get him. Even if I jumped in the water, I still could not catch him, even if I knew exactly where he was. So I get a fishing pole, a hook, and a line, put a big old fat, juicy worm on it, and drop it right down in front of him. All of a sudden, something appears outside of him that promises to satisfy a desire inside him. He comes out from the safety of the rock, bites the worm, the hook catches him, and I have fish for dinner.

Every man is drawn away and enticed of his own lust. And when lust hath conceived, it produces sin. And sin, when it is finished, it brings forth death.

This is exactly what God is saying. He is talking about the old man that is corrupt according to his deceitful lust. Hebrews chapter 3, beginning at verse 12, shows how deceitful this really is and makes clear that we are talking about brethren, believers, and Christians. He says, "Take heed brethren," so we are talking about believers: "Take heed brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called today, lest any of you be hardened, watch through the deceitfulness of sin." If we allow it, sin will deceive us as well. Sin is exceedingly deceitful.

So, in Ephesians 4:22, we are told to put off—to undress, to take this rascal off—the former conversation, the old man, which is

corrupt according to the deceitful lust. Verse 22 ends with a semicolon, and verse 23 begins with the conjunction “and,” A-N-D. The semicolon shows that these two thoughts are related. Since verse 23 begins with the conjunction “and,” these instructions must be taken together. First of all, we put off the old man, which is corrupt. Secondly, “and be renewed in the spirit of your mind.” It is impossible to be renewed in the spirits of our mind as long as we are hanging on to the old man, which is corrupt according to his deceitful lust. That has to be put off.

Renewal of the Mind

The word renewed is the Greek word ana-ana-eo, and it literally is a present passive infinitive. It is asserting an obligation and is treated as a command: “Be renewed in the spirit of your mind.” Literally, we are commanded here to have a renewed mind. This renewal is not a self-renewal. In this instance, the renewal is accomplished on us and not by us. In some instances it is to be accomplished by us, but in this instance it is to be accomplished on us and not by us. We are to be constantly and continually renewed in our minds by Jesus Christ. Thus, we put off the old man and are renewed in our minds by Jesus Christ.

There are specific commands given to us in the Bible concerning the mind. Romans 12:1–2 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, and be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed, how? By the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good and perfect and acceptable will of God.” He said that we are to be transformed. How are we to be transformed? By the renewing of our mind.

The word transformed is a very interesting word. It is where we get our English word metamorphosis. It is literally to go through changes like a butterfly: the cocoon, the larva, the butterfly. He literally says, “Be metamorphosized,” how? By the renewing of your mind. In Philippians 2:5, he says, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.” We are to have the mind of Jesus Christ. In 1 Peter 4:1, he says, “Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us

in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind." In other words, we are to have exactly the mind of Jesus Christ.

Over and over he tells us we are to be renewed. Ephesians 4:22–24 says, "That ye put off concerning the former conversation of the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness."

Putting On the New Man

In order to learn Jesus Christ, a third step must be taken. It is insufficient just to put off the old man. It is insufficient to put off the old man and then simply have a renewed mind. If you genuinely have a renewed mind, you will then put on a new godly, obedient habit, conduct, or thought pattern. In other words, you will learn to think biblically and scripturally.

Verse 24 begins with the conjunction and, so these three truths are to be taken together: put off the old man, be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new man. If the old man is what we are in Adam, what is the new man? It is what we are in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is this new man, as verse 24 says, "which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness."

When our minds have been renewed, we begin to understand the scriptural truth: obedience, submission, godliness, holiness, and sanctification. We understand that we have been set apart and are to live differently. We are not to act, think, or walk the way the unsaved act, think, or walk. Righteousness and true holiness are found only in the Lord Jesus Christ and His Word. Thus, what we do is seek to bring our lives into conformity to His Word.

In 2 Corinthians chapter 10, verse 3, Paul says, "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh." You and I are walking around in the flesh, and our flesh is just as wicked as it can be. But although we are walking in the flesh, we are not warring after it. We are not trying to satisfy it and appease it, but every sin in it that we can get, no. Then verse 4 says, "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds."

Your stronghold is your place of defense; it is how you protect yourself. What is man's stronghold? Look in verse 5: it is his mind. "Casting down imaginations and every high thing or every high thought that exalted itself against the knowledge of God and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." So here is my question: As a Christian, as a new man in Christ, how many ungodly, unholy, wicked, and sinful thoughts are you allowed? What is the answer? None. Every thought is to be brought into captivity to Jesus Christ.

Now stop and think about this. You say, "That's impossible." No, it is not impossible. For instance, if I were to ask you what I have in my hand, you would say, "That's a bottle cap." If I asked you its color, you would say it is white or transparent. But if I then asked what you saw, you might say, "It's a cell phone." What color is it? Black.

Here is the interesting thing: while you were thinking about the cap, you were not thinking about the cell phone. When you were thinking about the cell phone, you were not thinking about the cap. You cannot think about two things at the same time, no matter how hard you try. That is all. So what happens when an ungodly, unholy thought comes into your mind? You must stop and say, "No, I refuse that. That is the old man. I am going to put it off. Lord, I need to be renewed in my mind, and here is the biblical alternative; here is what I am to think about." Then concentrate on that. Keep doing it over and over until you learn to do it instantaneously, without even thinking, until it becomes second nature. He is telling us how to put off and how to put on.

Now let me give you a warning. We must put off, be renewed, and then put on. Some people say, "I am just going to put off. I am going to quit smoking, quit drinking, quit running around, quit this and quit that." Basically, they try to reform themselves according to their own thoughts, dictates, and desires.

If you try to put off an old habit without putting a new godly habit in its place, inevitably that old habit will come back, and it will come back with a vengeance. You will be worse off than when you started. Let me show you. Look in your Bibles. Hold Ephesians 4, but turn to Matthew chapter 12.

Our Lord made this exceedingly clear in Matthew chapter 12. Notice, beginning with verse 43: “When the unclean spirit is going out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and finding none. So he’s been cast out. Then he said, I will return into my house from whence I came out.” When he is come, he findeth it empty, and swept, and garnished—all cleaned up. “Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself. And they enter in, and dwell there. And the last state of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be also in this wicked generation.”

Self-reformation does not work and will not work. The only thing that will work is when you learn to put off, be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on.

I told you that what Paul does in verses 22 through 24, he gives us how to learn Christ in a capsule. In the rest of this chapter, he explains exactly what he is going to teach us. He shows us and gives us illustrations of how to put off and how to put on. The list in verses 25 through 32 is not extensive, but it is illustrative. Paul could not enumerate every sin and every vice. If he listed them all, we could not carry our Bibles. What he does is give us the principle of how to deal with our sins, how to change our lives, and how to learn Christ.

Practical Illustrations of Put Off/Put On

Although the words may not necessarily be there, the rest of this chapter is still put off and put on. Look in verse 25: “Wherefore putting away lying”—that is something you put off. Here is what you put on: “speak every man truth with his neighbor: for we are members one of another.” Lying is a sin that has to be put off. Telling the truth is a godly habit that must be put on. In the new man, we are to speak the truth; however, we are to speak the truth in love. Ephesians 4:15 says, “But speaking the truth in love may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ.”

You can tell the truth in several ways. You can speak the truth in such a way that folks will hate you, get angry with you, and refuse to listen to you. But you can speak the truth in love, and they may still reject it and become angry. It does not matter; the truth is still truth. You understand that. You are not purposefully trying to upset

someone. The reality is, truth hurts and truth is offensive. Jesus Christ is offensive. But we have to speak the truth, no matter how much it hurts or offends.

The apostle says, “Wherefore putting away lying you put on speaking every man truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.” In other words, we owe the truth to each other. We owe the truth to each other. So if I have to tell you, or you have to tell me, something that hurts, you have to say it. Say it as lovingly and as kindly as you can, but you have to say it. You follow that? We are to put off lying and put on speaking the truth.

Men, do you hate it when your wife asks, “How does this dress look on me?” or, “Do you like this dress?” Instead of avoiding the question, you could say, “Sweetheart, I’ll be honest. I don’t really like that dress, but if you want to wear it, go ahead and wear it.” Have I ever told you I did not like your dress? Of course I have. And has she ever told me she did not like what I had on? Yes, she does—weekly, she says. It does not bother me at all. Put off lying; put on telling the truth.

Watch verse 26. This one is a good one; watch carefully. Verses 26–27 go together: “Be ye angry and sin not, let not the sun go down upon your wrath, neither give place to the devil.” What he is telling you in verse 26 is this: you put off sinful anger and put on righteous anger—“Be ye angry, and sin not.” Now, you say, how in the world can I tell whether or not my anger is sinful or righteous? Anger is an emotion and is not necessarily sinful in and of itself. Usually our anger is sinful anger, but it does not necessarily have to be sinful. If you think it is, you need to deal with Mark chapter 3, because the Bible says that our Lord looked round about upon them with anger.

He was angry with those people, but it was a righteous anger; it was not a sinful anger. You say, “Well, how do you explain the difference?” Usually, sinful anger is expressed in one of two ways. It will either act like a volcano and blow up, blow out, and blow off. In other words, you get so angry that you cuss everybody out, tell them off, and rip them up one side and down the other. You do not care who hears or who knows; you are just getting it off your chest. That is sinful anger.

The other sinful anger is this: When Steve does something to me, I do not blow up and cuss him out, but I internalize it and say, as I smile, “You just wait, big boy. Your time’s coming. I will nail you in a few weeks. You just wait.” Then it eats me up inside. I think about it and meditate on it, and it kills me. That is sinful anger.

Do you know why we are to be angry? Righteous anger deals with the sin and seeks to resolve the sin. Now look what he said: “Be ye angry and sin not. Let not the sun go down upon your wrath.” Whether you have sinful anger or righteous anger, God says it needs to be dealt with before the sun goes down. Husbands and wives should never go to bed angry with each other; it should be dealt with. Whatever it is, it should be dealt with.

You say, “Well, it’s not always like that in my house.” I understand that. That is why God put verse 27 there: “Neither give place to the devil.” When you refuse to deal with things daily before the sun goes down, you are inviting the devil into your life and your house. If you invite him in, he is coming in. You give him ground, and he is going to take it.

So God says you need to put off unrighteous anger and put on righteous anger. You need to resolve your problems before the sun goes down. Otherwise, you are giving place to the devil. Put off the unrighteous anger, put on righteous anger, and put on a daily resolution of that anger. Watch verse 28; here we go.

"Let him that stole, steal no more. But rather let him labor, working with his hands a thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth." We are to put off theft in every aspect. Fraud, deceit, and dishonesty are all part and parcel of theft; they have to be put off.

Is it sufficient just to quit stealing? No. When is a thief not a thief? It is not when he is not stealing. You can be a thief and not be stealing at the time. A thief might enter a store with the intent of stealing, but see three or four cops walking around and decide, “I better go somewhere else.” He is still a thief; he is just not stealing at the moment. So, “Let him that stole steal no more.” Stop stealing—but there is something else.

“Let him labor, working with his hands.” That is good, honest work, but that is not all. He is to work so that he may have to give to him that needeth. In other words, in place of his covetousness, he must put on a generous, gracious, and sacrificial heart. He puts off all his theft, dishonesty, and fraud, and puts on honest labor and a heart ready to sacrifice and be generous. He puts off, and he puts on.

Then verse 29 says, “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the hearers.” We are to put off all corrupt communication and put on communication that is good for edifying, so that it may minister grace to the hearers. Corrupt communication is that which is bad, rotten, putrid, corrupted, and not fit for use.

It is language that is worthless and of poor quality, a waste of time and breath. Why would you waste your time or breath speaking it if it is corrupt? God says what you are to put on is quality communication— that which edifies. The word edifies means to build up and strengthen. Therefore, gossip, innuendo, slander, false accusation, libel, and malicious implications are all forbidden in verse 29. What we are to put on is communication that builds each other up and encourages each other’s growth in Christian wisdom, piety, holiness, and happiness. So put off and put on.

Verse 30 says, “And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.” Verse 31 is a total put-off verse. Everything in it is to be put off: “Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice.”

There is nothing in verse 31 for you to put off. Everything is to be put off. Everybody knows what clamor is? I'm sure you know what bitterness is, and wrath, and anger, and evil speaking, and malice. What's clamor? Clamor is useless and worthless noise. Here's the individual that says, “We got a problem. And I don't have the answer to the problem. I don't know how to work this thing out, but bless God, I'm gonna put my two cents worth in,” and he just has clamor. It's useless, worthless noise. It's like when we say people are talking just to hear themselves talk. God says all that's to be put off.

Well, what is to be put on in its place? You have to put something on if you want to put all that off. Verse 32 says, “And be ye kind one to another.” You put on kindness: “Tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.”

A good illustration of being tender-hearted is this: If we had two pianos in this room, and they were both tuned, and my wife went over and hit middle C on one piano, middle C on this piano would vibrate. It wouldn't necessarily play, but it would vibrate, because they are in tune. Being tender-hearted means if Gary comes to me crying and weeping, I'm going to start crying and weeping with him before I ever find out why, because I know he's a brother and something is really bothering him. On the other hand, if I see Pat jumping up in the air, clicking his heel together, and saying, “Whoopee, praise the Lord,” I'm going to start rejoicing with him before I ever find out why. That's tender-hearted. So, he says, you put that on: “forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven you.”

People often say, “I’ll forgive you, but I ain’t forgetting.” If you do not forget, then you are not forgiving, because we are to forgive one another even as God, for Christ’s sake, has forgiven us. When God forgave us, He forgot our sins. If Steve does something to me and I tell him, “I forgive you,” I do not have the power to eradicate it from my mind. I may remember it ten years from now. But I do have the power never to speak of it again, never to use it against him, and never to bring it up.

This is where so many people, especially husbands and wives, fail. The wife says, “All right, honey, I forgive you,” and two weeks later, when he messes up, she says, “Uh-huh. I knew it. I knew you’d do it again.” Why are you laughing? Because you know that is the way it goes. You never really forgave to begin with, because if you had, you would not be bringing up what happened two weeks ago. That is a fact.

He tells us to put off all bitterness, anger, wrath, clamor, and evil speaking, and to put on kindness, tenderheartedness, and forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ’s sake, has forgiven us.

Grieving the Holy Spirit

Now look at verse 30: “And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of your redemption.” In this context, how do you grieve the Holy Spirit? He has regenerated us, converted us, indwelt us, become the earnest of our inheritance, and sealed us. How do you grieve Him? By not putting off the old man, by not being renewed in your mind, and by not putting on the new man. When we fail to do any of those three things, we grieve the Spirit of God.

Paul tells us to walk differently. We walk differently by learning Christ, and we learn Christ by putting off, being renewed, and putting on.

Applications and Conclusion

Let me make one quick application. How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time. How do you build a house? One step at a time. We can sit here and say, “This is just so vast, and there is so much in my life that is so wrong.”

The Second Application

How can I ever change? You begin with one thing: one habit, one thought pattern, one conduct, one area. Once that old man is put off, you are renewed, and you put on the Biblical alternative; then you go to the next. The old saying is true: a journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step. If you do not take that first step, you will never reach your destination. If you do not begin today putting off, being renewed, and putting on, you will never experience Biblical change. You will never learn Jesus Christ.

Your goal is to become something entirely different from that which you are by nature. When is a thief not a thief? Not when he is merely not stealing, but when he becomes an honest man working with his hands, generous, gracious, and sacrificial—when he becomes something totally different. When is a drunk not a drunk? Not merely when he is sober, because drunks are sober occasionally, but when he becomes something entirely different.

Your goal is not merely to quit doing things, but to become as godly, holy, and obedient as you can be by the grace of God, by learning Jesus Christ and effecting Biblical change in your life one step at a time. We must learn Christ. Where most people have messed up is that they have never really learned Jesus Christ.

Father, in the name of Jesus, we pray and ask for Your grace and Your mercy. Teach us and build us upon the most holy faith, that we may learn Thee, change our lives, and bring them into submission to Thee and conformity to Thy Word. In Thy blessed name we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 25

Walking With The Lord - Part 9 - Walking In Love

Part One

April 11, 2016

Walking in Love

Introduction to Walking in Love

In Ephesians chapter 5, beginning with verse 1, the Bible says: “Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour. But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints. Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient, but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain

words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with them."

In this brief series, we have pointed out that you must walk before the Lord before you can actually walk with the Lord—that is, walk in His presence. We talked about walking by faith. Then, in Ephesians 4, we had three messages on walking worthily, what it means to walk worthy before the Lord. We also had three messages on walking differently, learning Christ, and bringing our lives into conformity to His Word. Now we come to Ephesians chapter 5, walking in love.

Be Followers of God as Dear Children

Paul begins verse 1 by saying, "Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children." This command follows a simple principle: children ought to be like their fathers. We are the children of God, and therefore, as much as possible, we ought to bring our conduct in line with our heavenly Father.

Our Lord used this same principle in Matthew chapter 5 and verse 48 when He said, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father in Heaven is perfect." In Matthew 5:27–47, He tells us how not to live, then how to live, and culminates His message with verse 48: "Be ye therefore perfect, as your Father in Heaven is perfect." In other words, we ought to resemble our Father.

If His image is stamped upon our hearts, and if His grace runs through our veins, then obviously we should be like Him. So, in verse 1, he says, "Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children."

The Greek word for "followers" here is mimetes, which literally means a follower or an imitator. If it sounds like our English word "mimic," that is because it is related and is the source of our English word "mimic" as well. We are to be followers of God as dear children.

What are dear children? There are children, and then there are dear children. How would you make a distinction between children and dear children? The word for "dear" here is the Greek word agapetos, which literally means beloved, esteemed, that which is dear, a favorite, one who is worthy of love, and one who is dearly beloved. So Paul says, "Be followers of God as dear children."

The Scripture says in Psalm 4 and verse 3, “But know this, that the Lord has set apart them that are godly for himself.” A dear child, then, is someone who is indeed a follower of God, someone who is obedient, someone who acts like his heavenly Father. So he calls us dear children.

Love Is Not a Feeling but an Act of the Will

Now, if we are going to walk pleasingly and acceptably to our Father, we must walk in love. “And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us, and has given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour.” Do you walk in love? You should know whether or not you actually walk in love. Unhappily, most professing Christians have absolutely no idea what it means to walk in biblical love. Love is not some warm fuzzy feeling. Love is not a desire to please everyone. Love is not a desire not to offend anyone. Love is not emotions, nor is it emotional feelings.

Too many times I've heard people say concerning love, "But I don't feel anything." Oftentimes, when you find a couple on the verge of divorce, one will say to the other, "But I have no feelings for you." There may be truth in that statement, only because love is not a feeling. Love is an act of the will. You cannot command feelings; you can command the will. I can't look at Steve and say, "Steve, I command you right now to feel sick," or, "I command you right now to feel happy," or, "I command you to feel strong." I can't command feelings. I can command him to do something, because whatever he does would be an act of the will.

That's why the Bible says in Ephesians 5 and verse 25, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the church and gave himself for it." What is he doing when he says, "Husband, love your wives"? He's commanding us to love our wives. Husbands must therefore choose to obey and to love their wives. It has been commanded by our Heavenly Father.

We may not always have certain feelings for our wives. We may not always be emotional, or get that warm and tingly feeling when we're around them, but that's beside the point. We've been commanded to love them. Love is not feelings.

Look in your Bibles to 1 Peter chapter 3, verse 8. The Word of God says, "Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another. Love as brethren. Be pitiful, be courteous." God has commanded us here to love as brethren. Are you warm and fuzzy and emotional with the brethren? I hope not. We are never commanded in the Scripture to have certain feelings toward anyone. I've never had warm fuzzy feelings toward Pat. I've never had warm fuzzy feelings toward Steve, and I don't want them either, brother. Listen to me carefully: Love is not feelings. When we've been commanded to love the brethren, there are some brethren that are not too lovable. There are some brethren that are irritating.

There are some who have idiosyncrasies, things that you and I do not like. But that is immaterial. God does not even command us to like the brethren. He commands us to love the brethren. Isn't that interesting?

You have to consider this. Say, for instance, I said, "Boy, that Steve, he's got some idiosyncrasies. He's got some strange things, and I don't know if I like that or not." You see, he might be looking at someone and saying, "You know, that preacher, he's got idiosyncrasies. He's got some strange things, too. I don't know if I like that or not." What we can say about one, that one can say about us as well. So it is not whether we have feelings; God has commanded us to love each other whether we have any feelings or not.

After you see this passage, you might want to decide, "Yeah, we probably better love the brethren." Notice 1 John 3:14: "We know—note, underline that now—we know—here's how, one of the ways that we know—we know that we've passed from death unto life," that is, this is one way we know we are saved, "because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death." What? He says we know that we've passed from death into life because we love the brethren. And if we do not love the brothers, that is because we abide in death. We are not saved. Isn't that simple?

Love as the Mark of Discipleship

In John 13:34, our Lord says, "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one

another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." Isn't that amazing? Our Lord has commanded us to love each other. Moreover, He says this is the true mark of His disciples: that they love each other. Look in John 15:12: "This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you. This is my commandment." Then, in verse 17: "These things I command you, that ye love one another." The command is repeated plainly: we are to love one another.

Romans 12:10 tells us, "Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another." This means that we are to be kindly affectioned to one another with brotherly love, preferring one another in honor.

Before explaining Ephesians 5:2, let me point out that we have limitations in the English language. Consider the word love. I can say, "I love my wife." I can also say, "I love my dogs," or, "I love avocados." Obviously, I do not love avocados the way I love my animals, and I certainly do not love my animals the way I love my wife. The point is that we have one word for love, and we use it for everything. We say, "I love hot dogs. I love hamburgers. I love french fries."

Greek Words for Love and the Meaning of Agape

In the Greek language, things could be expressed somewhat differently. There are three main words in Greek for love. The first, which everyone knows, is the Greek word agape. Agape love is the highest form of love. It is used repeatedly in Scripture concerning God's love, and it is also used concerning our love. Even in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world," agapao is the verb, meaning, "I love." God loved us. He used agapao, or agape, the noun, to indicate love. Agape love is the love that gives

It gives and expects nothing in return. The second word that is used in the Greek is phileo. It is also translated "I love," but it is also where we get our English word "family," or phileo. Phileo love is the love that gives and receives. It gives and receives: "I love my wife and my wife loves me," "I love my children and my children love me," or "I love my dogs and my dogs love me." It is the love that gives and receives.

There is a third Greek word that is never used in the Bible. It is the word eros, where we get our English word “erotic.” It has to do with nothing but sensual or sexual pleasure or lust. It is the word used when someone takes.

The interesting thing is that when Paul says in Ephesians 5:2 that we are to walk in love, he uses the word agape. When he says that we are to walk in love, your walk imports your everyday life. It is how you go about your business, what you do on a daily basis; it is your lifestyle. So here is the question: How do we walk in love? How is that accomplished?

Love Is the Fulfilling of the Law

Obviously, many times we do not feel lovingly or even loving. We do not have warm, tingly, fuzzy sensations and feelings. If the truth were known, sometimes we feel downright mean. We do. We want to be nasty and we want to be ugly. Love is not feelings. I have already told you that love is an act of the will. But more than that, love is also obedience to the law. When God commands us to walk in love, He is actually commanding us to be obedient. He is saying that we should choose to obey, and choosing to obey is indeed our duty and responsibility, regardless of how we feel. Feelings have nothing to do with it. Let me show you. You are in Romans. Look in Romans chapter 13 and verse 10. Look what the Scripture says: “Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.”

What is love? Love is the fulfilling of the law. How do I walk in love? The answer is that I fulfill God's law; I do what God commands me. Love works no ill, and the reason it works no ill is because it is the fulfilling of God's law.

Our Lord equates love with obedience. In John 14:21, He says, "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him." Note the words, "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me." How do we know that we love God? We keep His commandments. Then, in verse 24, He says, "He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings."

So obviously love is indeed the fulfilling of the law. If we love Christ, we obey Him. If we do not love Him, we disobey Him. Love is obedience, and we choose to obey or we choose to disobey. Obedience and disobedience do not rely upon feelings or emotions. They are an act of the will. Obedience is our submission to God, and disobedience is our rebellion to God. It has nothing to do with feelings, either good or bad.

In 1 John 5:2-3 we read, "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments." For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous. By this we know that we love the children of God—that would be the brethren. We could read it like that: "By this we know that we love the brethren, when we love God and keep his commandments." So I could look at Ron and say, "Ron, here's the truth."

I've never had warm fuzzy feelings towards you. Does that mean I don't love him? Of course not. What is love according to verse 2? He said, "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep his commandments." How do I know that I love Ron? Because I respect him, his wife, his children, and his property. I act toward him the way God commands me to act toward him. Regardless of whether I ever have emotions or feelings, I still love him, because love is the fulfilling of the law.

Verse 3 makes it even clearer: "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments." And his commandments are not grievous. It does not grieve us that we obey, or that we cannot disobey. It does not grieve us that we cannot murder and pillage and plunder and loot and steal. We love him and keep his commandments, and it does not grieve us. We are thankful to be able to keep his commandments.

Walking in Love as Christ Loved Us

Now go back to Ephesians chapter 5 and look at verse 2. What I've covered, in one sense, is the easy part of verse 2. He says, "Walk in love," and love is obedience to God's law and an act of the will. We can choose to obey God and His commandment now that we have been regenerated by His grace. But look at the rest of verse 2: "And

walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour."

What do you mean that "walk in love" is the easy part? Look at the little word "as": "And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us." The word "as" is the Greek word kathos, translated in our Bibles as "even as," "just as," "in proportion to," "according to," and "agreeable to the fact."

Here he is telling us that we are to walk in love just as Christ loved us and gave Himself for us. That is a pretty tall order. We are to walk in love commensurate with, agreeable to, and in proportion to the way Christ loved us. We may never in this life be able to love like Christ quantitatively. We are not God; He is God. We cannot ever have the depth of His love. But although we may not be able to love as He loved quantitatively, we may love as He loved qualitatively. We may not have the quantity, but we have the quality. Our love should be of the quality and kind that Christ had when He loved us.

Christ loved us by giving Himself for us as an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour. Jesus Christ gave Himself for us. Everything that He did was for us. When He left His home in glory, it was for us. When He became incarnate, it was for us. When He walked on this earth, it was for us. When He gave obedience to God's law, it was for us. When He sacrificed Himself, it was for us. Yes, it was done in obedience to the Father, and the Father was glorified, but He did it for us.

The Bible teaches us in 2 Corinthians 5:21 that Jesus' obedience was for us: "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." That is the doctrine of imputation. If this pen is our sins, and this cell phone is the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ—and Jesus Christ is the only one who ever gave to the law that which it demands, the only one who ever gave to the law a personal, perfect, and perpetual obedience—then God took our sins and imputed them to Jesus Christ. He put them on Christ's account.

Christ died as our substitute, as our sacrifice in our place. Then God took that perfect righteousness that Jesus Christ worked out and imputed it, putting it to our account, so that we are not only

forgiven; we now have a perfect righteousness in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, then, is not just our substitute and our sacrifice; He is our righteousness.

In verse 2, he says, "...and walk in love, as Christ also has loved us, and hath given Himself for us an offering." The word "offering" here is prosphora, which means an offering, the act of bringing, that which is presented, or that which is given as a gift. Christ literally gave Himself as a gift. But that is not all. He says, "and a sacrifice to God." His offering and His sacrifice were to God. The word "sacrifice" is thusia, and it is translated "sacrifice" twenty-nine times in our Bibles. Christ loved us and gave Himself as an offering and a sacrifice to God the Father for a sweet-smelling savour.

The Sweet-Smelling Savour of Obedience vs. the Stench of Sin

John Calvin, commenting on this "sweet-smelling savour," says: "While this statement leads us to admire the grace of Christ, it bears directly upon the present subject. No language indeed can fully represent the consequences and efficacy of Christ's death. This is the only price by which we are reconciled to God. The doctrine of faith on this subject holds the highest rank. But the more extraordinary the discoveries which have reached us of the Redeemer's kindness, the more strongly are we bound to His service. Besides, we may infer from Paul's words that unless we love one another, none of our duties will be acceptable in the sight of God.

"If the reconciliation of men affected by Christ was a sacrifice of sweet-smelling savour, we too shall be unto God a sweet savour when that holy perfume is spread over us." The Bible says that Jesus Christ has offered Himself as a sacrifice unto God. When we think of the word "sacrifice," we think of something dead. All of those lambs and oxen and rams in the Old Testament died. Even in the New Testament, before Christ accomplished our redemption, those animals that were given for sacrifice died. We think of Christ as the great sacrifice, and what did He do? He died.

Although we are commanded to walk in love and to emulate Christ, our sacrifice is a little different. Let us consider one passage, then look at another.

Paul said in Romans 12:1-2, "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." So he tells us that we are to offer our bodies now as a living sacrifice. Christ gave Himself and died in our stead. Now Paul says we are to live; instead of dead, our bodies are to be a living sacrifice.

In the context of Hebrews 13, we are talking about Jesus Christ. In fact, if we go back to verse 12, it says, "Wherefore Jesus also..." Christ is the subject here in the context. Verse 15 says, "By him"—that is, by Jesus Christ—"therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually. That is the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name. But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased."

Notice again the words in verse 15: "By him"—that is, by Jesus Christ—"therefore let us offer"—there is that word—"the sacrifice"—there is that word—"the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name." Just as Christ loved us, we are to love, and we are to walk, and we are to give an offering of praise and sacrifice to our God. We are a living sacrifice, and that praise is to be given constantly and continually. If we are walking in biblical love, we are going to be walking obediently, in accordance with the law of God.

The Apostle Paul said in Ephesians 5:2 that the work of Jesus Christ was a sweet-smelling savour to God the Father. All of us understand what it is like to smell a good steak on the grill or barbecue chicken. We like that smell. That is what a sweet-smelling savour was in the Old Testament: the offerings or the incense that was going up. Jesus Christ has given Himself as a sweet-smelling savour.

Our Lord delights in our obedience. Our obedience is a sweet-smelling savour to our Heavenly Father.

The word “abomination” literally means a stench in the nostrils—a stench in God’s nostrils. I want you to listen, because in

each of these passages the word “abomination” is used. The Bible says in Proverbs 11 and verse 20, “They that are of a froward heart are an abomination to the Lord: but such as are upright in the way are his delight.” Now God says the froward, that is, the perverse and the rebellious, they are a stench in His nostrils; but the man who is upright, who walks according to His Word, is His delight.

And then when you get to Proverbs 12 and verse 22, the Bible says, “Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord: but they that deal truly are his delight.” How do you deal truly? You deal honestly, justly, and righteously. You are not defrauding someone, stealing from someone, or trying to get the best of someone; you are dealing honestly and truly. So God says that lying lips are a stench in His nostrils, but those who deal truly are His delight.

That's a sweet-smelling savour to Him. Proverbs 15:18 says, "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord: but the prayer of the upright is his delight." Anything that a wicked man can do, even a sacrifice, is a stench in God's nostrils. He doesn't like it. But the prayer of the upright is his delight. In other words, that is the sweet smell unto God.

Do you know the difference between a sweet smell and a stinking smell? How many of you really enjoy smelling a skunk? Do you enjoy the smell of a rotten egg? Do you like to smell that which is putrid and rotting? The answer is no. We find those odors offensive, and we get away from them as quickly as possible. We leave the area or erase those odors as quickly as we can. I don't know if you've ever tried to wash the scent of a skunk off your clothes or body. I used to catch skunks.

They make wonderful pets once they are deodorized. A skunk is a better mouser than a cat. My uncle, when I was a boy, would pay you to catch a skunk and bring him one because he had a hundred thousand chickens and liked those skunks to catch the rats. But have you ever tried to wash the scent of a skunk off a dog? It's a chore.

Alice and I love our dogs. But if one gets in a fight with a skunk, that dog belongs to Alice; it doesn't belong to me then. We find those odors offensive.

Have you ever stopped to think, if the work of Jesus Christ, obedience, and godliness are a sweet smell to God, what is the stench in His nostrils? He tells us: "And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour." That's a sweet smell.

Now He is coming with the offensive odors: “But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient, but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with them.”

First, in verse 3, fornication is a very broad term that includes all illicit sexual relations. Uncleanness is also a broad term; it refers to that which is impure and lustful. It is normally used in a physical sense, but it is also used in a moral sense. Covetousness in verse 3 is connected both to fornication and uncleanness, because it is a covetous desire and an unclean desire that leads to fornication.

Stop and think about this: because these sins are a denial of God’s supremacy and sovereignty, they also make one an idolater. Look down to verse 5: “For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater…” He said the same thing in Colossians 3:5: “Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry.” The covetous man has already, in his own mind, heart, and life, dethroned God and enthroned himself. By his actions he is saying, “I don’t care what God says. I don’t care what God commands. I want what I want. I’ll do what I want to do.” It is just that simple.

Sins Not to Be Named Among Saints

God tells us here that fornication, uncleanness, and covetousness are not to be named among us. The Greek word literally means “not so much as one time.” One time is one time too many. These sins should never be named among the saints of God. Paul had to deal

with a horrific offense in 1 Corinthians chapter 5. Here was a man who was living in fornication and

I would probably go ahead and say even incest with his stepmother. In 1 Corinthians 5:1, the woman is not called his mother but his father's wife, so evidently his mother had died and his father had remarried, probably a younger woman. The Bible says, "It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you. And such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles"—or among the heathen or pagans—"that one should have his father's wife. And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you. For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."

Even the heathen have better sense than this. So Paul makes it clear in Ephesians chapter 5 that, if we are walking in love, this is not to be named at all among the saints.

This should show you how far we have fallen and how much we have strayed from the truth of God's Word. Very seldom is there a church today where there is not fornication, adultery, and covetousness. Look at the pastors who have to leave the ministry every year because they become involved with the church secretary or some other woman in the church. I am simply pointing out the fact: this is not to be even once named among the saints.

He goes on: "Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient, but rather giving of thanks."

Filthiness refers to that which is obscene, ugly, and dirty. I never will forget, years ago, when I had a Christian brother whose wife was out of town while my wife was out of town. He invited me to his house to watch a movie. We did not have television, and I hardly ever went to a movie theater, so I went over to fellowship with him and watch the movie. The movie had not been on five minutes because of all the foul, filthy language. I looked at him and said,

"Turn it off." He said, "Why?" I said, "I'm not going to sit here and listen to that language. I don't talk like that. I don't know anybody who talks like that. That's not reality. That's not real life." He said, "Pastor, I'll turn it off," but added, "I'll tell you one thing: you're sheltered."

He said, "Where I work, the women speak worse than that." I said, "They might, but I'm not going to listen to it." So when he talks about filthiness, he is talking about that which is ugly, dirty, filthy, and obscene.

Then he talks about foolish talking. What is foolish talking? It is that which is foolish, impious, and godless. The word for foolish talking is morologia in the Greek, made up of moros, meaning foolish, and logia, meaning words. The verb is lego, "I say." Actually, foolish talking is moronic talking—talking like a moron, as if you have no sense or rationality. God says that is not to be named among you.

Then he talks about jesting. Jesting is scurrility, from ribaldry; it is low jesting, that which is bad, obscene, and vicious. He says, "Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient." Does that mean there is a convenient time for these things? No. He says to put them off because they are not convenient. The Greek word for "convenient" is aneko, referring to that which is fitting or due. Neither filthiness, foolish talking, nor jesting is fitting for the child of God. It is not our due, what we are owed, or what we owe God. What do we owe God? He says in verse 4, "but rather giving of thanks."

Colossians 1, verses 12 and 13, says, "Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son." Giving thanks unto the Father, who hath made us meet, or suitable, to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. In other words, God has saved us, so we are to be continually giving Him thanks. He says, obviously, that neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting—these are not things fitting for the child of God, nor are they fitting for God. It is not our due that we owe God. We

owe Him thanks, and that should consume us. I will cover this more next week, Lord willing.

Warning Against Deception and Partaking in Sin

Now look at verse 5. He says, "For this ye know"—wow—"that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God." What he mentions in verse 5 are the same sins he has just mentioned in verse 3. You better understand and know this: any whoremonger, or unclean person, or covetous man who is an idolater does not have any part or parcel in the kingdom of God. He is not going to inherit it.

Hold this and go back in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians chapter 6. Notice verse 9; we will read through verse 11. Paul says, "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God." Do not be deceived; anyone who lives like this is not saved.

Then verse 11 says, "And such were some of you"—now that is past tense. "Such were some of you." Yes, God saves these kind of people, but the people who are living like this now are not saved. That is what he is saying: "And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God."

Back to Ephesians chapter 5, look at verse 5: “For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.” I do not care if you have been baptized, are a church member, a Sunday school teacher, or even a preacher. If you are living like this, God says you have no part in the kingdom of God. He says they are lost. It is just that simple: not saved, not converted.

Now skip down to verse 6: “Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.” Do you realize the average Christian is so

easily deceived? Why? Because the average Christian does not know his Bible. Look at politics. How many politicians promote themselves as Christians and Bible believers, and when they are elected to office, turn around and do everything contrary to Christ and contrary to the Bible?

We have been conditioned to think that somehow everybody who professes to be saved happens to be saved. That is not true. “Let no man deceive you with vain words.” It is not your lips that determine whether or not you have been converted; it is your life. If your life does not back up your lips, then you are a liar. Anyone who thinks he is a Christian while living in such rebellion and wickedness is deceived, and God says we are not to be deceived.

Moreover, “because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.” These things bring God’s judgment and wrath: fornication, covetousness, uncleanness, filthiness, foolish talking, and jesting. Then, after saying, “Let no man deceive you with these vain words,” he says, “Be not ye therefore partakers with them.” If somebody wants to live ungodly, let him live ungodly; you cannot stop him. But you be not partakers with him.

Do not be deceived. Do not get into that line of thinking: “Everybody’s doing it, so I might as well do it too.” Do not say, “Look at so-and-so. It looks like he got away with it. Maybe I can get away with it, too.” No, you better not be deceived, be partakers with them, or envy them. One problem today is that so many Christians who happen to be poor, like most of us, envy rich men who are wicked.

Asaph had this problem in Psalm 73:1, and he confessed it: “For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.” All you have to do is look around. Look at the Clintons, the Bushes, George Soros, and the Kennedys. Wow. They have it. But the Bible says in Proverbs 24:1, “Be not thou envious against evil men, neither desire to be with them.”

I do not care how rich they are; I do not want to be with them. It is like walking down the road in a thunderstorm with lightning while a man nearby carries a metal pole. I do not want to be near him. These men are going to receive God’s judgment sooner or later. Proverbs 24:19 says, “Fret not thyself because of evil men, neither be thou

envious of the wicked." God says you cannot be partakers with them. Do not have anything to do with them, be envious of them, desire to be with them, or partake of anything they do.

Applications: Walking in Obedience and Separation

Stay as far away as possible. The first application is this: Walking in love signifies walking in obedience to the law of God. When we walk in obedience out of the grace and mercy found in Jesus Christ, we walk acceptably and pleasingly to our Heavenly Father. To walk in love, we walk in obedience. A second implication, according to verses 3 through 7, is that if we walk in love, we put off the lust of the flesh. We are not walking to please our flesh, and we refuse to participate in anything contrary to our Lord and His words. We refuse to be partakers with those who are disorderly and disobedient.

Moreover, we are not to be deceived simply by someone's profession of faith. That is what he said: "Let no man deceive you with vain words." Unless a person's life backs up his profession, his profession is false. Ultimately, the wrath and judgment of God will fall upon such individuals. So God says, "Be not partakers with them."

If we are going to walk with our Heavenly Father, we must not only walk in faith, walk worthily, and walk differently; we are to walk in love. Walking in love is walking in obedience to the law of God. We do not have to have feelings to obey. "I don't feel like praying." That is beside the point. God commands you to pray. "I don't feel like reading my Bible." That is beside the point. God commands you to study the Word of God. "I don't feel like loving my wife." God commands you to love your wife. "I don't feel like loving Pat. He's mean and cantankerous." God commands me to love him anyhow. Even Effie, you have to love him. Love is not feelings. Love is an act of will, and love is obedience to the law of God.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow before thee. We thank you for your word and your truth, and I pray, Father, that you would indeed make us more holy, more godly, more biblical. May we learn to walk in love as we learn to walk differently, walk worthily, walk in

faith, and walk before Thee. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 26

Abiding In Christ

March 27, 2018

John 15 presents Christ as the true vine and the Father as the husbandman: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit, he taketh away, and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit."

"Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit."

"So shall ye be my disciples. As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's

commandments, and abide in his love. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full."

Introduction and Personal Struggle with Pietistic Standards

A number of years ago, I read several books on abiding in Christ, but I do not really think that any of them particularly helped me. Many were pietistic, egocentric, and deeper-life-related, or just plain nonsense. Some authors posited or demanded a life that absolutely no one could live or fulfill. Some even went so far as to say that unless you lived exactly as they prescribed, obviously you were not a Christian. When one tries to do many impossible things, reality sets in and brings him back to his senses.

Many years ago, I was reading a great deal of the Puritan writings, and I was struck by their piety, dedication, exposition of Scripture, and prayer life. Many of those old Puritans would arise at two or three in the morning and begin praying, studying, and preparing themselves for the day.

I thought, well, that is wonderful. That is something I really need to do myself. So I determined that was exactly what I was going to do. I got up—I do not remember whether it was two or three o'clock—and knelt beside my bed. I put my head in my hands on the bed and started praying. When I woke up about three hours later, my knees were sore. I tried it again, and it happened again the second day. I tried the third day and failed again. I was berating myself, thinking, "I must be very unspiritual. I must not be up to par. Something has to be wrong with me. They did it."

Then it dawned on me: yes, they did it, but they also went to bed at six o'clock in the evening—no telephones, no television, no computer, no nothing. I was not only a pastor; I was the principal of our Christian school. I taught there, served as the counselor and disciplinarian, and taught three nights a week at our Bible study group, besides Sunday preaching and Wednesday night preaching. The Bible Institute was three hours a night. I was putting in twelve- and fourteen-hour days, getting to bed about eleven or twelve o'clock, and then trying to get up at three. No wonder I failed.

The point I am trying to make is very simple: God is very reasonable. He said in Isaiah 1:18, “Come now, let us reason together, saith the Lord.” Obviously, someone who lived two or three hundred years ago is not our pattern. The Lord Jesus Christ is our pattern, and whatever He demands, we must obey. But our lives are not to be lived based upon what someone was able to do two or three hundred years in the past. Our lives must be based upon the Scripture, and we must seek Him for grace and mercy to obey Him and bring our lives into conformity with that Word. The Lord Jesus Christ is our example, and we must follow Him.

When you look in John chapter 15, this subject of abiding in Christ is very personal, and I am going to show you that it is very important as well. Several truths are obvious to anyone who looks at John 15. The first is this: our Lord uses a very common metaphor, that of a vine and its branches.

The Metaphor of the Vine and Branches

If you study some of the commentators, you will find different explanations for why our Lord used this particular metaphor. Some say the Passover had just ended, and, since they had wine, it was obvious that He was saying, “I am the true vine, and you are the branches.” Others, like Josephus, say that at the entrance of the temple there was a golden vine. Still others say that He was walking with the disciples to the Mount of Olives and passed a vineyard.

Obviously, there were many vineyards in those days because everyone had grapes. But when you think about a vineyard or vines, you find an illustration used throughout Scripture. Major portions dealing with vineyards and vines include Isaiah 5, Psalm 80, Joel chapter 1, Jeremiah chapter 2, and Ezekiel chapter 19. These illustrations have been used throughout history.

So you have to ask yourself: Why would Jesus Christ refer to Himself as the true vine? In verse 1 He says, “I am the true vine, and My Father is the husbandman.” He calls Himself the true vine to demonstrate that all other vines are false vines. This is much like the illustration He used in John chapter 10: “I am the good shepherd. I am the good shepherd giving His life for the sheep.”

Then He talked about the hirelings. Jesus Christ is the true shepherd, in contrast to all the hirelings who do not care for the sheep. He is the true vine, in contrast to all the other false vines that entangle and ensnare. If you have ever walked in the woods with any frequency, you have tripped over a vine. Many vines do not even produce fruit; they are simply there.

Our Lord is saying, "I am the true vine, and in Me, and only in Me, are you going to be able to produce fruit." There is another reason, I think, that He refers to Himself as the true vine. He does so to demonstrate to His disciples that their fruit was not in themselves, but was to be found in Him alone. Fruit did not, and does not, originate from ceremonial laws, the rituals of the Pharisees, or any religiosity. Biblical fruit comes only from our union with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Everything flows out of Christ, because He is indeed the true vine. There is a second obvious truth here: if you are savingly united to Jesus Christ, you are going to produce fruit. He said, "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit, he taketh away. And every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit." That is, He prunes it and shapes it. Every branch in Him brings forth fruit. Bearing fruit is normal and natural for a true, genuine child of God.

Fruit-Bearing as Evidence of Salvation

When we talk about fruit, we must understand Galatians 5:22–23, where he refers to the fruit of the Spirit: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law." Every child of God is going to have, to some degree, that fruit in his person. In Matthew 13, Mark 4, and Luke 8, the parable of the sower shows that some brought forth twentyfold, some sixty, and some a hundredfold. Not everybody will produce fruit a hundred percent every year, but there will be some kind of fruit in us that is noticeable. It will be made manifest. In every child of God there is going to be some fruit.

It is called the fruit of the Spirit because it is produced by the Holy Spirit. Romans 8:9 says, "Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." If the Spirit of Christ does not abide in you,

you will not have any fruit. If the Spirit of Christ does abide in you, then you will have fruit. It will be made manifest in one way or the other.

The third truth that is very clear in this passage is that abiding in Christ is not optional but mandatory. It is absolutely necessary. “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine, no more can ye except ye abide in Me.” It is impossible to live a Christian life without Jesus Christ.

The Mandatory Nature of Abiding

Many people try to do that. That is why so many church members are actually lost. It is impossible to please God the Father apart from the Lord Jesus Christ, and it is impossible to produce biblical fruit apart from the Spirit of Jesus Christ. It is possible to be religious and lost. It is possible to be a baptized church member, a Sunday school teacher, a deacon, or a preacher and be lost. Many preachers have been saved after they were preaching. One of my dear friends preached for a number of years while lost, and then God saved him. He gives testimony very clearly.

But you have to understand this: professions do not save. So many people count their profession as their salvation. Years ago, when I was in the university, I had a ministry going to the jail, and I preached there every Friday night. One Friday night, the jailer, who was a Christian and a friend, told me about a man in a cell who had just been charged with murdering his wife and his mother-in-law. When I returned, all the prisoners in the larger cell block were released, and I was able to preach to them.

I noticed that this man stood against the wall with his foot against it while everybody else stood up front. When I finished preaching, he came to me and said, "Preacher, I'm glad you brought that message. They really need it." I asked, "Are you implying that you didn't need it?" He said, "Oh, no. I'm a Christian." I said, "Wait a minute. Pardon me?" I asked, "Aren't you the man who is here because you're charged with murdering your wife and your mother-in-law?" He answered, "Yes, I am." I said, "How is it that you claim to be a Christian? You just violated God's law and murdered your wife and your mother-in-law." He replied, "I know I'm saved because I went

forward to the Billy Graham crusade." I looked at him and said, "Sir, the scripture says, 'And ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.'"

I said, "So either you are lying or God is lying, and I don't think it's God. So if I were you, I believe I would be seeking the Lord Jesus Christ is what I'd be doing." But professions do not save. Works do not save. Churches do not save. Soul winners do not save. Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone saves.

What the Scripture is telling us is this: if there is no biblical fruit in your life, then you are lost. It is just that simple. If there is fruit, that is evidence of life. If there is no fruit, there is no life. It does not matter what your profession is or what your position in the church is. If there is no fruit in your body, you are not a Christian. It is just that simple.

Here is another reason that demonstrates that it is absolutely mandatory to abide in Christ. In verse 6, He says, "If a man abide not in Me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned." Obviously, there is no life apart from Jesus Christ, and a refusal to abide in Christ places one in eternal jeopardy.

Our Lord said to the goats in Matthew 25, those on the left hand, “And these shall go away into everlasting punishment.” So according to verse 6, a failure to abide in Christ means that you are to be cast out, cast away, dried up, withered, and burned. Everyone understands that dead limbs do not produce fruit. The only thing a dead limb is good for is firewood.

That is exactly what He is saying. There is a real, specific emphasis in this passage: abiding in Jesus Christ.

The Emphasis on 'Abide' in John 15

The word “abide,” which occurs so many times here, is from the little Greek word meno, M-E-N-O, which means to abide, to remain, to dwell, to continue, to endure, to last, and to tarry. The word “abide” occurs twice in verse 4, once in verse 5, once in verse 6, and twice in verse 7. In verse 9, the word “continue” is the same little Greek word, meno. In verse 10, it occurs twice, and the word “remain” in verse 11

is still the same Greek word, meno. When these are added up, the word meno, translated “abide,” occurs ten times in eleven verses.

Obviously, there is an emphasis here upon abiding. Here are two questions I want to answer. First, what does it mean to abide in Christ? Secondly, how do I know whether or not I am abiding in Christ? How do I know whether Gary is abiding in Christ? If the emphasis is upon abiding, we need to know what abiding is and how we can tell whether we are genuinely abiding in Christ. If abiding in Christ is some type of esoteric experience, or some type of mystical feeling somewhere, how in the world would you know it?

If you had it, how would you continue in it? If you lost it, how would you get it back? Very obviously, there have to be some biblical answers to these questions. Thankfully, there are answers. So, if you look in verse 7 and then verse 10, I want to emphasize this before showing you a number of other passages. Look in verse 7.

Abiding Defined by Obedience to Christ's Words

Our Lord says, "If ye abide in Me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will and it shall be done unto you." Then if you'll skip down to verse 10, He says, "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love." Now go back to verse 7. He says, "If ye abide in me and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will and it shall be done unto you." I want you to notice the word "words," plural. "If ye abide in me and my words abide in you." The little Greek word there is the word rhema, which refers to that which has been uttered or spoken by the living word. So actually what he is saying is the reference here is to his doctrine or to his commandments. His words are to remain, continue, indwell, and abide in us as a living principle to regulate our affections and our lives. In other words, we are to derive our life, our sustenance, and our nourishment from His words.

Now, let me point something out. When you read verses 1-6, everything is about abiding in Christ. When you look at verses 7-10, it's still about abiding in Christ, but there is a transition. The transition is from Christ to His words. That's why I said in verse 7, "If ye abide in Me and My words abide in you." Now skip down to

verse 10. "If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love; even as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love." Now, I want you to see that there is a transition from Christ to His words, but in reality they are one and the same.

I've probably told you this many times, but I'm going to tell it to you again in light of what I'm preaching and teaching. Jesus Christ is the living Word. The Bible is the written Word. You remember that passage in John 1:1-3? "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with Him."

“All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made.” And then, in verse 14: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory as the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” Jesus Christ is the Living Word. In 2 Timothy 3:16-17, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for correction, for proof, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good work,” or every good work.

Since Jesus Christ is the Living Word and the Bible is the written Word, He puts the two together in John 12: “He that rejecteth me,” that is, the Living Word, “and receiveth not my words,” that is, the written Word, “hath one that judgeth him in the last day. The word that I have spoken shall judge him in the last day.” You cannot have one attitude toward Jesus Christ and a different attitude toward His Word, because they are one and the same.

In verse 10, He says, “If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.” How did Jesus Christ abide in His Father's love? According to verse 10, by actively keeping and obeying His Father's commandments. How, then, do we abide in Jesus Christ? The answer is the same: by actively keeping and obeying His commandments. Christ's pattern is to be emulated and imitated by us.

It is impossible to retain a sense of God's pardoning love without continuing in the obedience of faith. The obedience of Jesus Christ

marked out and manifested His love to the Father. Likewise, our obedience to Jesus Christ and His commandments marks out and manifests our love to Him. Our obedience does not save us, nor does it help save us. We are saved by the sovereign grace and mercy of God alone. However, our obedience does manifest whether or not we are saved.

Obedience as Evidence of Love and Salvation

Clearly, this passage also refers to the government of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is not only God; He also governs. Our Lord asked in Luke 6:46, “Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say unto you?”

The word "Lord" is the Greek word Kyrios, which literally means boss, owner, master, sovereign. Jesus Christ is saying, "Why are you calling me boss? Why are you calling me master? Why are you calling me sovereign if you're not going to obey me?" Those who recognize Him as boss, owner, master, and sovereign do obey Him. Those who do not recognize Him as that refuse to obey Him. There is, then, a most weighty meaning for those who belong to Jesus Christ in these words. If we acknowledge Him as our boss, owner, master, and sovereign, we will obey Him.

It is impossible to produce fruit for the Father or to keep up the enjoyment of Christ's love being manifest in our lives without obedience. In verse 11, after giving us the truth in verses 1–10, He says, "These things have I spoken to you that my joy might remain in you and that your joy might be full." In other words, if you want His joy in you and want full joy, then you obey what He is telling you. Obedience is not optional. It is mandatory. It is an expression of our love to Jesus Christ.

Our Lord prepares us for John 15 in John 14:15: "If ye love Me, keep My commandments." He makes it very clear. In verse 21 He says, "He that hath My commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me. And he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him and will manifest Myself to him." Thus, "He that hath My commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me." If that is not understandable, our Lord reverses it in verse 24: "He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings."

"The word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me." According to John 15:10, abiding in the love of Jesus Christ relates directly to obedience. I do not see how it could be any plainer. Our Lord said, "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love." "Ye shall abide" is a future active indicative in the Greek. It means that abiding is the result of active obedience, that is, keeping his commandments. The indicative mood is a simple statement of fact. He is stating a simple fact: "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love."

It is his grace, mercy, and power that initially and originally unite us to Jesus Christ. It is also his grace, mercy, and power that enable us to abide in Christ, which also enables us to obey Christ. We must understand that abiding does not arise from human strength or merit, but from the same divine grace that first unites us to him.

The Relationship Between Preservation and Perseverance

This truth is like the truth of preservation and perseverance. In Jude 1, the Bible tells us that we are preserved in Jesus Christ, but it also says that we are to persevere: "He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved." The Bible speaks of holding out, working out, continuing, and holding on. What is that talking about? It is talking about perseverance. Those whom God preserves, he enables to persevere. When we are preserved in Jesus Christ, God gives us grace to continue in repentance, continue in faith, and continue in obedience. In truth and reality, our perseverance is evidence and proof of the fact that we have been preserved. If God had not preserved us, we would never persevere. Preservation and perseverance are two sides of one coin.

Likewise, abiding in Christ and obeying his commandments are two sides of one coin. God unites us with Jesus Christ, and then, according to the book of Hebrews and Jeremiah as well, writes his law upon our hearts. He thereby enables us to obey and gives us both the desire and the ability to obey. Obedience to his commandments is evidence of abiding grace. This truth can be explained further by the Scriptures, beginning with Jude 21.

Keeping Ourselves in the Love of God

“Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.” Now, if you call it just what I read, “Keep yourselves in the love of God,” wow. Is that an imperative? It probably is. It is an imperative, which is a command: “Keep yourselves in the love of God.”

Now there is a good question: How do you keep yourself in the love of God? These thoughts could be connected, but we will still need further explanation. In verse 20 he says, “But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.” So you have a responsibility to build up yourselves on your most holy faith. One of the ways we do so is by praying in the Holy Ghost. The word “building” is a very interesting Greek word. The word is epoikodomeo.

And it means, listen carefully, to finish the structure of which the foundation has already been laid. Do you remember that passage in 1 Corinthians 3? The Apostle Paul said, “I have laid the foundation which no other man can lay, which is Jesus Christ.” Now he is commanding us to finish the structure. The foundation has already been laid. We must build up ourselves in our most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost. Watch.

"Keep yourselves in the love of God." Matthew Henry said, "Keep up the grace of love to God in its lively, vigorous actions and exercises in your souls." Then he said, "Take heed of throwing yourselves out of the love of God to you, or its delightful, cheering, strengthening manifestations. Keep yourselves in the way of God if you would continue in His love."

Sometimes, when you read these commentators, it makes you think of what the old black preacher said years ago: their Bible shed a whole lot of light on them commentaries. That's true. Although what Matthew Henry said is good, when he says, "Keep yourselves in the way of God," you have to ask yourself, What is the way of God? If we are going to keep ourselves in the love of God, we are certainly going to keep ourselves in the way of God. But what does it mean to keep yourselves in the love of God?

Look back in your Bibles to 1 John, chapter five. It was the apostle John who wrote the Gospel of John, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, and Revelation. We have the same individual. Look at what he says in 1 John 5:3. Here is what he is telling you the love of God really is: "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments, and His commandments are not grievous." What is the love of God?

It is not some little esoteric experience, some type of mystical feeling, or something floating around in the universe somewhere. The love of God is keeping His commandments. The love of God is obedience. We build up ourselves in our most holy faith by obedience to His commandments. Praying in the Holy Ghost, we keep ourselves in the love of God by obedience to His commandments.

Remember Joseph. He was sold into slavery in Egypt and ended up in Potiphar's house, where he was made master of the house. Potiphar's wife made a play for Joseph, and he ran off, leaving his coat. In Genesis 39:9, Joseph said to her, "There is none greater in this house than I. Neither hath he kept anything back from me but thee, because thou art his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" And he ran out.

How did Joseph keep himself in the love of God? He obeyed God. He ran away from temptation. Paul told Timothy, "Flee also youthful lusts." When Paul wrote that, Timothy was in his forties. Yet youthful lusts continue whether you are seventy, eighty, or ninety. It does not matter; you still have to flee them and get away from them. You always flee.

Joseph then built himself up in his most holy faith simply by obedience. He obeyed instead of sinning against God.

Albert Barnes, speaking of the words, "This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments," says, "This constitutes true love. This furnishes the evidence of it. And his commandments are not grievous," the Greek word meaning heavy. That is, they are not difficult to be borne as a burden.

The meaning is that God's laws are not unreasonable. The duties He requires are not beyond our ability. His government is not oppressive. It is easy to obey God when the heart is right, and those

who sincerely endeavor to keep His commandments do not complain that they are hard. All complaints that they are hard come from those who are not disposed to keep His commandments anyhow. Barnes continues, "No man ever yet heard a true Christian say that the laws of God requiring him to lead a holy life were stern and grievous."

It does not grieve me that I cannot murder or steal. Does it grieve me that I cannot commit adultery or worship idols? I do not want to do those things anyhow. This is what John is saying: "This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments, and His commandments are not grievous."

John Gill said it this way: "Keeping of the commandments of God is an evidence of love to God. This shows that love is not in word and tongue, in profession only, but in deed and in truth. And that such persons have a sense of the love of God upon their souls under the influence of which they act, and such shall have and may expect to have greater manifestations of the love of God unto them."

Another author went on to say: “This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. There is nothing else that is worth calling love. Love to God is the spirit of obedience. It is that which subjects the whole life to Him. How can it be love to Him, whose authority we admit and whose perfection in the exercise of it we cannot truly doubt for a moment, and yet at the same time refuse obedience to Him? What is this path that His commandments mark out for us but a path of peace? As it is a path of victory over all that the world would destroy, subjection to God is that which is peace to the individual and to the whole universe.”

That is true: subjection to God. “This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments, and His commandments are not grievous.” Yet I have heard professing Christians say, “But I love God, and I do not keep His commandments.” I have heard people say, “I do not like the restraints. I do not like the hindrances. I want to be free to do my thing. But now I believe in God and I love Him.” Really? Here is my answer: Now that you have expressed yourself, allow God to express Himself.

The Test of Knowing God: Obedience

In 1 John 2, beginning with verse 3, John writes: “And hereby we do know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.” How do I know that I know God? Because He is enabling me and empowering me to keep His commandments.

That does not mean that I am perfect. It does mean that the general tenor of my life is a life of obedience. I may sin and fall short, but my life is characterized by obedience to God in keeping His commandments. “Hereby we do know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.” But watch verse 4: “He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.” Then verse 5 says, “But whoso keepeth His word, in him verily is the love of God perfected. Hereby know we that we are in Him.”

Obedience demonstrates and manifests our knowledge of and submission to Him. Disobedience demonstrates and manifests our rebellion and the reality that we do not truly know Him or love Him. For our Lord said, “If ye love Me, ye’ll keep My commands.” If you love Me, you will obey Me. Now look in 1 John 3, verses 23 and 24.

Notice verse 23: “And this is His commandment, that we should believe on the name of His Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another as He gave His commandment.” Now look carefully: “And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us by the Spirit which he hath given us.” The word “dwelleth” there is the same little word meno. He that keepeth His commandments abideth in Him, and He, that is, God, in him. And hereby we know that He abideth in us by the Spirit which He hath given us.

Here is the explanation for John 15: “He that keepeth His commandments dwelleth in Him.” Why am I keeping His commandments? Because He dwells in me. The Holy Spirit in us enables us to obey Him and to abide; therefore, we know that He abides in us because He enables us to obey Him. Look in 1 John 4:13: “Hereby know we that we dwell in Him,” that same word, meno, abide, “and He in us, because He hath given us of His Spirit.” How do I know that God abides in me? Because He has given me His

Spirit, who enables me to obey Him and bring my life into conformity to Him.

This is the same truth as preservation and perseverance. Our preservation comes to light by God enabling us to persevere. Our abiding in Christ comes to light by His power enabling us to obey and bring our lives into conformity to His Word. In 1 John 3:22, He says, "And whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight." Whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight. What is pleasing in God's sight? Keeping His commandments. Obedience.

Living in the Sight of God

The Bible says in verse 22, "and do those things that are pleasing in His sight." The word "sight" is the little Greek word enopion, and it literally means before, in the sight of, or in the presence of; colloquially, in front of. Let me show you how important this is.

You remember that passage in 1 Samuel chapter 15, when God sent Saul, King Saul, on a mission to utterly slay all the Amalekites. He said, "Slay them all, man, woman, boy, girl, ox, suckling ass, everything." But the Bible says that Saul spared Agag the king, the best of the sheep, and the best of the oxen. When Samuel came, Saul said, "Blessed be thou of the Lord, I have performed all the commandments of God."

Something had gone wrong. Samuel said, "If you obey God, what meaneth the bleating of the sheep and the lowing of the oxen in my ear? If you had obeyed God, everything had been dead." Saul tried to blame it on the people: "The people spared them," that they might sacrifice. Then came that tremendous passage: "Hath the Lord's great delight in burnt offering sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord?"

Then Samuel said, "Bring ye hither to me Agag." Agag came delicately, saying to himself, "Surely the bitterness of death has passed." Every time I read that word, I have never looked at him, but I can see him pressing up to little Samuel. Samuel said, "As thy

sword hath made women childless, so thy mother shall be childless." Then Samuel took the sword, and the Bible says he hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord.

In the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, "in the sight of the Lord" uses the word enopion. What Samuel did to Agag, he did in front of the face of God, in the presence of God, and with God's approval, because he did to Agag exactly what God wanted King Saul to do, but Saul refused.

Now the Bible says we do those things that are pleasing in His sight. What does it mean? It means that we live our lives keeping His commandments in the presence, in the face of, and before our God.

Applications of Abiding in Christ

Practical Applications: Fight and Flee

Let us stop and think about everything that we do. It is in the face of God, before God, and in His presence. If we want to please Him, we obey Him.

Abiding in Christ is not optional; it is mandatory. We cannot exist apart from Jesus Christ. He is the vine, and we are the branches. Abiding is not an esoteric act, nor is it a mystical feeling. Abiding in Christ is obedience to the totality of His Word. It is submitting to Him, refusing to sin against Him, fleeing temptation, running from that which is contrary to Him, and obeying Him in His presence and in His sight. Abiding in Christ is obedience.

We must keep ourselves in His love by fervent obedience, by His grace and mercy. We cannot become apathetic, lazy, indolent, or lackadaisical.

Like Joseph, we have to learn to flee from every violation of Scripture. Sometimes it is mental, emotional, or physical. Whatever form it takes, we must learn to flee from it.

Abiding is a term of constancy and continuance. In 1 Corinthians chapter 9, beginning with verse 26, the Apostle Paul says, "I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air." He is not a shadow boxer or merely playing around.

“But I keep under my body and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means, when I preach to others, I myself should be a castaway.”

What is the apostle saying? I fight to obey God and to keep from sinning against my God. I am not playing in this thing. It is a real, genuine fight and struggle. The Apostle Paul also said, “I die” how often? Daily. Sometimes it must be hourly; sometimes it may be minute by minute or moment by moment. We have to fight the good fight of faith, and that fighting is real and genuine.

Most of our battles are called spiritual. They are all spiritual, but most of them are mental. Everything starts in the mind. “Out of the heart proceedeth all of these things.” The heart, as Scripture shows, is the mind and the reasoning ability. If you can control your mind, you usually can control your body. Abiding in Christ is not optional; it is mandatory. Abiding in Christ is obedience to Him: fighting the good fight of faith and bringing our lives into total submission to Jesus Christ.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we ask for Your grace and Your mercy. We pray, Lord, that You would give us understanding of what it really means to abide in Jesus Christ. Help us understand that You have said, if we keep Your commandments, we will abide in You. Help us to be obedient. Help us, Lord, to trust in the Holy Spirit of God to enable us to resist temptation, submit ourselves unto Thee, and obey Thee in every area of our lives. We ask for Your grace and Your mercy. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord, in whose name we pray, amen.

CHAPTER 27

Why Has God Blessed You?

October 10, 2018

Introduction: The Multitude of God's Blessings

Psalm 105: “O give thanks unto the Lord, call upon His name, make known His deeds among the people. Sing unto Him, sing psalms unto Him, talk ye of all His wondrous works, glory ye in His holy name, let the heart of them rejoice that seek the Lord. Seek the Lord in His strength, seek His face evermore. Remember His marvelous works that He hath done, His wonders and the judgments of His mouth. O ye seed of Abraham His servant, ye children of Jacob His chosen. He is the Lord our God, His judgments are in all the earth.”

Why has God blessed you? Have you been blessed by the Lord God? Undoubtedly, the answer would be a resounding yes. It is impossible to recount all of God's blessings. It is God who has given us life and health and love and family, silver, gold, money, and a host of other blessings as well. The truth is that we cannot number His blessings because they are so multitudinous. In fact, one of my favorite passages, which I quote regularly, is Lamentations 3:22-23, where the Bible says, “It is the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions, they fail not.”

They are new every morning. Great is thy faithfulness." It is absolutely impossible to number the blessings we had yesterday. It is impossible to number the blessings we had this morning. How much more impossible, then, to number the blessings of a lifetime?

There are many incidents and episodes that stand out in your mind. You can see how God has preserved you so many times, and say, "Yes, I recount and recall those." But there are a multitude of others that you cannot recount or recall, and cannot enumerate because there are so many.

The Bible says in Job 5:9, speaking of God, "Which doeth great things and unsearchable, marvelous things without number." God does marvelous things without number. Then Job 9:10 says, "Which doeth great things past finding out, yea, and wonders without number." God performs wonders without number, and great things past finding out. Some of those marvelous wonders and great things relate to God's providence.

God's Providential Care and Thoughts Toward Us

Hold Psalm 105; we are coming back there. But look in Acts chapter 14, verse 17, because included in these wonderful works of God is His marvelous providence. The Word of God says, “Nevertheless, He (that is God) left not Himself without witness, in that He did good, and gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.”

When you stop and think of all the providential things that God brings to pass in our lives, they are actually a witness and a testimony to Him. He gives us rain. Just yesterday we were praying for rain, and the Lord sent a very good one last night. But notice, it is not just rain, but fruitful seasons. Then He fills our heart with food and with gladness.

When we talk about God’s providence, we also have to point out that God does not forget us. Go back in your Bibles to Psalm 40, verse 5. Here is a very interesting and enlightening verse. David says, “Many, O LORD my God, are thy wonderful works which thou hast done.” Again, he talks about the wonderful works of God. But note

the rest of the verse: “And thy thoughts which are to us-ward, they cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee.

“If I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered.” Has it ever dawned upon you that God thinks about you individually? What He says is, “and thy thoughts which are to us-ward.” God thinks about us. They cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee. It is an amazing thing that the sovereign God of heaven and earth condescends to think of His people, His creatures, and sinners.

He may not forget us, but the truth of the matter is that, in our sin, disobedience, and rebellion, oftentimes we forget about Him. We presume upon His mercy and grace, assuming that God will continue to bless us regardless of our conduct or whether we thank Him. We presume upon His grace and mercy almost to the point that we think He owes us these things.

When in reality, He does not owe us anything. The truth is that many times, when God blesses us, we fail to acknowledge and thank Him for those blessings.

Psalm 40:5 says, “And thy thoughts which are to us-ward, they cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee.” David said, “If I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered.” God oftentimes thinks of us.

But look at Jeremiah 2:32. Note what God asks: “Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire? Yet my people have forgotten me days without number.” There is a very clear implication in this verse: we think about and remember things that are important to us.

He asks, “Can a maid forget her ornaments?” There is not a woman in the world who would forget her jewelry. There is not a maiden, a bride, who is going to forget her bridal attire. A woman will not forget her jewelry because it is important to her. A bride will not forget her bridal gown because it is important to her. And a man will not forget his work because it is important to him.

We think about and remember those things that are important to us. But God says, "My people have forgotten Me days without number." Unhappily, the truth of the matter is that remembering

God and thinking about Him, all of His blessings, and all of His grace and mercy to us is really low on our list of priorities. That is why He said, "My people have forgotten Me days without number." We forget His works, His marvels, and His blessings.

The Danger of Forgetting God's Blessings

We fail to acknowledge Him in every area of our life. When is the last time that you stopped and considered, as well as thanked God, for all the blessings that He has given unto you? Remember this: the blessings of sleep and rest are something that you and I enjoy on a regular basis. How about the food that He provides? And not just the food, but the ability to eat that food and enjoy it?

This past week, Alice and I went to a restaurant. I noticed a man across from me at a table in a wheelchair, and I watched his wife put the spoon into the food, lift it up, and feed him. I could not help but say, "Lord, thank You for letting me be able to feed myself and enjoy the food that I am eating." I do not even know that he knew he was eating.

You have to understand that this is the blessing of God. Have you ever really thought about your life and your health? It is God who sustains and nourishes us. Have you stopped to consider that it is God who enables you to do what you can do? The older I get, the more I appreciate the fact that God allows me to do many things that many people do not get to do at my age.

I am at least twenty-one now, Brother Francis, so you have to stop and think. Here are a multitude of blessings. Many of the people that Alice and I went to school with are in nursing homes, in wheelchairs, and many of them are dead. We breathe God's air, walk on His earth, and He gives us the ability to work and enjoy all the beauties of His creation. Many times I am absolutely astounded at what I see when I go out in the forest. I have often thought about thanking God for the oceans, for the mountains, for the swamps, and for the trees.

I have a picture on my cell phone that I took in the woods last year. You know those vine wreaths that everybody likes to hang on their doors? I have a picture of one that formed naturally in the woods. I thought, “My goodness, look at that.” It was hanging from

one of the trees, the grapevine growing round and round until it formed a wreath.

And you stop and think about how God has allowed us to see and enjoy these things. I came across an article posted October 20, 2008, titled “The True Seven Wonders of the World.” Let me read it:

The True Seven Wonders of the World

“Junior high school students in Chicago were studying the seven wonders of the world. At the end of the lesson, the students were asked to list what they considered to be the seven wonders of the world. Though there was some disagreement, the following received the most votes: Egypt’s Great Pyramids, the Taj Mahal in India, the Grand Canyon in Arizona, the Panama Canal, the Empire State Building, St. Peter’s Basilica, and China’s Great Wall. While gathering the votes, the teacher noted that one student, a quiet girl, had not yet turned in her paper. She asked the girl if she was having trouble with her list. The quiet girl replied, ‘Yes, a little.’”

'I couldn't quite make up my mind because there were so many.' The teacher said, 'Well, tell us what you have and maybe we can help.' The girl hesitated, then read, 'I think the seven wonders of the world are to touch, to taste, to see, to hear.' And then she hesitated a little and added, 'to feel, to laugh, and to love.' The article said the room became so quiet you could hear a pin drop. You know, most of us have never thought about the ability to touch or to feel. Those of us who are half deaf have thought about the ability to hear. Those who are nearly blind think about the ability to see, but even tasting. I mean, laughing, loving. I mean, when you stop and think of all the blessings that you and I experience, we take for granted and we never even think of them. And yet, of course, they're here; God has given them. So the question would be, when is the last time that you have thanked God for those things?

You know, and as bad as things are at times, we can still thank God they're not worse. It could be an awful lot worse. Now I haven't forgotten Psalm 105. I'm going to come back to that, but I want to show you a bunch of passages to try to set you up for what I want to share with you from Psalm 105. So I want you to turn to Psalm 103, and let's look at the first five verses. Psalm 103. Remember, we're

coming back to Psalm 105, but look if you would at Psalm 103, and let's read the first five verses. Look what David says.

Blessing the Lord for His Benefits (Psalm 103)

"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits." Do not forget these benefits: "Who forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases, who redeemeth thy life from destruction, who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies, who satisfieth thy mouth with good things so that thy youth is renewed like the eagles."

Look at verse 1: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me." In other words, it is not merely a half-hearted blessing and praising of the Lord; it is with everything within Him. "Bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all thy benefits." Now look at verse 3: "Who forgiveth all thine iniquities."

Each one of us is a sinner. Each one of us has sinned and done things we wish we had never done, things we wish we could forget. But they are there. God knew about each and every sin, and yet He forgives all thine iniquities—not nearly every one, not almost every one, but all of thine iniquities. The Bible says He puts them behind His back, buries them in the depth of the sea, and takes them as far as the east is from the west. So David can say, "Bless the Lord,

“O my soul, and all that is within me.” Why? Because He forgiveth all thine iniquities. And he says, “Who healeth all thy diseases.” Stop and think about this. Every one of us has been sick and gotten well. It does not matter whether you are talking about the flu, cancer, polio, or whatever. Someone says, “Well, some of my loved ones got sick and died.” If they were Christians, they are not sick anymore. He still healed all of those diseases. That is a fact. So we can bless the Lord there.

Then he says in verse 4, “Who redeemeth our life from destruction.” Stop and think how many times God has preserved us and saved us. You and I could probably talk about car wrecks, fires, tornadoes, hurricanes, and whatever. We can say, “Wow, God just miraculously took care of us in that occasion.” But think of all the

times God saved our lives when we were not even aware that we were in danger.

Then he says, “Who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies.” All of that is upon us. And in verse 5, “Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things.” You are able to eat and enjoy, so that thy youth is renewed like the eagles.

Now, I want to point out something that most of us have never really thought about. He says in verse 5 that God not only satisfies our mouth with good things, but He renews our youth like the eagle. I want to give you two quotes. One is by Joseph Caryl, who preached for years and years just out of the book of Job. He wrote concerning verse 5, “The renovation of his youth may be understood in three ways,” talking about David’s. First, as to the natural state or bodily strength. Second, as to his civil state or worldly successes, as to his honor and kingly renown.

Thirdly, consider his spiritual state, or the heightening of his gifts, graces, and comforts. It is probable that David had found a declension in all these; yet, through the goodness of God and His blessing upon him, they were renewed from oldness to youthfulness again, like that of eagles.

Matthew Henry goes farther: "The eagle is long-lived, and as naturalists say, when she is nearly a hundred years old, casts all her feathers (indeed, she changes them in great measure every year at molting time), and fresh ones come, so that she becomes young again. When God, by His graces and comforts of the Spirit, recovers His people from their decays, and fills them with new life and joy, which is to them an earnest of eternal life and joy, then they may be said to return to the days of their youth." Thus the eagle molts, receives new feathers, and appears young again.

I once read another article about the eagle. It said that, as an eagle aged, its beak continued to grow and curl until it was often unable to eat. The eagle would then get upon a rock and rub its beak back and forth against it, as one sharpens a knife, until part of the beak broke off. It would then begin to grow as it should, enabling the eagle to eat again. Thus it retained the youthfulness, or the ability to eat, that it had in its youth. God says we will be renewed like the eagle.

Consider two passages, Psalm 92 and Isaiah 40. Psalm 92:13–15 says, "They that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age. They shall be fat and flourishing, to show that the Lord is upright, He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him." Notice especially: "They shall still bring forth fruit in old age."

In other words, we retain the vigor, and we retain the youthfulness: “They shall be fat and flourishing.” Then, if you would turn over to Isaiah 40, you will see again a comparison to the eagle. Notice, please, verses 29 through 31. Isaiah 40, verse 29. The Bible talks about the grace, the mercy, and the goodness of God in this passage: “He (that is God) giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might He increaseth strength. The youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall.” Watch: “But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint.”

Note, if you would please: here is God's enabling power, enabling grace, strengthening grace, and persevering grace. He enables us by renewing our strength, and it is compared to mounting up with wings as eagles. And he said, “We shall run and not be weary, and we shall walk and not faint.” In other words, God is saying this is what it means to have the youth of an eagle, where God just keeps us going. Isn't that amazing? Stop and think about this. I've told several people, Alice and I probably outdo a lot of folks in their 30s and 40s. But it is only God's grace, God's strength, and God's mercy that keep us going. That's exactly what He says right there. It's like the eagles.

Now, let me show you this. I want you to turn now to Psalm 107. I'm going to go back to Psalm 105, but I want you to see Psalm 107, because I want you to see another passage that deals with God's goodness and God's blessings. But this passage also reveals to us our duty, our obligation, and our responsibility in reference to all of God's blessings. I want to begin by reading the first three verses. Look at Psalm 107, beginning with verse 1.

The Obligation to Praise: Lessons from Psalm 107

The psalmist says, “Oh, give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good, for His mercy endureth forever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom He has redeemed from the hand of the enemy, and gathered them out of the lands from the east and from the west and from the north and from the south.”

This psalm, of course, relates to the deliverance of Israel from Egypt. The very first verse says, “O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever.” Then verse 2 says, “Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy.” If we have been redeemed from the hand of the enemy, we have an obligation and a duty to say so.

Years ago, when Alice and I were first converted, we would occasionally attend a church where the pastor would stand up and say, “We need to have a say-so meeting,” and he would quote this verse. In other words, if God has blessed you, if God has done something for you this week, say so. We would be given a few minutes to stand up and give a testimony to the grace and mercy of God: “Let the redeemed of the Lord say so.”

Psalm 107 is a psalm of praise. Charles Haddon Spurgeon divided this psalm, not to expound it, but to show its divisions and a proper response based on each one. He wrote: “The psalmist commences by dedicating his poem to the redeemed who have been gathered from captivity, verses 1-3. He then likens their history to that of travelers lost in the desert, verses 4-9; to that of prisoners in iron bondage, verses 10-16; to that of sick men, verses 17-22; and to that of mariners tossed with tempest, verses 23-32. In the closing verses, the judgment of God on the rebellious and the mercies of God to His own afflicted people are made the burden of this song, verses 33-42. And then the psalm closes with a sort of summing up in verse 43, which declares that those who study the works and ways of the Lord shall be sure to see and to praise His goodness.” It is not my intent to expound this psalm.

I do want to show you the proper response given to us from these divisions that Spurgeon has outlined. He talks about travelers lost in the desert. You remember how God led Israel through the desert.

Look in verse 4: “They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way. They found no city to dwell in.” Naturally, they were not out in the desert. “Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them. Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and He delivered them out of their distresses. And He led them forth by the right way”—watch—“that they might go to a city of habitation.”

Here are travelers lost. They are found, led in the right way, and brought to a city of habitation. What should be the response? Look at verses 8 and 9: “Oh, that men would praise the Lord for His goodness and for His wonderful works to the children of men. For He (God) satisfieth the longing soul and filleth the hungry soul with goodness.” If you have been delivered in this particular way, you should praise the Lord for His goodness and for His wonderful works.

Now, look at the second one: prisoners, individuals in bondage. Beginning in verse 10, he says, “Such as sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, being bound in affliction and iron, because they rebelled against the words of God and contemned the counsel of the Most High.” In other words, they were condemned, but they were condemned rightly. “Therefore He brought down their heart with labor; they fell down, and there was none to help.” That is Israel in Egypt. “Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and He saved them out of their distresses. He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and brake their bands in

Those who have been delivered from sickness should consider their response. “Fools because of their transgression and because of their iniquities are afflicted. Their soul abhorreth all manner of meat.” In other words, they become so sick they cannot eat. “And they draw near unto the gates of death. Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and He saved them out of their distresses. He sent His word and healed them and delivered them from their destructions.” What should be your response when God has sovereignly, powerfully, miraculously, and marvelously healed you? “Oh, that men would praise the Lord for His goodness and for His wonderful works to the children of men. And let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving and declare His works with rejoicing.”

There are also sailors and mariners in a great storm. “They that go down to the sea in ships, they that do business in great waters. These see the works of the Lord and His wonders in the deep. For He (God) commandeth and raiseth up the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof. They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths; their soul is melted because of trouble. There in the midst of this storm, they reel to and fro and stagger like a drunken man, or near their wits’ end, and it looks like they’re going to die. Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and He bringeth them out of their distresses. He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves are ever still. Then are they glad because they be quiet. So He bringeth them unto their desired haven.”

Here God has marvelously and miraculously rescued people from a storm and brought them to their desired haven. What should be the response? “Oh, that men would praise the Lord for His goodness and for His wonderful works to the children of men. Let them exalt Him also in the congregation of the people and praise Him in the assembly of the elders.” Isn’t this amazing? When you look at this psalm, over and over the Scripture is saying, “Oh, that we would praise Him for His goodness.”

Let me ask you a question. You have praised God in times past for His goodness to you, but have you noticed what Scripture says very carefully and very clearly: “Oh, that men would praise the Lord for His goodness and for His wonderful works to the children of men”? Have you ever stopped to think, “Lord, I will praise You for this, but multitudes will not. So, Lord, I want to thank You for them. I cannot make them thankful, but I can acknowledge Your blessings on their behalf, and that is what I want to do”?

Understanding Lovingkindness Through Observation

Yesterday, Alice, Andrew, and I were praying for rain. We needed it desperately, and the Lord sent us a wonderful rain last night. We were all rejoicing, and it struck me that many people probably would not be thankful for that rain. So I said, “Lord, I want to thank You for them. I am thankful, and I want to thank You for those who refuse to thank You and will not even acknowledge that this was Your blessing.”

I saw something similar with my own eyes when I was a boy. There was a tremendous drought—I think it was in 1954—and all the farmers gathered for a prayer meeting to ask the Lord to send rain. One man I knew was pretty much an atheist; basically, he was a drunk. He was also a neighbor and a farmer, so my father invited him to the meeting simply to be neighborly. The man laughed at my father and asked, "What good will that do?" Those men prayed, and that afternoon the Lord sent rain. I stood and watched it fall right on our property, right up to his property line, but it did not cross onto his property. I am simply saying that there are very obvious reasons to praise God.

Now look at the last verse of Psalm 107: "Whoso is wise and will observe these things, even they shall understand the lovingkindness of the Lord." He has been speaking of all God's marvelous blessings, deliverances, and works. Then He says that if you are wise, you will observe these things; and if you observe them and thank God and praise Him appropriately, you will understand the lovingkindness of the Lord. Isn't that amazing? If you do not thank God and contemplate these blessings, you will never comprehend the lovingkindness of the Lord.

Now go back to Psalm 105. Everything I have shown you so far lays a foundation for what I want to give you there. You remember the question I asked: Why has God blessed you?

The Purpose of Blessings: Obedience (Psalm 105:45)

Psalm 105:1 says, "O give thanks unto the Lord, call upon his name, make known his deeds among the people. Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him: talk ye of all his wondrous works. Glory ye in his holy name: let the heart of them rejoice that seek the Lord. Seek the Lord and his strength, seek his face evermore. Remember his marvellous works that he hath done; his wonders, and the judgments of his mouth; O ye seed of Abraham his servant, ye children of Jacob his chosen. He is the Lord our God: his judgments are in all the earth."

In these first seven verses, we are called upon to give thanks unto His name. We are commanded to make His deeds known among the people. We are to sing psalms unto Him, talk of His wondrous

works, glory in His name, rejoice in Him, seek His face, and remember all of His marvelous works.

Psalm 105 recounts the miracles, wonders, and marvels that God did in Egypt in delivering Israel out of the house of bondage. What has the deliverance of the children of Israel from Egypt got to do with me? In 1 Corinthians chapter 10, the Apostle Paul takes what happened in Egypt and what happened to the children of Israel and applies it to a New Testament church, the church at Corinth. He makes some astounding statements:

"Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea. And did all eat the same spiritual meat," that is, the heavenly manna that God sent, "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." Here we are talking about the deliverance from Egypt and the Red Sea.

"These things that happened to them 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 twenty and three thousand," that is Numbers 25. "Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of the serpents," that is in the book of Numbers. "Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer," that is also in the book of Numbers. "All these things happened to them for examples, and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come."

Everything that happened to Israel in the Old Testament has an application to us. In Psalm 105, consider some of the things that God did in Egypt. Anytime you see the word "He," it refers to God in this psalm: "He sent Moses, His servant, and Aaron whom He had chosen. They showed His signs among them and wonders in the land of Ham. He sent darkness and made it dark, and they rebelled not against His word. He turned their waters into blood and slew their

fish. Their land brought forth frogs in abundance in the chambers of their kings. He spake, and there came diverse sorts of flies and lice in all their coasts."

He is talking about the ten plagues here: "He gave them hail for rain and flaming fire in their land. He smote their vines also and their fig trees and brake the trees of their coasts. He spake, and the locusts came and caterpillars, and that without number, and did eat up all the herbs in their land, and devoured the fruit of their ground. He smote also all the firstborn in their land, the chief of all their strength. He brought them forth also with silver and gold."

There was not one feeble person among their tribes. Egypt was glad when they departed, for the fear of them fell upon them. He spread a cloud for a covering, and fire to give light in the night. The people asked, and He brought quails and satisfied them with the bread of heaven. He opened the rock, and the waters gushed out; they ran in dry places like a river. For He remembered His holy promise and Abraham His servant. And He brought forth His people with joy and His chosen with gladness, and He gave them the lands of the heathen, and they inherited the labor of the people.

Why did God deliver the children of Israel out of Egypt? Why did God work all of these miracles, wonders, and marvels for them? Why did He lead them through the wilderness with a pillar of cloud by day and a fire by night? Why did He provide manna from heaven, smite the rock so that water gushed out, and supply all their needs? The Bible says their foot did not swell and their clothes did not rot. He took care of them and preserved them. He gave them the land of the heathen, land they did not work for, crops they did not plant, and fig trees they did not cultivate. He gave it all to them.

Why did God do that? Let me ask the question another way: Why did God save you? Why did God deliver you? Why has God given you life and health? Why has God allowed you to hear His Word? Why has God given you peace and possessions? Why has God satisfied your mouth with every good thing? Why has God given you a home? Why has God blessed you in innumerable ways? Here is the answer: the answer is the same for the second question as it is for the first. Why did God do what He did for Israel? Why did God do what He has done for you?

Psalm 105:45 gives the answer: “That they might observe His statutes, and keep His laws. Praise ye the Lord.” God blessed us so that we would be obedient unto Him. Verse 44 says, “He gave them the lands of the heathen, and they inherited the labour of the people; that they might observe His statutes, and keep His laws. Praise ye the Lord.”

Now turn to Romans chapter 2, verse 4. Do you realize that God’s goodness and blessings lead you to repentance, and repentance leads you to obedience? The Bible asks, “Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?” Two things are here. First, it is the goodness of God that leads you to repentance. Then he asks, “Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering?” If you and I do not repent, if we are not obedient, we are despising all of God’s goodness. When we despise His goodness, we despise Him.

Blessings Lead to Repentance, Not Despising God

Numbers chapter 14 gives an excellent example and application. Where there is no repentance, there is no obedience; and where there is no repentance and no obedience, there is nothing less than a despising of God’s goodness, and hence a despising of God. The people had said that God brought them into the wilderness to kill them and make their babies a prey. But God said in Numbers 14:31, “But your little ones, which ye said should be a prey, them will I bring in, and they shall know the land which ye have despised.”

When they refused to obey God, they were despising His promise, His gift, and His blessing. God had given them the land and said, “Go up and possess it,” but they refused. Thus God said that they were despising His blessing. When you and I do not take God’s blessings and use them to improve our repentance and obedience, we are, in essence, despising what God has done for us.

Our Lord made this exceedingly clear in John 14, verse 15, when He made this simple statement: “If you love Me, keep My commandments.” If we love our Lord and love and appreciate all that He has done for us, it leads us to repentance. It leads us to obedience.

Let me ask you this question: Out of all the blessings that God has given you—from the beginning of the time that you were born until now—out of all the blessings that God has bestowed upon you, how many of them have you deserved? Not one. You know what Jacob said in Genesis 32, verse 10? He said, "I am not worthy of the least of Thy mercies." When you think of how rebellious we have been, how depraved we are, how wicked and disobedient, and yet God has still showered us, even when we were unsaved, with blessings, we should be humbled.

Conclusion: Undeserved Mercy and the Call to Gratitude

When God blesses us, we cannot be lifted up with pride and arrogance because we do not deserve the least of His mercies, which should lead us to be more grateful, more thankful, and more appreciative. Now I want to take you back to Psalm 107—you do not have to turn there—but to the last verse, because in that verse he said that if you are wise and consider these things, how God delivers and how God blesses, then you will understand the lovingkindness of God. Without properly considering the blessings of God in our lives, will we ever really comprehend His lovingkindness? We do not realize how gracious, kind, and loving God has really been to us.

Just the fact that He's allowed us to live should be a tremendous blessing. It should make us more grateful, more thankful, and more appreciative of everything God does for us. If David handed me a thousand-dollar bill today, I took it and walked off, he would think—of course, if he had a $1,000 bill, Janice would already have had it. I understand that; they do not even make them anymore, I do not think.

The point is this: if he handed me a $1,000 bill, I took it, turned around, walked off, and said nothing—not even thank you or an acknowledgment—he would think, "Huh, I won't do that again." What do you think God's response to our unthankfulness and ungratefulness is when we take His blessings one after another, never acknowledge Him, and never acknowledge that He is the giver of all good things?

We need to learn to be more appreciative, thankful, and grateful for every little blessing God gives us, because we do not deserve the least of His mercies.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank You for Your Word, truth, goodness, and kindness. We must confess that we have forgotten Thee days without number.

So many times we've been unthankful, ungrateful, and unappreciative. So many times we've assumed and presumed upon Your grace and mercy. Forgive us for our sins. Help us to praise and acknowledge Thee, and help us understand and comprehend Thy lovingkindness to each of us. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 28

Holiness and Obedience

December 5, 2018

1 Peter 1:13: “Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance, but as he who hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation. Because it is written, Be ye holy, for I am holy.”

Introduction: The Problem of Holiness

A few questions begin this message. The first is this: Do you have a desire or an inclination to be holy? The second is this: Do you understand the essence of holiness, that is, of what holiness really, truly consists? This brings us to a third question: How would it be possible for anyone to be holy unless he knows and understands the essence of holiness? One of the most frequent complaints I have heard from Christians is this: “Holiness escapes me. I’ve tried and I keep trying to be holy, but I fail miserably.”

There is a very logical and biblical answer to such failure. We do not understand the beginning or the end of holiness. Our minds and

flesh, by nature, recoil against holiness. The reason should be obvious: our depraved nature and wicked flesh desire to be fulfilled even at the expense of God.

In Galatians 5:16–17, the Apostle Paul says: “This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.” Then he makes this statement: “For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.” Mark this down in your minds: you will never be holy as long as you give in to fleshly desires.

You'll never be holy as long as you do what comes naturally and what your flesh truly wants to do. Your flesh will do anything and everything contrary to God and against God. Colossians 1:10 teaches us, "That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God." Note especially this: "that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing."

The choice is this: you either please the Lord or end up pleasing your flesh. That is why Galatians 5 says the flesh lusteth against the Spirit—that is, it fights against the Spirit—and the Spirit against the flesh, and you cannot do the things that you would. It is impossible to please your flesh and the Lord at the same time. We either please Him or end up pleasing ourselves.

Anytime you put your flesh, desires, will, and way above God and His way, you are not only in violation of the first commandment; it is nothing less than blasphemy and idolatry.

We have been commanded to be holy. In 1 Peter 1:16 he says, "Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy." Here is the command, and the only alternative response is disobedience and rebellion. The command is that we must be holy.

A few years back, I brought an entire series from 2 Corinthians 6 and 7 dealing with perfecting holiness, because that is what Scripture says: "Perfecting holiness in the fear of God." In times past I brought at least two messages on this passage entitled "Holiness Explained and Encouraged." However, for the last week or two, my mind has been on this passage, and I thought I might condense

everything into one message so that it would be easily comprehended.

Now, before I begin dealing with 1 Peter 1, verses 13 and 14 particularly, there is another verse that I want you to see in light of this passage. So, if you will hold 1 Peter, turn to Psalm 4 and look at verse 3. Notice what the Scripture says: "But know that the Lord hath set apart him that is godly for himself: the Lord will hear when I call unto him."

Now look at the first part of this verse: "But know that the Lord hath set apart him that is godly for himself." First, I want you to consider the fact that God sets apart him that is godly for himself. The phrase "sets apart" is actually from the Hebrew word "palal," which means to mark out, to distinguish, to be distinct, to separate, and to set apart. So God distinguishes and sets apart the individual who is godly.

Secondly, the Hebrew word for "godly" is "chasid," and it literally refers to those who are holy, those who are godly, those who are saints, those who are merciful, and those who have received mercy. A godly man is the same as a holy man. When we talk about someone who is godly, that means he is godlike, or like God, and since God is holy, a godly man must be a holy man as well. So the Bible says, "But know that the Lord sets apart him that is godly for himself."

Thirdly, the godly man, or the holy man, is set apart for God himself. In other words, he is in a distinguished class and in a unique position. Therefore, look in verse 3 again: "But know that the Lord hath set apart him that is godly for himself." And then David says, "The Lord will hear when I call unto him." In other words, I know God is going to hear me because God has set me apart. He has distinguished me. He has made me what I am. I am a godly individual, and I know therefore that God is going to hear me.

Now, I don't know about you, but quite frankly, I would definitely like to be in this special class. I would like to be in this special position. When we were kids, anyone in our class who really studied, had the answers, and the teacher would always praise became classified as the teacher's pet. The reason they were the teacher's pet was because they were right on all the time.

Holiness Begins in the Mind

In order to be truly and genuinely holy, one must be regenerated and converted. No Pharisee, no hypocrite, no unsaved church member, or anyone else can be truly holy. It is true that an unsaved man may be moral, he may be civil, he may be kind, and he may possess a certain degree of uprightness, but the truth is he cannot be what you and I and what the Bible would call absolutely holy. No one can be holy unless there has been a supernatural work of grace in their heart. They must be saved by God. They must have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

However, once an individual has been saved, Peter, in 1 Peter chapter 1, very succinctly and very concisely tells us not only about holiness, but also how that we can increase in holiness as well. Let us boil this down very concisely today, like Peter did. There are two points, and the first one is this: look at verse 13.

Verse 13 says, “Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” So here is the very first point: holiness begins in the mind. Holiness begins in the mind. That is why he said, “Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind.” Everything begins in the mind. Your mind controls your attitude, your actions, and your conduct. I am sure that those of you who have ever visited the psych info wars happen to be completely aware of the slogan that is used there: “There is a war for your mind.”

That is true, not just politically. That is certainly true in every area, but it is especially true spiritually speaking. The Word of God teaches us very clearly. In Proverbs 23:7, “As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.” You remember, years ago I preached a message from Proverbs 4:23 on keeping the heart. That verse simply says, “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.” I took the time to go through the Bible to demonstrate that the heart is the mind. For instance, the very first time the word “heart” occurs in the Bible is Genesis 6:5, where God saw the imaginations of the heart—the heart can imagine. Then I took you to Genesis 27:41 and showed you where Esau said in his heart, so the heart can speak. Then I took you to Proverbs 5:12, where the heart was capable of either receiving or refusing instruction. Finally, I took you to

Matthew 5:27–28 to demonstrate that the heart is intimately connected with the eyes, where Jesus Christ said, “Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.” So when we talk about keeping the heart, it is the same as keeping the mind.

When Peter says, “Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind,” he could have literally said, “Wherefore keep your heart,” because the heart is basically the mind. Now, when he says, “Gird up the loins of your mind,” first of all, the Orientals in the Bible centered everything around the loins. The loins were basically not just the position that you needed for action. You cannot walk without moving your loins. I laugh every time I think about it. The Bible speaks of bowels, and the bowels are located down in the lower part around the loins. One of my favorite Greek words is translated “bowels.” It literally means “guts.” Love supposedly comes from the bowels. I would look at Alice and say, “I love you with all my bowels.” But that was not romantic for her. That is why I would say, “I love you with all my guts.” Well, that was still not romantic, but it is true. That is where it is. So he says, “Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind.” Just as the loins are the center of everything physically, your mind is the center of everything intellectually and spiritually as well.

So when the Orientals, who wore those long flowing robes, when they got ready to run or to work or to do anything that required exertion, they would take those robes and bring them up and tie a rope or tie a belt around them so they could actually move and get to it. So, when Peter then says, "Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind," what he is saying is you get ready to think. You get ready to think biblically. You get ready to use your mind and you work this mind and you work it in a biblical framework as well.

Now, let me just point out the fact that—and I want to ask you a question. Peter says, "Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind?" Here's my question: Why does it start with the mind? Why does this start with the mind? And the answer is because that is where we were initially as the enemies of God. Let me show you. Hold 1 Peter, but look in your Bibles first of all to the book of Ephesians chapter 2. In fact, we'll come back to Ephesians 2 several times if you want to mark it, but look in Ephesians 2 and verse 3. Ephesians 2:3, note

what he says: "Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind." Note the mind. "Fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind." Look in Ephesians 4 and verse 17. Ephesians 4:17, he says, "This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind."

And the word "vanity" means the uselessness, the worthlessness, the stupidity of their minds. Then if you would turn over just a few pages to the book of Colossians chapter 1. Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, look in Colossians 1 if you would and verse 21. It cannot be said any more plainly. Colossians 1:21: "And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled." I want you to think about Adam. Do you realize when Adam first rebelled against God, he rebelled first in his mind? His thoughts were contrary to God and contrary to God's commands. And he actually believed that his thoughts were better than God's word and God's command. Every sin begins in the mind. You cannot sin without thinking about it. Every sin begins in the mind. I've had people tell

"Well, Brother Weaver, I didn't mean to steal that. It was just—it just happened." No. You thought about it before you ever did it. "Well, I didn't mean to run off with that woman." No. You planned it. You thought about it. You cannot sin without thinking about it first. Everything starts in the mind. Just as it is obvious that every sin starts in the mind, it should also be obvious that every act of obedience starts in the mind as well. The mind is the battleground.

Whoever or whatever controls your mind controls your life. Whoever or whatever controls your mind controls your life.

The Difficulty of Refusing Our Own Thoughts

Peter tells us that we are to gird up the loins of our mind. The difficult part in doing that is learning to refuse your thoughts. Everyone prefers his own thoughts and his own opinion. If we were sitting around talking about building a building, everyone in the room would have thoughts about how to do it and what to use.

Everyone would like his own thoughts and ideas better than the thoughts and ideas of others. That is just all there is to it.

You remember that passage in Proverbs chapter 3, verses 5 and 6? “Be not wise in thine own conceits; lean not to thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.” “Be not wise in thine own conceits; lean not to thine own understanding.” The difficult part in girding up the loins of the mind, in one sense of the word, is learning to refuse what we would think normally and naturally.

The truth is, most people like to play God, and they like to think their thoughts are sufficient. Look in your Bibles at Isaiah chapter 55, verses 7 through 9: "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."

Note that God says, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord." But in verse 7 He says, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts."

When you and I are converted, when we are saved by the grace of God, initially we do indeed forsake our ways and our thoughts. Does it not make common sense that if we are going to continue to follow the Lord, and if we are going to be holy and increase in holiness, we still must forsake our way and our thoughts, learn to follow His way, and learn to think His thoughts? One of the biggest problems that we have, regardless of how far we have progressed in our Christian life, is pride. Pride is a root sin. When we think, "Our thoughts are number one; our thoughts are right," that is nothing more than pride exhibiting itself.

There is so much emphasis in the New Testament on the mind. Whoever controls your mind controls your life. Think about some Scriptures in this light. Romans 12:1-2 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. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed"—how?—"by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." This transformation comes by the renewing of your mind. The word "renewing" is where we get our English word "metamorphosis" from.

Renewing the Mind Through Scripture

It literally means to go through changes like the butterfly does. When the butterfly has what you and I say "metamorphosized," he has come from this cocoon to become a beautiful butterfly. So God tells us that we are to be metamorphosized by the renewing of our minds. In Ephesians 4:23, he simply says, "And be renewed in the spirit of your mind." In Colossians 3:9-10, he says, "Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him." In Philippians 2:5, listen carefully: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." Has it ever occurred to you that you must have the mind of Jesus Christ? "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." How about 1 Peter 4:1? "Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind." One of our pieces of armory is the mind of Jesus Christ. Now I want to tie this together for you.

Turn to 2 Corinthians chapter 10. We are talking about renewing the mind and girding up the loins of the mind. Beginning with verse 3, Paul says, "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh." While we are in the flesh in this world, we are not warring after the flesh. In other words, we are not trying to get our flesh satisfied in every way possible. Verse 4 says, "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds." Paul is not dismissing carnal weapons. He is saying that, for the warfare we are fighting now, carnal weapons are useless. Our weapons are mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds.

If you want to know what your stronghold is, your stronghold is your defensive position. It is the place where you hide and protect yourself. Now watch carefully: "For the weapons of our warfare are

not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds; casting down imaginations, and every high thing"—or literally every high thought—"that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."

If we are required to bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, how many unbiblical thoughts are we allowed? The answer is none. It does not matter what subject we are thinking about or discussing. Every thought is to be brought into captivity to the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is what Peter talks about when he says, “Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind.” You keep your mind; you keep your heart. In 1 Peter 1:13 he says, “Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober.” When Peter uses the words “be sober,” it has absolutely nothing to do with alcohol. Of course, drunkenness is a sin in the Bible, but the Greek word here is “nepho,” translated “sober” four times and “watch” two times in our Bibles.

Being Sober and Hoping to the End

Why, then, does he command us to be sober? The word literally means to have a calm and collected spirit, to be temperate and circumspect, and to watch our thoughts. After telling us to gird up the loins of our mind—that is, to learn to think biblically and to be renewed in the spirit of our mind—he tells us calmly and soberly to assess our thoughts. We must make sure that they are indeed biblical thoughts, assessing them in light of the Word of God.

Then, in verse 13, he tells us to “hope to the end.” The word “end” refers to the completion or perfection of that grace which is to be brought unto us at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

We are talking about holiness. There is a positional holiness, which we have in Jesus Christ, and a practical holiness that we have in this life. Although there is a practical holiness, we are not perfectly holy yet; that perfection is to be brought unto us at the revelation, or return, of the Lord Jesus Christ. Until then, He says, we keep striving for practical holiness by renewing our minds, girding up the loins of our mind, and thinking biblical thoughts.

If we are required to think God's thoughts—and we are—the question is, how do we know what God thinks? The answer is that He has revealed it to us in the Bible. This is the mind of God; these are the words of God. Therefore, God tells us that we have a duty and a responsibility not only to read but to study the Word of God and apply it in our hearts and in our lives.

Think about Colossians 3:16: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." The Word of Christ is the entire Bible. When he says, "singing to yourself in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs," those three things are divisions of the book of Psalms. That is why I enjoy singing the Psalms, because you are simply singing Scripture. That is how you get all of the wisdom of God in your mind. It is amazing what you can learn through music. That is why I really despise a lot of music, because it is so junky.

Alice and I were at Mule Days, where they plowed mules and all this kind of stuff. We saw a little kid in a stroller, whose parents were pushing him, and he was singing, "Outback Steakhouse." You remember that? Outback Steakhouse—they would sing that. This little kid was singing it. We saw another child, four or five years old, singing, "When you're out of slits, you're out of beer." It was just a catchy tune, but that is what the child was singing. The point is that if we learn to sing the Psalms, if we learn to sing Scripture, then we are putting that Word deeply in our minds as well.

It all begins in the mind. Holiness begins in the mind. You cannot act without thinking; thoughts produce actions. The will is activated by our mind. So, if you want to be holy, you have to do something in your mind. As he says in verse 13, "Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober." You have to have your mind girded up.

Holiness Ends in Obedience

You have to be able to think biblically and scripturally. But now watch verse 14: “As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance.” So my first point was holiness begins in the mind. The second point is holiness ends in obedience.

Now let me point out the fact: he said in verse 14, “as obedient children.” There are obedient children and there are children of disobedience. Ephesians 2:2 says, “Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.” The children of disobedience. Then, in Colossians chapter 3, verse 6, he says the same thing practically: “For which things’ sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience.”

So there are children of disobedience and there are children of obedience, that is, children that are marked by obedience. Stop and think about this. What do we think of when we think of an obedient child? And the answer is, we think of a child that hears, submits, and instantly obeys.

Delayed obedience is disobedience. I hate to say this, but it is the absolute truth. Most parents teach their children to be disobedient. They tell them something, and the child disobeys, simply continuing what he is doing. Then the parents say, “Now I’m going to tell you one more time.” By repeating the command, they are actually teaching their children to disobey.

I heard a story years ago about children who were playing outside. The mother of one of the little boys began calling, “Johnny, suppertime! Come on in!” The child continued playing. She called again, “Johnny, supper’s on the table. Come on in!” Still, he kept playing. Finally, one of the other children said, “Johnny, don’t you hear your mother calling you?”

He said, “Yes, but I don’t have to obey her until she puts her mean voice on.” What had that child learned? He had learned, “I don’t have to obey her until she gets mad, until she is really going to whip my rear end.” That is what we teach when we fail to understand that delayed obedience is disobedience.

If we want our children to obey us when we speak to them, do you think it is any less with the Lord? He says, “as obedient children.” The word “obedience” here literally refers to what we would call obedience, compliance, and submission; everything is rolled up into

one word. We are therefore to be obedient to God's commands, God's warnings, God's counsel—whatever He tells us.

A good example is Samuel. In 1 Samuel chapter 3, Samuel had been given to the Lord and was in the temple with Eli. God called Samuel while he was asleep. Samuel jumped up, ran to Eli, and said, "What do you want? You called me." Eli answered, "I didn't call you. Go back to bed." God called him again, and Samuel ran to Eli, saying, "Surely you called. What do you need?" Eli again told him to go back to bed. The third time God called Samuel, Eli perceived that the Lord was speaking to him. He told Samuel to go back and, if He spoke again, simply say, "Speak, Lord; thy servant heareth." This indicates submission and obedience as well.

An obedient child is one that hears and responds submissively. There is no rebellion, complaining, whining, or bellyaching. It is simply obedience.

When we know the mind of God, when we know the thoughts of God, when we know the will of God, and when we have girded up the loins of our minds and understand all of that, then that understanding is to motivate and move our bodies into action. Consider the Apostle Paul. There was no greater missionary than Paul. He preached practically everywhere, it seems like. Look at what he said in Romans 1:9: "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."

He says, "For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel." Was it Paul's spirit that was running all over the Roman Empire doing the preaching? No, it was his body. But it was in his mind, in his spirit, and that was what was motivating and moving his body. The mind and spirit understood the will of God, and that understanding moved the body into action. If something is in your mind, and you know that it is the will of God and the Word of God, then obviously it has to move your body.

Now look at 1 Peter 1:14: "As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance." In other words, you respond; you do not sit still. You obey. If we are obedient, we are not going to fashion ourselves according to the former lusts in

our ignorance. The word “fashion” here is from the Greek word “suschematizo,” which literally means to fashion or to conform.

It is the same word that is translated as “conform” in Romans 12:2: “Be not conformed to this world.” Do not fashion yourself after this world. I use this illustration because I think it is very applicable. Years ago Alice used to make butter. We could get fresh milk, and she would make her own butter. After we churned the butter—and I took turns turning too—she got it the consistency that she wanted, poured it into a butter mold, and put it in the refrigerator. Once it hardened, she would take it and empty it out of the mold. The butter was shaped exactly like the mold. That is what God is saying: be not conformed; do not be pressed into the mold of the world or fashioned into its mold. In verse 14 he says, “as obedient children, not fashioning or molding yourself according to the former lusts in your ignorance.”

Former Lusts and Ignorance

There is a word here that I really appreciate and am thankful for in verse 14. Look at it: “as obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts.” The word “former” means that you have repented. It means that you have been delivered. You used to be that way, but you are no longer that way now. So he says you are not fashioning yourself according to the former lusts.

I will tell you something unhappily, but yet it is true: the best of God’s children, the most holy, spiritual, and godly of God’s children, all had their time in the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

I have read it, but I want to go back to Ephesians chapter 2 and read verses 2 and 3 again in light of this. The apostle says, “Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world”—you were worldly—“according to the prince of the power of the air”—Satan—“the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience”—you were disobedient, you were rebellious—“among whom also we all had our conversation”—our conduct—“in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.” These were some of the former lusts that each of us was involved in,

and probably a multitude more. The word “lust” is literally “epithumia.”

"Epi" is a preposition which means "upon," and "thumos" means "passion" or "soul." Your lust is whatever you set your soul upon, your passion upon. You want it, you desire it, and you're going to have it regardless of what it costs, regardless of who gets hurt, and regardless of whether or not you disobey God. That's a lust: whatever you set your desire upon.

The obedient child does not fashion himself or conform himself to the way he used to live, act, and think. Those were his former lusts. And then he says this, and I'm thankful for this: "as obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance." What we did, we did in ignorance. We didn't know God, the Word of God, or the will of God. We were totally ignorant, and we thought what we were doing was okay and right. We thought satisfying our flesh and the desires of our mind was simply the way to live. The word "ignorance" here is the word "anoia," which talks about ignorance, especially in divine things.

Ephesians 4:17-19 demonstrates this ignorance: "This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness." That's the way we were. Through the blindness of our hearts and through our ignorance, we did all of these things.

When we have girded up the loins of our mind, learned to think biblically and scripturally, and know the Word and will of God, we are going to be obedient children. We are not going to fashion our lives or our thoughts according to the former lusts we held when we were ignorant and alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that was in us.

Applications: Thinking and Acting Biblically

After he talks about girding up the loins of the mind and being obedient, and how it affects us, he says in verse 15, "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation." The word "conversation" means conduct; it is the way you live. You could read, "so be ye holy in all manner of life." And here is why: "Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy."

As obedient children, we know that we have been called into holiness and called to be like our heavenly Father. In order to please Him, we must think His thoughts and follow His ways. Holiness begins in the mind and ends in our body responding in obedience to Him.

First, it is impossible to be holy and disobedient at the same time. You are either going to be holy or disobedient; you cannot be both. You will end up either pleasing yourself or pleasing the Lord. If you please the Lord, you will be an obedient child. If you displease the Lord, you will be a disobedient child.

If we are going to obey Him, we must know Him and know His Word. It is impossible to obey instructions that you do not possess or know. I could look at Steve and say, "Obey me." He could answer, "What? Obey you? And what? You have not told me anything." If I want him to obey me, I must give him instructions: "Steve, this is what I would like. I would ask you to do this, please." Now he has instructions, and now we can obey. God has given us His instructions in the Bible. We know that we have the thoughts and mind of God; therefore, we are required to obey.

Second, we must learn to think biblically if we are going to act biblically. We must believe rightly if we are going to act rightly. Thinking precedes action, and thought precedes conduct. If you cannot think right, you cannot act right. If you cannot think biblically, you cannot obey biblically or walk in holiness. The battle is for the mind. Whoever or whatever controls your mind controls your life. Can I sit here twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, and think only holy thoughts? The answer is no.

When a holy thought—or an ungodly thought—comes into my mind, I must refuse and reject it: “Lord, that is wicked, wrong,

ungodly, fleshly, sensual, and devilish. I do not want it. Here is what You say, and I will set my mind upon Your Word." Thus I am learning to think biblically and to have my body respond to my mind.

At times, while drifting to sleep, waking, or even during sleep, we think or dream things that are completely unbiblical. What do we do? We refuse and reject them: "That is wrong and wicked. Here is what God says. I will have my mind rest in His words." We cannot think about two things at the same time, no matter how hard we try. If we are thinking about what is unbiblical, we are thinking wrongly. Put it out, and put what is biblical in your mind.

Here is the third point: you never separate holiness from obedience. The Pharisees tried to do that, and our Lord condemned them viciously for their hypocrisy and wickedness. It is impossible to be holy without obedience. What is holiness? It is conformity to the Lord Jesus Christ and His Word. Remember Romans 8:29: we have been predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son.

Holiness is learning to think like Jesus Christ and to walk like Jesus Christ. That's why he said, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." If you think biblically, you're going to act biblically. It's just that simple.

In John 8:29, he said, "The Father hath not left me alone. He that sent me is with me: for I do always those things that please him." Holiness is pleasing him. It's renewing your mind and walking in obedience. Holiness begins in the mind and ends in obedience in our lives.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to thee. We thank you for your word and truth. And Lord, we ask that you would make us holy, make us godly, make us submissive, and help us to bow before thee, knowing that thou art the sovereign God and that thy thoughts are not our thoughts and thy ways are not our ways. We do not expect thee to submit to us. We must submit to you. Teach us to think biblically and teach us to walk in obedience, and we'll be practically holy for your honor and your glory. We ask these things in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

CHAPTER 29

Pretend Christians

August 23, 2019

Introduction: The Problem of Pretend Christians

In John chapter 8, verses 30 through 32, our Lord says: “And as he spake these words, many believed on him. Then said Jesus to those Jews, which believed on him, If you continue in my word, then are you my disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” I am not necessarily going to be expounding these short verses as much as explaining them, and we will certainly come back to them at the end.

I have made this statement before, and I will make it again: I am really tired of what you and I would call pretend Christians. Evidently, many professing Christians—and by that I mean mainly church members—believe that Christianity is a game, because they really pretend to be Christians. They pretend to believe the Bible. They pretend to worship God. They pretend to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. They pretend to be obedient, and they pretend to submit to the Word of God. They are much like that obedient son in Matthew 21.

Our Lord is talking to these Pharisees when He asks them: "But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work today in my vineyard. And he answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not. Whether of them twain did the will of his father?" They say unto him, "The first." Jesus saith unto them, "Verily I say unto you, that the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you." Now I want you to note that many pretend Christians are like this son.

They are nice and mannerly. They even act as though they are going to obey, but in reality they do not. They simply say, "I go, sir," and went not. Evidently, many professing Christians have never really matured or grown up.

I remember when I was a boy, we used to play pretend games. We would say, "Let's pretend that we're cops and robbers," or cowboys and Indians, or Yankees and Confederates. In South Georgia, you had problems finding Yankees because nobody wanted to play that part particularly. But we knew those games were pretend and not real. After we matured and became adults, we quit playing them. I have not played cowboys and Indians in probably seventy years.

The Pharisees as Examples of Pretenders

Pretend is something for a child, but not for an adult. When our Lord speaks to these people, He is speaking to the Pharisees, and the Pharisees and the religious world today are still playing pretend games. The Pharisees were notorious for pretending. They pretended to be righteous, to keep God's law, and to be the guides and instructors of the people.

The Word of God says in Matthew 23:14, concerning the Pharisees: "Woe to you, scribes, Pharisees, and hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayer. Therefore you shall receive the greater damnation." In Mark 12:40, He likewise said, "Which devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers: therefore you shall receive the greater damnation."

The word “pretense” is the Greek word prophasis, literally meaning a cloak, a show, a pretext, something done under color or in a pretended cause. Our Lord is saying that the Pharisees used their long religious prayers as a cloak over their wickedness and greediness. They were pretending to be obedient, but they were being disobedient.

Now, remember what He said here in these passages: “which devour widows’ houses.” In fact, the Bible says in Exodus 22:22, God says, “You shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child.” Deuteronomy 10:18 says, in reference to God, “He doth execute the judgment of the fatherless and the widow, and loveth the stranger in giving him food and raiment.” Again, in Deuteronomy 24:17, God commands, “Thou shalt not pervert the judgment of the stranger, nor the fatherless, nor take a widow’s raiment to pledge.” When you get to Psalm 68:5, God is called “a father of the fatherless and a judge of the widows.”

What these Pharisees were doing was pretending to be righteous and pretending to be keepers of the law. They were using these long prayers for their cover while they devoured widows’ houses and substance. They were literally taking advantage of the helpless. We find today that many in our day and time use religion and Christianity as a cover for their wickedness.

Modern Pretenders and Pretend Preachers

Let me give you an illustration. The San Antonio Express, which is a newspaper, and the Houston Chronicle, which is a newspaper, reported on February the 19th of this year, 2019. Here is the title: “Hundreds of Southern Baptist church leaders and workers have been accused of sexual misconduct over the past 20 years.” The article went on to say that some of the victims were as young as three years of age, and many were teenagers. Of course, the Independent Baptists have also had their sins exposed many times as well. Some of those men accused of abusing children are now dead. Some are still alive, and some, of course, are in prison even at this particular point.

So it was the antinomianism of the Pharisees that actually led to their wickedness, corruption, and perversion. Likewise, it is the

antinomianism of the church today that leads to using Christianity as a cover for perversion and corruption as well. The interesting thing is, in Bible times, there were not only pretend Christians.

There were also pretend preachers. In Philippians 1, the Apostle Paul was in prison, and at one time he thought he was going to lose his head. He points out that there were indeed some pretend preachers. Beginning with verse 12, he says: "But I would that ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happen unto me"—that is, his being imprisoned—"have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel. So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places; and many of the brethren"—that is, true brethren in the Lord—"waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear."

"My imprisonment," he said, "has emboldened others to become more vociferous preachers of the truth." Then he says in verse 15: "Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will. The one preached Christ of a contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds: but the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defense of the gospel. What then? Notwithstanding every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice."

The Apostle Paul is saying, "Look, there are some here preaching that are not sincere, they're not genuine, and the only reason they're preaching is to stir up trouble and add affliction to the affliction that I'm already in and already receiving." So the question is: How can you tell a pretend Christian—or, particularly, a pretend preacher—from a real preacher? The answer is given very clearly in the Bible. We can know in two specific areas. First, by the message; secondly, by the messenger. By the message, remember Isaiah 8:20: "To the law and to the testimony: if they

How to Discern True from False: Message and Messenger

"Speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." So God is saying the real message is going to be according to the law and to the testimony. It is going to be biblical and scriptural. It will be an exposition, an explanation, and an application. He said

you can judge whether one is a true preacher by his message. Secondly, you can also judge whether one is a true preacher by his life.

This would not just simply apply to preachers; it would apply to a lot of individuals. I hate to say this, but Christians are the most gullible people in the world, because they simply believe everything that is told them without ever researching or examining someone's life. Our Lord says in Matthew 7:15, "Beware false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves." Here are false prophets. They are dressed up as sheep, but they are actually wolves.

Now, how do you know them? "You shall know them by their fruits." And then He explains: "Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so, every good tree bringeth forth good fruit"—that is, his life is going to manifest that which he preaches and teaches. "Neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit." An evil man cannot do that. "Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them."

Our Lord says you have to examine the message and the messenger as well. Sometimes it becomes very difficult to examine the messenger because of what he is saying. For instance, look in Matthew 7, beginning with verse 21. Look what our Lord says.

Now He is talking not just about preachers, but about those who profess to believe in Him. He says, "Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? Did we not preach in your name? And in thy name have cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works?" Then He says, "And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you." Not, "I knew you and forgot you," but, "I never knew you. Depart from me, you that work iniquity." Therefore, it is not simply that you hear the Word or say the Word; you actually do the Word.

Do you understand that how we live, what we do, and how we act is often far more important than what we say? So many people

depend upon their profession of faith: “Well, I made a profession of faith.” But a profession never saved anyone. Jesus Christ is the One who saves. You can make all the professions you want, but if you have not been convicted by the Holy Spirit, converted, and brought to repentance for your sins and belief on Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ, your profession is worthless. It is not professions that save. According to Matthew chapter 7, it is possible to profess Jesus Christ, even preach Jesus Christ and do works in His name, and still be lost. I have known preachers, and still know preachers, who preached for years and then God saved them. They were already preaching. One is a dear friend of mine.

Just because someone speaks and talks a good talk, you must also examine the walk. When you examine the walk, you must examine the talk as well. We are not perfect, and we are not sinless. However, in every true child of God there is a desire to honor the Lord, worship Him, give Him glory, and give Him praise. You want to worship Him as He has revealed Himself through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. The man who is truly a Christian will continually endeavor to bring his life into conformity to the Word of God. I can tell you the will of God for everyone in this room.

How can I tell the will of God for everyone in this room? It is a piece of cake. All I have to do is quote Romans 8:29: “For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.” So it is God's will that His people be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. That is, we are to be made into His likeness, and we are to live, walk, and talk like Him.

So many people simply pretend. Pretending is nothing more than a scam. Why? Because when you pretend, you are trying to deceive someone—to make someone think that you are something that you are not. It is often easy to deceive man, but you cannot deceive God. It fails every time. Here is why: Second Timothy 2:19 says, “Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let everyone that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.” The Bible tells us that the Lord knows who are His, and if you name the name of Christ, He said you must depart from iniquity.

Iniquity is simply another word for sin. The word for righteousness is dikaios, and when you put an alpha in front of it—a-dikaios—it negates it. The word iniquity is a-dikaios. Thus, when you are unrighteous, you are unjust. When you are unrighteous, when you are unjust, when you are committing iniquity, you are also violating God's law, for sin is a violation of God's law. First John 3:4 says, “Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is a transgression of the law.”

Let me lay this out clearly. The Apostle Paul asked a very important question in Romans 6:1–2. He begins with this simple question: “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?” Let me stop right there: “Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?”

When God saved us, He found us in sin. We were in rebellion, wicked, disobedient, sinners, and our sinners. He found us in our sin, and He saved us out of our sin. So Paul asks, "Shall we then continue in sin, that grace may abound?" Then he says, "God forbid." He asks, "How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?"

When he says, "God forbid," the Greek is very strong. Literally, it is, "Perish the thought. Don't even think this. Don't even let this enter into your mind." No, you do not continue in sin that grace may abound.

We died in Jesus Christ. We were buried with Him. We were raised from the dead in Him in newness of life. If you have been raised in newness of life in Jesus Christ, how can you live as a dead man? If you are dead to sin, how can you live any longer therein? This does not mean that you are not a sinner; it means that you cannot live in that sin.

The Nature of True Christianity: Continual Obedience

Many have taken 1 John 3 out of context and tried to teach sinless perfection from it. Sinless perfection is a false, heretical doctrine. No one is sinlessly perfect in this life, nor will they ever be in this life. But look at the passage, beginning with verse 6: "Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not. Whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither

known him. Little children, let no man deceive you. He that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother."

When you look at these verses, you begin to ask: “Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not.” If I am abiding in Jesus Christ, am I never, ever going to sin again? “Whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him.” You have sinned in times past. Does that mean that you have never seen Him by faith and never known Him? How do we explain these passages?

The same author who wrote 1 John 3, verses 6 through 10, also wrote 1 John 2 and verse 1: “My little children, these things I write unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin”—that is a believer, a brother—“we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” John is saying, “I am writing to you that you sin not, but if and when you do sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, who will plead our case.” Now, if you go back to 1 John chapter 3, here is the explanation.

Each of these verbs in the Greek is a present active indicative. It is something happening and continuing to happen. Literally, verse 6 would say: “Whosoever is continually abiding in Him is not continually sinning. Whosoever is continually sinning hath not seen him, neither known him. Little children, let no man deceive you. He that is continually doing righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. He that is continually committing sin is of the devil. For the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. Whosoever is born of God is not continually committing sin. Why? For his seed is continually remaining in him, and he cannot continually sin, because he is born of God. In this the children of God are manifest from the children of the devil.”

These are two different lifestyles: people whose lives are geared to righteousness and obedience, and those whose lives are geared to wickedness, sin, and disobedience. He is not talking about being sinlessly perfect. He is saying that our lives are now pursuing continual obedience.

A Christian, a real Christian, cannot continue in that which he knows is absolutely unlawful and wicked and sinful. We see this same truth in 1 John 2:3–4: "And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." In other words, we know that we know Him if we are continually keeping His commandments. Whoever says, "I know him," and is not continually keeping His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

Christianity is not an off-and-on sport. It is not religion on Sunday and heathenism the rest of the week. Real, genuine Christianity affects our lives seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day. Christianity is life. Everything else is death.

Our Lord emphasizes this in Matthew 7:24–27: "Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them"—that is, continually doing them—"I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not. Why? For it was founded upon the rock."

The Wise and Foolish Builders: Hearing and Doing

"But everyone that heareth these sayings of mine, and does not do them"—they are not his life; he is not pursuing them or continuing in them—"shall be likened to a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it." In other words, it is death. Christianity is life; anything else and everything else is death.

Why Some Forsake the Truth: Worldly Allurements and Philosophy

Obedience to the truth and application of the truth testify that we are truly His. We cannot be pretend Christians if our lives are constantly and continually brought into conformity to the Word of God.

Why do some professed believers who have seemingly been faithful to the Word of God suddenly forsake and cast off the truth? How can one who professes to be a Christian turn and act wickedly, refuse to repent, and refuse to conform his life to the Word of God? How can one seemingly turn off every vestige of the truth and become totally self-centered and obsessed with his will, lust, desires, and ways? You and I know people who have been seemingly faithful to Christ, the church, and the Word for years. Then, all of a sudden, they are gone. One answer is the enticing, seducing, and tempting power of the world.

The world is opposed to anything spiritual, biblical, and right. It appeals to the fallen and depraved nature of man. If you have never read Pilgrim's Progress, I encourage you to read it. There is a character named Mr. Worldly Wise Man. One author commenting on him writes: "Mr. Worldly Wise Man is a citizen from the city of Carnal Policy, which tells us that it is a place that is ruled by fleshly strategies meant to damn its citizens to the darkest confines of eternal punishment. This man, Mr. Worldly Wise Man, attacks the scriptures, the book that Christian is holding in his hand. Mr. Worldly Wise Man is a smooth, cool soul dressed in the garb of a pastor who is married up with the world. He works in a very seducing way toward Christian, and that sometimes is the most deceptive of all means. Usually it is not the outright heretical views that entrap, but the subtle seducing spirits. All of his actions are exactly the opposite of the honesty and purity of Evangelist, who is doing the real nitty-gritty of pastoral work. Mr. Worldly Wise Man is a deceitful man who is constantly swayed in the changing winds of popular doctrine and uses that influence very effectively on the spiritually naive."

Mr. Worldly Wise Man is a man who is constantly swayed in the changing winds of popular doctrine. I could change that and say Mr. Worldly Wise Man is a man who is constantly swayed in the

changing winds of political correctness, because political correctness today is absolutely contrary to the Bible.

You have to remember Demas. Demas worked with the Apostle Paul. The Apostle Paul, in 2 Timothy chapter 4 and verse 10, had to write these words: "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica." The world drew Demas away from Christ and Paul. But it is not simply the allurements of the world; it is also the philosophy of the world. The world does not have many allurements for some people, especially the older we get.

I have no desire to go to a fair. I am not going to ride one of those roller coasters. I would not do that anyhow. I like my stomach exactly where it is. I have no problem with that. I do not want to do those things. As you get older, you are not going to waste your money on something like that anyhow. You are just not going to do it. But it is an attraction for some people.

It is not necessarily the allurements of the world, particularly, as much as it is the philosophy of the world. Humanistic attitudes and humanistic dispositions are indeed a worldly philosophy, and they are absolutely in opposition to and contrary to the Word of God. Many people fall prey to the thinking and philosophy of the world, and they absorb it. I am talking about Christians. I am talking about churches. You can hear young people and young adults make statements to excuse their disobedience or their worldliness. They will say, "Well, everybody's doing it," or, "Everybody's saying this; everybody is thinking this." Not everybody is doing it. Not everybody is saying it. Not everybody is thinking it. But that is what they say.

The Bible has an answer to that. In Exodus 23:2, God says, “Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil.” Just because someone jumps off a cliff and kills himself, or twenty people do, or a hundred people do, does not mean that you have to. You look around the world today and find many humanistic ideas and philosophies absolutely contrary to Scripture: feminism, transgenderism, socialism, communism, anarchy, and pedophilia. These are not only being excused and overlooked by many Christians and churches; they are actually being embraced.

A few weeks ago, I mentioned a library that canceled a drag queen story hour in one of the cities in Texas, and a church opened its doors so that the event could be held in the church building. I saw a picture of a woman with her little girl, about three or four years old. The woman was kneeling in front of the drag queen with her arm around the little girl, and both were smiling. If you believe the Bible, you have to be absolutely insane to try to sacrifice your child on something like that.

There is a breakdown in the family. Feminism, and particularly transgenderism, is attacking the family unit. In many homes, wives are usurping the authority of the husband and becoming the head of the house. I know preachers who attack what is known as patriarchy, or man being the head of the house.

Women are equal to men in their standing before God. A woman is just as much the creation of God as a man and can be redeemed exactly as a man can be redeemed. There is an equal standing before God, but equal standing does not mean equality of positions. You can be equal in some areas and positionally unequal in others. God has established a head of the house. Have you noticed that our bodies have only one head? The Church of Jesus Christ has only one head, and that is Jesus Christ.

If your body does not have a head, you are dead. If your body has two or three heads, you are a freak; something is wrong with you. I have seen pictures of two-headed snakes, turtles, and goats, and usually they do not live long. A headless body is dead, and a body with multiple heads is a freak.

Biblical Order: Headship and Submission

God has indeed established order. I want you to see it. In 1 Corinthians 11, verse 3, Paul states plainly: “But I would have you to know”—this is something you need to understand—“that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God.” God's order is very simple: God, Christ, man, and woman.

There is so much ranting and raving today against male patriarchy and even white male patriarchy. If you are a white male

and you claim to be the head of your house, this is now being equated with white supremacy. As one Congresswoman said, “The problem in America is white males.” Really? You see what I am saying? If you are against God's ordinance and God's orderly way, your problem is not with men; it is with God. It is nothing less than sheer rebellion to fly in the face of Scripture.

Now look in your Bibles to the book of Ephesians, chapter 5. Beginning with verse 22, we are talking about the fact that men and women are equal before God, but positionally we are different. If I were to go to work for James, and James hired me, we might be equally the creatures of God and have equal standing before Him; but if he hired me and I worked for him, he would be positionally over me and have the right to tell me what to do. Of course he would. Look in your Bibles at Ephesians 5, verse 22. The Bible says, “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.” Part of a woman's submission to the Lord is her submission to her husband. Notice verse 23: “For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the Saviour of the body.”

"Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything." Biblical headship does not mean that the woman is inferior. She is equal, equally the creation of God and equally has standing with God, but positionally she is different. She does not occupy the same position that the man occupies. It is her honor and glory to represent the church of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ came as a servant of the Father. The phrase "the sent one" is used of Jesus Christ over and over in the Bible. The fact that Jesus Christ is the servant of the Father does not mean that He was inferior to the Father, for He said in John 10, verse 30, "I and my Father are one."

So submission is not wicked, inferiority, or a denial of equality. The submission of a wife to her husband is not a denial of her person and worth; it is evidence of her submission to God. It is her glory and honor to represent the Church of Jesus Christ, because as the Church is in subjection to Christ, the woman is to be in subjection to her husband.

Some people say, "But my wife knows more than I do." If the husband is wise, and his wife does know more than he does, then he ought to talk to her more often and learn what she knows. But remember Luke chapter 2. When our Lord was twelve years old, they found Him in the temple hearing and answering questions from the doctors. His mother said, "Son, we have sought thee sorrowing." And He said, "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" Luke 2:51 and 52 says, "And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them."

Jesus Christ, who is God incarnate, God in the flesh, and omniscient, was in submission to His parents because He was a child. That was His position. He certainly knew more than His parents. So the husband is also required to be in submission—to Jesus Christ.

In Ephesians 5:25, he says, “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.” So as the wife is to be in submission to the husband, the husband is to be in submission to Jesus Christ. The husband who is in submission to Jesus Christ is going to love his wife the way Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it. It will be very easy for a woman to be in submission to her husband who loves her the way Jesus Christ loves the church.

But here is what we have done. We have reached the point today in our society that if the wife cannot get her way, she leaves. She departs. She forsakes her husband and her home. Her claim of equality even forces her to say that we are equally positionally, and it drives her away from her role as a wife and a mother. Conformity to the thinking of the world, conformity to worldly philosophy, not only destroys the home and the family; it also destroys the church, society, and ultimately the nation. You look at our nation; it is falling apart.

Do you understand? There is no one—no man or woman, boy or girl—who is not commanded to be in submission. Even the President of the United States is supposed to be in submission: submission to the Constitution and submission to God. He took an oath with his hand upon the Bible. Congress is supposed to be in submission. Everyone is supposed to be in submission. The only one who is not

in submission is God the Father. He is the Sovereign God of Heaven and Earth. Everyone else is required to be in submission.

If you do not understand what I am saying, then you are ultimately going to be doomed and destroyed, because worldly philosophy is contrary to biblical philosophy. In 1 Corinthians 1:18, the Bible says, "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved, it is the power of God." What I am teaching you today is foolishness to someone who does not believe the Bible and who does not trust Jesus Christ.

They say, "That's crazy." Really? Let's keep reading. Verse 19: "For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?" Here is where the wisdom of this world will take you. Verse 21: "For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." The wisdom of this world will take you as far away from God as you can possibly get, and far away from biblical principles.

I have often said that I have never had a problem with problems. Every problem has a solution; every problem can be solved. I have problems with people—getting people to do what is necessary and right to resolve the problem. There is no help for anyone who is not willing to repent and do that which is biblical and right. There is grave danger, especially to a professing Christian who, when shown what is right from the Bible, refuses to bow to it and submit to it. How in the world can anyone flee from the Lord Jesus Christ? How in the world can anyone flee from the truth? Let me show you what is going to happen.

The Danger of Rejecting Truth and the Evidence of True Discipleship

When people leave the Lord Jesus Christ and leave the faith and begin to live wicked lives contrary to Scripture—divorcing husbands, divorcing wives, forsaking children, and doing all kinds of things that are wicked and wrong—look what the Bible says in 1 John 2:19: "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been

of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us." What did John say? If a man can leave the faith, walk away from Jesus Christ, and walk away from the truth, it is proof that he was never saved to begin with.

He was nothing more than a pretend Christian. I hope everything that I have said has been an explanation of these verses. John 8, verse 30: "As he spake these words, many believed on him. Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If you continue in my word, then are you my disciples indeed." Let me read this another way: "If you continue in my word, then are you my true disciples. If you continue in my word, then you're truly my disciples." His disciples continue in His word.

"And you shall know the truth"—because the truth is His word—"and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free." His true disciples continue in His word, and the truth sets them free from the flesh and the world and every enemy. His truth sets us free to enjoy our status, our position, and every blessing that He gives us in life.

Hebrews chapter 5, verses 8 and 9, speaks of Jesus Christ: "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; and being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that"—what?—"obey him." He became the author of eternal salvation to all them that obey Him. Obedience is the evidence of our sonship and our salvation. If there is no obedience, then that is indicative of the fact that you are a pretend Christian.

Our Lord asked this question: "Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say unto you?" The word "Lord"—kurios—means boss, owner, master, sovereign. Jesus Christ said, "If I'm your true boss, if I'm your true sovereign, if I'm your true master, if I'm your true owner, you will obey Me." He is the author of eternal salvation to all those who obey Him. Where there is no obedience, there is no evidence of salvation.

Someone who professes to be a Christian and lives in direct disobedience to the plain command and truth of God is in grave

danger. They're either a pretend Christian, or they're getting ready, according to Hebrews 12, to receive a serious chastening. His true disciples continue in His word.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank You for Your word, truth, and teaching. Lord, make us more obedient, more holy, and more godly, and enable us to bring our lives into greater conformity to the Lord Jesus Christ and to His Word. In Thy name we pray, Amen.

CHAPTER 30

Practical Truths From The Law Of God

January 18, 2021

Introduction: The Law of God as Sovereign Rule

Proverbs 28:4 says, “They that forsake the law praise the wicked, but such as keep the law contend with them.” Verse 9 says, “He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be an abomination.” Verse 13 says, “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper, but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.” I hope you will see the connection as well as the practicality of these verses as we proceed.

I have preached many times on the applications and the practicality of the law of God to our lives. In fact, you will probably remember that not too long ago, I finished twenty-three messages on the promises of the law. There were also multiple other messages in which I dealt with the law of God in several instances. But while reading through the book of Proverbs recently, these verses literally popped out before my eyes. Although I have used these verses before in different sermons, I have never placed them in one sermon, and I

have never really shown the connection between these verses. Before showing you the practicality and applicability of these three verses to our lives, I want to reiterate one specific truth: in reality, all of God's Word is law.

When we talk about the law Word of God, we are not referring simply to the Ten Commandments, although the Ten Commandments are usually referred to as the Decalogue, or the moral law. The Ten Commandments are not the whole of what is meant when we speak of God's law. We must understand what the Bible means by the law Word of God.

You must remember that the Bible says, “Where the word of a king is, there is power,” and there is law. The truth of the matter is this: when God speaks, it is law, because He is God, He is King, and He is sovereign. His Word therefore issues demands and commands upon our lives. A king rules by his law, and God is certainly no different from any other king in that sense, because His law is an expression of His will, His declaration for His creatures, and how He rules. Isaiah 33:22 says, “For the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our king; he will save us.” God therefore has the offices of King, Lawgiver, and Judge. James 4:12 says that there is one lawgiver, who is able to save and destroy.

“Who art thou that judgest another?” When we begin judging, we are officially taking the place of God. God is indeed the only lawgiver. Therefore, when it comes to God’s law, there should be no ambivalence or hesitation. It is absolutely impossible to claim God as sovereign and man as sovereign at the same time. There can only be one sovereign.

Sovereignty excludes anything and everything else as well. Our Lord makes this exceedingly clear in Luke chapter 11 and verse 23: “He that is not with me is against me, and he that gathereth not with me scattereth.” Our Lord makes it very plain.

When you stop and think about the law of God, there is only one alternative to it. The word theos is Greek for God, and nomos is Greek for law. Theonomy simply means God’s law. The only alternative is autonomy: auto is Greek for self, and nomos is Greek for law. Thus, you either have God’s law or self-law, or man’s law.

God's law recognizes God as sovereign, while man's law recognizes man as sovereign.

It is impossible to live without law. You will submit to law. It will either be God's law or man's law, but you will submit to law one way or the other. When we reject, refuse, or repudiate God's law, the only alternative is man's law. Once you go to man's law, it is indeed a rejection of God.

You remember the passage in 1 Samuel chapter 8, where the people came to Samuel and asked for a king to rule over them, that they might be like all the other nations, and that the king might go out and fight their wars for them. The thing displeased Samuel. "But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto the Lord. And the Lord said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them." When they asked for a man, it was a rejection of God.

Forsaking or Fighting

In fact, I have a message on that that I preached many, many years ago. The title is "Trading God for a Man." But notice, if you would, in that passage in 1 Samuel chapter 8, that God said, "All right, if you want a king, I'm going to let you have a king." But then He told Samuel, "You tell these people, this is exactly what your king is going to do." He's going to take, take, take, take. In other words, there's going to be a different set of rules. There's going to be a different set of laws. Because a king is going to rule by his law, and when they rejected God, simultaneously they were rejecting God's law, because now they had chosen themselves a man, and they were going to be in submission to man's law.

Now, when we think about rejecting God and His law, may I point out that one does not need to verbally, theoretically, or religiously disavow God and His law. He does not need to stand up and say, "I hate God and I reject His law." No, not at all. Rejection and disavowal of God and His law may be done on a very practical level. That level is so practical, simple, and common that we do it on a regular basis without ever thinking about it. The reason is simply

because we have done it unconsciously so many times that it has actually become ingrained in us.

We have to understand the importance of God's law and the very fact that we cannot serve two masters. We are either going to be serving God or serving man. So I want you to look, if you would please, at these truths with me from Proverbs chapter 28, and consider these concepts and how they apply to your life, your church, and your family. First of all, let's look at verse 4. My first point is, "Forsaking or fighting."

Forsaking or Fighting (Proverbs 28:4)

I will explain that. Look in verse 4. God says, "They that forsake the law praise the wicked: but such as keep the law contend with them." When it comes to God's law, we basically only have two options. We either forsake it or we fight for it. When you are not fighting for God and His law, in reality, you are forsaking God and His law.

If you look closely at the word forsake, "They that forsake the law praise the wicked," the word forsake in the Hebrew means to forsake, to leave, to leave behind, to leave alone, to abandon, to neglect, to apostatize, and to desert. When you forsake God's law, you have apostatized, deserted, abandoned, and turned your back upon that law. Ignoring God's law, or pretending that it is not real, is the same as forsaking, because it is neglect.

It is a form of abandonment as well. When one forsakes God's law, he is living in contempt of it and disobedience to it. He lives contrary to God and to God's demands and commands, with no regard for God or His law whatsoever. Now note one of the consequences of forsaking God's law: "They that forsake the law praise the wicked." The forsaking of God's law is praise of the wicked.

You've heard the old adage that actions speak louder than words. It has also been said, "I can't hear what you're saying for the way that you're acting." Actions of disobedience and contempt, when you act in disobedience and contempt of God's law, ultimately result in your praising the wicked. You are celebrating and glorifying not only the wicked, but wickedness as well. By your actions, you commend those

who are transgressing God's law as commendable, honorable, and praiseworthy, when in reality they are despicable and deplorable.

Moreover, when you forsake God's law, you are not only praising the wicked; in one sense, you are saying that those who sin against God have the right to sin against God and the right to transgress. Since you have forsaken God's law, you would ultimately be doing the same thing. The word wicked here refers to the ungodly, the guilty and criminal, and those hostile to God and man.

When he says, "They that forsake the law praise the wicked," he is not just saying that they praise the wicked; they ultimately justify the wicked. Proverbs 17:15 says, "He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are an abomination to the Lord."

To justify is to declare righteous; to condemn is to declare wicked. God says that if you justify the wicked, whether by words or deeds, you are an abomination to Him. If you condemn the righteous, whether by words or deeds, that also is an abomination to God. Very plainly, if we forsake the law, we end up praising the wicked, which is an abomination in His sight.

Now, if you look at verse 4 again, there is an alternative to forsaking. He says, “They that forsake the law praise the wicked, but such as keep the law, contend with them.” In other words, the alternative to forsaking is to fight.

Now, let us consider the word keep. The word keep is from the Hebrew word shamar, which means to keep, to guard, protect, to act as a watchman, to keep the charge, to observe, to regard and retain, and to treasure up in memory. So when it comes to keeping God’s law, you are guarding it. You are protecting it. You yourself are keeping it. You are observing it. You are retaining it. You are not forsaking it. You are not throwing it away. You are making sure you are treasuring it up in your memory. So, verse 4 again: “But such as keep the law, contend with them.”

We must understand the word contend as well. The Hebrew word actually means to stir oneself up. It means to excite oneself. You stir yourself up; you excite yourself up to engage in war. In other words, it means to fight. You remember, even in boxing, you have a

contender, and that is someone who is going to fight against the champion. So obviously, we have to hear that we can fight.

Now, when you stop and think about this—"but such as keep the law, contend with them"—that is, contend with the wicked, how do we contend with the wicked? We may contend with them by rebuking them, reproving them, admonishing them, exhorting them, proclaiming the truth of God, and defending the throne rights of God. In keeping the law and contending with the wicked, we are actually upholding His throne and His rights. We are upholding His dominion and His kingdom. We are saying that He is sovereign, confessing that He is the Creator, and acknowledging that He has absolute control and the absolute right to tell all of His creatures exactly how they should live, what they should do, and what they should not do. So, in one sense of the word, that is indeed contending, or fighting, against the wicked.

This point is most often overlooked, yet exceedingly important. "They that forsake the law praise the wicked, but such as keep the law contend with them." Has it ever dawned upon you that one way we may fight against the wicked and contend with them is by our own obedience to God? While the lawless forsake the law of God and end up praising the wicked, we fight against them, yea, we contend and condemn them by our obedience to God and His law. Our obedience exposes their disobedience. Our righteousness exposes their wickedness. Our refusal to turn from God and His law is an act of contention—that is, an act of fighting—and it is also an act of condemnation against the wicked. The truth is, the fight primarily is in our minds. You remember Elijah.

The Fight in the Mind

He had a great contest with the prophets of Baal in 1 Kings chapter 18. He slew 400 prophets of Baal. After that battle, Jezebel heard what he had done to her prophets and said, "God do so to me and more also tomorrow if your head is not like one of theirs." In other words, she was going to cut his head off just as he had cut theirs off. And Elijah ran.

You know the story. Under the juniper tree, the angel fed him and told him to rise and eat, because he had to go forty days and forty

nights in the strength of that meat. When Elijah finally reached a mountain, God came and asked him, "What doest thou here, Elijah?" What are you doing here? Listen to what he said in 1 Kings chapter 19 and verse 14: "I've been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts. Because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword. And I, even I, only am left. And they seek my life to take it away."

Now I want you to know what he was saying and thinking: I'm the only one. Everybody else is dead. Everybody else is apostatized. I'm here by myself, the only one left, and they're trying to kill me. God answered him in 1 Kings 19 and verse 18: "Yet I have left me 7,000 in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which has not kissed him."

Elijah thought that he himself was alone, but God said, No, you are not alone. There are seven thousand. They have not bowed the knee to Baal, and they have not kissed the lips of Baal. Elijah was wrong; he believed that he was alone and that he was the only one left standing for God.

The point is clear in this sense of the word: most of our fighting will be within our own minds. Listen carefully: we must endeavor to keep them clean and clear from what the Bible calls vain thoughts. What are vain thoughts? A vain thought is something useless, worthless, sinful, fleshly, carnal, or unbiblical. The apostle Paul said in Romans 7 and verse 14, “For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin.” On the one hand, you have the spirituality of God's law; on the other hand, the carnality and fleshliness of man. Of course, Isaiah 58 tells us that man by nature does not think the thoughts of God. Therefore, our fleshly, carnal thoughts are usually vain thoughts. They are wrong and wicked, and we must learn to fight against them.

David said in Psalm 119 and verse 113, “I hate vain thoughts: but thy law do I love.” Now, when you stop and think about vain thoughts, every one of us who has prayed, each one who has prayed at one time or another, has had some kind of carnal, fleshly, filthy, wicked thought just hit his mind and wondered, Where did that come from? How did that get in my mind?

Sometimes you may be reading Scripture, driving down the road, or even singing a hymn, and all of a sudden this stupid thought hits your mind. Where did it come from? The answer is that it came from your flesh, because your flesh hates God.

I do not care what the vain thought consists of. It could be a thought of fornication or adultery. That thought must immediately be rejected, and you must say, “Lord, I refuse that. Thou hast said thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou hast said thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s wife nor anything that belongs to your neighbor.” In other words, you are rejecting the vain thought. It may deal with theft, greed, pride, or arrogance.

You know the story: we do that which is right, then think we have done that which is right, and become so proud of it that we think, “Wow, I’m on top of the mountain. I’m on the hill.” Really? Then you have to stop and think: everything that you have, God gave you. He gave you faith, repentance, life, health, and His gifts. Everything that you have and everything you were able to do, you did only by the grace and mercy of God.

There goes your pride. You have to refuse that vain thought and say, "Lord, no. I am what I am only by the grace of God." We have to learn to say, "I hate vain thoughts, but thy law do I love." When we keep God's law, we are fighting against the wicked; we are contending with them—not only in our minds, but also in our actions and our bodies.

When we think right, we end up acting right and doing that which is right. Our actions are demonstrations of our thoughts. Just as God told Elijah, "I've got 7,000 have never bowed the knee to Baal. I've got 7,000 never kissed him," those people condemned the Baal worshipers by refusing to bow to Baal and kiss Baal.

Likewise, we have to fight against the wicked, not only by reproving, rebuking, exhorting, admonishing, and preaching, but by living godly lives in obedience to the Word of God. Our obedience condemns their disobedience. We have to learn to say with Job, in Job 13 and verse 15, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust him." In other words, I am going to do what is right. Even if it costs me my life, I am going to do what is right and trust him regardless. This is

exactly what Proverbs 28:4 teaches: "They that forsake the law praise the wicked," but those who keep the law contend with them, fight with them, do battle, and rage war against them. If you forsake the law, you praise the wicked; if you keep the law, you praise God. Now look in verse 9, because this passage is closely connected. On this one, I am going to say, allegiance or abomination.

Allegiance or Abomination (Proverbs 28:9)

We had forsaking or fighting; now, allegiance or abomination. Verse 9 says, “He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be an abomination.” The one who turns his ear away from hearing God’s law has no allegiance to that law. When you think of the word allegiance, you may be surprised at how modern-day dictionaries define it.

I want to give you two definitions. Listen carefully, and be able to pick up on these words: allegiance. The loyalty of a citizen to his or her government, or of a subject to his or her sovereign; it is also loyalty or devotion to some person, group, cause, or the like. We have talked about loyalty. We have talked about devotion. Here is another definition. What is allegiance? The fidelity owed by a subject or citizen to a sovereign or a government. Thus, allegiance means loyalty, devotion, and fidelity.

The forsaking and turning from the law of God indicates that there is no allegiance, no loyalty, no devotion, and no fidelity to Him. If you did give allegiance to Him, you would not turn from His law.

Understand this concept. Some of you may remember that, a number of years ago, I preached two messages on the Pledge of Allegiance. The Pledge of Allegiance was written by Francis Bellamy, who was a socialist.

He was actually a defrocked Baptist preacher. He got kicked out because even the people back then could not stand his socialism and downright communism. But let me just tell you about allegiance so that you can understand this. And what I'm going to tell you and give you right now is what Bellamy said in his own words, when in August of 1892, he sat down and penned the original words to the pledge.

Now, the phrase, "under God," was only added, it was either 1952 or 1954. "Under God" was not in there originally, okay? But here's what he said. He said, "It began," that is the way he began to think of the pledge, "it began as an intensive communing with salient points of our national history, from the Declaration of Independence onwards, with the makings of the Constitution, with the meaning of the Civil War, with the aspiration of the people."

Now, I stop right there because I need to ask this question just to provoke your thinking. He said, "with the meaning of the Civil War." Here's my question. Whose meaning of the Civil War? You see one's framework or perspective is always influenced by his theology and by his culture.

Now I'm going to give you his perspective because he says that and listen to what he goes on to say. "The true reason for the allegiance to the flag is the Republic for which it stands." You would say, well, I have no problem with that, but let him finish. He says this, "And what does that vast thing, the Republic, mean? It is the concise political word for the nation, the one nation which the Civil War was fought to prove."

Our founding fathers did not give us a national government; they gave us a federal government. There is a vast difference. He is saying that the war was over for the nation. Continuing the quote: “To make that one nation idea clear, we must specify that it is indivisible, as Webster and Lincoln used to repeat in their great speeches, and its future.”

He said that it was indivisible. When the Treaty of Paris was written and entered into by George III and the colonists, it was entered into with thirteen separate, sovereign, and independent states. It was always divisible, it still is divisible, and we may see that even sooner than we think. He goes on to say, “and its future.” His question concerning its future is answered in his next paragraph.

He saw that, as a result of the Civil War, the United States had taken a giant step toward becoming the socialistic utopian society born of the French Revolution that he dreamed of creating in the United States. Bellamy stated that the purpose of the Pledge of Allegiance was to fulfill his and his cousin’s lifelong goal of making

their socialist fantasy a reality. The true reason for allegiance to the flag, he said, was to indoctrinate American schoolchildren into what our founding fathers would have considered totalitarian socialism. Thus, the man who wrote the pledge was a socialist. He wanted you to pledge allegiance to a sovereign state or sovereign government, not to a sovereign God.

That quote should stir you to listen to those two messages, which you have not heard in many, many years, on the pledge and its history. I also wanted to stir you to think about the word allegiance. As Christians, our allegiance is to the Lord Jesus Christ first, foremost, and forever. It is not to a state. It's not to a nation. It's not to a flag. It's not to some humanistic cause. Our allegiance is indicated by our adherence to our Lord's person and His principles, which we hear, heed, obey, and apply. You're ultimately going to obey your Sovereign, whoever that Sovereign is. You're ultimately going to follow the principles of that Sovereign's law.

I hope you can begin to see now how verse 9 says, God's law is an expression of His will for His creatures. When you turn your ear away from hearing God's law, He says even your prayer now is an abomination. It does not matter how pious someone tends to be or pretends to be. It does not matter how religious or how devoted they are seemingly. If you are not listening, if you're not hearing, if you're not heeding, if you're not studying, if you're not applying the law of God to your life, He is saying that even your prayer is an abomination. And the word abomination means it's a stench in God's nostrils.

It is by the word and prayer that our communion with God is kept up. God speaks to us by His law and expects we should hear Him and heed Him. We speak to Him by prayer and wait for an answer of peace. How reverent and serious should we be whenever we are hearing from and speaking to the Lord of glory.

If God's word be not regarded by us, our prayers shall only not be accepted of God, but they shall be an abomination to Him. Not only our sacrifices, which were ceremonial appointments, but even our prayers, which are the moral duties and, when put up by the upright, are so much His delight. The sinner whose prayers God is thus angry at willfully and obstinately refuses to obey God's commandments; he

will not so much as give them the hearing, because his ear declines the law and refuses when God calls. God will therefore justly refuse him when he calls.

So that's exactly what he's saying. "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be an abomination."

Now, I want you to watch. David gave us another truth. In Psalm 66 and verse 18, I'm sure that you can quote it. David said, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." Now think about that. If I regard iniquity in my heart, you know what the word regard means? It means to esteem highly. It means to count as something valuable, something good, something honorable. So David said, if I just merely esteem iniquity, if I think it's right, if I think it's good, if I think it's honorable, God will not hear my prayer. Now, if the mere regarding of iniquity causes God not to hear our prayer, how much more is our prayer an abomination when we actually engage in iniquity and turn our ear away from God and refuse to obey Him?

So that is exactly what he's saying. Now, you're in the book of Proverbs. Look in Proverbs chapter 15 and verse 8. Proverbs 15 and verse 8. God says, "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord." Not just His prayer, but His sacrifice. But, he says, "the prayer of the upright is His delight." Now, the upright are the righteous, the obedient, and those that are honoring Him. So, turning your ear away from hearing the law of God indicates that you have forsaken Him.

That you have no allegiance to Him. And therefore you are not righteous, you're not obedient, and you have no desire to honor him or obey his commands. Therefore, even your prayer, he says, is an abomination to him.

Now the principle is also clearly stated in 1 Samuel 2 and verse 30. You remember God was speaking to Eli, just the latter half of that verse, he said this, "But now the Lord saith, Be it far from me, for them that honor me will I honor, saith the Lord, and those that despise me shall be lightly esteemed." Those that despise me shall be lightly esteemed. God said, I'm going to honor those that honor me.

If you want to dishonor me, wonderful, I'll dishonor you. So whoever turns his ear away from hearing God's law, even his prayer shall be an abomination.

Now, look if you would please at verse 13. We've looked at forsaking or fighting, allegiance or abomination, and now we have covering or confessing. So in verse 13 he says this, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper, but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy."

Covering or Confessing (Proverbs 28:13)

How does this fit in with the law of God, and how is verse 13 connected with the previous points? Consider verse 13 again: “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper, but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.” How do we know what sin is? How do we know what confession is, what it means to forsake, or how we understand mercy? All of those questions are answered when we recognize that the answer is the law of God.

“He that covereth his sins shall not prosper.” How do we know what sin is? How can you confess something as sin if you do not understand what sin consists of? The Bible says in Romans chapter 3 and verse 20, “Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.” Without the law, you have no idea what sin actually is. You cannot confess sin if you do not have the law of God.

What did the apostle Paul say in Romans 7:7? “What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.” The only reason Paul understood what sin was, was because of God's law. Then 1 John 3:4 gives an even clearer statement: “Whoso committed sin transgresseth also the law, for sin is the transgression of the law.” Whatever transgresses God's law is sin. If there is no transgression of God's law, it is not sin.

When one forsakes God's law, according to verse 4, and turns from God's law, according to verse 9, he is hiding and covering his sins by denying them, or pretending that they do not exist. He does not believe that God will call him to account. The one who forsakes

and turns from God's law thinks that his sins are not actual sins against God's law. No; they are merely shortcomings and failures.

They are a lack of perfection, but they are not really, really sin. Do you understand that it is impossible even to know what sin is apart from the law of God? What is absolutely astounding to me is the way men seek to hide and cover their sin while denying its existence. If you are going to deny its existence, why take the pains to cover and hide it?

Now look at what he said in verse 13. May I tell you what confession is? Confession is a declaration of sin, a declaration of the violation of the law of God. You are never going to confess if you do not believe in God's law. You are not going to confess unless you believe in God's sovereignty.

The first step in repentance is indicated by confession, because in confession you acknowledge that God is God; He is sovereign. You acknowledge that His law is the rule of our lives, confessing His sovereignty and the superiority of His law. You cannot truly confess your sins without admitting and recognizing God's sovereignty and the supremacy of His law.

I want you to look in 1 John 1 and verse 9. I can quote this verse, but I want you to see it and understand this passage, because it is going to be important just momentarily: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

If we confess our sins, what in the world does confession mean? Even the Roman Catholics have a confession. You go and sit in a little booth, talk to the priest, and tell him what you have done. But is it real, genuine confession? Confession is more than the mere mouthing of words or a simple statement of wrongdoing.

When he said, “if we confess our sins,” the Greek word confess is homologeo. We understand homo, which means one in the same, and lego is “I say.” The word confess literally means, “I say the same thing as God says.” It means to agree with God. If I confess my sins, I am saying what God says about my sins.

I am saying that my sins are wicked and vile, transgressions of His law, iniquitous, and deserving of the death penalty. I am agreeing

with God that I have sinned against Him, broken His law, and violated His law. That is confession. If I merely mouth my sins without really agreeing that they are wicked, wrong, and deserving of the death penalty, then I have not confessed my sins at all.

"If we confess our sins, he's faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." True confession leads us to the forsaking of our sins. Proverbs 28:13 says, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper, but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." You do not really confess your sins unless you forsake your sins.

If I confess my sins and agree with God that my sin is wicked and vile, a transgression of His law deserving the death penalty, and that the only reason I am alive is by His grace and mercy, then I genuinely believe that my sin deserves death and that God has the absolute right in justice to kill me if I sin. Do I want to continue in it?

True confession leads to the forsaking of sin. Mercy comes from confessing and forsaking. Confession leads to the realization of what sin is, and of its wickedness and vileness, and to agreeing with God concerning it. That then leads to forsaking the sin, which shows God's mercy to the individual. Confession without forsaking is merely bragging: "I did it. Look at me, I did it." That is all it is. Real, genuine confession always includes the forsaking of sin.

Practical Applications

We do not really confess until we forsake. That does not mean that we are perfect from there on out, or that we would not be tempted again in the same area. It means that we are not going to plan on it; we are not going to do it purposely or deliberately. We are going to turn from that sin. We are still sinners, still weak, and still in need of the grace of God.

If I am confessing that I have stolen, and I realize that stealing is deserving of the death penalty, I want to make restitution, and I am going to quit stealing. Quitting my stealing indicates that I have genuinely forsaken that sin. I might be tempted six months from now, but I do not have to do it. If we genuinely confess our sins, we

forsake those sins. We turn from them because we agree with God concerning our sins.

Applications: The Broadness of God's Law

David said in Psalm 119, verse 96, "I've seen the end of all perfection and thy commandment is exceeding broad." God's law is practical and applicable to every area and every sphere of our lives. God's commandment is exceeding broad; His law covers every area of our life—prayer, our marital relationship, our money, and everything else.

Our allegiance is to Him and the totality of His Word. We have been commanded in 1 Timothy chapter 6 and verse 12 to fight the good fight of faith. How can you fight the good fight of faith to a sovereign to whom you have no allegiance? You have to have allegiance to fight the good fight of faith. How can you fight against the wicked by obeying God's law if you are totally ignorant of God's law? You cannot obey that which you are ignorant of.

The truth of the matter is this: if you and I are not reading, listening to, hearing, studying, and applying God's law, in reality, we are forsaking it and turning from it. Because we give allegiance to our Lord, we give allegiance to His law, which means it must have reign in our lives.

One reason we fail so miserably in obeying Jude 1:3, where we are told to earnestly contend for the faith once delivered unto the saints, is that we are totally ignorant of what we are to fight for. To earnestly contend means to earnestly fight for the faith once delivered to the saints. We have no idea. How can we contend for the faith if we do not understand the faith, know its history, know our sovereignty, and know what He demands?

Here is the third one. I love my wife, and I will fight for her and defend her. I love my family, and I will fight for my family and defend my family. I also love my state and my country, and I would fight for and defend them. However, my allegiance is to the Lord Jesus Christ. He is sovereign. He is God. All these other things fall under my allegiance to Him. He is first, foremost, and forever. He

deserves all honor, all glory, and all praise. All other entities must fall under Him.

I want to challenge you this year to read the Word of God over and over. Look up words. Study. Then ask, How am I to apply this to my life? How am I to apply this to my family's life? You should have a burning quest, a holy zeal, and a desire to say, Lord, my allegiance is to You. I want to fight and not forsake. I want my allegiance, not an abomination. I want confession, not covering. I want to do that which is right, holy, godly, and obedient by Your grace and mercy.

The practicality of the Word of God should strike us in every area of our lives, and we should learn to apply it in every area of our lives. Father, we ask in the name of Jesus Christ that You would help us, teach us, and build us up in the most holy faith.

Lord, make us fighters, where our allegiance is to Thee, and willing to confess and forsake that we might find mercy. I pray that You would indeed speak to each heart and encourage each one in Your Word and in Your truth. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 31

Two Sides Of A Coin

January 19, 2021

Introduction: The Coin Analogy

Psalm 115:1 says, “Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory, for Thy mercy and for Thy truth's sake.” This is not the verse I am going to be expounding; however, by the end of the message, I will be applying it, and I think you will see why.

When we state that a coin has two sides, the statement is quite understandable. There is no coin that only has one side; that is absolutely impossible. If you sliced off half of the coin and threw it away, it would still have two sides. One may be minted and the other mutilated, but it still has two sides. The two sides of a coin go together. They are concurrent with each other—that is, they are there at the same time—and they cannot be separated.

There are truths in the Bible that are like a coin. They have two sides and, consequently, should not be separated. When individuals endeavor to separate these truths, they are, in essence, destroying the truth.

Hebrews 4:12 says, “For the Word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” Verse 13 continues, “Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight. But all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.”

Truth as a Two-Edged Sword and a Marriage

Go back to verse 12: “For the Word of God is quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword.” A sword that has two edges cuts either way. In other words, there are two sides to the sword. We always refer to the Bible as a sword, and as the sword of the Lord. When you think of truth, then, you have to think also of truth often having two sides.

We could liken truth to a marriage: what God has joined together, let not man separate. When you divorce, separate, divide, or cut the truth in half, it becomes a half-truth. A half-truth is an untruth. Only a whole truth is a truth. If you were in a courtroom and sworn in as a witness, would you swear with your hand on the Bible to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?

Why do they want the whole truth? Because a half-truth is a lie. Anything in opposition to the truth is a lie, whether it is only half true or not. Truth is righteousness, and a lie is deceit. Truth is established forever, but a lie is only temporary. Proverbs 12:17 says, “He that speaketh the truth showeth forth righteousness, but a false witness is deceit.” Proverbs 12:19 says, “The lip of truth shall be established forever, but a lying tongue is but for a moment.” In other words, the truth is permanent, and the lie is but for a moment.

What I want to do today is share with you several truths that have two sides. They go together, and you cannot separate these truths without destroying the truth. Before I finish today, I will show you that many individuals do exactly what those reprobates did in Romans 1:25: they change the truth into a lie and worship the creature more than the Creator.

Repentance and Faith Are Inseparable

First of all, repentance and faith go together. Whenever and wherever there is real, genuine, saving repentance, there is always real, genuine, saving faith. Wherever there is real, genuine, saving faith, there is always real, genuine, saving repentance.

Many people have perverted the coin of salvation. They have tried to make only one side of it true. They will say, “All you have to do is believe.” That is true if you understand what the Bible means when it says believe. Usually, however, what they mean is that you must give mental assent and acknowledge certain facts. Salvation is not just mental assent or merely saying that certain facts are true.

In Acts 16, the Philippian jailer came under such conviction that he called for a light, sprang in trembling, and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” Paul answered, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.” Certainly, he did believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you read the context, you will find that the Philippian jailer also did that which John the Baptist demanded of the Pharisees in Matthew 3:8: “Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance,” or fruits evidencing repentance. When the Philippian jailer was saved, he took them out of jail, brought them to his house, washed their stripes, fed them, and did whatever he could to make amends. In other words, there was real repentance there as well.

We are told in Ephesians 2:8-9, which everybody can quote, “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.” However, we oftentimes leave out verse 10: “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”

Here is the point: true faith is never alone. True believing is never alone. There is another side to faith, and that side is repentance; there is another side to repentance, and that side is faith. Our Lord began His ministry in Mark 1:15 with these words: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.” There is no true believing without repentance. Repentance and faith go together.

Many people have turned belief into simply intellectual assent. They ask, “Do you believe Jesus Christ came into the world and died?” “Yes.” “Do you believe Jesus Christ rose from the dead?” “Yes.” “Do you believe Jesus Christ is in heaven?” “Yes.” “Do you believe Jesus Christ is ruling and reigning?” “Yes.” “Do you believe Jesus Christ is coming again?” “Yes.” Those are facts. They may be real, genuine, and true facts, but you are not saved merely by assenting to facts. Jesus Christ is the gospel, and not merely facts about Jesus Christ.

Usually, you will find many individuals who profess to be Christians who have never repented. Their lives have never changed, and they have never had any real desire to change as well. The problem is this: most people want to be saved from the penalty of their sins so that they may continue in and enjoy their sins.

Here is an interesting thought. Do you realize that the salvation Jesus Christ purchased is not a salvation from hell? It is not a salvation from judgment or condemnation. You may ask, What is it? In Matthew 1:21, the angel Gabriel said to Mary, “And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins.” Being saved from judgment, condemnation, and destruction is a byproduct of being saved from our sins. Our Lord came to save us from our sins and the sin which condemns us and judges us.

Now let us look at another reason why God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Acts 5:30–31 spells it out: “The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.” God resurrected and exalted Jesus Christ in order that He might give repentance and forgiveness. Pay close attention to the fact that repentance is given; it is indeed a gift. Repentance is just as much the gift of God as faith is the gift of God. As man cannot believe without God giving him the gift of faith, so man cannot turn from sin without God giving him the gift of repentance. Repentance and faith are both the gifts of God.

Second Timothy 2:24 shows that repentance is indeed a gift of God: “And the servant of the Lord,” that is, the pastor or preacher,

"must not strive, but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves."

Why should we continue to preach and teach? Why should we continue to put up with the things we put up with? Here is the answer: "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."

The Bible tells us that unsaved men are taken captive by the devil at his will, but it also says that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil. When do men recover themselves? The answer is found in verse 25: when they acknowledge the truth. When do men acknowledge the truth? The answer is found in verse 25 as well: when God gives them repentance.

If there is no repentance, there is no acknowledging of the truth, no belief, and no faith. If there is no repentance and no faith, there is no recovering oneself from the snare of the devil. Only God can give repentance. Only God can give faith. Preachers, evangelists, deacons, and those who witness to others cannot give repentance or faith. Only God can give repentance and faith. That is why the Bible says in verse 24, "that the servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle," and then in verse 25, "...in meekness, continually instructing those who lie, if God peradventure will give repentance." Repentance brings forgiveness, and repentance is unto life.

In Acts chapter 10, Peter went to the house of Cornelius, a centurion and Roman soldier, and Cornelius and his household were converted. In Acts chapter 11, the elders of Jerusalem called Peter to account: "Look, you've gone into the house of one that is unclean. You have eaten with a Gentile. Explain yourself." Peter told them what God had taught him and how God saved Cornelius and his house exactly as He had saved them. Their response is found in verse 18: "When they heard these things, they held their peace and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life." Note that repentance is unto life. Repentance and faith go together.

When you try to separate these truths, divide them, or divorce them, you will end up, on the one hand, with what we would call decisional regeneration, easy-believism, or merely intellectual faith—or with a "deuce-believe": "Well, I believe that. That sounds reasonable to me." On the other hand, you have someone who leaves faith out altogether and simply says, "What I need to do is reform myself."

Here you have a drunkard who says, "Well, I need to reform myself," and so he quits being a drunk and becomes a sober man. That does not mean he is saved. Here is a man who is a fornicator and a whoremonger. He says, "Well, I need to quit that." He does, but just because he quits does not mean he is saved. You cannot quit your way into heaven. Here is a murderer. He can stop murdering, but that does not necessarily make him a saved individual.

When you divide these things, on the one hand you go to one extreme, merely teaching people to assent to the truth; on the other hand, you end up with self-reformation.

If you look in Matthew chapter 12, you will see that our Lord never thought too much of self-reformation. Beginning in verse 43, our Lord says, "When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none. Then he said, I will return unto my house from whence I came out. And when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished. Then goeth he and taketh with him seven other spirits, more wicked than himself. And they enter in and dwell there. And the last state of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation."

Here is a man who is a drunkard. "I need to quit drinking. I need to quit being drunk." And he does. The next thing you know, he goes around saying, "I'm not a drunkard anymore. Look at me; I can quit. I did quit." Pride, arrogance, and haughtiness have taken over in his life. I cannot help but think of what one man wrote many years ago: "Quitting smoking is easy. I've already quit a thousand times." Well, you're really wanting too easy. He kept going back.

This is what our Lord is saying: Man cannot reform himself. If he does temporarily reform in one area, it makes him far worse in other

areas as well. Only God can give repentance. Only God can give faith. Many individuals profess to be saved, but their lives are absolutely contrary to the Word of God. When you see that, you cannot help but think of 1 John 2:4: “He that saith, I know Him and keepeth not His commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him.” Real, genuine faith and repentance always bring other graces as well.

James says, “Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.” In other words, true, genuine faith works and has other graces with it. He continues, “Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works. Show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works.”

If I were to ask Gary, since he is a believer, “Show me your faith,” he could not show me his faith. God may see it and know it, but I cannot see his faith. What I can see is the evidence of that faith applied in his life on a daily basis. James is saying, “You show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.”

Now watch verse 19: “Thou believest there is one God, thou doest well. The devils also believe and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead.” Look at all these people who are willing to confess that God is. Then he says that the devils also believe and tremble. I usually say that the demons have more faith than the average individual because at least they tremble at the truth, and most men do not tremble at the truth at all.

Then he demonstrates what he means. “Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered up Isaac his son upon the altar?” He is not saying that works saved Abraham; he is saying that works evidence the fact that his faith was genuine. His faith was real. That is why he says, “Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect,” or at least evidenced. “And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness, and he was called the Friend of God.”

James also points out, “Likewise also was Rahab the harlot justified by works when she had received the messengers and had sent them out another way.” Rahab gave a tremendous confession of

faith in the book of Joshua. She said, “We know that your God is real, and we know that He's given you this land, and we know that you're going to conquer.” She confessed God's sovereignty. She knew that God was real, but she did not stop there. She demonstrated her faith by hiding the messengers, protecting their lives, and sending them out another way. Clearly, then, what James is saying is that faith without works is dead.

Someone who makes a profession of faith, but whose life never backs it up, has a dead and worthless faith, because real, genuine faith and real, genuine repentance always produce a godly, obedient life. If it is dead, it is useless and worthless. Titus 1:16 says, “They profess that they know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.” They profess with their mouths that they know Him, but in their works—that is, in their daily lives—they deny Him. They are disobedient and abominable, and unto every good work they are basically reprobates.

When you separate, divide, and divorce repentance and truth, you always end up with either easy believism, decisional regeneration, self-reformation, or what we would call moral humanism. It is just that simple.

First Thessalonians 1:9 says, “For they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.” You turn to God—that is faith—from idols—that is repentance—to serve the living and true God—that is obedience. Repentance and faith go together.

You cannot have one without the other. Whenever there is real, genuine, saving faith, the other side of the coin is real, genuine, saving repentance. Whenever there is real, genuine, saving repentance, the other side of the coin is real, genuine, saving faith. If it is real faith, it will always have repentance; if it is real repentance, it will always have faith.

Preservation and Perseverance Go Together

Do not separate what God has joined together. Consider preservation and perseverance, a truth that has been distorted to almost absolute heresy.

I was raised in church—I was raised in a Baptist church—and I have heard expressions and terminologies all my life. I have heard the phrases “eternal security” and “once saved, always saved.” I have also heard people say, “Now you have made a decision for Christ. Now you have to pray through. Now you have to hold on, or you are not going to be saved.” Let me point something out.

The error and the heresy involved, usually, in the statement “once saved, always saved” is this: what most people mean by it is that once you have made a decision, once you have made a profession, once you have joined the church, or once you have been baptized, it does not matter how you live; you are on your way to heaven. Here is someone who made a profession of faith when they were, say, twelve years old, but for the next thirty years was a drunkard, a whoremonger, a liar, and a thief. Obviously, something is wrong somewhere, because real, genuine faith always brings real, genuine repentance.

The point I am trying to make is this: usually, when you hear that expression “once saved, always saved,” it is applied to people who made a profession of faith but then turned around and denied that profession of faith. They say that no matter how you live, you are eternally secure and on your way to heaven. Others will add works to it, like the Judaizers.

Paul constantly had to fight the Judaizers because they would say it was all right to believe in Jesus Christ, but if you really wanted to be saved, you had to be circumcised, keep this tradition, and keep that tradition. Others will say, “In order to really prove that you are saved, you must do this and you must do that as well.”

Do I believe that the saints are secure in Jesus Christ? The answer is yes. Do I believe that we are eternally preserved? The answer is yes. Would I say, “Once saved, always saved”? Most certainly, if someone was really, genuinely saved to begin with.

Not just a profession, not just a mockery, not just a baptism, and not just a church membership. The Bible teaches very clearly that we

are preserved. Look in your Bibles to the book of Jude, right before the book of Revelation, the one little book of Jude, verse 1: “Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James, to them that are sanctified by God the Father and preserved in Jesus Christ and called.” So the Bible tells us that we are preserved in Jesus Christ. By the way, we are not pickled; we are preserved. You pickle with vinegar. You can preserve with honey and sugar.

Turn to the book of John, chapter 10, and notice what our Lord said, beginning in verse 27: “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.” Now note that: “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they” what? “Follow Me.” That is obedience.

“And I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish. Neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand. My Father which gave them Me is greater than all, and no man is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand. I and My Father are one.”

Our Lord says that He gives His sheep eternal life. He says that they shall never perish. He says that we are in His hand, that He is in the Father's hand, and that no man can pluck them out of His Father's hand.

I do not know about you, but that sounds very secure to me. I probably told you this, but I just thought of it again. Years ago, I was driving home late at night around Atlanta. It was probably one or two in the morning, and I was trying to stay awake. I had the radio on and found some preaching. It was a black pastor preaching from John, chapter 10, and I never will forget what he said.

He read this passage when he said, “And no man shall pluck them out of My hand. My Father which gave them Me is greater than all. No man will pluck them out of My Father's hand.” Then, in that old gruff voice, he said, “Now that God saved you, He put you in the hand of Jesus Christ. And Jesus Christ is in the hand of God the Father and the Holy Spirit sealed you. And no man shall pluck you out of My hand. Now that means Jesus Christ won't pluck you out of His hand. God the Father won't pluck you out of His hand. The Holy Spirit won't pluck you out of His hand.”

“Come to think of it, them's only three that can do any plucking anyhow.” I have never forgotten that. It is pretty true, and that is what he is saying. That is fact.

Now, let me show you how the apostle Paul applies this truth. Turn to Romans chapter eight. He puts it in terms that you and I can really latch on to and understand. Romans 8:35 asks, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” The answer is nothing and no one. He continues: “Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.”

“Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.” Then he says, “For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Nothing and no one can separate us—not any creature here, nor any creature to come, nor anything we can imagine—from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Once again, that sounds exactly like we are preserved. And we are. Since Scripture teaches that the real, genuine saints are preserved, how do we know that we are preserved? How can we tell that we are preserved? How do I know if Steve is genuine or not? Here is the answer: Those who are preserved evidence that preservation in perseverance. Preservation and perseverance are the two sides of one coin.

When God preserves us in Jesus Christ, by His grace and mercy, He enables us to persevere. That is, we continue in faith. We continue in repentance. We continue in obedience. We continue in worship. We continue regardless of the circumstances and regardless of the situation. It does not matter whether we are under persecution or not under persecution. We persevere in the faith.

Matthew 10:22 says, “And you shall be hated of all men for My name's sake, but he that endureth to the end shall be saved.” He that endureth to the end shall be saved. That is what He told His disciples. Hebrews 6:11 says, “And we desire that every one of you do

show forth the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end." We want you to give the full assurance of hope unto the end. First Peter 1:13 says, "Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end, for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." Revelation 2:26 says, "And he that overcometh and keepeth My works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations." Notice: "and keepeth My works unto the end."

Since repentance and faith are two sides of one coin, and both of these are the gifts of God, when God preserves us, He enables us to continue in perseverance in those gifts and in those graces. We do not stop repenting just because we have been saved. We do not stop believing just because we have been saved. We continue. We do not stop obeying. We continue.

Someone may say, "But pastor, I know of some folks that profess to be Christians. They went to church for the longest. But now they have forsaken the faith. They have walked away from the church. They have walked away from the preaching and teaching of the Word of God, and their lives are wicked." Are they still saved? Here is my answer: They were never saved to begin with. How can I say that?

Scripture teaches that preservation and perseverance go together; they are the two sides of one coin. In 1 John 2:19, the apostle John writes, "They went out from us, but they were not of us. For if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us. But they went out that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us."

What did he say? "They went out from us, but they were not of us." In other words, they were never saved initially, originally. If they had really been one of us, they would no doubt have continued with us. They went out that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.

The apostle John makes it clear that perseverance in the faith evidences preservation: "For if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us." The proof that one is ever savingly believed is that he continues to believe. The proof that one is ever

savingly repented is that he continues in repentance. The proof that one has been preserved in Christ Jesus is that he perseveres in repentance and faith and obedience, regardless of the situation or circumstances.

We are greatly harmed when we try to divide what God has put and placed together. You cannot separate repentance and faith, and you cannot separate preservation and perseverance without destroying the truth of God.

Knowledge and Obedience

Knowledge and Obedience Are Two Sides of One Coin

These things go together. Do not try to separate them. Number three is knowledge and obedience. When you separate or divorce these truths, you fall into many errors.

There are many people who desire knowledge just for knowledge's sake. I know people, and know of people, who simply like to read encyclopedias. Why do you need a lot of information that you are never going to use? Perhaps they want to appear intellectual; perhaps they simply like to acquire knowledge. I do not know. Some people like to have knowledge just so they can argue and debate. It is not that they want to apply it; they just want to argue about it.

When you separate knowledge and obedience, you fall into gross error. On the one hand, if you say, "I just want knowledge, I just want to know," you will fall into pride, arrogance, and haughtiness. First Corinthians 8:1–2 says, "Now as touching things offered unto idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth. And if any man think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know."

Isn't that amazing? Look what he said: "Knowledge puffeth up." When you think you have arrived, when you think you know it, God says you know nothing as you ought to know. So when somebody wants knowledge just for knowledge's sake, he will fall into the sin of pride, arrogance, and haughtiness.

On the other hand, someone may say, "What I want is just simple obedience." Simple obedience, or supposed obedience, without

knowledge is worthless and useless and becomes nothing more than will-worship. If we say that we are obeying and yet do not have knowledge, all we are doing is what we think best, or that which pleases us, instead of the Lord. Without the knowledge of God, without the knowledge of the Holy, obedience becomes nothing more than will-worship.

Colossians 2:20–23 says, “Wherefore, if ye be dead with Christ through the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances?” These ordinances are religious ordinances.

They are traditions, a lot of them: “Touch not, taste not, handle not, which are all to perish with the using.” The commandments and doctrines of men, which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will worship and humility and neglecting of the body, are not in any honor to the satisfying of the flesh. Notice that all these ordinances he is talking about are the commandments and doctrines of men. You simply become obedient to your traditions or to your religion without knowledge, without thinking. Look at all the cults and all the false religions where people do things that are absolutely insane and stupid, and they never think. They are simply following the commandments and doctrines of men.

That is what it amounts to. I told you that knowledge and obedience go together. How in the world can you obey God if you do not know what God commands? How can you walk pleasing to the Lord if you do not know what pleases the Lord? If you are going to obey God, you must have knowledge. You remember that passage in Hosea 4 and verse 6, which most of you can quote, where God says, “My people perish for lack of knowledge.”

Let me show you two passages, and I want to ask you a question after we look at them. Turn to Job 28 and verse 28, and then to Proverbs 9 and verse 10. We will read Job 28:28 first, and then Proverbs 9:10. Job 28:28 says, “And unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding.”

Job 28:28 says, “And unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding.”

Proverbs 9:10 says, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,” which is the same as the first half of Job 28:28. But the last half says, “And the knowledge of the Holy is understanding.”

Is understanding departing from evil, or is it the knowledge of the Holy? The answer is both. They are the two sides of one coin. You cannot depart from evil unless you know that which is holy and right. You cannot obey God unless you know what God commands. You cannot depart from evil unless you know what is evil, nor do that which is holy unless you know that which is holy.

Amos 5:15 says, “Hate the evil and love the good and establish judgment in the gate.” What is evil? How can you know what is evil without knowing what is holy? How can you love the good without knowledge? How can you establish judgment or justice in the gate if you do not know what justice and judgment are? Knowledge and obedience go together. You cannot obey God unless you know what God demands. That is why the Bible says, “to depart from evil is understanding” and “the knowledge of the Holy is understanding.”

When we know what God demands, who God is, the holiness of God, and the holiness that He demands, we also know what evil and wickedness are, and we learn to depart from evil and obey God. Whenever you begin to separate knowledge and obedience, you are heading into error.

We fall into error, heresy, and trouble by dividing and separating that which God has joined together. Usually, truth is two-sided, and in the Bible, when you read a truth, there is often a positive and a negative. When God makes a statement, you must understand that there is a positive and a negative.

Applications: Avoiding Error and Glorifying God

In Colossians 3:19, we read, “Husbands, love your wives and be not bitter against them.” There is a positive and a negative right there. Love is positive; “be not bitter against them” is negative. But “husbands, love your wives” can have a negative implication as well: do not love anybody else’s wife. When we look at truth, it is not enough to look at both sides of it. We must understand the various and variegated implications of each side of the truth, whether

negative or positive, and consider those implications so that we can apply them to our lives. You cannot apply what you do not understand. It is impossible.

Steve could tell me that I need to fix the brakes on my truck and could probably tell me how to do it. But since I am not mechanically inclined, I would probably end up tearing something up because I do not understand mechanical things. If you do not understand it, you cannot apply it. It is just that simple. You cannot obey what you do not know.

Here is the second implication: We must not be as the reprobates in Romans chapter one, who turned the truth into a lie. Verse 25 says, "Who changed the truth of God into a lie and worship and serve the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen." Whenever we separate what God has joined together and divide it, we will glorify ourselves, doing what we think is best and going our own way. We will turn the truth of God into a lie and end up glorifying ourselves.

Psalm 115:1 says, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory for Thy mercy and for Thy truth's sake." When we divide what God has joined together, we get the glory for ourselves, because it will always work to praise man and not God. If we want God to have the glory, we must not divide what He has joined together.

Truth has two sides. When God has joined two things together—repentance and faith, preservation and perseverance, knowledge and holiness—we cannot divide them without destroying the truth and making it a half-truth, which is a lie. God has given us His truth; as we proclaim and apply it as it is, we glorify His name. When we pervert it, we try to glorify ourselves.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank You for Your Word and truth. Help us not to divide that which You have joined together, but to honor Thee in what we say and do. Help us read and study Your Word so that we may know. We fail so miserably in reading and studying; teach us, O Lord. Open our eyes and grant us faith, that we may serve Thee acceptably with reverence and godly fear. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 32

Some Good Things

November 11, 2021

Introduction: Defining Good Things

Psalm 84 and verse 11 says, “For the Lord God is a sun and shield. The Lord will give grace and glory. No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.”

The truth is that everyone loves good things. It does not matter whether they are food, jewelry, clothes, places, or activities. Most people are interested in good things, good times, and good places. Another interesting thought is that “good” is probably defined in different ways by different people. I have heard individuals describe certain things as good that I would not necessarily have thought to be good. I have even heard people say, “I’ve had a good time at the beach.” For me, a good time would be the mountains or the forest. I love trees, mountains, and animals. Now, I am not against the beach. I enjoy seeing the sun come up and set, and I enjoy those little sandpipers running up and down the beach. But one day of that will last me about twenty-five years.

I am simply pointing out that people have different tastes and enjoy different things. In the same way, what one individual determines to be a good thing is not necessarily a good thing for someone else. For instance, there are those who suppose that a little, expensive, two-seater sports car is a good thing. To me, a big, nice, comfortable pickup truck is a good thing.

My middle grandson had one of those little sports cars, and he was proud of it. He drove it to the house and said, “Pop, I want you to drive it.” I said, “Thank you, son, but I really do not need to drive it.” He said, “Well, Pop, if you are not going to drive it, at least sit behind the steering wheel and feel it and relax in that seat.” I said, “Son, I do not mind sitting in that car. But if you can promise me that you can get me out in one piece, I will be glad to sit in that car.”

It was a good thing to him, but it certainly was not a good thing to me. Being young, limber, and flexible is a good thing. But when you get older, just being able to stand and sit and bend down occasionally is a good thing. If the Lord allows you to live to old age, you will understand clearly what I have said. If you live long enough, your time is coming.

Beware, I can assure you. When you look at Psalm 84 and verse 11, the Bible says, “For the Lord God is a sun and shield. The Lord will give grace and glory.” Then he says, “No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.” Matthew Henry comments on verses 8 through 12, which we have not read in their entirety:

“In all of our addresses to God, we must desire that he would look at Christ, his anointed one, and accept us for his sake. We must look to him with faith, and then God will look with favor at the face of his anointed. We without him, that is without the Lord Jesus Christ, dare not show our faces.

“The psalmist pleads love for God's ordinances. Let us consider one day in God's courts better than a thousand spent elsewhere and deem the lowliest place in his service preferable to the highest earthly preferment. We are here in darkness, but if God is our God, He will be to us a sun to enlighten and enliven us, to guide and direct us. Here we are in danger, but He will be to us a shield to secure us from the fiery arrows that fly thickly around us.

"Though He has not promised to give riches and dignities, He has promised to give grace and glory to all those that seek Him in His appointed way. And what is grace but heaven begun below in the knowledge, love, and service of God? What is glory but the completion of this happiness in being made like him and in fully enjoying him forever? Let it be our care to walk uprightly and then let us trust God to give us everything that is good for us. If we cannot go to the house of the Lord, we may go by faith to the Lord of the house. In him we shall be happy and be at peace. That man is really happy, whatever his outward circumstances be, who trusts in the Lord of hosts, the God of Jacob." And that's true.

Exegesis of Psalm 84:11

When you consider the fact that verse 11 says, "No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly," you must understand that God's good things are truly and genuinely good things. Before going further, consider the latter part of verse 11 and these words. First, consider the word "good." It is the Hebrew word tov, and it refers to that which is good, pleasant, agreeable, beautiful, and excellent. It also refers to wealth and prosperity in every area. In fact, this one Hebrew word is translated "prosperity" six times in our Bible, and three times it is translated as "wealth."

There is another verse in light of this. The Bible says in Psalm 34 and verse 10, "The young lions do lack and suffer hunger, but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing." The young lions suffer hunger, but those that seek the Lord shall not lack for any good thing. So, when he says, "No good thing will he withhold," he is talking about that which is agreeable, excellent, beautiful, and pleasant, and certainly he indeed is the giver of good things. Note next in verse 11 that he said, "No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly."

The word "withhold" is the Hebrew word mana, and it is translated in our Bibles as "withhold," "keep back," "restrain," or "deny." Literally, he is saying, "No good thing will he deny, restrain, keep, or hold back from them that walk uprightly." Let me give you a good illustration of this. In Romans 8 and verse 32, the Apostle Paul gave us a tremendous truth. He said, talking about God, "He that

spared not his own Son but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not also with him freely give us all things?" Listen to that: "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not also with him freely give us all things?" This argument is an argument from the greater to the lesser. If God has already given us his best gift, which is his only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, how shall he not also with him freely give us all things? Since God the Father has given us his Son to be our sacrifice, to be our

Having given us Christ to be our surety, our substitute, and our salvation, Paul is saying that if God has given us the best already, it is nothing for Him to give us the less or the lesser. So obviously this is an argument. This is why he says, "No good thing will he withhold from those that walk uprightly."

Notice that verse 11 is not what we would call a blanket promise. It is not a promise that goes to everyone indiscriminately. No, there is discrimination in this promise, because he says, "No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly." The promise is directed to those who walk uprightly, not simply to everyone without distinction.

The Hebrew word translated "uprightly" is tamim. It refers to those who are without blemish, whole, complete, sound, upright, and sincere. This same word is translated in our Bibles "without blemish" forty-four times and "perfect" eighteen times. When the Bible says, "No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly," it is not talking about sinless perfection. That does not exist. Uprightness, according to the Bible, deals with genuineness, sincerity, honesty, truthfulness, and, above all, obedience.

In 2 Samuel 22:24, David said, "I was also upright before him, and have kept myself from mine iniquity." David was tempted many times, and his flesh desired that which was wicked and wrong; but he kept himself from his iniquity. He said, "What I have done, I was upright before him." In other words, he was obedient. He followed God and obeyed Him.

David said the same thing in 2 Samuel 22:26: "With the merciful, thou wilt show thyself merciful. And with the upright, thou wilt show thyself upright." David said exactly the same thing in Psalm 18:23: "I

was also upright before him and kept myself from mine iniquity." Psalm 94:15 says, "But judgment shall return unto righteousness and all the upright in heart shall follow it." What are the upright in heart following? Righteousness, that which is right, true, and just.

Uprightness has nothing to do with perfection, as some people interpret it, but it does have to do with consistent, constant obedience and following after God. It is not a claim that the person has reached perfection, but that he is genuine and sincere in following God. Therefore, Proverbs 10:29 says, "The way of the Lord is strength for the upright, but destruction shall be to the workers of iniquity." The way of the Lord, the way of obedience, the way of his word, and the way of righteousness is our strength. To the wicked, it is the way of destruction because they do not want to obey anyhow. They disobey God and end up being destroyed.

The upright are not those who are sinlessly perfect. No one has ever been sinlessly perfect except the Lord Jesus Christ—not Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, the apostle Paul, or anyone else. The word "upright," then, refers to those who are genuine and sincere, who are following God and endeavoring to bring their lives into conformity to his word by obedience. Obviously, uprightness cannot mean that a person has never sinned. The promise, "No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly," is for those who genuinely and honestly desire to obey him and please him.

Whenever we look for good things, we must look to God, not to ourselves. Paul said in Romans 7:18, "For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing. For the will is present within me, but how to perform that will I find not." He repeated the principle: "I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing." If there is anything in us that is righteous, holy, and godly, or any desire to please and honor God, he had to put it there. By nature, there is not one good thing in us. God is good, and there is none good but him.

Therefore, any and everything that is good comes from him. Let me explain this. James 1, verses 16 and 17. Verse 16 is very short: "Do not err therefore, my beloved brethren." Do not err. Do not make an error on this part; do not mess up on this truth. He said, "Do not err therefore, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect

gift cometh down from above, from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." So where does every good gift and every perfect gift come from? The answer is from God, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. It is God, then, who is the giver of good things. He was the giver of good things in the Old Testament, and He is also the giver of good things in the New Testament. Let me just show you some things.

I want you to turn in your Bibles. Hold Psalm 84, but turn, if you would, to Deuteronomy chapter 26. This passage deals with the tithes, even the tithe of rejoicing. Let us begin reading at verse 9. "And he hath brought us into this place, and hath given us this land, even a land that floweth with milk and honey. And now, behold, I have brought the firstfruits of the land, which thou, O Lord, hast given me. And thou shalt set it before the Lord thy God, and worship before the Lord thy God. And thou shalt rejoice in every good thing which the Lord thy God hath given unto thee, and in thine house, thou, and the Levite, and the stranger that is among you."

Did you notice what he said? Thou art to rejoice in every good thing which the Lord thy God gives you, you and your house. So it is God who gives good things.

In Joshua 21, verse 45, Joshua says to these people, "There fell not out of any good thing which the Lord had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass." So all of the good things that God promised—not one thing failed—all came to pass. In Joshua 23, Joshua is about to die and is giving some instruction. He says in verse 14, "And behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth," that is, I am going to die, "and you know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof." Note this: God made every good thing come to pass.

The Ultimate Good Thing: Jesus Christ

There are many good things that God has given us. But He has also given us what I am going to call the best good thing, and it may surprise you. The first passage is Jeremiah 33, and then we will turn to John chapter 1. In Jeremiah 33, verse 14, we read, "Thus saith the

Lord of Hosts." Verse 14 says, "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will perform that good thing which I have promised unto the house of Israel and to the house of Judah."

Now note: "The days come, saith the Lord, that I will perform that good thing." What good thing is He talking about? Verse 15 explains: "In those days, and at that time, will I cause the branch of righteousness to grow up unto David, and he shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land." So that good thing mentioned in verse 14 is the Branch of righteousness from the root of David, which is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. He is saying, I have promised the Messiah. I have promised that good thing, and I am going to send it. Now look in your Bibles to the book of John, chapter 1, and notice verses 45 and 46.

“Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses, and the Law, and the Prophets,” that would include Jeremiah, “and the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? And Philip saith unto him, Come and see.”

The good thing that God promised was His only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is our salvation. In light of this truth—that Jesus Christ is our good thing—there are a number of good things that should be in every one of us.

I want you to look in Philippians 2, verse 13, and then Hebrews chapter 13, so I can set the stage for what I want to share with you. Philippians 2, verse 13, says, “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do his good pleasure.” If God ever puts the “to will” in you, He will also put the “to do” in you. Anytime we will to do that which is right, holy, godly, and obedient, it is God who put it in us. He put the “to will” in us, and then He also put in us the ability to fulfill that will.

Remember, now look in Hebrews chapter 13, at verses 20 and 21. Jesus Christ is that good thing that God promised. Because we have that good thing—the Lord Jesus Christ—in us, there should be a number of other good things in us.

Hebrews 13:20 says, "Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant." Because God has given us His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and raised Him from the dead, what is going to happen in us? "Make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen."

Since God has given us His good thing, His Son, the Lord Jesus, and since we are indwelled by His Spirit—He is our head, and we are His body—God is going to make us perfect in every good work to do His will, working in us that which is well-pleasing in His sight through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Since we have the good thing in us, there should be other good things that stem from the Lord Jesus Christ.

What are some of the good things? I want to show you three of them. Remember, "No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly." Here is a good thing that should be in every Christian, in every child of God. Number one, there should be in us the good thing of thanksgiving and praise. Psalm 92:1 says, "It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord. And to sing praises unto thy holy name, O Most High." Verse 2 says, "To show forth thy lovingkindness in the morning and thy faithfulness every night."

Good Thing #1: Praise and Thanksgiving

Pay close attention: it is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord and to sing praises. Why? In order that we might show forth His lovingkindness in the morning and His faithfulness every night. This passage should already make you think of Lamentations 3:22–23: "It is of the Lord's mercies that we're not consumed.

“Because His compassions, they fail not. They are new every morning. Great is thy faithfulness.” Notice carefully that he talks about showing forth the lovingkindness in the morning and the faithfulness every night. If the good thing, the Lord Jesus Christ, is indwelling us, there should be this good thing of giving thanks and praise to the Lord.

Every morning when you wake up, before you ever get out of bed, you should thank the Lord that He has preserved and protected you through the night and allowed you to awaken to a new day, because He has given you fresh compassions, fresh lovingkindness, and fresh mercies. When you go to bed at night, you should thank the Lord for those compassions, mercies, and kindnesses that have allowed you to live through the day.

Remember, “No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.” Psalm 33:1 says, “Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous.” We are righteous because Jesus Christ is our righteousness. “Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous, for praise is comely for the upright.” Praise is beautiful and excellent for the upright. Who are the upright? Those who are honest, genuine, sincere, and obedient; those who are intent on following Him.

Psalm 147:1 says, “Praise ye the Lord, for it is good to sing praises unto our God, for it is pleasant, and praise is comely.” That is, it is beautiful and excellent. When you consider all the multitudinous blessings God has given us, we should not praise Him merely in the morning and at night, but basically all day long.

Matthew Henry said, “It is a privilege that we're permitted to praise the Lord and hope to be accepted in the morning and every night, not only on Sabbath days, but every day, not only in public, but in private and in our families. Let us give thanks every morning for the mercies of the night and every night for the mercies of the day going out and coming in.”

Let us bless God as He makes us glad through the works of His providence for us, His grace in us, and both through the great work of redemption. Let us be encouraged by this. Just as there are many who do not know the intentions of providence, nor care to know them, those who through grace do know them have all the more reason to be thankful. If distant views of the great Deliverer so stirred believers of old, how should we abound in love and praise?

That last sentence is very important. When we read the Old Testament and see how Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, and others praised God and glorified Him, our praise should be greater in the New Testament. Hebrews 11 says that these all died in the faith,

having not received the promise. They had not received its fulfillment. They looked forward to the work of Jesus Christ; we look back on the finished work of Jesus Christ. We know that we have received the fulfillment of the promise. They were looking forward; we look back to an accomplished fact and reality. Therefore, our praise should be far greater than the praise given in the Old Testament.

David said in Psalm 34:1, "I will bless the Lord at all times: his praise shall be in my mouth continually." You can praise the Lord while driving: praise Him for letting you live, for help, for protection, and for anything you can possibly think of. That is what the Bible is saying: we should praise the Lord. Why? Because praise is comely for the upright. If the good thing, the Lord Jesus Christ, indwells us, then we should have praise and thanksgiving in our hearts. David said in Psalm 35:18, "I will give thee thanks in the great congregation: I will praise thee among much people." In other words, David said, "I am not ashamed to praise the Lord."

It does not matter who is around. We should never be ashamed. In Psalm 35:28, he said, "My tongue shall speak of my righteousness and of thy praise all the day long." We should be praising the Lord. I love Psalm 40:3: "He hath put a new song in my mouth, even praising our God." Listen to this: "Many shall see it and fear and shall trust in the Lord." He has put a new song in my mouth, even praising our God. Many shall see it—not just hear it. They shall see it in my life. They shall hear it, yes, but they shall see it in my life.

So the question is, how thankful are we? How appreciative are we? How often do we praise God? Psalm 50:23 says, "Whosoever offereth praise glorifyeth me." One of the ways that we glorify God is by giving Him praise for anything and everything.

In Psalm 65:1, the Bible says, "Praise waiteth for thee, O God, in Zion, and unto thee shall the vow be performed." Think about this: "Praise waiteth for thee, O Lord, in Zion." When you read Hebrews chapter 12, you read about the heavenly Zion. In the book of Revelation, those four and twenty elders are always throwing their crowns at His feet, praising Him and glorifying Him. It is true that praise waits for God in Zion. But do you have to wait until you get

into heaven to give God the praise and thanksgiving that He deserves?

The answer is no. If you want to give Him perfected praise in glory, then you had better practice up here. You had better get used to giving Him praise and thanksgiving. If the good thing of the Lord Jesus Christ dwells in us, there should also be the good thing of praise and thanksgiving unto God. Have you ever stopped to think about this? I think about it often: the grace and mercy of God when I believe and others do not, when I want to obey and others do not, and when I want the truth and others do not.

We must come back to 1 Corinthians 4:7, where the question is asked: "Who maketh thee to differ one from another? And what hast thou that thou didst not receive?" Everything that we have, God gave us. Therefore, there should be in us the good thing of praise and thanksgiving.

Secondly, there should be in us the good thing of zeal toward our God and His kingdom. Galatians 4:18 says, "But it is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing, and not only when I am present with you." Notice what the Apostle said: it is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing, not only when he is present.

Good Thing #2: Zeal for God

In other words, he did not need to be there to encourage them, pat them on the back, give them directions, or tell them what to do. They should be zealous in this good thing.

The Greek word for "zealous" is zelo, and literally it means to burn with zeal. It means to boil over, to desire earnestly, to exert oneself, to strive after, and to earnestly pursue that which is good. Literally, the verse says that it is good to be boiling over always in a good thing, always exerting oneself and striving for the best in a good thing.

Now turn to John 2, beginning with verse 13: "And the Jews' Passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And he found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting. And when he had made a scourge of

small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables. And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house a house of merchandise. And his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up." The word "zeal" is the word zelo.

You can see in this passage that our Lord was boiling over. He was exerting Himself. He was indeed striving after that which was genuinely right, true, and holy. Especially when He made that scourge of small cords, He literally drove them out of the temple. Then the disciples remembered that it was written, "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up."

Now, let me point out one major problem that exists among Christians today: most Christians have no zeal for God. We do not. Instead of being heated up, instead of boiling over and exerting ourselves, we are lukewarm. Turn to Revelation chapter 3 and see what our Lord says to the church of Laodicea. Revelation chapter 3, verse 14: "And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, These things saith the Amen," the faithful and true witness, "the beginning of the creation of God." The word "Amen" means verily, truly, so be it; and "Amen" is also one of the names of the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, when you say "Amen" to a preacher who is preaching, you are not merely saying, "Truly, truly, so be it." You are calling the Lord Jesus Christ to witness that what the man is saying is true.

He tells the church, "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot. I would that thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth." Now, if you are neither cold nor hot, you are in between; you are lukewarm. In verse 15, He says, "I would that thou wert cold or hot." Then in verse 16 He says, "So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth." Our Lord would rather have someone who is out and out against Him or out and out for Him than someone in between who cannot make up his mind and hardly ever does anything anyway.

Now look at verse 17: "Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and

naked." Look at the average church and the average church building: huge, with stained-glass windows, padded pews, deep-throated organs, and beautiful choirs.

Alice and I have often passed this huge church outside Atlanta as we go north on 75. I have often laughed and said, "If I had one Federal Reserve note for every brick in that building, Lord have mercy, I would be an extremely wealthy man." It is a huge, unbelievable building, but I have seen beautiful church buildings used only on Sunday morning.

The Lord said, "You say you are rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing," but, "You do not realize that you are wretched, miserable, and poor, blind, and naked." Then He said, "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich, and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear, and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see." In other words, you are blind as a bat. You think you have it made, and you have it.

"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Be zealous therefore, and repent." Zealous—zelo: be boiling over in repentance, striving after repentance, and exerting yourself in repentance. Many people are zealous in wicked, bad, and evil things, but very few are truly zealous in good things. We should be zealously affected toward God, the Lord Jesus Christ, His law, His Word, His kingdom, and His work.

Most people have no zeal. Look at the enemies of Jesus Christ. The Muslims have zeal; they may be wrong, but they are zealous. Look at the Jehovah's Witnesses. They come door to door on Sunday morning, catching all the backsliding Baptists. I am serious, but at least they are zealous.

Christians, no. Everybody can scream their heads off at a ball game, and no one thinks anything of it. But stand up for Jesus Christ and speak biblical principles and truth, and everybody will call you a nut job, saying that you have gone off the deep end and are absolutely crazy and insane.

The Apostle said that it is good to be always zealously affected in a good thing. If the good thing, the Lord Jesus Christ, indwells us,

then we should always be zealously affected in the good thing that relates to Him. We need to have in us the good thing of praise and thanksgiving, and the good thing of being zealously affected toward God, His Word, and His work.

Good Thing #3: An Established Heart

Here is the third thing. Hebrews 13:8 says, "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever." He is immutable; He is always the same. In light of the immutability of Jesus Christ, verse 9 says, "Be not carried away with divers and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace, not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein."

There should be in each of us the good thing of heart establishment. Our hearts should be established. We are not to be carried away with divers, that is, different, and strange doctrines. The book of Hebrews was written to people who wanted to return to the old emblems, types, and symbols. That is why verse 10 says, "We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle." If you want to return to the meats and the Old Testament sacrifices, you have no right to the Lord Jesus Christ, because He is the fulfillment of all those old types, emblems, and symbols. We are not to be carried away with divers and strange doctrines. It is a good thing that the heart be established with grace.

Do you realize that many have heard in this particular area? Most Christians are doctrinally confused. They are wavering, vacillating, and unsettled in their hearts and in their doctrine. Most professing Christians are often on an up and down, here a while and gone a while. They are so inconsistent and ignorant concerning the things of God that most have no testimony whatsoever.

I had one man whom I asked how long he had been a Christian. His response was, “30 years off and on.” I couldn’t help but say, “I suppose it’s been more often on too, hasn’t it?”

Well, you know, the average Christian cannot define or defend the doctrine of justification by faith alone. The average Christian cannot define or defend the propitiation of Jesus Christ. The average Christian cannot define or defend the inerrancy and inspiration of

the Bible. The average Christian cannot define or defend the doctrine of sanctification. The average Christian cannot define or defend the everlasting covenant. The average Christian cannot define or defend the doctrine of total depravity.

The truth of the matter is that most of them are absolutely, totally ignorant. The fact of the matter is that a lot of professing Christians go from church to church, preacher to preacher, and doctrine to doctrine. They have no idea what they believe or why they believe it. I have asked a number of people in times past, "Why are you a Methodist?" or "Why are you a Baptist?" They answer, "My mother and dad were raised in this church, and my grandparents were raised in this church." Really? That's the only reason? What does the Bible teach?

I am simply pointing out how in the world your heart can be established when you are totally, completely ignorant and inconsistent. Look back in your Bibles to 1 Thessalonians chapter 3 and verse 13. In fact, let's begin reading with verse 11. 1 Thessalonians chapter 3, verse 11:

"Now God himself and our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ direct our way unto you. And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another and toward all men, even as we do toward you. To the end he may establish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints."

Now how many Christians do you know have their hearts established unblameably in holiness? Very few.

Look in your Bibles, if you would please, to 2 Thessalonians chapter 2, verse 16 and 17. In fact, let's read verse 15. 2 Thessalonians 2, verse 15, he says, "Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions or the ordinances which you have been taught, whether by word or our epistle."

Our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God, even our Father, which has loved us and has given us an everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work.

James 5:8 says, “Be ye also patient, establish your hearts for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.”

So let me ask you two burning questions. The first one is this: Is your heart established? The second one is this: How do you get your heart established? What will it take to establish your heart?

The answer is this: It will take the grace of God, in the power of the Holy Spirit, through the exposition, explanation, and application of the Word of God. I want you to look in your Bibles to the book of Ephesians, chapter 4, and here it is spelled out black and white, beginning there with verse 11.

Here is what the Bible says: “And he,” that is, the Lord Jesus Christ, “gave some apostles and some prophets and some evangelists and some pastor-teachers.” Why did God initially give prophets, evangelists, and apostles? And why does He now give pastor-teachers? Here is why: “For the perfecting or the maturing of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come into the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect or mature man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” Why? “That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive. But speaking the truth in love may grow up in him in all things, which is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working and the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.” Pastor-teachers are given for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, and for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come together in the unity of the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man and the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we henceforth be no more children tossed to and fro. We are to be established in our hearts and established in our faith. If your heart is not established in truth and doctrine, you are easy prey for the flesh, the world, the devil, and the cults. It is impossible for you to be established in your heart if you are still a babe in Christ, still on

the milk of the word, or still wavering and vacillating, becoming double-minded and easily deceived.

You cannot be established in your heart unless you are willing to listen and be taught. You cannot be established in your heart unless you are a consistent and constant hearer of the Word of God and a dedicated reader and student of the Word of God. It is impossible. But if the good thing of the Lord Jesus Christ indwells us, we will not only have the good thing of praise and thanksgiving and the good thing of being zealously affected; we will also have the good thing of an established heart. We will know doctrine. You cannot have your heart established without doctrine.

Applications and Conclusion

So let me make a couple of applications. First, we must establish in our lives a pattern of praise and thanksgiving. We should praise our Lord at a minimum morning and night. Before I ever get out of bed, when I awaken, the first thing I do is thank the Lord for allowing Alice and me to live through the night. It is His compassions and His mercies. When I go to bed at night, I thank the Lord for allowing me to live through the day and get through it safely. We should not praise Him only morning and night; we should praise Him all in between as well.

We have to learn to be appreciative and thankful for everything He gives us. If Steve walked up to me and said, "Pastor, I really love you. Here's a million bucks," would I thank Steve? Of course I would. But I would also thank God, who first gave it to Steve and then moved on his heart to give it to me. God still gets the honor and glory, even though He used Steve to give it to me.

We have to learn to be thankful and appreciative. Psalm 103 is a good primer. David says, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul."

"And forget not all his benefits." Here's just some of them: "Who forgiveth all thine iniquities? Who healeth all of thy diseases? Who redeemeth thy life from destruction? Who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies? Who satisfies thy mouth with good things, so that thy youth is renewed like the eagles?" I can be

thankful for all those things, and there's a multitude more as well. So we have to develop a pattern in our lives of being thankful and praising the Lord for that which He's done.

Here's the second thing: We must develop in our lives a burning passion and zeal for truth, for our Lord, and for His kingdom. We must become zealous in the things of God. Look at the world once again. Look at these stupid cities when their team wins the championship. They go crazy. They set cars on fire, tear up stores, and tear up personal and private property. Well, they're just happy. Really? But the point I'm making is that they can be zealous and cheer about things like that. But you begin to say, "Hmm, we're on fire for the Lord Jesus Christ. We want to tell everybody about Christ," and now you are a nut job for sure.

The world will tolerate zeal except in biblical Christianity. And I will even go further: modern-day Christianity and modern-day churchism will tolerate zeal in everything except biblical Christianity. It does not want biblical Christianity. I like what Vance Havner said. Vance has been dead for years, but he still spoke the truth. He said, "Most Christians have lived subnormal for so long that when one gets normal, everyone else thinks he's abnormal." And that's about the truth. We have to understand that if we were like the first-century Christians, we'd have already turned this world upside down. That's what the Bible said of them. And they were so much fewer than we are. But we're not turning anything upside down, because we have no zeal.

The third is this. Remember the Scripture said, "No good thing will he withhold from those that walk uprightly." We must remember, and we must make sure, that our hearts are established in the faith, in doctrine, in duty, and that we're consistent in those things; that we are sincere and honest, seeking to please Him and seeking to be obedient. If we truly desire the good things of God and walk uprightly, He will not withhold them from us. So look in Matthew 7, and let's begin reading with verse 6: "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet and turn again and rend you."

So God is not going to do what He commands us not to do. Then He says, "Ask and it shall be given you. Seek and you shall find.

Knock and it shall be opened unto you. For everyone that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, to him that knocketh it shall be open. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son asks bread, will he give him a stone?" Of course not. "If he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent?" Of course not. "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father, who is in heaven, give good things to them that ask Him?" And remember, "No good thing will He withhold from those that walk uprightly." If we want the good things, we must ask, but we must be upright.

We must be honest and genuine, sincere and obedient to the best of our ability, by His grace and by His mercy.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee this day. We thank You, first of all, Father, for the good thing of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are so thankful, Father, that He is the propitiation for our sins, and we are thankful that the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all sin. We praise Thee.

We are also thankful, Father, for the multitudinous blessings that You have given us. You have enabled us to live and move and have our being in Thee. You have given us health, friends, and family, and so many things. We praise Thee and acknowledge that every good gift and every perfect gift cometh down from above, from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. We give Thee praise.

Help us, Father, to always be zealously affected toward Thee, Thy Word, and Thy work. Help us to be established in our hearts and know Thy truth, so that we may not be deceived or waver with every wind of doctrine, but may stand fast in Your truth. In the name of Jesus Christ we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 33

The Bible And Treason

November 11, 2021

Introduction to Treason

Open your Bibles to 1 Kings chapter 16 and 2 Kings chapter 11. The title of the message is "The Bible and Treason." Notice 1 Kings 16:20: "Now the rest of the acts of Zimri and his treason that he wrought, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?" Then turn to 2 Kings 11:14, concerning Athaliah: "And when she looked, behold, the king stood by a pillar, as the manner was, and the princes and the trumpeters by the king. And all the people of the land rejoiced and blew with trumpets. And Athaliah rent her clothes and cried, Treason, treason."

Treason is a word that reeks of treachery, subterfuge, espionage, and death. It is usually associated with such names as Judas, Benedict Arnold, and even the Rosenbergs. Treason is one of the few crimes named in the Constitution of the United States, and it is defined in that document as well. While most of us are aware of the political ramifications of treason, unhappily, we are woefully ignorant when it comes to the Bible and treason. The word "treason" occurs only five times in our Bible and in three passages. However,

the Hebrew word for treason is "qesher," translated as "treason" five times, "conspiracy" nine times, and "confederacy" two times—a very broad word.

Constitutional Definition of Treason

From my reading and studying over the years, probably only about 30 people have been charged with treason since the founding of this country. Our Constitution defines treason in Article 3, Section 3: "Treason against the United States shall consist only in levying war against them or adhering to their enemies, giving them aid and comfort." "No person shall be convicted of treason unless on the testimony of two witnesses to the same overt act or on a confession in open court. The Congress shall have the power to declare the punishment of treason, but no attainder of treason shall work corruption of blood or forfeiture except during the life of the person attainted." In order to be convicted of treason, according to the Constitution, there has to be at least one overt act, but there has to be at least two witnesses to that one overt act, and/or there can be a confession of treason in open court.

Here's the remarkable thing about this definition: it actually demonstrates states' sovereignty, or states' rights, and the plurality of the states. The article says, "Treason against the United States"—plural—"shall consist only in levying war against them"—plural—"or adhering to their enemies"—plural. So the definition of treason refers to the plurality of the states, not to a central bureaucracy or central government as we have it. Initially, the crime of treason was against any or all of the confederated states, individually or collectively, which made up the United States.

It is true that Congress alone had the power to declare the punishment of treason, but originally Congress was to represent the states. The federal government did not create the states; the states created the federal government. In that sense, the states were the masters, the sovereigns, and the federal government was to be the servants. Thus any attempt to overthrow the union of the states, or subvert the Constitution, which was the glue that held the states together, was considered treason.

If we meditate upon this line of thought, we can come up with names of treasonous individuals. Whether you like to admit it or not, Abraham Lincoln would be one of those men because he destroyed the Union in order to save the Union. Lincoln himself admitted to six constitutional violations. Mildred Rutherford lists about 13 or 17 actual violations of the Constitution. But you can also think of modern-day political figures that could be added to this.

Attainder of Treason and Biblical Parallel

Let me mention something else in light of Article 3, Section 3. What in the world is attainder of treason? It referred to a practice carried on in Europe, where when an individual had committed treason against the king, that individual's family was punished, ostracized, banished, and sometimes even put to death for what one member of that family did. Our Constitution says, no, you can't do that. You cannot destroy a person's family because of the act of one individual. That's why in Ezekiel 18:20, God says: "The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, and the father shall not bear the iniquity of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him."

Now, when you get to 2 Kings chapter 14 in verse 6, Amaziah, who was the king, was putting to death the men that murdered his father, Joash. And here's what the Bible says: "But the children of the murderers he slew not, according to that which was written in the book of the law of Moses, wherein the Lord commanded, saying, The father shall not be put to death for the children, nor the children be put to death for the fathers, but every man shall be put to death for his own sin." And thus, when we say in the Constitution there is to be no attainder of treason, it is indeed a biblical context. Now, let me give you one other quote, and I'm going to come back with this quote in the end, at least. But this quote is from Black's Law Dictionary on treason. And it simply says this: "Treason: a breach of allegiance to one's government, usually committed through levying war against such government, or by giving aid and comfort to the enemy. The offense of attempting by overt acts to overthrow the government of the state to which the offender owes allegiance, or of betraying the state into the hands of a foreign power. Treason consists of two

elements: adherence to the enemy and rendering him aid and comfort." And then there's a whole list of legal cites. Now the interesting thing is, Black's Law Dictionary says that treason consists of two elements: adhering to the enemy and, of course, rendering him aid and comfort. Now without going into details, I'm just going to tell you there are actually different kinds of treason that are referred to in our legal system. There is constructive treason, there is high treason, there is petit treason, there is misprision of treason, and there is treason felony. So I wanted to give you this kind of a summary of a historical and legal background and make application to the Word of God and let you see what is actually happening when we look at certain passages of the Bible. Now when you look at 1 Kings chapter 16, we're reading about Zimri. And it said very clearly in 1 Kings chapter 16 and verse 20: "Now the rest of the acts of Zimri and his treason that he wrought, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?"

Zimri's Treason

Now, in order to really understand this passage, you would really need to read all of chapter 16, especially verses 8 through 20. And I'm just going to try to summarize all this for you, because in this passage, you're going to find that Zimri murdered Elah the king. Now, it is true that Elah was an ungodly and wicked king. In fact, the truth of the matter is all the kings in the northern kingdom were wicked and ungodly. So what Elah was doing was he was drinking himself drunk. And of course, Zimri then seized the opportunity and murdered the king. Now we need to ask this question: what made Zimri's acts unlawful and treasonous? Certainly, murder is wrong. Self-will is wrong. And I'm probably sure that after reading the Scriptures, Zimri had no other motive other than to elevate himself and to usurp authority and to institute himself as king. In all probability, he had absolutely no desire to serve the people and certainly had no desire to obey God and honor Him. So here's a man then who murdered a wicked, ungodly king. What made it treason? Well, here's the problem. The problem with the murder of Elah was that he did have some legitimacy to his rule. You see, Elah was the son of Baasha. Now, in order to understand the implications, you have to know a little bit of Bible history. And I'm just going to try to

summarize all of this rather than take the time to take you through every passage. You'll remember that in 1 Kings 11, God gave Jeroboam 10 of the 12 tribes. When you get to 1 Kings 12, Jeroboam decided, "If this people keep going down to Jerusalem, then their hearts are going to turn back to Rehoboam, and they're going to kill me." So in an act of self-preservation, in an act of trying to preserve his kingdom, what he did was he built two golden calves, put one in Bethel—I forget where he put the other one right now—and he said, "These be thy gods, O Israel, who brought thee up out of the land of Egypt." And he forced the people basically to worship those two golden calves. And of course, many of the people left. A lot of the Levites left at the same time.

Now, the interesting thing is God pronounces judgment against Jeroboam and against his house. When you get to 1 Kings chapter 14, God used Baasha then to destroy the house of Jeroboam. God raised Baasha up to execute His judgment. Now, remember, if you would, Elah was Baasha's son. So if you look in 1 Kings 16, verses 1 and 2, verse 2 is the pivotal verse: "Then the word of the Lord came to Jehu the son of Hanani against Baasha, saying, Forasmuch as I exalted thee out of the dust, and made thee prince over my people Israel, and thou hast walked in the way of Jeroboam, and hast made my people Israel to sin, to provoke me to anger with their sins; behold, I will take away the posterity of Baasha and the posterity of his house, and will make thy house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat." You have to remember, it was Baasha that destroyed Jeroboam. But note, if you would, in verse 2, God says, "Forasmuch as I exalted thee out of the dust, and made thee prince over my people Israel." So Baasha did have some authority in the sense and some legitimacy because God raised him up in order that he might execute judgment against Jeroboam. And Elah was therefore the son of Baasha, which would mean that he would have legitimacy as the heir of Baasha. May I remind you of Psalm 75, verses 5 and 6, where the Bible says, "Promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. But God is judge: He putteth down one, and setteth up another." You'll find the same truth in Daniel chapter 2 and verse 21. So God is judge, and God is the one who puts down kings, and God is the one who puts up kings.

Zimri was not chosen by God, nor was he chosen by the people. In verse 21, the Bible says, "Then were the people of Israel divided into two parts: half the people followed Tibni the son of Ginath, to make him king; and half followed Omri." Nobody was for Zimri. Verse 16 says, "And the people that were encamped heard say, Zimri hath conspired, and hath also slain the king: wherefore all Israel made Omri, the captain of the host, king over Israel that day in the camp." So Zimri had no following, no authority, no one for him. He simply murdered Elah and anointed himself as king. Compare Zimri and David. King Saul chased David and tried to kill him innumerable times, and David had opportunity to kill Saul over and over, and he refused. On one occasion, Abishai, one of David's warriors and friends, caught Saul asleep on the ground and said, "Let me smite him to the ground this once, just once. I will not smite a second time." In other words, "David, let me kill him. I'll make it clean, I'll make it quick, I'll make it sure." David said, "No. Who can stretch forth his hand against the Lord's anointed and be guiltless?" David would only say, "God's going to take care of this. Either he's going to die a natural death or he's going to descend into battle and he'll be killed. But I am not going to have the kingdom at the price of murder or rebellion. I can wait." So the attitude of David was totally different from the attitude of Zimri. Zimri conspired and murdered and stole that which neither God nor the people had given unto him. I know you have not had time to read this chapter, and we did not take the time to read the entire chapter.

Zimri reigned a total of seven days. In his last act of defiance, he burned the palace down with himself in it and killed himself as he destroyed the palace.

God also raised up Jehu, the son of Nimshi, to take care of Ahab and Jezebel and their house. Jezebel tried to use this incident of Zimri against Jehu. After Jehu had already killed Ahab, he went after Jezebel. The Bible tells us that Jezebel tired her head and looked out the window and said to Jehu, "Had Zimri peace, who slew his master?" In other words, "Jehu, you better learn a lesson from history." But there was a vast difference between what Zimri had done and what Jehu was doing. Jehu was actually anointed king by a prophet at God's direction. God told Jehu specifically to take care of

the house of Ahab. So Jehu had authority to execute the judgment of God where Zimri had absolutely none.

The contrast is seen very clearly between Zimri and David and Zimri and Jehu.

Turn over to 2 Kings 11 and begin reading with verse 1.

Athaliah's Usurpation and Cry of Treason

"And when Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, she arose and destroyed all the seed royal. But Jehosheba, the daughter of king Joram, sister of Ahaziah, took Joash the son of Ahaziah, and stole him from among the king's sons which were slain; and they hid him, even him and his nurse, in the bedchamber from Athaliah, so that he was not slain. And he was with her hid in the house of the Lord six years. And Athaliah did reign over the land." Athaliah murdered all her grandchildren except Joash. Jehosheba, wife of Jehoiada the priest, stole Joash and hid him in the temple to keep Athaliah from murdering him. For six years he was in the temple with Jehoiada, who taught and trained him. Who is Athaliah? Why would a grandmother murder her own grandchildren? Athaliah was the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. She married Jehoram, king of Judah. Their son was Ahaziah. Jehoram died, and Ahaziah died. Her husband and her son, who was king, had died. The Bible says in 2 Chronicles 21:6 that Athaliah and all this seed walked in the ways of the house of Ahab.

They were Baal worshipers, wicked. In 2 Kings 8:26, Athaliah is called the daughter of Omri. Actually, she was the granddaughter of Omri, but many times in the Bible, especially when someone acts like their grandfather, they were called the daughter or the son. Omri was the father of Ahab. So Athaliah had Omri, a murderer himself, as a grandfather, and Ahab and Jezebel as her parents. Since her husband and son were dead, she decided to take over the throne. She would murder all her grandchildren except Joash. Athaliah had absolutely no authority to rule, either from God or from the people. She simply stole the kingdom. Scripture declares in Isaiah 3:12 that when women and children rule, the land is under a curse. God said, "As for my people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O my people, they which lead thee cause thee to err, and

destroy the way of thy paths." So Athaliah now for six years is ruling and reigning over the land. For six years, Jehoiada is teaching and training Joash. When Joash turned seven years of age, they took him into the temple and had a coronation service. In this coronation service, they gave him a testimony, a copy of the law. They had the trumpeters. In the temple, Jehoiada had soldiers there guarding the king 24/7.

And he said, "Nobody's to come in, nobody's to go out. You guard him." And when you read in 2 Kings, also in the book of Chronicles, Jehoiada gave the soldiers weapons that were stored in the temple in the house of God. And so they were guarding him up until the time of that coronation. And of course, when the coronation took place, here he is by the pillar, as all the princes and kings were when they were crowned, and the trumpets were playing, and the people were shouting, "God save the king, God save the king." Evidently, Athaliah heard all the noise. And if you look in verse 14 again, "And when she looked..."—she came down. Well, look at verse 13: "And when Athaliah heard the noise of the guard and of the people, she came to the people into the temple of the Lord." Probably the only time she'd been there. "And when she looked, behold, the king stood by a pillar, as the manner was, and the princes and the trumpeters by the king. And all the people of the land rejoiced and blew with trumpets. And Athaliah rent her clothes and cried, Treason, treason." Wow.

The cry of "Treason, treason" was, first of all, a charge and an indictment against Jehoiada and the people for inaugurating and coronating the king as king. It was not only a charge and indictment, but the second thing it was, it was a cry to any who followed Athaliah to have Jehoiada and Joash and the people who followed them put to death. Why? Because it was treason. Treason was always punishable by death. Athaliah was still claiming at this point to have authority and jurisdiction as the queen and as the ruler, even though she had murdered to get the office, and even though she had stolen the office.

There is an application that we could make today. According to the Bible, stealing an office is treason. It's treason against God because it is a denial of His divine sovereignty and His divine providence. And it's treason against the people because the people never chose the ruler. There's an interesting thing about David. It is

true that God chose David to be king. But when you study, I think it's 2 Samuel 7 or 14, the people come together and make a covenant with David and choose him to be king. God chose David, but so did the people. And so here, Athaliah, she has stolen the office of authority and the office of the civil ruler, and now she has committed treason against God and also against the people.

So what Jehoiada did was he commanded those soldiers there "to have her forth without the temple and to slay her." Look down, if you would please, in verses 15 and 16. 2 Kings 11, verse 15: "But Jehoiada the priest commanded the captains of the hundreds, the officers of the host, and said unto them, Have her forth without the ranges: and him that followeth her kill with the sword. For the priest had said, Let her not be slain in the house of the Lord. And they laid hands on her; and she went by the way by the which the horses came into the king's house: and there was she slain."

Now, the interesting thing is this: what Jehoiada and the soldiers did was the highest form of justice. Yet, according to the usurper, Athaliah, it was the highest crime: treason, treason. Here's an interesting thing, and we need to watch this: those who are guilty of the vilest of the crimes are usually the first to charge others with that same vileness and that same crime, although the others are absolutely, totally innocent. And Jehoiada was innocent. The people who followed him were innocent. She was the guilty party. And yet at the same time, she is branding everyone else as being treasonous.

Many of you will probably remember when Patrick Henry spoke to the House of Burgesses in Virginia. He said, and I'm quoting, that some good American will do to George III what Brutus did to Caesar. If you remember what Brutus did to Caesar, he killed him. And when John Robinson, who was the Speaker of the House, heard that, he went into a rage and he accused Patrick Henry of treason. That is when Henry said, "If this be treason, then make the most of it." Obviously, it was not treason because George III and Parliament did not have any authority over the colonies because all of the colonies had a covenant, they had a constitution with the king, they were never under Parliament, and each colony had its own legislature. So obviously it was not treason, neither could it be treason whatsoever.

Governments Can Commit Treason

Most Christians only see treason as a crime against the state or the federal government. They do not see it as a crime against God. Treason first and foremost is a sin and a crime and rebellion against the sovereign God of heaven and earth, because God is the sovereign lawgiver. It's not just individuals that can be treasonous. Governments can be treasonous. Hold 2 Kings 11, but turn in your Bibles to Psalm 94, verses 20 and 21. Verse 20 is a question: "Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with thee, which frameth mischief by a law?"

Verse 21: "They gather themselves together against the soul of the righteous, and condemn the innocent blood." Return to the question: "Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with thee, which frameth mischief by a law?" First, it is a throne, meaning it has authority and jurisdiction—a civil government. Second, it is a throne of iniquity. Iniquity is another word for sin, so it is a wicked, ungodly civil government. The question: "Shall the throne of iniquity"—a wicked civil government—"have fellowship with thee?" That is, with God. Can a wicked, rebellious, ungodly, reprobate civil government have fellowship with God? The answer is no. Why? Verse 20: "which frameth mischief by a law." Mischief is another word for sin. The question in verse 20 is: "Shall a wicked civil government have fellowship with God, which makes sin legal?" Here is the sovereign God of heaven and earth issuing His law. The government turns around and says, "We don't want that law. We don't like that law. We're going to make our own law. And what God says is wrong, we're going to make it right."

It's not only treason against God, it's treason against the people. Verse 21: "They gather themselves together against the soul of the righteous, and condemn the innocent blood." Who is the "they"? We were just talking about the civil government—the throne of iniquity, the rulers there. They gather themselves together against the soul of the righteous and condemn the innocent blood. In other words, they're the ones who persecute and prosecute and put to death the innocent and the people of God. So very clearly, it's not just individuals who can be treasonous, it is governments as well.

Spiritual Treason: Idolatry and Lawlessness

Let me go a little bit farther. I want you to understand spiritual treason. We could go even farther and acknowledge that idolatry, in any shape, form, or fashion, is treason against God. Here's the problem: most professing Christians are not going to bow down to an idol. I cannot even imagine a professing Christian bowing down before a statue of Buddha or Baal. It's just not going to happen—not if they've got any biblical knowledge in any sense at all. But the same Christian who would never ever bow down to an idol will entertain wrong, wicked, and unbiblical thoughts and ideas and concepts about God in their minds. And here's what we have forgotten: idolatry begins in the mind, not in the workshop. Cars do not begin in the factory. Cars begin in the mind of an engineer who draws. And then once all the drawing is complete, it is shipped to the factory and the factory makes what is drawn.

Each one of you understands Romans chapter 1 is an indictment against the wicked for their idolatry. The Bible says: "Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, but neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened." The next verse says they "changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things." Where did it begin? It began in the mind. Anytime we entertain ideas in our mind that are contrary to God and unbiblical and unscriptural, it is a form of idolatry. If treason against the state or government is such a great and horrible crime—and it is—how much worse is treason against the sovereign God of heaven and earth who instituted civil government? If treason consists of betraying a state or government into the hands of a foreign power, how much worse is it to betray the kingdom of God into the hands of the wicked? If treason against an earthly government is to betray its power to the hands of the enemy, how much worse then is it to betray the kingdom of God into the hands of the enemy?

Here's what the Bible says in Proverbs 28, verse 28: "When the wicked rise, men hide themselves: but when they perish, the righteous increase." When the wicked rise, men hide themselves. And when you get to Proverbs 29, verse 2: "When the righteous are

in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn." Now, here's a good question. Since we're talking about treason, and since treason is a betrayal of government, how do we betray the kingdom of God into the hands of the wicked? How do we do that? Well, let me show you a very simple way. I want you to turn in your Bibles to 2 Kings chapter 17, 2 Kings 17. And I want you to look very carefully with me at verses 7 and 8. I'm going to show you this. But the simplest way, the simplest way to betray the kingdom of God into the hands of the enemy is by denying, denigrating, and deserting the law of God. Here it is, plain and simple.

2 Kings 17 verse 7: "For so it was, that the children of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God, which had brought them up out of the land of Egypt, from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and had feared other gods." Now, let me stop right there. Note, if you would, the Bible clearly says that the children of Israel sinned against the Lord, that is, they betrayed Him, they were traitors to Him, they forsook Him, and they feared other gods. What does it mean to fear other gods? And how was it seen that they feared other gods? Verse 8: "And walked in the statutes"—that is, the laws—"of the heathen, whom the Lord cast out from before the children of Israel, and of the kings of Israel, which they had made." And so what they did then, they denied and they deserted the law of God. And they started following the law of man, the law of the wicked, the law of the ungodly, the law of the unrighteous. You have to remember what the Bible said in Psalm 94 and verse 20: "Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with thee, which frameth mischief by a law?" And so what the people of Israel were doing was saying this: "We like these ungodly laws a whole lot better than we do these godly laws." And thus they forsook God's law and they began to follow man's law. So whenever we begin to deny and denigrate and desert the law of God, we're guilty of treason. We're guilty of treason.

1 Samuel chapter 8 makes that very clear. 1 Samuel chapter 8—not 1 Kings, but 1 Samuel chapter 8. Also 1 Samuel chapter 12 and verse 21.

There is another way we can betray the kingdom of God into the hands of the wicked: by denying, demoting, and dismissing Jesus

Christ as head of the church. The Bible says specifically that Jesus Christ is the head of the church, meaning He rules and reigns sovereignly over His church. Ephesians 1:22 says, "And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church." Colossians 1:18 says, "And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence." So the Bible speaks very clearly that Jesus Christ is the head of the church. How do we deny and demote Jesus Christ from being the head of the church? There are numerous ways, but one way is through church incorporation. Incorporating a church places the state as the head of the church and not Jesus Christ. Thus, you demote Christ and put the state over Jesus Christ. Any incorporated entity is a creation and a creature of the state. How does that happen? Let me show you how it happens legally and practically. If you want to refute what I just said, you need to read about State Street Baptist Church v. Marshall, a 1981 court decision. State Street Baptist Church was an older church; it had been in existence for 140 years. But State Street Baptist Church decided to incorporate. And they did. Later on, there was an argument in the church over money. Some people did not like how the money was being spent. And so some people then sued the church.

The church's position was this: "The state has no authority. The state has no jurisdiction over the church. We're independent. We're under the headship of Jesus Christ." The court ruled in favor of the people suing the church. The judge said: "The State Street Baptist Church has been in existence for over 140 years. In 1973, the membership organized a non-profit corporation. Once the church determined to enter into the realm of Caesar by forming a corporation, it was required to abide by the rules of Caesar, or in this case, the statutes of the Commonwealth of Kentucky." You know what the court said? "Jesus Christ is not your head. We are your head. You volunteered. You entered into the realm of Caesar willingly. And now you have to abide by the edicts of Caesar." So if we deny Jesus Christ as the head of the church, it has to be an act of treason. We are removing Him against the sovereign authority of God the Father and placing the state there.

Further, let me go on. Another reason is when you talk about 501(c)(3) tax-exempt churches. They, too, are state churches. Moreover, a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt church has bargained with the government through the IRS to receive a handful of measly benefits.

Now, if you would take the time to read IRS Publication 557, you will find this paragraph. In fact, two paragraphs. The first one is this one: "Churches. Although a church, its integrated auxiliaries, or a convention or association of churches is not required to file Form 1023 to be exempt from federal income tax or to receive tax-deductible contributions..." Let me just stop right there. What did the IRS just say? A church does not have to file any form to be tax-exempt or to receive tax-exempt deductions. None. So if we here at members of Freedom Baptist Church, and Steve gives the church $10,000 and he wants to deduct it from his income tax, and the IRS says, "Where is the tax-exempt number for Freedom Baptist Church?" We don't have one. Don't need one because we're tax immune. That's just what this just said. Now, listen, I'm going to read it again. I'm going to finish the paragraph: "Although a church, its integrated auxiliaries, or a convention or association of churches is not required to file Form 1023 to be exempt from federal income tax or to receive tax-deductible contributions, the organization may find it advantageous to obtain recognition of exemption." That's all. You're already exempt, but we'll recognize you if you apply. "In this event, you should submit information showing that your organization is a church, a synagogue, association or convention of churches, religious order or religious organization that is an integral part of a church and that it is engaged in carrying out the function of a church." Hmm.

Now, the publication just said you don't have to be a 501(c)(3) to be tax-exempt and receive tax-deductible contributions. You might find it advantageous. But when you sign on the dotted line to get those few little measly benefits, you have to remember this: there's another paragraph. Moreover, in order to receive a tax-exempt number, one of the requirements is that the practices and rituals associated with the organization's religious belief or creed are not illegal or contrary to clearly defined public policy. Abortion is public policy. Sodomy is public policy. Socialism, fascism, Marxism, progressivism, and communism are all now public policy. So when

you sign to get that, you are agreeing that you're not going to be speaking out against any public policy that the government says, "This is what we're going to do."

The truth is, incorporated churches are subject to total governmental control: whom they may hire—that's why they can tell some of them they have to hire the Sodomites or LGBT—what they may and may not teach and preach, they cannot conflict with public policy or assault the hearer's sense of mental well-being, self-esteem, or sexual orientation. The IRS prohibits such organizations from carrying on propaganda or otherwise attempting to influence legislation. This prohibition extends not only to the endorsement of a political candidate, but also to any other attempts to influence legislation, including taking a public stand against such government-protected abominations as abortion and homosexuality.

Allegiance and Application

So treason then is the offense of attempting by overt acts to overthrow the government of the state to which the offender owes allegiance, or betraying the state into the hands of a foreign power. As a child of God, to whom do you owe allegiance? First and foremost, you owe allegiance to the kingdom of God. How does one overthrow the government of the state to whom he would owe some allegiance? By forsaking, breaking, transgressing, and repudiating the laws of the state. How does one betray and overthrow the kingdom of God? The answer is the same: by forsaking, breaking, transgressing, and repudiating the law of God. You have to remember this: a king rules by his law. And it is treason against God to forsake His law-word. Subversion and rejection of God's law is an act of treason.

Now let me make some applications and tie these things together. Listen carefully. First, Zimri murdered a king whose reign had been appointed by God. He did so out of covetousness and willful malice, without divine or human authority, because he was a murderer and a thief. Jehoiada, on the other hand, did not rebel against God or against God's ordained authority. What Jehoiada did was resist a murderer and a thief. Although Athaliah, the reigning power at that time, attributed his actions to being treasonous and him being a

traitor, his actions did not constitute treason, but rather justice. So if you don't get anything else today, get this: a simple biblical principle. It is not treason, and it is not rebellion, to resist an unlawful government or an unlawful individual who is claiming authority that does not have that authority. Where there is no lawful authority, where there is no lawful power, it is not rebellion, it is resistance. It certainly is not treason. Black's Law Dictionary again defines treason as "the offense of attempting by overt acts to overthrow the government of the state to which the offender owes allegiance, or by betraying the state into the hands of a foreign power." So ask yourself: to whom do you owe allegiance? As a Christian, to whom do you owe allegiance? Let me answer that two ways. First, Godward. Our primary allegiance, our primary obligation and duty, is to God and His kingdom. You remember Philippians chapter 3, where the Apostle Paul said, "For our conversation is in heaven." And in Acts chapter 5, when those rulers told the apostles they could not preach and teach in the name of Jesus Christ, Peter and the others answered, "We ought to obey God rather than men." So obviously and clearly, Godward, our allegiance is first and foremost and primarily to Him. Secondly, what do we owe manward? Do we owe allegiance to a bureaucracy, a democracy, or one-world government? How about a United Nations one-world government? The answer is, manwardly speaking, we owe allegiance to a constitutional republic that was handed down to us by our forefathers who gave their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor.

That's who we owe allegiance to, manward. The government that our illustrious civil rulers owe allegiance to—it's not the oil cartel, the Zionist lobby, big pharma, the CFR, the Bilderbergers, the UN, or the one-world government. They owe allegiance to the constitutional republic to which they took an oath to uphold, as found in Article 6, Clause 2 and Clause 3. Clause 2: "This Constitution, and the laws of the United States which shall be made in pursuance thereof, and all treaties made, or which shall be made, under the authority of the United States..." What is the authority of the United States? It's the Constitution. "...shall be the supreme law of the land; and the judges in every state shall be bound thereby, anything in the constitution or laws of any state to the contrary notwithstanding." Clause 3: "The

senators and representatives before mentioned, and the members of the several state legislatures, and all executive and judicial officers, both of the United States and of the several states, shall be bound by oath or affirmation to support this Constitution." So every senator, representative, judge, and officer of any nature has taken an oath to uphold the Constitution of the United States, and not to do so is treason.

Because it is denying the states the republican form of government demanded in the Constitution, and it is destroying the Constitution, which is the glue that holds the states together. So if treason consists of betraying the state into the hands of a foreign power, who has done so? Who may do that most effectively? The answer is civil government, or the politicians, or the leaders thereof.

Has America been betrayed and handed over to a foreign power monetarily and economically? Yes. Politically? Yes. Is not an attempt to subvert, destroy, and mutilate American sovereignty treason? Is not an attempt to destroy the constitutional republic treason? Yes. Do the citizens of America owe allegiance to a bastardized, bureaucratized, and democratized one-world government, or to the constitutional republic which our forefathers gave us? It is not treason to expose wickedness or to expound the truth. It is right to do so. If speaking the truth and teaching right history is treason, then like Patrick Henry said, "Make the most of it." Truth is still truth, error is still error, right is still right, wrong is still wrong. There will probably be people who get upset over what I am preaching today, but it is truth, and you can deny it all you want until you read the Word of God.

Conclusion and Call to Repentance

Tyrants have risen and fallen. Empires have emerged and faded away. But the sovereign God of heaven and earth and His truth shall endure forever. I want to end with a quote by Matthew Henry: "When men forsake God, they will be left to plague each other. Proud, aspiring men ruin each other. Omri struggled with Tibni for some years. Though we do not always understand the rules by which God governs nations and individuals in His providence, we may learn useful lessons from the history before us. When tyrants

succeed each other, and massacres, conspiracies, and civil wars, we may be sure that the Lord has a controversy with the people for their sins. They are loudly called to repent and reform. Omri made himself infamous by his wickedness. Many wicked men have been men of might and renown and have built cities, and their names are found in history. But they have no name in the Lamb's Book of Life." I would much rather have my name in the Lamb's Book of Life than to have a bridge or road named after me or some building.

Treason is first and foremost a sin against God. You cannot sin against an individual without first sinning against God. If I murdered Steve, I would have already sinned against God in my mind and heart in determining to do it. Treason is a crime that merits death, and God is the sovereign judge of all the earth. Consider how we as Christians have betrayed Him and His kingdom into the hands of the wicked. As Matthew Henry said, when tyrants succeed one another and there are nothing but wars, troubles, and heartaches, God is calling us loudly to repent and reform. That is what we need to hear: repentance. Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee this day. We thank You for Your Word and truth. We acknowledge, Lord, that we have sinned against Thee, grieved Thee, and betrayed Thee as Judas did in many varying ways. Forgive us our sins. Call us to repentance. Quicken us, Lord, that we may call upon Thy name. Turn us, O Lord, and we shall be turned. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 34

You Do Have A Choice

November 11, 2021

Introduction: The Reality of Daily Choices

The message is in two parts, but I am going to combine them and bring forth one message. I will very quickly go over the first message, which I should have preached last week but was unable to preach because I was not here. The title of the message is “You Do Have a Choice.”

We are not going to be able to read all of chapters 13 and 14 of Numbers, but everyone should be familiar with this passage. It is when the spies are sent out and come back, and the people rebel against God because ten of the spies bring up an evil report on the land.

In Numbers chapter 13, verse 17: “And Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan and said unto them, Get you up this way southward and go up into the mountain and see the land, what it is, and the people that dwell therein, whether they be strong or weak, few or many, and what the land is that they dwell in, whether it be good or bad, and what cities they be that dwell in, whether in tents or

in strongholds, and what the land is, whether it be fat or lean, whether it be wood therein or not, and be ye of good courage, and bring of the fruit of the land."

Now the time was of the first ripe grapes. So they went up and searched the land from the wilderness of Zin unto Rehob, and came to Hamath. And they ascended by the south and came unto Hebron, where Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmai, the children of Anak, were.

Now Hebron was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt. And they came into the brook of Eshkol and cut down from thence a branch with one cluster of grapes, and they bare it between two upon a staff, and they brought of the pomegranates and the figs. The place was called the brook of Eshkol because of the cluster of grapes which the children of Israel cut down from thence. And of course they returned from searching after forty days.

There is such an emphasis today upon choice that oftentimes that which is absolutely necessary and important falls by the wayside. Everyone has heard the chant, "My body, my choice," and that chant is quite acceptable as long as one is advocating aborticide, which is murder. However, you apply that to a refusal to accept an experimental gene therapy shot, and all of a sudden, it's no longer a valid chant. And of course, then, when you no longer submit to tyranny but choose freedom, it's no longer a valid chant. And certainly, when we choose independence over dependence, it would certainly not be a valid chant.

The truth of the matter is that we do indeed choose every day. We choose to get up in the morning. We choose what we're going to wear. We choose what we're going to eat. I oftentimes jokingly say, "Sometimes I'll wake up grumpy. Other times I'll let her sleep." But the truth is we do even choose our attitudes. We can choose to see the glass half full or half empty. Truthfully, attitude is very important because if I view the glass as half empty, I should be thanking the Lord for what I've already consumed. If I view it as half full, I should be thanking Him for what I have left. So we do choose whether to be happy or sad or to praise or to sulk, and we are choosing every day to either walk biblically or simply walk in the flesh.

When you look in Numbers chapters 13 and 14, you find that these people did indeed make some very poor choices. In Joshua chapter 24, verses 14 and 15, Joshua told the people, "Choose you this day whom you shall serve, whether you're going to serve the gods on the other side of the flood, or you're going to serve the gods of this land." But he said, "As for me and my house, we're going to serve the Lord."

And so the truth of the matter is that we as believers do have a choice. Certainly, we must choose to obey Him and honor Him.

Choose Between Fear and Faith

We must choose either to walk in fear or in faith. Fear and faith are absolutely opposite. You cannot walk in fear and faith at the same time. You will walk in faith, or you will walk in fear; it is impossible to walk in both. The Bible also tells us in 1 John 4:18, “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casteth out fear, because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.” Just as faith is the opposite of fear, biblical love is also the opposite of fear.

When we come to Numbers 13, Moses has sent out the twelve spies. They have viewed the land and brought back a report. Joshua and Caleb bring back a good report, while the other ten bring forth an evil report. They discover who is in the land and who is not. In Deuteronomy 1, Moses summarizes Numbers 13 and 14. Notice verse 21: “Behold, the Lord thy God hath set the land before thee. Go up and possess it, as the Lord God of thy fathers hath said unto thee. Fear not, neither be thou discouraged.”

“And you came near unto me, every one of you, and said, We will send men before us, and they shall search out the land, and bring us word up again, by which way we must go up, and in what cities we shall come. And the saying pleased me well. And I took twelve men of you, one of a tribe.” In other words, they were to search out the land, bring back the best route, and describe which cities they were to come into first.

Now notice verse 24: “And they turned and went up into the mountain and came to the valley of Eshkol, and searched it out. And they took the fruit of the land in their hands, and brought it down unto us, and brought us word again, and said, It is a good land which

the Lord our God doth give us. Notwithstanding, he said, you would not go up, but rebelled against the commandment of the Lord your God."

Moses sent them, and they came back saying, "Look, we're not going to do this." The reason was the children of Anak. Numbers 13:31 says, "But the men that went up with him said, We may not be able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we."

They brought up an evil report of the land which they had searched unto the children of Israel, saying, "The land through which we have gone to search it, it is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof. And all the people that we saw in it are men of great stature. And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants. And we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight."

Notice here that this fear was truly based upon their own forgetfulness. In order to fear, they had to forget. They had to forget all the miracles in the land of Egypt, the crossing of the Red Sea, how God destroyed Pharaoh and his entire army, and the leadership of God as He led them out by a pillar of fire by night and a pillar of cloud by day.

In Deuteronomy 4:9, the Bible says, "Only take ye to thyself and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget what thine eyes have seen." God says, "Don't you forget this. You have seen my power and you've seen my grace." Then, in Deuteronomy 6:12, He says, "Beware that thou forget not the Lord, who brought thee up out of the land of Egypt." David said in Psalm 77:10, "This is mine infirmity, but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High." In other words, David said, "My infirmity is I have forgotten." This was their infirmity: they forgot.

Let me put it very plainly: forgetfulness produces fear, especially when we forget the Lord, His word, and His promises. When we fear, we are looking at ourselves, our strengths, circumstances, and situations; we are simply not looking at the Lord. That is all there is to it. These people were beginning to walk in fear.

In verse 33, he said, "And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants. And we were in our own sight as

grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight." The Israelites viewed themselves as insects, as grasshoppers. A grasshopper can easily be stepped on and mashed or caught. In other words, a grasshopper has absolutely no strength to resist a man whatsoever. They were viewing themselves as absolutely helpless before the Anakims. They said, "That's what we were in our sight," and then, "So were we in their sight."

My question would be, how did they know? Did they ask the Anakims how they viewed them? No, of course not. That was merely their assessment of the situation because they were living in fear.

How can we tell whether fear is controlling or manipulating us? First, understand that fear belittles one's strength and views oneself as helpless and hopeless. They said they were as grasshoppers. It is true that the children of Israel had strength, and it is true that they had the Lord on their side. Yet it was not merely one tribe, two tribes, or three tribes that they viewed as helpless and hopeless. It was all the tribes—all 600,000 fighting men who came out of the land of Egypt. They all viewed themselves as absolutely helpless and hopeless.

Their attitude was this: It is useless to resist. It is useless to fight. We might as well quit, give up, and accept the consequences. They were grasshoppers in their own sight, and therefore grasshoppers in their enemies' sight as well. They based their own estimate of themselves and gave that estimate to their enemies. Fear always magnifies one's weaknesses and the strengths of the enemy.

You talk about the mind playing tricks upon you. That is exactly what happened here. Second, fear also belittles and disbelieves the promises of God. It casts doubt and dispersion and unbelief upon God—His person, His power, His position, and His love. The truth is that our unbelief is indeed the origin of our fear.

"And all the congregation lifted up their voice and cried, and the people wept that night. And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron. And the whole congregation said of them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt. Or would God we had died in this wilderness? And wherefore hath the Lord brought us into this land to fall by the sword that our wives and our

children should be a prey? Were it not better for us to return into Egypt?" And they said one to another, "Let us make a captain and let us return into Egypt."

Fear Leads to Blasphemy and Rebellion

They did not believe God. They said, "God brought us out here to kill us. God brought us out here to drop us. God brought us out here to destroy us." In other words, they were casting pure blasphemy upon God.

You remember the passage in Exodus chapter 14 and verse 13, when Pharaoh was behind them, the sea was in front of them, and the wilderness was on each side of them. They had no place to go. Here is what Moses said: "Stand still, and fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will show you today. For the Egyptians which you have seen, you will never see again."

Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord. The truth of the matter is this: if you fear, you are not exercising faith. If you are exercising faith, then you are not fearing. Fear should be something completely unnatural for the child of God. How can I say that? There are two passages: Romans 8 and verse 15, and 2 Timothy chapter 1 and verse 7. Look in Romans 8 and verse 15.

Romans 8:15 says, "For you have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the spirit of adoption whereby we cry, Abba, Father." We have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear. We have received the spirit of adoption whereby we cry, Abba, or Papa, Father.

Obviously, God has not given us a spirit of fear. Second Timothy 1:7 makes that exceedingly plain: "For God hath not given us a spirit of fear but of power and of love and of a sound mind." Whenever you are governed by the spirit of fear, it is not of God and it is not from God, for God does not give us the spirit of fear. It should be totally and completely unnatural for the child of God to fear. Fear is not our default mechanism whatsoever.

Thirdly, fear will allow you to see the fruits of the land, but it will stop you from enjoying and possessing them. Remember, they brought back one cluster of grapes on a pole between two men

carrying it on their shoulders. They saw the fruits of the land, but fear kept them from going into it.

We need to read through the Bible and underline all the verses that say, “Fear not.” Fear will allow you to dream. Fear will allow you to wish, fear will allow you to daydream, fear will allow you to pant at the fruits of victory, but fear will stop you from possessing because when you fear, you refuse to act. You can't act on faith, you can't act in obedience because you are afraid.

That's how most people live today. Let me give you a sharp contrast between faith and fear. Ten of the spies brought back an evil report, while two brought back a good report. Joshua and Caleb were the faithful spies. First, understand that faith does believe in one's abilities and the strengths that God has given. If you look at Numbers 13 and verse 30, look what the scripture says: “And Caleb stilled the people before Moses and said, Let us go up at once and possess it, for we are well able to overcome it.”

Faith Believes God's Promises and Sees Opposition as Opportunity

If we have faith, you believe in the abilities and in the strength that God has given you. It's not that you're trusting in yourself. You're trusting in God who gave you that strength and who gave you that ability. In other words, the statement by Caleb here is much like the statement by Paul in Philippians 4:13 when he said, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

He said, "We're quite capable of doing this." You have to remember that James 1:8 says a double-minded man is unstable in all of his ways. Secondly, understand that faith always sees the promises of God, and faith believes that opposition is nothing more than an opportunity for God to prove Himself.

“And Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, which were of them that searched the land, rent their clothes. And they spake unto all the company of the children of Israel, saying, The land which we pass through to search it is an exceeding good land. If the Lord delight in us, then he will bring us into this land and give it us, a land which floweth with milk and honey. Only rebel ye not

against the Lord, neither fear ye the people of the land, for they are bread for us. For their defense is departed from them, and the Lord is with us, fear them not."

Note something: In faith, the focus is not upon the enemy, his might, or his multitude. It is upon God and His grace and mercy. He said, "If the Lord delight in us, then he's going to bring us into this land." That's all there is to it. God will bring us into this land. Did the children of Israel have to fight? Yes.

The Bible says in Psalm 44, “We've heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us what work thou didst in their days, in times of old, how thou didst drive out the heathen with thy hand, and plantest them, how thou didst afflict the people and cast them out, for they got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arms save them, but thou, O God.” Did they have to fight? Yes, but whose sword was it? It was God's sword. It was God's power.

The truth of the matter is this: when you look at verse 9, that is the proper attitude of faith: “Only rebel not against the Lord, neither fear ye the people of the land, for they are bread for us. Note, if you would, their defense is departed from them, and the Lord is with us: fear them not.” Dr. Bob Jones Sr. used to say, “The doors of opportunity swing on the hinges of opposition.” Whenever there is an opportunity, there is always opposition. The Apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians chapter 16 and verse 9, “For a great door and effectual is open unto me, and there are many adversaries.” The door of opportunity swings on the hinges of opposition.

Now, I want to give you a quote before I go on to my next point, and that is this. We are being bombarded today with fear on every hand. Most of it's from the government. What's not from the government is from the medical establishment. We're afraid of death. We're afraid of disease. We're afraid of failure. We're afraid of everything. People who are fearful are very easily manipulated and controlled.

Martin Luther lived during the bubonic plague in the 1500s. I want you to listen to what he wrote. Here it is. "I shall ask God mercifully to protect us. Then I will fumigate, purify the air,

administer medicine and take medicine. I shall avoid places and persons where my presence is not needed in order not to become contaminated and then perchance inflict and pollute others and so cause their death as a result of my negligence. Now listen, if God should wish to take me, he will surely find me. But I've done what he's expected of me and so I'm not responsible for either my own death or the death of others. If my neighbor needs me, however, I shall not avoid places or persons, but will go freely.

This is a God-fearing faith because it is neither brash nor foolhardy and does not tempt God. In other words, we must not live in fear. We should do whatever is necessary and wise to protect ourselves and our families, but we must not let that interfere with our ministry or with obeying God. We must do what God commands. Thus, we have to choose whether we will walk in fear or in faith.

Choose Between Truth and Error

Second, we have to choose whether we will walk in truth or error. We see this in Numbers 13 and 14. We must choose whether we will walk in truth or a lie, in biblical truth or humanistic error, and in biblical doctrine or heresy. You have to choose whether or not you are going to walk in truth or a lie. You have to choose whether or not you are going to walk in biblical truth or humanistic error. You are going to have to choose whether or not you are going to walk in biblical doctrine or walk in heresy. In 3 John verse 4, the Apostle John said, “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in the truth.”

Truth is vitally important. Truth is what is to govern and to guide our lives. The Word of God is truth. John 17:17 says, “Sanctify them through thy truth, thy word is truth.” The Lord Jesus Christ is truth: “I am the way, the truth, and the life.”

No man cometh to the Father except by me.” John 14:6. And then, of course, the Spirit of God is called also the Spirit of truth in John 14 and verse 17. So walking in truth, then, involves walking in light of the Word of God, in obedience to the Son of God, and being led by the Spirit of God.

Caleb stilled the people before Moses and said, “Let us go up at once and possess it, for we are well able to overcome it.” Then we read how he said it. They were talking about the giants there, the sons of Anak.

Now, let me ask you a question. Who spoke the truth? Was it Joshua and Caleb, or was it the 10 spies? Joshua and Caleb were the only two that spoke the truth. They said, “We’re able to come up and defeat these people.” The other said, “No, we’re not able.” So here’s my question: Did the people believe the truth, or did they believe a lie?

The answer is that they believed the lies. Why? Let us go back to the first point: they were already walking in fear. They did not wish to face their enemies or fight. Fear prevailed in their lives, and they not only believed the lies, but also denied the truth. Whenever you believe a lie, you deny the truth.

Look in Numbers chapter 14. When you believe a lie, you deny the truth. Verse 1 says: “And all the congregation lifted up their voice and cried, and the people wept that night. And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron. And the whole congregation said to them, Would God we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would God we had died in this wilderness! And wherefore hath the Lord brought us into this land to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? Were it not better for us to return into Egypt? And they said one to another, Let us make a captain and let us return into the land of Egypt.”

They were denying God's promises and God's power. They chose to believe a lie and those who spake against God—those who were fearful and cowards. They chose to believe that God could not and would not deliver them. They chose to believe that they had it better back in Egypt in slavery. They chose to believe that their will and their way was better than God's, and that what they needed to do was to point in a captain and return into slavery.

So you have two men speaking the truth and ten men speaking lies. There were only twelve spies, which means there were six times more lies being broadcast than truth. Everybody has heard the old adage, "A lie will go around the world while truth is putting her boots

on." Another says, "If you tell a lie loud enough and long enough, most people will believe it's the truth."

That is what has basically happened in this country. We, like Old Testament Israel, have believed lies and refused the truth. Very few people today really entertain biblical concepts and compare what is being said with the Word of God. We have been purposefully misinformed and propagandized, and we have absorbed humanistic error. We have been seduced, led astray, and drawn from truth into error. Hardly anyone reads, researches, or searches for truth anymore. We listen to the mainstream media, and most people believe everything they hear. If you change channels, you will hear the same thing on every television channel. Isn't that amazing?

Let me give you three quotes that I came across this past week. “The terms propaganda, misinformation, and fake news often overlap in meaning. They are used to refer to a range of ways in which sharing information causes harm, intentionally or unintentionally, usually in relation to the promotion of a particular moral or political cause or point of view. It is possible to separate out three clearly different uses of information which fall into this category.”

Misinformation is false information shared with no intention of causing harm. Disinformation is false information shared intentionally to cause harm. Malinformation is true information shared intentionally to cause harm. So you have misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation.

Robert Black wrote, “In dictatorships, the media is controlled by the state. In democracies, the media is controlled by wealthy individuals with political affiliations. Objective media and journalists simply do not exist in the mainstream.”

“One of the greatest responsibilities for the people of our time is to accept everything that he hears in the pro-government media as a lie and to investigate the truth from independent sources personally.” Everything you hear, accept it as a lie.

I remember years ago, when I had television and listened to the news, discovering that if I believed exactly the opposite of what was reported, I would come closer to the truth. That certainly is true.

Truth is still truth even when it is rejected and refused. Joshua and Caleb were right; they were telling the truth.

The people did not believe them, but the truth was still the truth. There are so many voices today and so much ranting and raving. How do we know whom to believe? We believe those whose reports are in line with the Word of God. Everything else is a lie. Joshua and Caleb were the only two who brought back a true report. Their truth was based upon the promises of God and the Word of God. Caleb stilled the people and said, "Let us go up at once and possess it; for we are quite capable of taking and overcoming."

Numbers 14:7 says, "And they spake unto all the company of the children of Israel, saying, The land which we pass through to search it is a good land, if the Lord delight in us, then he will bring us into this land and give us a land which is full of milk and honey." Let us go get it. That was the truth, in spite of the lies, the fear, and the rebellion.

The promises of God were on the side of the Israelites. God had never promised to help the Canaanites or the Anakims. All the promises and all the power were on Israel's side. That was the truth, and yet they chose to walk in a lie.

Deuteronomy 7:17 says, "If thou shalt say in thine heart, These nations are more than I, how can I dispossess them? Thou shalt not be afraid of them, but shall well remember what the Lord thy God did unto Pharaoh and all Egypt." Remember I told you fear originates in our own forgetfulness? He said you should well remember this. "The great temptations which thine eyes saw, and the signs, and the wonders, and the mighty hand, and the stretched out arm whereby the Lord thy God brought thee out, so shall the Lord thy God do unto all the people of whom thou art afraid. Moreover, the Lord thy God will send the hornet among them, until they that are left and hide themselves from thee be destroyed. Thou shalt not be affrighted at them, for the Lord thy God is among you a mighty God and terrible.

"And the Lord thy God will put out those nations before thee by little and little. Thou mayest not consume them at once, lest the beasts of the field increase upon thee. But the Lord thy God shall

deliver them unto thee, and shall destroy them with a mighty destruction until they be destroyed. And he shall deliver their kings unto thine hand, and thou shalt destroy their name from under heaven. There shall no man be able to stand before thee until thou have destroyed them."

Let me show you something vitally important. When you get to Numbers 13 and 14, the people were about to go into Canaan land, but they rebelled against the Lord. They feared, disbelieved, and believed a lie. Consequently, they had to wander forty years in the wilderness until all the fighting men died. Forty years later, all of the children whom they said would be a prey were the ones who went in and conquered the land. Let this sink in. The ones who went in to conquer the land did not have any more promises or any more power. There were no additional promises given and no additional power given.

In other words, the original group had the same promise and the same power available through God. One group feared and believed a lie, while the other believed and went in and conquered. Hebrews 3:17–19 says, "Here it is."

"But with whom was he grieved forty years? Was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness? And whom swear he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believe not? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief." Notice, if you would, he was grieved with them for forty years, until their carcasses fell in the wilderness.

It does matter whether or not you believe the truth. It does matter whether or not you act upon the truth. It does matter to whom you listen. If you will not walk in the truth, you will walk in a lie. Anytime you believe a lie, you deny the truth; and anytime you deny the truth, you believe a lie. As a child of God, you can choose whether or not to walk in truth or a lie. You can choose whether to walk in fear or faith.

Choose Between Praise and Provocation

Here is the third thing that I want to point out: We will choose either to walk in praise or in provocation. Praise should always be in our hearts and on our lips. In fact, we have been given a command in

Hebrews 13 and verse 15: "By him, that is by the Lord Jesus Christ, therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name." By him, therefore, let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually. That is the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.

When situations and circumstances come our way that we do not desire and do not understand, we have a unique opportunity. We can either praise the Lord and ask for His mercy and grace to give us wisdom and insight, or we can whine, complain, bellyache, gripe, and provoke God. I would not have chosen for Alice to have been sick. I would not have chosen to have come down with sinus.

But I have news for you: I am thankful that God has been gracious and kind to spare us this long. I am thankful, and I praise Him for every little bit of progress Alice makes and every little bit of progress that I make. I am thankful.

SCRIPTURE READING - Numbers 14:11-24 (KJV)

> "And the Lord said unto Moses, How long will this people provoke me? And how long will it be ere they believe me? For all of the signs which I have shown among them."
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> God says they provoke me, they do not believe me, and I have demonstrated my power. Here is how provoked he was: "I will smite them with the pestilence and disinherit them, will make of thee a greater nation and mightier than they."
>
> "And Moses said unto the Lord, Then the Egyptians shall hear it. For thou broughtest up this people in thy might from among them, and they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land. For they have heard that thou, the Lord, art among his people, that the Lord art seen face to face, that the cloud standeth over them, and that thou goest before them by daytime in a pillar of a cloud, and a pillar of fire by night. Now, if thou shalt kill all this people as one man, then the nations which have heard the fame of thee will speak, saying, Because the Lord was not able to bring this people into the land which he sware to them, therefore he slain them in the wilderness. And now I beseech thee, let the power of my Lord be great according as thou hast spoken, saying, The Lord is longsuffering and of great mercy,

> forgiving iniquity, transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation. Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of thy mercy, as thou hast forgiven this people from Egypt even until now."
>
> And the Lord said, "I have pardoned according to thy word. But as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord. Now watch. Because all those men which have seen my glory and my miracles, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tempted me now these ten times, and have not hearkened unto my voice, surely they shall not see the land which I swear unto their fathers. Neither shall any of them that provoked me see it."

But my servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him, follow me fully, him will I bring into the land where he went, and his seed shall possess it. Now, note in verse 11: "How long will those people provoke me?" Then, in verse 23, he talks about being provoked again. The Hebrew word for provoked is na'ats, and it literally means to despise, to condemn, to provoke, to abhor, to blaspheme, and to spurn.

So provoking God is blaspheming God. It is condemning God, spurning God, abhorring God, and despising God. This is why we have to choose whether or not we are going to walk in praise or provocation. They could have taken the attitude, "Giants. Well, the bigger they are, the harder they fall." But they did not take that attitude.

In Hebrews 3, verse 15, we read: "While it is said today, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts as in the provocation." That whole period is called the provocation. "For some, when they had heard, did provoke: howbeit not all that came out of Egypt by Moses." "But with whom was he grieved forty years? Was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcases fell in the wilderness? And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief."

You may ask, “What in the world has that got to do with me?” May I remind you that in 1 Corinthians chapter 10, the Apostle takes everything that happened to Israel and applies it to the Corinthian Church. He says, “Everything that happened to them happened for our example, upon whom the ends of the world are come.”

After his warning, look in chapter 4, verses 1 and 2: “Let us therefore fear, lest a promise being left of us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.” In other words, do not act as they did in the wilderness. “For unto us was the gospel preached as well as unto them. But the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.” They heard the truth, but the truth was not mixed with faith; it was mixed with fear. They believed a lie instead of the truth. Consequently, instead of praising God, they provoked God.

When you walk in fear, you will be walking in a lie. When you walk in fear and in a lie, you will walk in a provoking manner toward God. It is only faith that will allow you to walk in truth and praise God.

Applications: Making Daily Choices to Honor God

You do have a choice. You can choose whether or not you will walk in fear or in faith. It is true that many times we do not know the answers. Experiences come upon us that we do not necessarily like. But fear sometimes catches our hearts and gets into our minds. What are we to do? We are to say, “Lord, I refuse that fear. That fear is wicked. It is ungodly. It is unbiblical. You have not given me the spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of sound mind. Lord, I refuse it.”

I will walk in faith. I believe Your Word. It is like that passage in Isaiah 12, where the Word of God says, “I will trust and not be afraid.” When our oldest daughter was two or three years old, she was afraid of the dark. I taught her that verse. During the night, you could hear her get up and walk in the dark toward the light switch, saying, “I will trust and not be afraid. I will trust and not be afraid,” until she found the switch. That is what we can do until we find the light switch. We can trust and not be afraid.

Have you considered that all your choices should be made in light of the Word of God? You choose whether to walk in fear or faith, in lie or truth, and in a praising manner or a provoking manner. We also need to consider how much needless trouble and heartache we bring upon ourselves by failing to walk in a pleasing manner before God.

There were over 600,000 men who came out of Egypt, not counting the women and children, and they died in forty years. I once figured how many died each year, month, and day. Do you realize? There were multitudes of people dying every day. Not a family was missed; somebody died. I have often thought, What did they do about funerals? Maybe that is why it took them forty years.

I am simply saying that, usually, when we sin against God and are disobedient, dig ourselves into a hole, and think that somehow, if we could just stay in that hole without repenting or changing, things would be different, we are only going to dig ourselves deeper. We can save ourselves an awful lot of heartache by saying, "Lord, enable me to walk in faith, not in fear; in truth, not a lie; praising, and not provokingly."

You also have to choose each day whom you are going to serve. When you wake up every morning, before you get out of bed, say, "Lord, this day I choose to serve Thee. I choose to worship Thee. I choose to honor Thee. I choose to walk biblically and scripturally. I ask You, Father, to make me holy, godly, and obedient; give me wisdom and insight; lead me, guide me, and direct me. I present my body unto Thee a living sacrifice. Help me, Lord, to walk pleasing unto Thee today."

That is my choice. I want to honor Him and obey Him. He tells us to make sure that there is not a promise we fail to receive because of unbelief. Do not walk in fear; walk in faith. Do not walk in a lie; walk in the truth. Do not walk in provocation; walk in praise.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank You for Your Word and Your truth, and we ask, Lord, that You would make us holy, godly, and obedient. Father, give us Your wisdom and direction. We ask in Thy holy and blessed name. Amen.

CHAPTER 35

My Worst Enemy

February 3, 2023

Introduction: Everyone Has Enemies

Romans chapter 7, verses 18 through 25. The messages I have for the next two Sundays are very, very important. I would trust that each one would be able to really hear and grasp what I want to convey. I think we're living in desperate times, and these are going to be desperate messages.

The apostle said, "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members."

"O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with

the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin."

Enemies. The truth of the matter is everyone has enemies. An enemy is an adversary. Today I want to tell you about my worst enemy. I've had a number of enemies over the years, but one stands out above them all. Like many people, I have been slandered, threatened, lied about, and blackballed.

The sad part is, most of that has been from Christians, especially other pastors as well. Most people cannot really believe it, but it is true: preachers can be just as unkind, unloving, uncaring, and downright hateful as any other individual. Moreover, usually what it is over is that they are defending their positions. If you don't agree with their positions and determinations, then they are going to act very tyrannical and hateful toward you as well.

But enemies are not always obvious. Oftentimes, enemies appear as friends, associates, and fellow workers. The Lord Jesus Christ had His Judas, Julius Caesar had his Brutus, George Washington had his Benedict Arnold, Norway had its Quisling, and Jesse James had his Robert Ford. Enemies do not always seek physical harm, but they do seek harm, that is for sure.

Biblical Examples of Enemies

The kiss of an enemy can be just as deadly as a blow from an enemy. In fact, the Bible says in Proverbs 27:6, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend: but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful." It would be wise for you to take the words enemy and enemies and run them down through the Bible to see how many Scriptures there are in relationship to this subject. It may surprise and astound you to discover how many times the words enemy and enemies appear in the Bible.

The very first time the word enemy appears in the singular is in Exodus 15:6, and it relates to Pharaoh. Israel was rejoicing over Pharaoh's defeat, and they sang, "Thy right hand, O LORD, is become glorious in power: thy right hand, O LORD, hath dashed in pieces the enemy." The enemy there refers to Pharaoh and his army.

The first time the word enemies, plural, appears in the Bible is in Genesis 14:20. It relates to the men who captured Lot and his family and carried them away. When Abram armed his 318 trained servants, fighting men in his house, he recaptured Lot and everyone with him. Then Melchizedek came out to meet him and said, "And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand." Abram gave Melchizedek tithes of all. Thus, the first occurrences of enemy and enemies happen to relate to the people of God. God's people do indeed have enemies.

In fact, this truth is also enunciated in what is known as the Protoevangelium, the first promise of the Messiah in the Bible. You will find it in Genesis 3:15, where the Lord is pronouncing a curse upon the serpent: "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." The enmity was not just between the serpent and the woman, but also between the woman's seed and the serpent's seed.

From the very outset, we do indeed have enemies. It is naive to think that we do not have enemies, or to think, "I want to be holy, righteous, and obedient; therefore, I do not expect to have enemies." The truth is that you are going to have enemies simply because you are saved and because you want to be holy and righteous.

Christians Will Be Hated by the World

Our Lord said in John chapter 15, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." He continued, "Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also." He said, "But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me."

The world will hate you because Christ has chosen you out of the world. Oftentimes the world will also hate us and speak evil of us because we are different and do not do the things they do. Peter said in 1 Peter 4:4, "Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with

them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you." They speak evil because you do not want to get drunk, commit adultery, steal, or defraud someone. They think it is strange.

In other words, you do not want to do what they are doing. So, in one sense of the word, it should not be counted strange that Christians have enemies. However, some people do indeed think it is strange that pastors have enemies. You know, it is almost funny in one sense of the word. When you study the Scripture, you will find that God's true preachers have always been hated and despised, while those false prophets that prophesy lies are always loved and respected.

True Preachers Are Often Despised

Jeremiah found this out to the nth degree. It is strange how the world loves those false prophets that speak lies, pamper the flesh, and pump pride into their lives, while hating those that speak the truth. In Jeremiah 18:18, we read concerning Jeremiah: "Then said they, Come, and let us devise devices against Jeremiah; for the law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet. Come, and let us smite him with the tongue, and let us not give heed to any of his words." They were not going to listen to him. They would lie about him, slander him, and destroy him. Everything he said was completely untrue, and they were not going to listen to him.

In Jeremiah 26, beginning with verse 8, we see how desperate it became. Jeremiah was preaching, and the Bible says: "Now it came to pass, when Jeremiah had made an end of speaking all that the LORD had commanded him to speak unto all the people, that the priests and the prophets and all the people took him, saying, Thou shalt surely die. Why hast thou prophesied in the name of the LORD, saying, This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be desolate without an inhabitant? And all the people were gathered against Jeremiah in the house of the LORD." Isn't that amazing? They not only hated Jeremiah, and wanted to slander and lie about him, but they were actually going to murder him as well.

The point is that God's true preachers have always been counted enemies by those who do not love the truth and do not want the

truth. Now let me give you one more illustration. Turn in your Bibles to 1 Kings chapter 21. It is not just simply the people, and it is not just simply the prophets and the priests; it also happens to be rulers.

Ahab had murdered Naboth and his sons so that he could steal the garden that Naboth had. Ahab did not personally kill Naboth. No, he did not. But Jezebel sent letters, had it done, and stamped them with the king's seal. God therefore charged him with murdering Naboth. In 1 Kings chapter 21, beginning with verse 17, the Bible says, "And the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, which is in Samaria: behold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth, whither he is gone down to possess it. And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Hast thou killed, and also taken possession? And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the LORD, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine." Look at the next verse: "And Ahab said to Elijah, Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?"

Elijah answered, "I have found thee: because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the LORD." Ahab was unabashed in calling the man of God his enemy: "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?"

The truth of the matter is this: we all have enemies. We do not need any more enemies of our own making. Let me explain what I mean by that. We do not need enemies due to our own arrogance, insolence, incivility, thoughtlessness, and forgetfulness. We have been unkind. We have been uncivil.

Avoid Making Unnecessary Enemies

We should never be unkind or uncivil to anyone unless there is a biblical principle involved. There are some to whom you cannot be kind. There are some to whom you cannot be civil. What are you talking about? Look in your Bibles to the book of 2 John. First John, Second John, Third John. Look at Second John, and we will begin reading with verse 7. Here are some folks to whom you cannot be civil, you cannot be kind, and you cannot even have them in your house. Notice, if you would, Second John, verse 7: "For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus

Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist." If someone does not believe that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, if someone does not believe that Jesus Christ is God, he is a deceiver and an antichrist. Look in verse 8: "Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward."

Here it is, very plain: “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, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.”

So when someone comes knocking at my house to teach me from the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, denying that Jesus Christ is God, God says I cannot receive him into my house or bid him God speed. Even saying, “God bless you,” makes me partaker of his evil deeds.

Unless there is a biblical principle involved, there is no reason to be unkind to anyone or to make an enemy simply because we want to make an enemy. But the truth of the matter is, we do have enemies. Enemies may even include God's elect who are not yet saved. Romans 11:28 says, "As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sakes."

Here is a good, clear illustration. Saul of Tarsus was one of the greatest enemies of Jesus Christ and of the church until Acts chapter 9, when he was converted. He became the Apostle Paul and became a great friend, not only of Jesus Christ, but of believers as well. But until then, he was consenting to the death of Stephen. He was hauling men and women and casting them into prison, doing all kinds of things that were contrary to the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you think, "Well, I don't have that many enemies that I know of," if you really want to experience just a little bit of persecution and unjust attacks, just a little bit of being slandered and lied about, and have fabrications made against you, let the Southern Poverty Law

Center get hold of your name, as well as the woke movement, cancel culture, BLM, and Antifa.

While mentioning the Southern Poverty Law Center, consider that it is really not Southern, even though it is in Montgomery, Alabama. It is in Montgomery, but it is not Southern just because it is in Montgomery, Alabama. It is certainly not in poverty, and it is certainly not a law center—not a center of biblical law or constitutional law. The only thing really accurate about that name is the word "center," because it is a center of wokeism, humanism, and all kinds of other isms, but it is not a center of Biblicism.

If you are a Christian, a Southerner, or a patriot, you are going to be hated by those people. You are going to be despised by those people. That is all there is to it.

Paul speaks about people who do not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and who fight against Him. In Philippians 3:18-19, he says, "For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things." They are enemies of the cross of Christ, enemies to Jesus Christ. They glory in their shame, and their god is their belly. That is, they simply take care of themselves. They could care less about God, Christ, or anyone else. They are looking out for old number one.

The Worst Enemy Is Self

Now, as bad as some of these people are, they are not my worst enemy. I will tell you who my worst enemy is: it is me. Or, to say it more correctly, it is I myself. I am going to show you this from the Scripture.

Martin Luther, the reformer, was asked which pope had caused him the most trouble. Professor Martin Luther responded, "The Pope who sits on the throne in my heart, no Pope in Rome has caused me as much trouble as I have caused myself." Arthur W. Pink wrote many years ago, "One of the reasons we don't like the Pope is because we want to be the Pope ourselves."

When Charles Haddon Spurgeon had built the tabernacle up to 5,000 members, someone asked which member had caused him the most trouble. Spurgeon answered, “Charles Spurgeon.” The man said, “What? You mean to tell me you have another man in your congregation with the same name as yours?” Spurgeon replied, “No, I refer to myself. No one has given me more trouble than I've given myself.” And that is a fact. This is exactly what Romans chapter 7 is teaching us. Look in verse 18.

He said, "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing." When you see the word flesh in the Bible, you have to understand that it is used at least four different ways. The Greek word for flesh is sarx. It is the context that determines how the word flesh is used.

Sometimes the word flesh refers basically to all humanity. For instance, in Isaiah 40, the Bible says, "And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it."

The passage continues: "The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever." That passage from Isaiah 40 is repeated in the New Testament in 1 Peter 1:24: "For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away." So sometimes the word flesh refers to all humanity.

Secondly, sometimes the word flesh simply refers to the human body. Remember that in Job chapter 19, Job was making his great confession of faith. He said, "For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me." He said, "I shall see him in my flesh"—that is, in my body.

Sometimes the word flesh simply refers to what you and I would call meat. I have heard people say, "Give me some flesh to eat." They are normally talking about a steak. But the Bible says in 1 Corinthians 15:39, "All flesh is not the same flesh: but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds."

So sometimes the word flesh refers to all humanity, sometimes to the body, and sometimes to meat. If you look in Romans chapter 7, here is the fourth use: the word flesh refers to the principle of sin. That is why he said in verse 18, "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing."

The phrase “no good thing” indicates that there is absolutely nothing pure, upright, honorable, decent, agreeable, and pleasing to God in and of ourselves. There is nothing in our flesh that is pleasing to God. In fact, our flesh—that is, the principle of sin—hates God. Romans 8:5-8 explains: “For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.” It is impossible, in and from our own flesh, to please God, because our flesh involves the principle of sin.

Romans 7:18 says, “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not.” Verse 19 continues, “For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.” In verse 18 it is the flesh; in verse 19 it is the evil; and in verse 20 it is sin. The apostle is saying that the good he intends and wants to do, he does not do; his flesh cannot accomplish it.

The Internal Conflict and the Mind as Battlefield

According to Romans 6, our old man has been crucified with the Lord Jesus Christ, and we are new creatures in Jesus Christ. We are also to reckon ourselves dead indeed unto sin and alive unto God

through the Lord Jesus Christ. However, we are still in the flesh. There are propensities, inclinations, desires, old habits, old ways, and old thoughts. All of these have to be dealt with. John Trapp, one of the old Puritans, said it like this.

He said, "Corruption is, though dejected from its regency, that is its throne, corruption is, though dejected from its regency, is not yet ejected from its inherency, it intermingleth with the best of our works." While sin is no longer on the throne, it is not out of the body or the flesh; it is still here. This is basically Romans 6:12: "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof." He did not say, "Let not sin therefore be in your mortal bodies." It is there. But do not let it reign, because Jesus Christ has destroyed the power, kingship, and lordship of sin. Sin is in us, but it is not to reign.

Spurgeon said on this verse, "Oh, how often have men been struggling after holiness, had to use these words of the apostle. The more holy they become, the more they realize that there is still something better beyond them after which they struggle, but to which they cannot yet attain, so still they cry, 'The good we would, we do not, but the evil which we would not, that we do.'"

What he is saying is very simple. We want to live holy, godly, and obedient lives. We do not want to sin. Yet the stronger our desire to be holy and righteous, the more the flesh seems to act up; this principle of sin exposes itself.

Sin is in the body, but it is not to be controlled, because it has been dethroned. On the other hand, it is still trying to regain the throne, so to speak. Here is a very important point: Romans 7:18 says, "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not." In other words, because of the principle of sin, there can be no perfection in the flesh. We cannot be perfect because of the principle of sin.

The word perform means to accomplish, to achieve, and to work out with the desired results. Paul says, “For to will is present with me.” In other words, I want to do what is right; I want to be holy. “But how to perform that which is good I find not.”

Martin Luther expressed it this way: “But because we cannot accomplish the perfection in this corruptible flesh, he said to the Romans, ‘To will is present with me, but how to accomplish what is good I find not.’ Or, as the Greek codices have it, ‘To will is present with me, but not to accomplish the good.’ In other words, it is not present with me to accomplish the good. He does not say ‘to do,’ but ‘to accomplish the good.’ For to do good is not to go after lust, but to accomplish the good is to not lust at all.”

He is saying, “I have the desire, but I do not have the power in the flesh to accomplish that desire.” In verse 18 he says, “I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing.” The little word “for” should take us back to verse 17: “Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.”

When Paul says, "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing," he is saying that no good thing is in the flesh simply because of sin. The principle of sin causes us to be unable to accomplish what we want to accomplish in the flesh. We remember the passage in 1 Corinthians 15, verse 50, where we are told that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. The reason it cannot inherit it is because of corruption.

Paul demonstrates this principle again in Galatians 3. You have to understand that these people wanted to go back into Judaism; they wanted to go back into legalism. So Paul asked them in Galatians 3 and verse 3, "Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?" They were not going to be made perfect by the flesh. It was impossible. Now, look in Romans 7 and verse 18 again.

I am trying to show you my worst enemy and your worst enemy. Paul says, "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing." In my flesh dwelleth no good thing. The word dwelleth is from the Greek word oikeo, which is a verb. The noun is oikos. The word oikos means a house. So literally, what he said in verse 18 is this: "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) is housed no good thing." Why? Because the principle of sin is housed in our flesh.

Thankfully, there is something else housed in us as well. If you look in Romans 8 and verse 9, he says, "But ye are not in the flesh,

but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you." "Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." When he says, "if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you," the word dwell there is oikeo. It is the same Greek word as sin dwelling in us. So, in one sense, the principle of sin is still in the flesh, but in the new man we also have the principle of the Holy Spirit, who is housed in us as well.

So here is the conflict, and this is what Paul is trying to give us in Romans chapter 7. I want to be holy. I want to be godly. I want to be obedient. I want the mind of Jesus Christ. Yet as I desire those things, want those things, and struggle after those things, there is something that remains in me that fights against them left and right.

Charles Hodge wrote years ago on this passage, using the words, “It is not I, but sin that dwelleth in me.” He says:

“This doctrine of sin as indwelling is irreconcilable with the assumption that sin consists exclusively in acts of the will or even the widest sense of the term involuntary action.”

He is saying that sin is not merely an act of the will, nor simply a voluntary action. He continues, “An indwelling act is a solecism.” The word solecism refers to a breach of good manners, an error, an inconsistency, or an impropriety. Then he says, “Sin in this, as in so many other places of Scripture, is presented as an abiding state of mind, a disposition of principle manifesting itself in acts.

“It is this that gives sin its power. We have measurably power over our acts, but over our imminent principles, we have no direct control. They master us and not we them. Herein consists our bondage to sin. And as the power of an indwelling principle is increased by exercise, so the strength of sin is increased by every voluntary evil act. No act is isolated. Nothing is more dangerous than the erroneous opinion that an evil act can stand alone, or that a man can commit one sin and then stop. All evil is concatenated, that is, linked as a chain together. And every sin increases the power of the indwelling corruption in a fearful progression until sooner than the sinner dreams of his head swims and he’s plunged into the abyss.”

Sin is more than simply an act of the will or a voluntary act. You are absolutely deceived if you think you can sin one time and then stop.

It is impossible, because every act of sin strengthens the principle of sin. Sin pervades our being; it pervades our mind, so that the whole man is corrupt, even the mind as well.

Let me give you an illustration of what I am trying to talk about. I am going to ask you some questions, and I already know the answer to the first question. Have you ever prayed? Of course, the answer is yes. Have you ever had trouble concentrating in prayer? Have you ever gone to sleep in prayer or gotten drowsy in prayer? Have you ever had vain, evil, wicked thoughts when you were praying? Have you ever noticed how easily you are distracted in prayer? Have you ever noticed that when you are reading your Bible or studying your Bible, all of a sudden you think of a multitude of things that you have to do?

And not only do you have to do them, but they are so pressing upon you that you almost have to close your Bible, get up, and do what you need to do. How about listening to the Word of God as it is being taught and as it is being preached? Does your mind wander? Do you concentrate on other things? Are you sitting there planning what your next meal is going to be? Are you sitting there thinking about all the work you have got to do next week?

How is it that whenever we are trying to do anything that is spiritual, honest, good, and holy, we have trouble concentrating? Do you really hear the Word of God? I mean, do you really, really, really hear the Word of God? How is it that when you plan to do something good, righteous, and holy, a dozen things intervene and try to stop you, so that you cannot accomplish your purpose? If you are a Christian, the answer is yes to all of these things. Why? The answer is because our minds still have the principle of sin.

On the other hand, have you ever noticed that when your sin is pleasing to your flesh, you are not ever interrupted? You do not get interrupted watching a ball game or playing games, or doing what you really, really like to do—what pleases your flesh, what pleases

you. You do not get interrupted. You do not have problems concentrating.

My father-in-law liked to play chess, and I used to play with him. He was a quiet man. He hardly said one sentence to me until after Alice and I got married. I would sit down and play chess with him, and he would stare at the board, concentrating. Finally, I would look up at him and say, "Pop, say something—anything, just say something." But when you are enjoying things like that, you do not get distracted. Isn't that amazing?

What is happening is this: we have the exact same problem the Apostle Paul had. Every time you have a desire to be holy, godly, and obedient, your flesh—this evil principle of sin—is going to fight against that.

Romans chapter 7, verse 18: "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do." In other words, that principle wants to be satisfied.

"Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me." Have you ever stopped to think about that? Even when you are praying, evil is present with you. There is enough sin in our prayers to damn us. Our prayers are not perfect. Paul continues: "For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members."

And then he says: "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin." The apostle's struggle is likened in verse 24 to being tied to a dead man: "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

Applications: No Perfection in This Life, Fight the Good Fight

The illustration is this: in earlier times, when a murderer was captured while the murdered man was still unburied, they would take the man he had murdered and tie him face to face, stomach to stomach, hand to hand, leg to leg, and foot to foot—the dead man to the living man—until the worms from the dead man ate the living man and killed him, or until he starved or perished for lack of water. This is the illustration the Apostle Paul is giving. He said, "I'm carrying around a dead man," because our old man in Adam has been crucified in Jesus Christ. We are actually carrying around a dead man.

What, then, is the answer? He says in verse 25, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." The perfect answer is that we will be absolutely, totally, and completely free from this dead man when we die, are glorified, and receive a new glorified body. There will be no sin, evil desires, or wickedness; nothing impure or unclean will enter the presence of God.

That is the perfect answer. But you may say, "I am not yet glorified. I am still here. What is the answer for me right now?" He still gives the answer when He says, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." Let me give you what Spurgeon said on this verse: "What a mercy it is that the Lord Jesus Christ has struck a deadly blow at our sin. He's broken the head of it. It is a monster and has immense vitality, but it is a broken-back, broken-leg, and broken-headed monster. There it is."

"It lies hissing, smiting, and writhing, capable of doing us much mischief. But he that has wounded it will smite it again and again, until at last it shall utterly die." When I read that quotation, I thought of a number of rattlesnakes that I have killed. Alice is often out in the yard while I am inside studying. She will call me and say, "Bring your Glock; there's a snake out here." I jokingly reply, "Really? Yes. How much ammunition do I need?"

She laughs, "Just one round; just come on." I have killed a number of them with one round right through the head. But the last one I killed took three rounds through the head, and the first was

dead center. Do you know what that snake was doing? Writhing, hissing, and rattling. He was dying. If I had not put two more rounds into him, he would have died. But guess what?

If I had stuck my hand down there, he would have still bitten me. This is exactly what he is talking about. Our old man has been crucified in Christ, and yet, at the same time as he is dying, he is still writhing, spitting, hissing, and doing everything he can to keep us from being holy, righteous, and godly.

The Apostle Paul says our only victory is through the Lord Jesus Christ. You remember his words in 1 Corinthians 15:57: “But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Thanks be unto Him. Our victory over sin, fleshly thoughts, fleshly desires, and our wicked and vile desires is found only in Jesus Christ. Let me show you.

When our Lord was about to go away, He told His disciples, “If I go away, I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.” Then He said, “I will send the Spirit unto you.” The Holy Spirit proceeds from God the Father and God the Son. Galatians 5:16-17 says, “This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.” Walk in the Spirit. The Holy Spirit never leads us contrary to the Word of God; He always leads us in obedience to the Word of God.

When you and I do that which is normal, natural, and fleshly, we sin against God. It is when we do not do that which is normal, natural, and fleshly that we are obedient to God. If someone slaps me, the very first desire I have is to slap him back. If somebody cusses me, the flesh wants to cuss him back. This is what he is saying: if you walk in the Spirit, you will not fulfill the lust of the flesh. Why? The flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh. They are contrary to one another, so that you cannot do the things that you would.

The Bible says in Philippians 2 and verse 5, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." In Ephesians 4, I think it is verse 17, he said, "be renewed in the spirit of your mind." Since this

principle of sin deals with our minds, you understand that you cannot do one thing without first thinking about it. I could say, Well, I am going to pick up that phone, but I cannot pick it up until I have already thought about it. I could say, I am going to slap Clay upside the head, but I cannot slap him upside the head until I have already thought it. This is why the mind is in reality the true battleground.

Charles Hodge said it like this: "The feeling of helplessness is not only consistent with a sense of acknowledgement of accountability, but is always found united with genuine self-condemnation and penitence." Do you realize that the more holy, godly, and spiritual you wish to be, the more wretched you see yourself to be? The more you want to repent, because you see how wicked you really are.

You think, "Oh God, how could I love you and think these thoughts? How could I be praying to you and have these rude, wicked, vain thoughts run through my mind? Lord, I am so wicked." You cannot really have a desire to be holy without at the same time recognizing your own wretchedness. The more holy you become, the more wretched you see yourself.

He goes on: "There are in general a few stronger indications of ignorance of the power and evil of sin than the confident assertion of our ability to resist and subdue it." In other words, it is complete ignorance to say, "I can control this." It is like someone saying, "I can take this meth, I can take this drugs, this dope one time and that is it." No, no, no, no.

Think about the people who took that stuff one time and it killed them. I'm simply saying this is what he is saying: “Paul groaned beneath its bondage as if it held him in a loathsome embrace of the body of death. The apostle's object, therefore, is not to apologize for sin, but to show that the experience detailed in Romans 7 is consistent with his being a Christian.”

“It is true that I really approve and love the law and desire to be conformed to it. I'm no longer the willing slave of sin. To the depth and power of the original evil is to be attributed to the fact that I am not entirely delivered from its influence.” In other words, the old man has been crucified, but there is still that writhing, slithering, spitting, rattling snake around.

He goes on to say, “This is obviously connected with the main object of the whole passage, for if sin remains and exerts its power notwithstanding our disapproval, and in despite of all of our efforts, it is clear that we must look for deliverance to something outside of ourselves, and that the mere perceptive power of the law cannot remove the evil.” In other words, there is nothing that we can do in our flesh. There is nothing that we can do in being more obedient that will get rid of this. The only thing that we can do is look beyond ourselves and outside of ourselves to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, I want you to turn, if you would, to the book of Hebrews, chapter 12. I get calls from Christians all of the time, and they tell me, “Brother Weaver, I'm fighting, I'm fighting. I get so tired of fighting. I don't understand where these thoughts come from.” I surprise them and say, “Well, number one, congratulations, because you're finding out really what it means to be a Christian and fight against sin. But you really haven't fought as much as you really could.” I'm going to show you what I'm talking about.

The same thing hits me. I think, “Lord, where in the world did that thought come from? Lord, I hate that. I don't want that. I refuse. Where did it come from?” It came from that principle of sin.

Now look what he said. Hebrews chapter 12, beginning there in verse 2: “Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.”

He said you better consider him and everything that he endured, lest you be wearied and faint in your minds. "Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin." How many of you have actually bled fighting against sin? Not one. Until we actually bleed fighting against sin, we really haven't fought against sin the way we should.

There is no perfection in this life. What did the Apostle Paul say? "I die" how often? Daily. Sometimes it's hourly, sometimes it's minute by minute. There is this principle of sin, and we have to fight against it.

The first application should be extremely obvious: no man is perfectly sanctified in this life. You may desire perfection, strive for perfection, want it, and pray for it, but you will never have it in this life. That does not mean that we can excuse our sins, give up, quit, or say, "Well, I'm a sinner and I'm going to sin." It simply means that we're not going to reach perfection in our flesh or in our works. We're just not going to do it.

John Calvin said it like this: "This is not the pleading of one excusing himself as though he was blameless as the cases with many triflers who think that they have a sufficient defense to cover all their wickedness when they cast the blame upon the flesh. But it is a declaration by which he shows how very far he dissented from his own flesh in his spiritual feeling. For the faithful are carried along in their obedience to God with such fervor of spirit that they deny the flesh."

In other words, when those evil thoughts come in your mind, you have to say, "I hate it. I'm not going to have it. I'm not going to think on that. I will place my mind upon the Lord Jesus Christ. I will place my mind upon the Word of God. I'll think of the promises. I'll think of anything else. Or I'll do what the apostles said, 'Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.'" We don't have to think about those thoughts.

Here is an old adage I heard since I was a boy: “You can’t stop a bird from flying over your head, but you can stop him from building a nest in your hair.” What does that mean? The flesh can throw thoughts into your mind like lightning. You cannot stop that; those thoughts come with lightning-like speed, before you realize it. But you do not have to retain those thoughts, keep them, meditate upon them, or think about them. You can refuse them.

That brings us to the second application: the mind is the battlefield. The real man—the man the Apostle Paul is speaking of in Romans chapter 7—is the man he is in Jesus Christ, not the man he was in the old Adam. Although the old Adam still has some propensities, he is still writhing, rattling, hissing, and spitting, our

Lord will continue to stomp him and put him to death. He will do so in our glorification.

That means this: “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.” That is why He said, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.” We must learn to look to Jesus Christ for deliverance.

It will not come from our flesh or our determination. It will come only, only from the Lord Jesus Christ. It is His grace and His mercy. Fight the good fight of faith, as the Apostle Paul told Timothy. We cannot give in, give up, or give out; we must strive to be holy and godly, depending upon the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Father, in thy name we pray to thee. We ask for thy grace, mercy, and help. May we see that each of us struggles, but there is an answer: Jesus Christ. The answer is obedience and submission to Jesus Christ. Help us determine that we will be as holy, godly, and obedient as we can be by thy infinite grace and mercy in Christ Jesus. We commit ourselves unto thee. Establish our thoughts, direct our steps, order our ways, and make us pleasing unto thee. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 36

How Is Your Vision

October 27, 2023

Introduction: The Confusion Around 'Vision'

Proverbs 29:18 says, “Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he.” How is your vision? Do you see clearly? Do you hear clearly? You may not understand some of the questions I am going to ask, but you shall understand the title. You may ask, “What in the world does hearing have to do with seeing?” Hearing is very vitally connected to seeing in this passage, and I will explain that later.

There has been much confusion concerning this text of Scripture. It is a favorite text of pastors who want to build a big church plant and establish what we call big programs. They say that if you really want to do something, you must have the vision, or you must catch a vision. I have heard pastors say, “I envision having three to four hundred people in this church by the next six months.” They always talk about the vision, but they can never delineate from Scripture exactly what the vision is.

This text is also a favorite of many missionaries. When they go to a local church and talk about their field of labor, they describe the squalor, misery, poverty, illiteracy, and lostness of the people to whom they will minister. When respondents begin to cry, weep, and give, they are said to have really caught the vision. Thus, vision means something different to a missionary than it does to a pastor.

Then there are evangelists who use unscriptural, unbiblical, and ungodly methods, devices, tricks, gimmicks, and gadgets to reach people. They say plainly that they would do anything to save a soul.

I have had someone tell me that in times past. My response was, "Well, let's stop and think about this. God will not do anything to save a soul. He will not save anyone apart from Jesus Christ. He will not save anyone apart from repentance and faith. He will not save anyone who is still in rebellion against Him, who refuses to cast down his weapons of warfare."

The point I am trying to make is this: this verse still carries a great deal of confusion for some people. I find it strange that it can mean so many things to so many different people. Consequently, there must be a private or personal interpretation concerning this verse, and most of the people who quote it truly cannot even explain what the vision is.

To the mystic, the vision is experience. To the pietist, it is meditation. To the Pentecostal, it is speaking in tongues. To the pragmatist, it is what works. To the Arminian, it is soul winning. To the soul winner, it is witnessing. To the promoter, it is success. The question is not what all these people say about the vision, but what God says about it. What does Scripture teach? How do we compare Scripture with Scripture and find out exactly what the vision really is?

The Nature of the Vision

I want to give you three things today. First, I want to share with you the nature of the vision. When we speak of its nature, we are speaking of its essence—what makes up its parts, its constituent parts, and what it is formed of.

The Hebrew word for vision in Proverbs 29:18 is chazon. When we hear the word vision, we normally think of dreams, trances, and sometimes an ecstatic utterance. Occasionally, that is how the word is used in Scripture. Not always, but occasionally. For instance, we think of the visions given to Daniel and the visions given to Ezekiel.

Remember that trance Peter was in, in Acts chapter 10, when the sheet came down from heaven with all kinds of animals on it, and God said, "Arise, Peter, kill and eat." There were all kinds of things in the Bible that spoke of this. Look in your Bibles to Job chapter 33, beginning with verse 14. The Bible says, "For God speaketh once, yea twice, and man perceiveth it not." Verse 15 says, "In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed; then He openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction."

There are times when the Bible says that God did indeed give dreams in the Old Testament, and some in the New Testament. There were visions as such, because men saw things in the night; that is for sure. But the Hebrew word chazon not only talks about a vision or a dream. It also means an oracle, a prophecy, or a communication. We talk about the books of vision: the vision of the book of Joel, the vision of the book of Daniel, or the vision of the book of Ezekiel. The word vision, in that sense, refers to a prophetic divine revelation. It has nothing to do with a dream. It has nothing to do with a trance. It simply means that which God has revealed. Now, Proverbs 29:18 says, "Where there is no vision, the people perish."

Clearly, the word vision here refers to what you and I would call an authoritative proclamation of the Word of God. Let me put it another way: where there is no public preaching, people perish. Where there is no declaration of the Word of God, people perish.

This is connected with 1 Corinthians chapter 1, beginning with verse 18. The Scripture says, "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? Where is the scribe?"

"Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, here it is, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." So the truth is, most of the time when Scripture uses the word vision, it really refers to public preaching or the authoritative proclamation of the gospel.

Consider this in Lamentations, which deals with the fall of Jerusalem as Jeremiah witnessed and recorded it in poems. Lamentations 2:9 says, "Her gates are sunk into the ground; He hath destroyed and broken her bars. Her king and her princes are among the Gentiles: the law is no more;" that is, there is no one to proclaim it. "Her prophets also find no vision from the LORD." In other words, God is not speaking to these false prophets or giving them any divine revelation. They find no vision, no prophecy from the LORD.

Now, in verse 14, remember that there were a number of false prophets in Jerusalem. God says, "Thy prophets have seen vain and foolish things for thee:" and they "have not discovered thine iniquity, to turn away thy captivity; but have seen for thee false burdens and causes of banishment." The point of the vision, or the point of preaching, was to pinpoint sin and iniquity, and to cause people to turn from their sins and turn unto God. But these false prophets were not teaching the true vision of God. Consequently, they did not discover the sins or the reasons why God banished the people. It is the ministry of the Word of God alone.

That is the appointed ordinance to communicate that particular blessing. Think about this: preaching the Word of God is the only human means involved in the conversion of sinners. I am just trying to show you that what God says is, "Where there is no vision, the people perish." He is talking about the public preaching of the Word of God.

In 1 Samuel 3:1, notice what the Bible says: "And the child Samuel ministered unto the LORD before Eli. And the word of the LORD was precious in those days; there was no open vision." Now what in the world does that mean? "The word of the LORD was precious in those days." What makes something precious? Because it is scarce. It

is rare. The Word of the Lord was precious because there was no open vision. There was no public proclamation of the Word of God.

You remember that Eli was rebuked by God, and Hophni and Phinehas, his sons, were wicked reprobates, and God killed them. That was when God raised up little Samuel. During this time, the Word of God was precious because there was no open vision, no public preaching of the Word of God.

Now look at 2 Samuel 7, beginning with verse 1, and pay close attention to the words: "And it came to pass, when the king sat in his house, and the LORD had given him rest round about from all his enemies; that the king said unto Nathan the prophet, See now, I dwell in an house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains. And Nathan said to the king, Go, do all that is in thine heart; for the LORD is with thee. And it came to pass that night, that the word of the LORD came unto Nathan, saying, Go and tell my servant David, Thus saith the LORD, Shalt thou build me an house for me to dwell in?"

Now look at verse 4: "And it came to pass that night, that the word of the LORD came unto Nathan." We know now that the Word of God came specifically to Nathan. But verse 17 says, "According to all these words, and according to all this vision, so did Nathan speak unto David."

"According to all these words, and according to all this vision." The prophetic revelation, the truth from God, was referred to as a vision. Did Nathan speak? Did Nathan preach and teach? The answer is yes. It is referred to as a vision, but we know specifically that the Word of God came unto him, for that is exactly what the Bible says.

In Ezekiel chapter 12, beginning with verse 21, we read: "And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying," Note that it is the word of the LORD. "The word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, what is that proverb that ye have in the land of Israel, saying, The days are prolonged, and every vision faileth?" That is, every prophecy faileth.

You have to remember that all of these false prophets were prophesying a quick and soon return of the people from Babylon.

Ezekiel was also in Babylon at this particular time. Notice what he says: “Son of man, what is that proverb that ye have in the land of Israel, saying, The days are prolonged, and every vision faileth? Tell them therefore, Thus saith the Lord GOD;” there is the word again, “Thus saith the Lord GOD; I will make this proverb to cease, and they shall no more use it as a proverb in Israel; but say unto them,” note that word, “say unto them,” “The days are at hand, and the effect of every vision.” He said, “For there shall be no more any vain vision”—that is, useless or worthless—“nor flattering divination within the house of Israel.” He is going to cut off the false prophets. “For I am the LORD: I will speak, and the word that I shall speak shall come to pass; it shall be no more prolonged.”

They were talking about the vision failing, and then the vision is prolonged. Now God says, “For I am the LORD: I will speak, and the word that I shall speak shall come to pass; it shall be no more prolonged: for in your days, O rebellious house, will I say the word, and will perform it, saith the Lord GOD.” Again, “the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, behold, they of the house of Israel say, The vision that he seeth”—that is, that which Ezekiel sees, that which Ezekiel was preaching—“is for many days to come, and he prophesieth of the times that are far off. Therefore say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; There shall none of my words be prolonged any more, but the word which I have spoken shall be done, saith the Lord GOD.”

Notice that the words of the Lord and the vision are synonymous. They are one and the same. Every false vision was going to fail—that is, every false prophecy—but not God’s. The Lord says, “For I am the LORD: I will speak, and the word that I shall speak shall come to pass; it shall be no more prolonged: for in your days, O rebellious house, will I say the word, and will perform it, saith the Lord GOD.”

The truth of the matter is that “the effect of every vision” refers to speech, to utterance, to words and saying: the words, preaching, teaching, speech, or utterance of every vision. In other words, His will be fulfilled, and theirs will not be. Then He says, “Therefore say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; There shall none of my words be prolonged any more.” Here the word vision and the word are equated; they are synonymous.

When you speak about the vision in the Bible, you are talking about the Word of God. You are not necessarily talking about dreams or trances; you are talking about the divine revelation of God and the authoritative proclamation of that Word. Hosea 12:10 says, "I have also spoken by the prophets, and I have multiplied visions, and used similitudes, by the ministry of the prophets." God said, "I've spoken by the prophets. I have multiplied visions." What does that mean? He gave them divine revelation. He gave them His Word. "And used similitudes, by the ministry of the prophets."

The Necessity of the Vision

The vision, then, refers to that which has been divinely revealed and that which is being publicly proclaimed and publicly preached. The nature of the vision is the revealed Word of God. He is not talking about some trance or some dream when He said, "Where there is no vision, the people perish." The nature of the vision is the proclamation of the Word of God.

The second thing to see in this verse is the necessity of the vision. Its necessity is easily seen, for He said, "For where there is no vision, the people perish." The vision must be vitally important because without it, people perish. The Hebrew word for people is am, which refers to a people, a kindred, countrymen, or basically a nation. Where there is no authoritative proclamation of the Word of God, a nation perishes, a people perish, a kindred perish, and countrymen perish. In other words, here is the absolute necessity of the Word of God.

Now, here's the interesting thing. The word perish. It's the Hebrew word para. When you and I think of the word perishing, we think of death. We think of destruction. We think of eternal judgment. The word perish here does include that. But it includes far more than that. Because when you and I think about death and destruction, eternal judgment, that is the end. There is something in between that brings us to that end. And that is what this word reveals. In fact, when you get to this, the Hebrew word para literally means this—are you listening?—it means to make naked, to loose restraints, to let something go. So when He talks about where there is no vision, people perish, He is talking about the fact, yes, there's

going to be death. Yes, there's going to be destruction. Yes, there's going to be the ultimate judgment. But there is going to be something that is happening in between that's going to lead up to that death, destruction, and judgment. And that is the people are going to be made naked.

That is, there's not going to be any restraints, nothing to hold them back. They will give themselves over to lasciviousness, to wickedness, to greediness, to immorality. It doesn't matter. There's no restraints. So if you would turn in your Bibles very quickly to the book of 1 Timothy chapter 1, I want to show you that one of the reasons God gave the law was of course as a means of restraint. So the Bible does indeed speak about the restraints of the law. For instance, the Bible says, "Thou shalt not kill." Basically, "Thou shalt not murder."

So if I decided, well, what I need to do is I just need to pull out a pistol and shoot Steve right now. I just want to shoot him. And so I shoot him. Well, what would stop me from just really wanting to shoot him? Well, when I stop and think, wait a minute, if I kill him, the Scripture says, "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed." Now, I'm fixing to get killed. I better think twice before I shoot him because I don't want to die.

There is a restraint in the law of God. In 1 Timothy chapter 1, the Apostle says, “But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully.” There is a lawful use of the law, and there is also an unlawful use of the law. The law was never given to save or to justify. When someone tries to be justified by works or saved by obedience, he is using the law unlawfully. Its lawful use is in its restraint.

“Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man.” Why is the law not made for a righteous man? Because the righteous man is obeying God, doing that which is right, and therefore the law is not needed as a restraint for that individual. He is living obediently. “Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured

persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine."

You can look up every one of these delineations and compare them to the Ten Commandments. Basically, verse 9 presents a violation of the Ten Commandments on every hand. They are all violations of God's law.

The perishing speaks not only of the ultimate end of death, destruction, and eternal judgment, but also of all the wickedness in between that leads up to that death and destruction. Where there is no vision, the people perish; the people are made naked, and consequently society and the nation do a tailspin down into violence, wickedness, and immorality. Compare where we are today with where we were fifty years ago in our society and nation. Where there is no open vision, no authoritative proclamation of the Word of God, people perish. They have to perish because there is no exposition.

There is no explanation and no application. How in the world can people obey if they have never been given anything to obey? How can they be restrained if they are not told, "God said, Thou shalt not"? Where there is no authoritative proclamation of the Word of God, the eyes of men are shut up. They cannot see. The ears of man are shut up. He cannot hear. The mind of man is shut up. It cannot understand, because he has not been given anything to understand. Their hearts are shut up to unbelief. They cannot believe anything because nothing is given them to believe. Where there is no authoritative proclamation of the Word of God, people are carried away as a prey into hell because they are made naked.

All the restraints are loosened. Without the proclamation of the Word of God, fallen man descends into anarchy, chaos, and confusion.

Because there is no vision—that is, no real authoritative proclamation of the Word of God—in the land, people are perishing, and God has a controversy with the people in the land. Hosea 4:1 says, "Hear the word of the LORD, ye children of Israel: for the LORD hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land."

How can you have any truth, any knowledge of God, or any mercy without the public proclamation of the word of God? The truth is, you cannot. What happens when there is no public proclamation of the Word of God? Men perish, they are made naked, and they lose restraints. As Hosea 4:2 says, “By swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, they break out, and blood toucheth blood.”

"Therefore shall the land mourn, and every one that dwelleth therein shall languish, with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven; yea, the fishes of the sea also shall be taken away." In other words, when men are made naked by a failure to preach and teach the whole counsel of God, creation itself suffers. Creation itself suffers as well as society. That's exactly where we are. How in the world can there be any knowledge, any truth in the land without the proclamation of His word?

You remember Ephesians chapter 4, verses 17 and 18: "This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them." It is ignorance that causes alienation. We are alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in us because of the blindness of our hearts. That's what the Bible says.

When there is no genuine proclamation of the Word of God, men are alienated from God through their ignorance. Stop and think about all the church buildings in this land and how few truly teach the Word of God. How many churches can you enter and be out in thirty or forty minutes? I am simply pointing out the fact: alienation, the Bible says, is through ignorance. Where there is no vision, the people perish. To be without the vision is to be in a perishing state. Does that mean, then, that people who do not hear the Word of God are lost?

Are the heathen lost? The answer is yes. The Bible describes people without Jesus Christ. Paul wrote to the Ephesians, in chapter 2 and verse 12, concerning their unconverted state: “At that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and

without God in the world." Those without Jesus Christ are without hope.

People say, "Well, I have a hope." But if your hope is not in Jesus Christ, it is a false hope, not a true, genuine hope. In fact, the Bible says in Job, chapter 8 and verse 13, "So are the paths of all that forget God; and the hypocrite's hope shall perish." Just as he is perishing, his hope will perish as well.

So let us ask the question again and answer it from Scripture: Will the heathen perish? The answer is yes. Romans chapter 2 and verse 12 says, "For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law." Men will perish without the law, without the authoritative proclamation of the Word of God.

Consider all these countries that do not have the preaching of the Word of God. Then consider America and all the states that really do not have the preaching and teaching of the Word of God. Stop and think about how God has spoken. The Bible tells us that God has spoken to us in creation, in our consciences, as Romans 2 teaches, in His commandments, and in Jesus Christ.

In light of creation, the Bible says in Romans 1 and verse 20, "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse." So even God's creation shows us there is a God, that He has eternal power, and that He is God.

Now consider something else in light of this. Romans chapter 10, verse 13, is a passage that just about everyone can quote. The Bible says, "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." Preachers have used that verse many, many times in talking to sinners. But usually, when you take something out of context, it is not really going to help much. So let me ask you this: Does calling save you? The Scripture says, "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." Calling is something that you do. Would that be classified as a work?

Why in the world would sinners ever call upon Him? Look in verse 14: "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall

be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed?" Now, wait a minute. I thought it was faith that saved you. It is believing in Jesus Christ that saves you. Do you understand that calling is a result of, the consequence of, and the effect of believing? The only reason people call upon the Lord is that they believe in Him. You do not call upon someone that you do not believe in.

I've never in my life called upon Vishnu. I've never called upon some pagan god because I don't believe in him. But let's go further. Paul says, "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?" It is not "heard about." If you hear about someone, he is not present. But if you hear someone, he is present. Christ must speak for you to believe, and when you believe, then you call. What did our Lord say in John chapter 10? "I know my sheep, and I call them by name, and they follow me."

Paul continues: "and how shall they hear without a preacher?" In other words, there is usually the public proclamation of the Word of God. Jesus Christ speaks through His Word as that Word is being preached. "And how shall they preach, except they be sent?" God sends His preachers. Then he says, "As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!"

Here is the problem: these verses show the necessity of the vision, the necessity of the preaching of the Word of God. Why, then, do we really not put our efforts into the preaching of the Word of God? The answer is that proud reasoning revolts against God and against His Word and presumes to be more merciful than God.

I've had people say, when I quoted the Scripture that the heathen were lost and would perish, "But wait a minute. They haven't had a chance." My response is: No one is saved by chance. We are saved by God's eternal purpose and God's grace and mercy in Jesus Christ. God never saves anybody by accident. It is always purposeful and deliberate.

The reason we do this is because it is easier to presume upon God's mercy than to fulfill our responsibilities, obligations, and

duties. It is easier to find fault with God than to acknowledge our sin and disobedience. It is easier to deny our responsibility and say somehow God will work it out for them, which is not true. I've heard people say, "Well, do you not believe that God is sovereign?"

And the answer is yes. God is absolutely sovereign. Do you not believe God has His elect? Yes, God has His elect. Then people say, “Well, if God is sovereign, His elect are going to be saved anyhow.” My response is no. God’s elect are going to be saved, God’s how? God’s how is through the preaching and proclamation of His Word. That is what His Word teaches us.

So here is the necessity of this vision. Without it, people perish. They are made naked; there are no restraints, and they are pushing headlong into death, destruction, and eternal judgment. There is a third thing I want you to see: the appropriation of the vision. God said, “Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he.” Stop and think about this. The vision and the keeping of the law have to be connected. How can you keep the law if the law is never taught or explained to you? The vision is the preaching of the word of God. The appropriation is this: happy is he who keeps that law.

If one does not hear the Word of God, he cannot believe, receive, or obey the Word of God, because he does not even know it. Clearly, then, if he is going to be blessed and happy, he has to hear, know, and receive.

The Appropriation of the Vision

There are actually two contrasts in Proverbs 29:18: “Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he.” First, there is the contrast between those who have the vision and those who do not have the vision. Where there is no vision, people perish. The opposite is also true: where there is a vision, people are being saved or are saved.

The second contrast is between those who appropriate the vision—that is, the preaching—and those who do not appropriate or apply it. “But he that keepeth the law, happy is he.” He that does not keep the law, he that does not obey, is not happy and is not blessed.

Thus there is a contrast between those who have the vision and those who do not have it, and between those who appropriate the vision and those who do not appropriate it.

When the Word of God is preached, some neglect it, some receive it, some despise it, some love it, some refuse it, and some apply it. How do you know whether you appropriate the vision, the preaching and teaching of the Word of God? That individual's life is identified by two characteristics.

First, his life is constantly and continually being brought into greater conformity to the Word of God. We are not perfect, and we are never going to be perfect in this life. But we are constantly and continually changing our lives, our thought processes, the way we live, and the way we do things, bringing our lives into greater conformity to the Word of God.

The second characteristic is that the Bible says he is a happy man; that is, he is a blessed man. There is a multitude of blessings enumerated in the Bible for those who believe, but consider this one: “When a man's ways please the LORD, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.” Clearly, you can be a blessed, happy individual simply by being obedient to the Word of God.

We see, then, the necessity of the preaching of the Word of God—not only the nature of the vision and the necessity of the vision, but also the appropriation of the vision. Martin Luther, the Reformer, said, “The meanest village”—by meanest he meant the smallest, the tiniest—“that has a pastor and a flock is a palace of ebony.” If you have a pastor and a flock of God, it is a palace, no matter how small or tiny.

Thomas Watson, the Puritan, said: “It was by the ear, that our first parents, listening to the serpent, that we lost paradise. And it is by the ear, by the hearing of the word, that we get to heaven.” He quotes Isaiah 55:3: “Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.” That is true. We need to know how to appropriate and apply the preaching of the Word of God.

Applications: God's Messengers and Our Response

I want to make a couple of applications. Turn in your Bibles to 2 Chronicles chapter 36, and begin reading at verse 15 in light of the message that I am preaching. I want you to understand this passage and think about it.

Whenever God is going to have mercy or compassion upon a people, He always sends them His preachers. He always sends them His word. Whenever God is going to judge a people, He removes His preachers. During the time of Ahab and Jezebel, God took Elijah and put him out of the land with a widow of Zarephath, and for three and a half years there was a drought. That physical picture was nothing more than an illustration or demonstration of a spiritual truth, because they were without the preaching of the Word of God. The man of God was not in the country. They were destitute; they were dying. Even creation was dying without the truth of God.

When it comes to Jeremiah—now, God kept Jeremiah in the land, but it is Jeremiah 8—I think it is Jeremiah 4:11 where God told Jeremiah, “Pray not for this people.” He left Jeremiah in the land. He said, “Just don't pray for them.” When you got to chapter 14, Jeremiah really wanted to pray for the people, and God said, “Okay, I'm gonna let you pray for them. But you pray that I'm going to destroy them, because that's exactly what I'm gonna do.” So God moved Elijah out of the land. He kept Jeremiah in the land. He just shut his mouth.

Second Chronicles 36:15 says, “And the LORD God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling place.” Whenever God has compassion upon a people, He sends them His word. He sends them men to teach and preach His word. But the people “mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against his people, till there was no remedy.” Therefore He brought upon them the king of the Chaldeans, who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young man or maiden, old man, or him that stooped for age: He gave them all into his hand. God sent His messengers and His truth because He had compassion upon His

people and on His dwelling place. But they mocked the messengers of God. Note that messengers is plural.

"But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words." And "his" is singular. They were despising the word of God that God sent by His messengers. They misused the messengers, they despised His word, and God says, "Therefore the wrath of the LORD arose against his people, till there was no remedy." He gave them all into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, who slew them, captured them, and carried them away into captivity.

It is a serious, serious calamity to have the vision removed from a people—the public preaching and teaching of the word of God. It is a serious calamity for the people to refuse and despise the word of God.

Jeremiah 3:14 presents one of the greatest blessings that God can bestow upon a people, blessings we always take for granted: "Turn, O backsliding children, saith the LORD; for I am married unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I"

God will bring you to Zion. Look at the promise God gives: "And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding." In other words, it is the blessing of God to give you men who will preach and teach, who will expound and explain and apply His Word.

How is your vision? Do you hear the Word of God clearly? Do you appropriate and apply the Word of God?

In 1 Thessalonians 2:13, look at what the Apostle Paul said to these Thessalonians: "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe." This is absolutely astounding. This is where you and I need to be.

When they heard the Apostle Paul preach, they did not say, "That is what Paul thinks." When they heard Silas or Barnabas, they did not say, "Well, that is just Barnabas' opinion." They received the Word of God "not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe." Can you imagine the change in our churches if Christians received the

proclamation of the Word of God as the Word of God Himself? That is not what the preacher says; that is what God says.

There is a big difference between my opinion and saying, "Thus saith the Lord, here is what the Word of God says." Your opinion is as good as mine, and your reasoning is as good as mine. But when it comes to the Word of God, that is a horse of a different color. The truth of the matter is, you need to receive it "not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe."

Do you realize that our business as Christians is not to save sinners? That may shock you, but it is true. I have preached for nearly fifty-nine years, and I have never saved anybody. I cannot save anybody, nor can I convict anybody. Saving people is not my business; that is the business of the Lord Jesus Christ. What did He say in Matthew 1:21? "Thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins." Then, in Luke 19:10, "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." Only Jesus Christ can save. My responsibility is to preach and teach His Word and point people to Jesus Christ, who can save them.

The truth is that preaching is the most important duty, obligation, responsibility, and privilege that we have. As much as I love music, I would rather attend a church that preaches the Word of God than one with the best music program in town. I would rather attend a church that preaches the Word of God than one with the biggest and best youth program in town. It is the Word of God that will change young people, magnify everything, and make everything better. Scripture says that God chose by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. Hebrews 1 says that in times past God spoke to the fathers by various and sundry means. He gave dreams; yes, He gave trances.

But listen to verse 2: "Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things." Jesus Christ is the full and final revelation of God. The Bible is the full and final revelation of God. We do not live by dreams or trances; we live by the Word of God. Jesus Christ is the fullness of God's revelation.

People have told me, “Well, Brother Weaver, I had this dream.” Everybody dreams, but your dreams usually do not mean, as we say in South Georgia, pea doodly squat. The Bible says that a dream cometh through the multitude of business; you usually dream about what your mind has been occupied upon. I tell people jokingly, if you want to have a dream, I can tell you how: just before you go to bed, you eat you a peanut butter,

A mayonnaise, ketchup, mustard, pickle, and onion sandwich may cause you to dream, but we are not living by dreams. We are living by the Word of God, and Jesus Christ is the full and final revelation of God.

Where there is no vision, the people perish. They are made naked, lose their restraints, cast everything off, and plunge headlong into violence, immorality, sin, wickedness, and rebellion, finally ending in death, destruction, and judgment. But he that keepeth the law, happy is he, blessed is he, because he has the word of God and keeps it.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank You for Your word and Your truth, Lord. We thank You that You have appointed the preaching of the gospel to reach the hearts and minds of men and women. Lord, raise up men who would indeed preach and teach Thy word. We ask for healing. As You clothed Adam and Eve, Lord, clothe us again. May we put the restraints back on by preaching and teaching Your truth. Thus saith the Lord. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 37

A Perfect Picture of The Modern Church

December 31, 2023

Introduction: The Mixed Multitude as a Picture of the Modern Church

In 2 Kings 17, the title of the message is “A Perfect Picture of the Modern Church.” There are a number of messages that I have prepared and am preparing, and I trust that you will pray with me concerning these messages. I think a lot of them are going to be very, very applicable.

In 2 Kings 17, verse 1: “In the twelfth year of Ahaz king of Judah began Hoshea the son of Elah to reign in Samaria over Israel nine years. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, but not as the kings of Israel that were before him. Against him came up Shalmaneser king of Assyria; and Hoshea became his servant, and gave him presents. And the king of Assyria found conspiracy in Hoshea: for he had sent messengers to So king of Egypt, and brought no present to the king of Assyria, as he had done year by year: therefore the king of Assyria shut him up, and bound him in prison.

Then the king of Assyria came up throughout all the land, and went up to Samaria, and besieged it three years."

When I read this passage recently, the first thought that hit my mind was the modern church today is much like the mixed multitude that came out of Egypt. I am only going to read the first four or five verses because we are going to go through this entire chapter and hope to see the applications as well.

The mixed multitude that came out of Egypt along with the Israelites were false professors. They brought with them multiculturalism, by which I mean cultures that were contrary to the Scripture. They were idolaters. They not only worshipped the unknown God, they also worshipped a multiple group of false gods as well. Moreover, it was this mixed multitude that caused many of the problems.

In Numbers 11:4, the Word of God says: "And the mixed multitude that was among them fell a lusting: and the children of Israel also wept again." They influenced the children of Israel and said, "Who shall give us flesh to eat? We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlic." Verse 6 says: "But now our soul is dried away."

"There is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes." So God brought the children of Israel out of Egypt along with this mixed multitude, and He gave them the absolute perfect food. He gave them manna. Yet this mixed multitude influenced the Israelites, and now they were all complaining about how good they had it back in Egypt when they were slaves. They remembered all the onions, the leeks, and the garlic. They wanted to go back into Egypt and eat the old food instead of that which God had sovereignly provided and given to them.

This is kind of a picture, much like 2 Kings 17, of the modern church as well. The church of Jesus Christ is in the world, but the world is not to be in the church of Jesus Christ. He said in John chapter 15 and verse 19, "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." So the truth of

the matter is, when you think of the modern church and all the pomp, programs, social life, and entertainment, if all that were taken away, then the modern church would be basically empty, simply because very few people really and truly desire either the milk or the meat of the Word. They do not want that. They are not interested in that. They are interested more in the onions, the leeks, the garlic, and the fish.

The Assyrian Displacement and Replacement of Israel

Not only is the mixed multitude a picture of the modern church; if you look back in your Bibles to 2 Kings 17, we also find that this is a picture of the modern church because of what happened to Israel after Israel was conquered by the Assyrians. The Assyrians uprooted and displaced many of the Israelites and put them in strange places and foreign lands. So we read in verse 4: "And the king of Assyria found conspiracy in Hoshea: for he had sent messengers to So king of Egypt, and brought no present to the king of Assyria, as he had done year by year: therefore the king of Assyria shut him up, and bound him in prison. Then the king of Assyria came up throughout all the land, and went up to Samaria, and besieged it three years." Now watch: "In the ninth year of Hoshea the king of Assyria took Samaria, and carried Israel away into Assyria, and placed them in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan,"

So he had taken all of these people out of the land and put them in foreign lands. He not only removed them from the land; he took other foreigners and strangers and brought them into Israel. It is kind of like he not only replaced the Israelites, much like the illegal immigrants are replacing the Americans today. I read this week that most immigrants coming in are, by our own government, given debit cards with $5,000 credit. Moreover, they are given free airfare wherever they want to go, not accounting for all the medical care, welfare, or everything else they receive. In fact, most of them fare far better financially than what you and I would call the middle class in America today.

That is exactly what the king of Assyria was doing. He wanted to control the people and the land; he did not want any trouble. Therefore, he took Israel out of the land and put foreigners into it. It

is kind of like Klaus Schwab said: they want to get rid of the white Europeans because the Asian people are already willing to be in subjection and pretty well obey authority. It is the white Europeans they are afraid will rise up and fight against them.

Look at 2 Kings 17:24: "And the king of Assyria brought men from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Ava, and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel: and they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof."

The few Israelites left in the land by Shalmaneser either intermarried with the heathen or were overrun by them. Hence the southern kingdom, Judah, looked upon the Samaritans as dogs, since these people had been interbred and the wicked and heathen had taken over.

Even our Lord, in Matthew 7:6, said, "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you." When our Lord said not to give that which is holy to the dogs or cast pearls before swine, He was not talking about the four-legged kind. He was talking about the two-legged kind.

Albert Barnes in his commentary said this: “Dogs signify men who spurn, oppose, and abuse the doctrine, men of particular sourness and malignity of temper who meet it with growling and quarrelsomeness like curs. Swine denote those who would trample the precepts under feet, men of impurity of life, corrupt, polluted, profane, obscene, and sensual, who would not know the value of the gospel, and who would tread it down as swine tread down pearls.”

You could throw a handful of corn in a hog pen, and they will eat it. Throw a bunch of pearls in there, and they will trample them down because they are not edible and they have absolutely no use for them. Our Lord is talking about individuals who hate the truth and have no use for the truth as well. The Apostle Paul said basically the same thing in Philippians chapter 3, verse 2: “Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision.” Once again, the dogs are not the four-legged kind; they are the two-legged kind.

Hypocrisy in Israel and Judah

Obviously, the Southern Kingdom hated the Samaritans. But I want to show you that not only was there hypocrisy amongst the Israelites in the Northern Kingdom, there was also hypocrisy in the Judahites in the Southern Kingdom.

Let us look in verse 7 of 2 Kings chapter 17 and read through verse 20. Think with me as we read here. “For so it was, that the children of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God, which had brought them up out of the land of Egypt, from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and had feared other gods, and walked in the statutes of the heathen, whom the Lord cast out from before the children of Israel, and of the kings of Israel, which they had made.” The next verse is very informative: “And the children of Israel did secretly those things that were not right against the Lord their God.” They began doing things in secret. But notice the rest of this verse: “And they built them high places in all their cities, from the tower

What began in private has now been made public. The watchmen had been unable to protect the fenced city. “And they set them up images and groves in every high hill, and under every green tree.”

Whenever you see the word “groves” in the books of Kings and Chronicles, and usually throughout the Bible, it does not refer to a grove of trees. The word is the Asherah or Asherim, a sexual goddess and an idol. Thus Israel set up images and idols in every high hill and under every green tree. “And there they burnt incense in all the high places, as did the heathen whom the Lord carried away before them; and wrought wicked things to provoke the Lord to anger: for they served idols, whereof the Lord had said unto them, Ye shall not do this thing.

“Yet the Lord testified against Israel, and against Judah, by all the prophets, and by all the seers, saying, Turn ye from your evil ways, and keep my commandments and my statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by my servants the prophets. Notwithstanding they would not hear, but hardened their necks, like to the neck of their fathers, that did not believe in the Lord their God. And they rejected his statutes, and his covenant that he made with their fathers, and his testimonies which

he testified against them; and they followed vanity, and became vain, and went after the heathen that were round about them, concerning whom the Lord had charged them, that they should not do like them. And they left all the commandments of the Lord their God, and made them molten images, even two calves, and made a grove, and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served Baal."

They caused their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire, used divination and enchantments, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger. Therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel and removed them out of His sight; there was none left but the tribe of Judah only. Also Judah kept not the commandments of the Lord their God, but walked in the statutes of Israel which they made. And the Lord rejected all the seed of Israel, afflicted them, and delivered them into the hand of spoilers, until He had cast them out of His sight.

So all Israel had fallen into idolatry. For a short period of time Judah remained true and faithful, but Judah finally fell as well. That is why verse 19 says, "Also Judah kept not the commandments of the Lord their God, but walked in the statutes of Israel, which they had made."

The interesting thing is this: when you look at Ezekiel, chapter 16, you find that God compares Israel, Judah, and Jerusalem with Sodom. In fact, He calls them sisters. He even says that Israel and Judah have done worse than Sodom, their sister.

Remember also that Samaria was the capital of the northern kingdom. God had taken these people out of the capital and, of course, all over Israel, and replaced them with heathen. Naturally, those heathen knew absolutely nothing about God, His worship, or His sacrifices, so they simply brought their idols in. In verses 24 and 25 we read: "And the king of Assyria brought men from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Ava, and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel: and they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof." Verse 25 begins, "And so it was

The False Priest and the People's Unchanged Hearts

At the beginning of their dwelling there, they feared not the Lord. Therefore the Lord sent lions among them, which slew some of them. The people were attacked by a wild beast, and the deaths of these people got their attention. In verses 26 through 28, they said to the king of Assyria, “The nations which thou hast removed, and placed in the cities of Samaria, know not the manner of the God of the land: therefore he hath sent lions among them, and, behold, they slay them, because they know not the manner of the God of the land.”

Then the king of Assyria commanded, “Carry thither one of the priests whom ye brought from thence; and let them go and dwell there, and let him teach them the manner of the God of the land.” Then one of the priests whom they had carried away from Samaria came and dwelt in Bethel, and taught them how they should fear the Lord.

Now, to show you the absolute ignorance and stupidity of these people: they spoke of the God of the land. The heathen had absolutely no concept of God’s sovereignty. They were polytheistic; they believed in many gods, and they believed that each land had its own god. That is why the Syrians, when they attacked Israel, told the king, “The reason we were defeated is that their god happened to be the god of the mountains. What we need to do is fight against him in the valleys, because obviously he cannot be the god of the valleys if he is the god of the mountains.”

God sent a prophet to Ahab and said, “You are going to defeat them again because they have said that I am not the god of the valleys; I am simply the god of the mountains.” Clearly, these people did not understand God’s sovereignty whatsoever. Shalmaneser sent a priest to teach them the way of the god of the land. But remember: this is Samaria.

It was Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who made the two golden calves and took of the lowest of the people and made them priests. Therefore, the priest whom Shalmaneser sent back was not a Levitical priest or a priest of God; he was a priest of the calves. That is why 1 Kings 12:31 says of Jeroboam, “And he made an house of

high places, and made priests of the lowest of the people, which were not of the sons of Levi." So he sent this false priest back to teach them the manner of the God of the land.

How in the world can truth be taught out of fiction, ignorance, or falsehood? The answer is that it could not. The truth of the matter is this: it really did not matter, because the people were not going to listen anyhow. They were not going to worship God. All they wanted was to stop the lion attacks. It is just like today: people are interested in using God. They will do things until they get what they want, and then they forget Him. That is exactly what these people did.

Look, if you would, beginning in verse 29; let us go back to verse 28: "Then one of the priests whom they had carried away from Samaria came and dwelt in Bethel, and taught them how they should fear the Lord. Howbeit every nation made gods of their own, and put them in the houses of the high places which the Samaritans had made, every nation in their cities wherein they dwelt." Then the men of Babylon made Succoth-benoth, the men of Cuth made Nergal, the men of Hamath made Ashima, the Avites made Nibhaz and Tartak, and the Sepharvites burnt their children in fire to Adrammelech and Anammelech, the gods of Sepharvaim. "So they feared the Lord, and made unto themselves of the lowest of them priests of the high places, which sacrificed for them in the houses of the high places."

I hope you see the plain, obvious, and clear contradiction. How can one fear the one true and living God and then turn around and serve idols? How can you supposedly submit yourself to God and then do as you please anyhow? Clearly these people made a false profession, and their fear was a false fear. When it said, "So they feared the Lord," they had made not only their false gods, but men of the lowest of the order, their priests.

They cared nothing about truth. They were not going to listen to any priest whatsoever; it did not matter that he was a false priest or that he did not know the truth. All they wanted was for the lions to stop attacking them. They lived as they had always lived. Their lives, habits, and attitudes were unchanged. There was no obedience and no submission to God.

The Contradiction: Fearing the Lord While Serving Idols

Their profession of faith, their professed fear of the Lord, was worthless because they were doing their own thing. “So they feared the Lord, and made unto themselves of the lowest of them priests of the high places, which sacrificed for them in the houses of the high places. They feared the Lord, and served their own gods, after the manner of the nations whom they carried away from thence.”

So they feared the Lord and they served their own gods. Why am I saying that this is a perfect picture of the modern church? Obviously, there are so many people in the church today that profess to be saved. And yet look at their lives; their lives are complete contradictions to their profession. “They feared the Lord, and served their own gods, after the manner of the nations whom they carried away from thence. Unto this day they do after the former manners: they fear not the Lord, neither do they after their statutes, or after their ordinances, or after the law and commandment which the Lord commanded the children of Jacob, whom he named Israel; with whom the Lord had made a covenant, and charged them, saying, Ye shall not fear other gods, nor bow yourselves to them, nor serve them, nor sacrifice to them: but the Lord, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt with great power and a stretched out arm, him shall ye fear, and him shall ye worship, and to him shall ye do sacrifice. And the statutes, and the ordinances, and the law, and the commandment, which he wrote for you, ye shall observe to do for evermore; and ye shall not fear other gods. And the covenant that I have made with you ye shall not forget; neither shall ye fear other gods. But the Lord your God ye shall fear; and he shall deliver you out of the hand of all your enemies. Howbeit they did not hearken, but they did after their former manner. So these nations feared the Lord, and served their graven images, both their children, and their children’s children: as did their fathers, so do they unto this day.”

In other words, you can read all through this passage. Over and over, it tells you they feared the Lord and served their own gods. Unto this day they do exactly the same thing. They do not fear God. How do we know they do not fear God? Because they did not keep God’s covenant. They did not keep God’s law. They did not keep

God's commandment. The truth is, they were just heathen. They were just totally, completely disobedient. They refused to keep God's law. They were what you and I would call practical atheists.

That is exactly why this is a perfect picture of the modern church. When you talk about atheists, you have to distinguish between what you and I would call a theoretical atheist and a practical atheist. In the modern church today, you will find people who profess to be saved and to be Christians, yet their lives are totally contrary to the Word of God. They refuse to obey the law of God and to submit to God. Their lives are full of all kinds of sins and wickedness—not just an occasional sin, but deliberate sin, committed many times.

What is the difference between a theoretical atheist and a practical atheist? A theoretical atheist denies the person and existence of God based upon his own intellect and reasoning abilities, however deficient and depraved they are. At least he reasons and says, "I don't believe there's a God. I don't believe that God is a God. I don't believe the Bible is the Word of God." He does so based on his own supposition and thinking. That is a theoretical atheist.

A practical atheist is not like that. He will admit that God is, that God has spoken, and that the Bible is the Word of God. But then he turns around and lives as if there is no God or as if God has not spoken. In his profession, he admits everything; in his actions, he denies everything.

Biblical Evidence: Love and Obedience Are Inseparable

Titus 1:16 says, "They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate." They profess that they know God, but in works they deny him. There is your practical atheist. Yes, God is. Yes, God has spoken. Yes, the Bible is the Word of God. But he is going to live his life the way he wants to. He will do what he wants to do. He will make money any way he can make money. If he has to lie or defraud, that is fine. That is a practical atheist.

In Luke 6, beginning in verse 46, our Lord says: “And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?” I want to remind you that the word “Lord” is kurios in the Greek, and it means boss, owner, master, sovereign. So Jesus Christ is asking, “Why are you calling me boss? Why are you calling me master? Why are you calling me sovereign? Why are you calling me owner if you’re not doing what I say?”

And then He goes on to explain it. He says, verse 47: “Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings”—look now—“and doeth them.” You do not only hear, but you do. “I will shew you to whom he is like: he is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock.”

Now watch the distinction carefully: “But he that heareth, and doeth not”—hearing does not help you. There must be obedience and submission. “But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great.” So our Lord said it is the man that hears and does who submits and obeys.

These verses are important in light of what He has just said. In John 14:21, our Lord says: “He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.” He that hath Christ’s commandments and keepeth them is the one who loves Him. He has His commandments, and he keeps them. He does not merely hear what Christ says; he submits to it and obeys it. That is the evidence our Lord gives of love for Him.

Love has nothing to do with sentimentality. It has nothing to do with feelings. It has nothing to do with some little something floating around in the atmosphere somewhere. No, no, no. Love is obedience. That is why He said in John 14:24, "He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me." So in verse 21 He said, "If you love me, keep my commandments." In verse 24 He said, "He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings."

So how can you tell whether someone is a real, genuine professor? How can you tell whether someone really and truly fears the Lord? The answer is that he submits and obeys. That is the answer. Look at 1 John chapter 2, verses 3 and 4. I do not see how this could be made any plainer. First John chapter 2, verses 3 and 4. Verse 3 says, "And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments." Now how do I

How do I know that I know the Lord? The answer is that He enables me by His grace to be obedient. No, not that I am perfect, and not that you are perfect, but our lives are like David's: we have a life of general obedience unto Him. He said very plainly, “And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.” Verse 4 says, “He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.” If we really and truly know Him, we are going to keep His commandments. If we really and truly love Him, we are going to keep His commandments. If He is really and truly our Lord, we are going to submit to Him and obey Him.

First John chapter 5, verses 2 and 3, says, “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments.” Now, how do I know? How does Ron know that I love him? I do not have to run up, hug his neck, and tell him I love him. All I have to do is obey God's Word toward him. As long as I do not steal from him, I love him. As long as I respect him, his wife, and his family, I love him. In other words, as long as I treat him the way God commands me to treat him, I love him. “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.” What is the love of God? The love of God is keeping His commandments, and His commandments are not grievous. That is what love is. Love is obedience.

This is why, when you look in 2 Kings chapter 17, you have a perfect picture of the modern church: people everywhere profess to love the Lord and profess to fear the Lord, but their lives are absolutely contrary to the Lord, His Word, and His law.

Applications: The Modern Church's Hatred of God's Law and the Mixed Multitude's Control

I want you to think with me first of all. We are living in a time when most professing Christians—do not get upset with me—hate God and hate God's law. How in the world did I say that? Because they refuse to submit to Him and obey Him. You remember what the Bible said in Romans 8, verses 7 and 8? "For the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God." The carnal mind is not subject to the law of God. It is enmity against God; it can never be in submission to God or please God.

You have to be converted. You have to have a new mind. You must have a spiritual mind. So the truth of the matter is this: most professing Christians hardly ever read their Bible. Very few truly study and apply God's Word, and very few truly want to know the truth of God.

I can go to the average church, the average Baptist church, and split it with one sermon. You will find out who really wants the Word and who does not. It is like when the Apostle Paul preached in Acts chapter 13: some got mad and some got glad. He shelled the corn. Those who did not like the truth got mad; those who wanted truth were made glad.

Our Lord said this to those Jews who professed to believe in Him. In John 5, verse 42, He said, "But I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you." Isn't that amazing? He knew who loved Him and who did not. You can fool a lot of people; you cannot even fool yourself. But the one person you cannot fool is God. That is why 2 Timothy 2, verse 19, says, "Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity."

"The Lord knoweth them that are his." Then he said, "Let every one that nameth the name of Christ"—what?—"depart from iniquity." If you are a child of God, depart from iniquity. You will leave it alone. This does not mean you are sinless, but your life is not going to be characterized by constant sin and constant wickedness.

Here is the second application: it is usually the mixed multitude in the church that creates division over biblical attitudes and stances. You remember that our Lord talked about the wheat and the tares; that is what is in the church—the wheat and the tares. The tares are there, and the mixed multitude are in the church. The mixed multitude are the ones who always want control. Why? Because they want their will. They want their flesh appeased, and they do not really care about truth.

These people know nothing of Christian charity or self-sacrifice. It is not, "Well, brother, you might be entitled to your opinion, and you might see things a little differently, and we can still be friends and still love one another." No, no, no. It is either you agree or you hit the highway. They want control; they want this thing done the way they want it done. It is just that simple.

How many churches have you ever been in where, when a problem arose, the first thing the people said was, "What does the Bible say about it? How does God say we are to resolve this? How are we supposed to respond and react? What are we to do? What does the Word of God say?" I am pointing out the fact that usually it is the mixed multitude who want to control everything. Church splits and church divisions are usually because of a mixed multitude.

Here is the third application: idolatry normally stems from government. I can take you all through the Bible. It was Jeroboam who made the two golden calves. He was not interested in the people or in truth; he was interested only in himself. He wanted to control and manipulate the people. This is why Shalmaneser removed the Israelites from Samaria and replaced them with the heathen: he could control them. Here is an interesting thing.

I don't know if you have put two plus two together in our country, but you can ask yourself this question: Why is our government so down on Christianity and making sure there is nothing Christian about our government and driving Christianity out of education when it was Christianity who basically taught all of the founding fathers, and they had biblical principles? Have you ever asked yourself, why? Why are governments seeking to destroy Christianity? Alice and I heard on the way to church this morning, we was listening to Christian radio station, when the news came on,

they said, "Christians are now the most persecuted people in the world." Why?

Well, if somebody knows the Lord, if they know truth, if their life is run by principle and by precept, that individual is very difficult to control. When you know what is right and you refuse to step away from what is right, you're very difficult to control. Do you realize Nebuchadnezzar, with all of his power, could not force the three Hebrew children to bow before his idol? The presidents and all of their power and their conspiracy combined against Daniel could not stop him from praying. And the only way the Roman Empire could stop the Apostle Paul from preaching was to cut off his head. So the point I'm trying to make is very simple. A people that know truth, and believe truth, and will stand for the truth, are not going to be easily swayed. They're not going to be easily controlled. Therefore, are you listening?

The churches must either be compromised or corrupted. When you get a church that's compromised, when you get a church that's corrupted, it's basically over and done with.

Now, I want you to go back to 2 Kings chapter 17. I want to show you two verses. Look in 2 Kings chapter 17, and I want you to look at verses 7 and 8. Here it is. 2 Kings 17, verse 7. We read it earlier: "For so it was, that the children of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God, which had brought them up out of the land of Egypt, from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and had feared other gods." Now, wait a minute. How do we know they feared other gods? Well, I know God said so, and I know the Bible states so. I understand that.

Conclusion: The Choice Between God's Law and Humanistic Law

But that is not the import of my question. How do we know they feared other gods? He reveals that. Look in verse 8: "They had feared other gods, and walked in the statutes"—that is, the laws—"of the heathen, whom the Lord cast out from before the children of Israel, and of the kings of Israel, which they had made." So they rejected God's law and walked in the laws of the heathen. They also walked in the laws of the kings of Israel—the golden calves. In other words,

when a people turn from God and God's law and refuse to walk in His statutes, the only thing left for them is the laws of the heathen. If you are not going to obey God's law, you will obey humanistic law.

The issue is still theonomy or autonomy. You will either obey God or obey man. It is just that simple. If we do not wish to be controlled, tyrannized, enslaved, and forcefully corrupted, we have to know the Word of God and His principles. We have to stand on those principles and do what is right in every situation. Relativism does not work. Situation ethics does not work. We have to determine that we are going to do that which is right regardless. We will obey God. That is why, when the high priest said to Peter, "You're not to preach anymore in this man's name," Peter said, "Whether is it right to obey God or man?" We will do that which is right, and that should be our position.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank You for Your Word and Your truth. Lord, we pray that You would help our lives to match our profession. May we be submissive and obedient to Thee. May we stand for Thee in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. May we honor Thee in all that we say and do. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 38

How Do You View Yourself?

July 20, 2024

SCRIPTURE READING - Luke 5:1-11 (KJV)

And it came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Gennesaret, and saw two ships standing by the lake: but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets. And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon's, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship.

Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught. And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net. And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake. And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink.

> When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord. For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken: and so was also James, and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon. And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men. And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him.

Introduction: The Problem with Modern Self-Esteem

> There is so much garbage being presented today as truth based upon what we call self-esteem or self-image. The truth is that many people think they have a low self-image. When I was a child, we used the little poem, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me.”

But that is really not true. Names do hurt, especially a child. And when you are telling a child constantly and consistently that he is stupid, that he is worthless, that he is of no account, and that he is no good, I can understand how someone can grow up with an attitude that he is absolutely worthless as well.

But the truth of the matter is that most people today do not suffer from a lack of self-esteem. In fact, the problem today is that most people are exceedingly proud and arrogant. Therefore, a lot of money is to be made in these self-image and self-esteem programs by telling everyone how beautiful they are, how successful they are, how wonderful they are, and that they are the pinnacle of worth, even if it is not true. We are also told today that self-image is of the utmost importance.

I have known men who have actually destroyed a ministry and brought tragedy to themselves by seeking to put forth a certain image of themselves and of their work. I know one pastor particularly who led his church into very deep debt in order to build a humongous building, which they really did not need. If you ever asked that pastor how in the world things were going and how he was doing, he had a stock answer: “Great and getting better.” But the problem was that things were not great, and they were not getting

better. They ended up losing the ministry, losing the building, and it was basically sold to pagans as well.

So I understand, on the one hand, a need, in one sense of the word, for a correct and biblical self-esteem and self-image. But on the other hand, let me make the point that it must be a biblical self-esteem, and it must also be a biblical self-image; otherwise, it is nothing more than a hypocritical sham.

Biblical Self-Assessment: Romans 12:3

Before I get to our text, I want you to turn to the book of Romans, chapter 12, and look at verse 3. I want to deal with this passage in light of what I am going to be teaching you today. The Apostle Paul writes: "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." Now, take the time to look at that verse again: "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."

The word for "more highly" happens to be the Greek word, you prefer no, and you pair literally means above or beyond. "Think" basically means to think. So, actually, what he is saying is that we are not to think of ourselves over that which we really are. We are not to estimate our abilities or capabilities, or our value, beyond what they really are. In other words, when you and I think more highly of ourselves than we ought to, we estimate our value and worth to be far greater than they are, and our abilities and capabilities to be greater than they really are.

If you look back at verse three in Romans chapter 12, he says, "For I say through the grace given unto me, that 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 has dealt to every man, the measure of faith." When he says "to think soberly," that has nothing to do with alcohol, being drunk, or being not drunk.

The word "soberly" literally means to be in one's right mind, to be of a sound mind, and to put a moderate estimate upon oneself and

one's ability. It means to think wisely. We are not to think more highly of ourselves than we ought; we are to think soberly, wisely, and with a sound mind.

The implication of this verse should be very clear. When we think of ourselves more highly than we ought, we are crazy; we are out of our minds. We are not dealing with a sound mind or a wise way of thinking. He tells us that we need to think wisely and soberly. I tried to give an illustration this morning. We have a brother in our church by the name of Ed Wolf.

Ed sings exactly like I do, which is nil, none. So I asked the people, "What would you think if I announced that this coming week Ed and I were going to make a trip to Nashville, Tennessee, make a record, sing as a duet, and try to make it a number-one hit?" Before I could even finish, Tom Davis said, "I think you're crazy." That is exactly right. You would be right to think we were crazy, because neither one of us could sing. What I am trying to point out is that we would be overestimating ourselves, our abilities, and our capabilities. Since I cannot sing and neither can Ed, to make such an assessment of ourselves would amount to absolute insanity.

In today's estimate, most people really and truly do not suffer from what you and I would call low self-esteem. Most people are actually arrogant, proud, and haughty; thus, they overestimate themselves. They do not think soberly. In fact, the truth of the matter is this: we have to know not only our abilities and capabilities, but also our limitations. God is telling us in Romans 12:3 that we must seriously, soberly, and scripturally assess ourselves, our abilities, and our capabilities, because God has dealt to each one of us a certain measure of faith.

That is, He has given us a gift and an ability. As I pointed out earlier, mine is certainly not singing. It might as well be music, by any stretch of the imagination whatsoever. But God does indeed expect us to think soberly and view ourselves according to that. Now let us go back to our text, having shown you that verse, and look at what is happening in Luke 5:1.

Jesus Borrows Peter's Boat (Luke 5:1-3)

“It came to pass that as the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Gennesaret.” The people were pressing upon Him to hear the Word of God. The word “pressed,” in verse one, is important. It is the word epikemi, and it literally means to lie upon or to be placed upon. It also refers to what you and I would call the pressure of a violent tempest. Our Lord was in a crowd, and the crowd was pressing upon Him in such a way that He could not function or really concentrate. It was stressful and very uncomfortable. Consequently, He borrowed a ship.

There were two ships there. One belonged to Peter, and I guess the other belonged to James and John. Luke 5:2 says, “And saw two ships standing by the lake: but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets.” He entered into one of the ships, which was Simon’s, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down and thought the people out of the ship.

As I was preparing this message, a thought hit me. When our Lord borrowed this ship, have you ever thought about the fact that while Jesus Christ was on the earth, He owned nothing? He owned absolutely nothing. In Luke 9:58, our Lord said, “The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.” He did not even own a place. You will find that He lived with His disciples.

Then I thought about an old hymn titled “The Cross Was His Own”:

“They borrowed a bed to lay His head when Christ the Lord came down. They borrowed the ass in the mountain pass for Him to ride to town. But the crown that He wore and the cross that He bore was His own. The cross was His own.

“He borrowed the bread for the crowd He fed on the grassy mountain side. He borrowed the dish of broken fish with which He satisfied. But the crown that He wore, that thorny crown, and the cross that He bore were His own. The cross was His own.

"He borrowed the ship in which to sit to teach the multitude. He borrowed a nest in which to rest, but He had never a home so rude. But the crown that He wore, the cross that He bore, were His own. The cross was His own.

"He borrowed a room on the way to the tomb that Passover lamb to eat. They borrowed a cave for Him, a grave; they borrowed a winding sheet. So the crown that He wore and the cross that He bore was His own. The cross was His own."

Those two things basically, really and truly, belong to Him.

Before I get to the point of this message, there are a couple of principles I want to point out. Think about this question: Would you lend to the Lord Jesus Christ? You have to consider this fact: He owed nothing, had no collateral, no job, no bank account, and was basically wandering from place to place preaching. I am sure that if Jesus Christ were here today on earth, it would be absolutely impossible for Him to acquire a bank loan, although He created the world and owns everything in the world. Because, basically, He had nothing. So my question is, would you lend to the Lord Jesus Christ? Which brings me to a second question: How in the world would you ever lend to the Lord Jesus Christ?

The Principle of Lending to the Lord

Well, let me show you. Hold Luke chapter five, but turn first to Psalm 112, verse 5. Here is a general principle. We will look at a couple of other passages, but the Word of God simply says this: "A good man sheweth favour, and lendeth; he will guide his affairs with discretion." Note this: a good man sheweth favour and lendeth.

Now turn to Proverbs chapter 19 and verse 17. Look at what the Scripture says: "He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the LORD; and that which he hath given will he pay him again?" So think about this: He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord, and that which he hath given, will He pay him again?

Now turn to Luke chapter 6, verse 35. Our Lord says, "But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again."

"And your reward shall be great, and you shall be the children of the highest, for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil." Note

that He is kind to the unthankful and to the evil. But the Bible says, "And lend, hoping for nothing again."

I remember years ago, when Alice and I were at the university, times were always tough. Sometimes we did not have much to eat. Even though I was working and in school, it was still difficult. Occasionally, my parents—or someone somewhere—would send us some money. We would have a bonanza, so to speak, and go out and buy all kinds of groceries, because usually we had to do without.

There was another couple from our local church who were also in school there. They were in the same position we were. We always laughed because it was mutual: if our friends got rich, then we got rich, and if we got rich, they got rich. In other words, we shared whatever we had. We would loan each other money, groceries, or whatever was needed, and never expect anything back in return. I think that is a wise thing to do.

When our Lord said, "But love you your enemies and do good and lend, hoping for nothing again," He was teaching this attitude. So if I win Steve fifty dollars and get it back, I am blessed. But if I lend him fifty dollars and he is unable to return it, I am still blessed. If I do not expect to get it back, my feelings will not be hurt when I do not. The attitude I basically took, and still take, is this: I give. If it comes back, it is wonderful; if it does not come back, it is wonderful as well. It does not really bother me. Our Lord is saying that the way to lend to Him is by helping the poor and the needy.

However, let me make this caveat. There is a huge difference between helping the biblical poor and needy and helping the lazy and indolent. God forbids us to help those who refuse to work, because the Bible says in 2 Thessalonians 3:10, "If any would not work, neither should he eat." God says that if someone is not going to work, he can starve and die out. That will take care of those who are so indolent and worthless that they refuse to work. Yet I would imagine that most people, however lazy and indolent they are, before starving to death would find something to do to earn money for food. They will either be forced to work, or they can simply die out. There is a great difference between helping the biblical poor and needy and helping those who are too lazy to work.

Here is a second principle tied to this passage, and I am going to show it to you from the Bible. As Solomon said in Proverbs 19:17, “He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord; and that which he hath given him will he pay him again.” This principle can be summed up in two ways. First, it is impossible to outgive God. Everything we give Him, He has already given us to begin with. Second, God will never be any man’s debtor. He will always give us more than we ever loaned to Him. He always repays more.

The Miraculous Catch and Peter's Response (Luke 5:4-9)

Let me show you a good illustration in Luke 5. What did He do there? First of all, He borrowed this ship. Verse 3 says, “And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon’s, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship.”

Now watch what happened when He finished speaking. He said to Simon, “Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught.” Simon answered, “Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net.” When they had done this, they enclosed a great multitude of fishes, and their net brake.

They beckoned to their partners, who were in the other ship, to come and help them. They came and filled both ships, so that they began to sink. After using Peter's ship, our Lord commanded him to go out a little way, let down the nets, and prepare for a large haul. It would be a tremendous catch.

I almost smiled when I read verse five. When Simon answered, he said, “Master, we have toiled all the night and have taken nothing. Nevertheless, at thy word I will let down the net.” I can hear this in my ears. It seems Peter was too tired, sleepy, and discouraged to have his heart truly in obeying Jesus Christ. Peter then halfheartedly obeyed.

There was a great surprise: he enclosed a great multitude of fish, so that the net began to break. They summoned James and John and

their ship, and when they got the fish into the ships, they were nearly sinking because they were so full of fish.

Think about this truth. Peter loaned his boat to our Lord for a few hours, and now the Lord rewarded him and his partners with this tremendous catch, two shipfuls of fish. Peter, James, and John had been blessed abundantly. This was the greatest catch, prize, and probably the greatest profit they had ever made in fishing. They had successfully brought their catch to land. The ships had come limping in, so loaded down with all this great catch.

What in the world do you think was going through Peter's mind? What went through the minds of James and John at this particular point? What would be in your mind if you had been there? I can tell you what I believe the modern-day Christian would be thinking. We might think, “Praise the Lord, we are rich. Look at this great catch!” Or, “Praise the Lord, we are now famous. We have more than anyone has ever caught.” We might think, “Lord, thank You for Your absolutely wonderful providence.” That would be fine. I know someone would come up with this: “Oh, Lord, You can borrow my boat anytime.” After all, look at the reward for loaning the boat. It was astounding. We might also say, “I am blessed of the Lord in this great providence.”

Look at Luke chapter five, verse eight: “When Simon Peter saw it,” when he saw this great catch, “he fell down at Jesus's knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” And here is why he did it: “For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken.” Isn't that astounding? Peter did not say, “Lord, thank You for this wonderful catch. Thank You for making us rich. Thank You for giving us this great blessing.” No, he fell down at Jesus's knees, saying, “Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.” What a confession, what an admission, and what a strange way of thanking the Lord for His wonderful providence.

When the Bible says that he fell down at Jesus's knees, the Greek word is prospepto. It means to fall forward, to fall down, to fall prostrate at one's person, in due homage and supplication. What Peter did, basically, was fall on his face and say, “Lord, depart from me, for I am a sinful man.” Now, why would Peter say that?

Principle 1: Seeing God's Glory Reveals Our Sinfulness

I want to give you two principles which we must learn from this. If these principles sink into our hearts, they will inevitably change us. Why would Peter say, after this tremendous blessing, “Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man”? First, the more we see and understand the glory, power, and blessing of God, the more we perceive and understand our own sinfulness. Peter was blessed in such a way that it was far above all the others who received a similar blessing. He was blessed not only with this tremendous catch, but also with a deeper realization of his own sinfulness and of the greatness and glory of Jesus Christ, because Jesus Christ is indeed God in the flesh.

If we talk to our fellow believers, usually we find that most think they are an all-right kind of people: moral, upright, trying to be honest and righteous. But there is a vast difference between what we are in Jesus Christ and what we are in our own sinful nature—the difference between what we are in Christ and what we are in and of ourselves.

In Romans chapter 7, notice what the Apostle Paul said, especially in verse 18: “For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing.” The will is present with him; he wants to do what is right, but how to perform that which is good he finds not. It is not in him, he is saying. “I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing.” I am a sinner, I am sinful, I am weak, I am depraved.

Then, in verse 24, he says, “O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” He continues, “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord,” so that “with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.” Matthew Henry commented on verse 24: “It was as troublesome to Paul as if he had a dead body tied to him, which he must have carried about with him.” This made him cry out, “O wretched man that I am.”

Henry then makes this observation: “A man that had learned in every state to be content yet complains thus of his corrupt nature.” Have you easily and readily seen and understood your own depravity and the corruption of your flesh? I am going to tell you very

pointedly: Your flesh does not love God. Your flesh does not want to do that which is right and holy. Your flesh does not wish to be obedient. Your flesh wishes basically just to please itself. Scripture says that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. Here is why.

Romans chapter 8, beginning with verse 6, says, “For to be carnally minded” or fleshly minded “is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace; because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither need envy. So then they that are in flesh cannot please God.” Obviously, our flesh is at enmity with God, and it can never please God. Flesh and blood, therefore, is not going to inherit the kingdom of God. John Gill and others have pointed out the fact that when the Apostle Paul said, “O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”

One way they punished a murderer, when he was caught in a timely manner, was to tie him to the man he had murdered. They would fasten the dead man and the living man together face to face, chest to chest, arm to arm, and leg to leg, and leave them. The dead man's worms and corruption would eventually eat the living man alive and kill him, leaving him to die a horrible, agonizing death.

The Apostle Paul is pointing to this as a picture when he says, “O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this dead?” He is talking about his sinfulness and depravity. Gil goes on to say that it was like that punishment: “They send us inflicted on criminals by fastening a living body to a putrid carcass,” and it is emphatically called “the body of this death.” Paul recognizes his own sinfulness. That is exactly what Peter was doing when he said, “Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.” In other words, “Lord, this blessing is a demonstration to me of how sinful I really am.”

The closer you come to God, the closer you come to the Lord Jesus Christ, the more you see His holiness and His righteousness. Inevitably, the more you are going to see your sinfulness, your wickedness, and your depravity. Isaiah chapter six points this out very clearly.

"In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up and his train filled the temple." That is in itself a tremendous verse. "Above it stood the seraphims. Each one had six wings. Between he covered his face. With twenty he covered his feet, with twenty he did fly, and one cried unto another and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory. And the post of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke."

Then said I, "Woe is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips. I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips, for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." So he begins to cry, "Woe is me, I am undone. I'm a man of unclean lips. I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips. Mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts."

When you see the one true and the living God as He is, you always see yourself as you are. "Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar. And he laid it upon my mouth and said, Lo, this has touched thy lips, and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged."

Also, I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then said I, "Here am I, Lord; send me." And he said, "Go." So here is the call of Isaiah. But when Isaiah saw the Lord, he also saw himself. He saw his filthiness and his sinfulness. He saw the filthiness and sinfulness of the people around him. You cannot see the holiness of God without seeing and understanding your own sinfulness. There will be no foolish pride in the presence of the Lord. It is impossible to get close to our Lord without recognizing our own sinfulness.

Because Peter says in verse 8, "Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man." But note that this is connected with verse 9: "For he was astonished at all that were with him at the draught, or the catch, of the fishes which they had taken." So here is a second truth: the more we see and understand the glory, power, and blessing of God, the more we see and understand our own unworthiness.

Principle 2: Seeing God's Blessings Reveals Our Unworthiness

We do not deserve any of our Lord's blessings. We do not deserve life, help, happiness, family, food, rest, or sleep. We do not deserve anything but justice and judgment. Yet we have reached the point in this land where our hearts are so hardened against God and His truth that many people think they deserve better. There is a catchy phrase prominent today: "Go ahead, you deserve it."

We reason, "I have driven an old truck for so long; I have 400,000 miles, so I deserve a new truck." Really? I do not even deserve what I have. We rationalize and say that we deserve these things, when in reality we do not deserve anything. When people say, "Go ahead, you deserve it," the answer is, "No, a thousand times no." I do not want what I deserve. I want the blessing of God. I want the mercy of God.

It is pride that thinks we are worthy. It is pride that thinks we deserve what we do not deserve. Remember what Jacob said in Genesis chapter 32. He was going to meet Esau. He had already separated his family and some of his stock, trying to appease Esau. There he wrestled with the angel. In Genesis chapter 32, he said, "Oh Lord God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the Lord which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee." Then he says this: "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant."

When you stop and think about Jacob, he had four wives. Look at all the children he had, the cattle, the sheep, and the wealth that he possessed. Yet he said, "Lord, I do not deserve the least of thy mercies and of all the truth which thou hast shewed unto me." The more you understand God's blessings, the more you understand your own unworthiness.

Look in Luke chapter 7. "Now when he had ended all his sayings in the audience of the people, he entered into Capernaum. And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear unto him, was sick, and ready to die. And when he heard of Jesus, he sent unto him the elders of the Jews, beseeching him that he would come and heal his servant. And when they came to Jesus, they besought him instantly,

saying that he was worthy for whom he should do this. For he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue."

"Then Jesus went with them. And when he was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying unto him, Lord, trouble not thyself: for I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof: Wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee: but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed. For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it." When Jesus heard these things, he marvelled at him, and turned him about, and said unto the people that followed him, "I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel."

Interestingly, the friends of the centurion told Jesus Christ that he was worthy: "He has built us a synagogue." What do you love with our nation? Evidently, he was pretty well off—a Roman soldier. They said he was worthy. When our Lord started coming, he sent word to Him, saying, "Lord, I am not worthy that you should even enter under my roof. I am not worthy. Neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee. Lord, you do not have to do this thing. You just speak the word, and my servant will be healed." And what did our Lord say? "I've not found so great a faith, no, not in Israel." The friends said the centurion was worthy, but the centurion had a biblical understanding of himself: "I am not worthy." Our Lord said it took great faith to acknowledge that and to acknowledge the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The principles, I believe, are exceedingly clear. The closer we get to the Lord Jesus Christ, and the more of His blessings we receive, the more we should perceive and understand His power, His righteousness, His holiness, His mercy, and His grace. This should demonstrate to us our own sinfulness and our great need of Him, while giving us a very humble heart and attitude. We should be like Peter and recognize that we do not deserve the least of His mercies.

Applications: How Self-View Affects Worship and Service

How do you view yourself? Do you view yourself worthy or unworthy? Righteous or unrighteous? Your view of yourself will affect your prayer life, how you praise or do not praise the Lord Jesus Christ, and how you worship—or whether you worship at all.

Let me give you a good illustration from Luke 17. Here is where most people, and most Christians, are today. "And it came to pass, as he went to Jerusalem, that he passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off."

"Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." When He saw them, He said to them, "Go show yourselves unto the priests." And it came to pass that, as they went, they were cleansed. One of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back with a loud voice, glorified God, and fell down on his face at His feet, just like Peter did, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan.

Jesus answering said, "Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? They are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger." And He said to him, "Arise, go thy way, thy faith that made thee whole."

Here is the question that you are going to be asked, and that you should be asking yourself: Are you the one leper who returned, or are you like the nine who thought that you deserved to be healed? What I am trying to make clear is that your view of yourself determines whether or not you really praise the Lord, give Him glory, and worship Him.

Here is the second application: If you do not see yourself as sinful and undeserving, you are nowhere close to the Lord Jesus Christ. The closer you get to Jesus Christ, just as Peter did, the more you will find that you have to confess that you indeed are a sinful man. The Bible says in 1 Peter 5:6 that we are to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt us in due time.

Our Lord Himself said, "Whosoever exalts himself shall be humbled, and whosoever humbles himself shall be exalted." When

we come to the Lord with pride, He is not going to hear us; and if He does, He is going to cast us down. The Lord is never, ever going to turn away a humble and contrite spirit. So, if you do not see yourself as sinful and undeserving, you are not close to the Lord Jesus Christ at all.

Now, go back to Luke chapter 5, because I want to make one last application. Watch this one very carefully. In Luke 5:10–11, the Bible says: “So was also James and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon. And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men.”

Forsaking All to Follow Christ (Luke 5:10-11)

“And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all and followed him.” I don't know about you, but this is absolutely astounding to me. Peter, James, and John were at the height of their careers and economic greatness. They owned their ships, and now they had the greatest catch of a lifetime. Yet, when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all and followed Him. They walked away from the greatest catch and monetary prize of their lives. They walked away from their families and from everything to follow Jesus Christ. Amazing.

Most people today would never have done that. Our arguments are, “I have to live. I have to make a living. I've got to do something.” They were not simply walking away from a job; they were walking away from the greatest catch and prize in their entire lives. Our Lord simply said, “Follow me, and I'll make you futures of men.” It is time we realized what Peter, James, and John did: they counted the service of Jesus Christ greater treasure than anything and everything they owned, and they were willing to sacrifice all to serve Him.

Everything we have, He gave us: our abilities, our capabilities, what little money we have, and what little possessions we have. You never can outgive God, and He is not going to be any man's debtor. Whatever you sacrifice for Him, whatever you lend Him, He will always pay you back more than you sacrifice. We have to understand that the closer we get to the Lord Jesus Christ, the more we will see our sinfulness and our unworthiness.

Conclusion: A Biblical View of Self

If we are not seeing these things in our lives or acknowledging that we are sinners and sinful, we have a wrong view of ourselves. We can see ourselves for what we are, but must also see ourselves for what we are in Jesus Christ. There is a vast difference: in Jesus Christ we are absolutely forgiven, absolutely perfect, and absolutely righteous. In and of ourselves, we can say like Peter, "Depart from me, Lord, for I am a simple man." I do not deserve this. "I recognize I am a sinner. I recognize I am unworthy. All I did was loan You my boat for a few hours, and Lord, look what You have done."

Your view of yourself determines how you serve the Lord, worship Him, praise Him, and pray.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ today, help us and speak to us, Lord, that we may soberly assess our lives, abilities, and capabilities, and not think more highly of ourselves than we ought. Enable us, Father, to see our sinfulness, because the more we see our sinfulness, the more we know that we need Thee.

For Thou hast said, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." You also said, Father, "They that behold need not a position, but they that are sick." The more we see ourselves as sinners, the more we realize how desperately we need Thee. The more You bless us, the more we see how unworthy we are to receive Your blessings, because we are sinners. Help us, Father, to have a biblical view of ourselves as we are in and of ourselves, and as we are in Jesus Christ. May we praise Thee, Father, for Your love, grace, and mercy. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 39

Rebellion Made Plain

August 10, 2025

SCRIPTURE READING - Jeremiah 28:1-4 (KJV)

Jeremiah 28 begins:

"And it came to pass the same year, in the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the fourth year, and in the fifth month, that Hananiah the son of Azur the prophet, which was of Gibeon, spake unto me in the house of the Lord, in the presence of the priests, and of all the people, saying, Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, saying, I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon. Within two full years will I bring again into this place all the vessels of the Lord's house, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon took away from this place, and carried them to Babylon. And I will bring again to this place Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah, with all the captives of Judah that went into Babylon, saith the Lord, for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon."

Introduction: Rebellion Redefined

Years ago, I preached on this passage under the title “Teaching Rebellion,” and I also preached a series of three messages from

Isaiah 1 on rebellion. The truth enunciated there is the same truth here.

When we think of rebellion, we normally think of riots and revolution: people looting, burning, stealing, and sometimes even committing murder. We think of teenagers, husbands, or wives who will not listen. We think of someone going far out of the way to do things that are exceedingly wicked and vile. We may think of Numbers 16, where Korah, Dathan, and Abiram rebelled against God and against Moses and Aaron.

We do not have to go to that extent to have rebellion. According to this Scripture, rebellion is very simple and very plain.

Israel's History of Rebellion

Throughout the Bible, God referred to Israel as disobedient and rebellious. Deuteronomy 9:7 says, “Remember, and forget not, how thou provokedst the Lord thy God to wrath in the wilderness. From the day that thou didst depart out of the land of Egypt until you came into this place, you have been rebellious against the Lord.” Verse 24 says, “You have been rebellious against the Lord from the day that I knew you.”

Moses says in Deuteronomy 31:27, “For I know thy rebellion and thy stiff neck. Behold, while I am yet alive with you this day, you have been rebellious against the Lord. How much more after my death?” Jeremiah 5:23 says, “But this people hath a revolting and rebellious heart; they are revolted and gone.” I could multiply passages, but God repeatedly refers to Israel as rebellious.

Are you rebellious? Are your children rebellious? Are the believers in your church rebellious? Is there a difference between disobedience and rebellion? If there is, where is the line drawn, and how do you know when you have crossed it? You may have to readjust your answer.

The Hebrew Words for Disobedience and Rebellion Are Identical

Before considering Jeremiah 28, let us examine passages using the words disobedience, disobeyed, and disobedient, and then passages

using rebellion and rebellious. The Hebrew words will help us understand the text.

First Kings 13 tells the story of the disobedient prophet. God told him to proclaim against Jeroboam's golden calves, but not to eat or drink anything in the land. He did eat and drink because he was lied to. Verses 21-22 say:

"And he cried unto the man of God that came from Judah, saying, Thus saith the Lord, Forasmuch as thou hast disobeyed the mouth of the Lord, and hast not kept the commandment which the Lord thy God commanded thee, but camest back, and hast eaten bread and drunk water in this place, of the which the Lord did say to thee, Eat no bread, and drink no water; thy carcase shall not come into the sepulchre of thy fathers."

Notice the charge: "Forasmuch as thou hast disobeyed the mouth of the Lord."

A lion killed this prophet. Verse 26 says, "And when the prophet that brought him back from the way heard thereof, he said, It is the man of God, who was disobedient unto the word of the Lord. Therefore the Lord hath delivered him unto the lion, which hath torn him, and slain him, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake unto him."

Whether you look at disobeyed or disobedient, the Hebrew word is marah. It means to be contentious, rebellious, refractory, disobedient towards, and rebellious against.

The New Testament word translated disobedience is the Greek word apeithes. It means to be impersuadable, uncompliant, disobedient, and contumacious. Romans 1:30 describes these people as backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents. Romans 10:21 says, "But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people." Titus 1:16 says, "They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate."

I checked every New Testament reference to disobedient, disobeyed, or disobedience, and each time it is from the same Greek

word. That is how disobedience is used in the Old and New Testaments.

Isaiah 30:9 describes “a rebellious people, lying children.” Notice the latter part: “Children that will not hear the law of the Lord.” Jeremiah 5:23 says, “But this people hath a revolting and a rebellious heart. They are revolted and gone.” Ezekiel 2:3 says, “And he said unto me, Son of man, I send thee to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that hath rebelled against me. They and their fathers have transgressed against me, even unto this very day.”

Rebellion Is Failure to Hear and Obey God's Word

The Hebrew word used for rebellion, sometimes as a verb and sometimes as a noun, is marah. It means to be contentious, rebellious, refractory, disobedient towards, rebellious against, to show rebellion, to show disobedience, and to disobey. The Hebrew word for disobey and the Hebrew word for rebellion are the same word.

Ezekiel 2:3 speaks of a rebellious people. In verse 8, God tells Ezekiel, “But thou, son of man, hear what I say unto thee. Be not thou rebellious like that rebellious house. Open thy mouth, and eat that I give thee.” What was God giving Ezekiel? He was giving him His Word. Verses 9-10 say, “And when I looked, behold, an hand was sent unto me; and, lo, a roll of a book was therein. And he spread it before me. It was written within and without: and there was written therein lamentations, and mourning, and woe.”

Ezekiel must eat or assimilate the Word of God. He must make it his own. God tells him not to be like that rebellious house, but to hear His words.

Psalm 78:8 says, “And might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation; a generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not stedfast with God.”

The Hebrew word for disobedient, disobedience, or disobeyed is marah, and the word for rebellion is the same. According to these texts, rebellion is a failure to hear, receive, and obey the Word of God.

God told Ezekiel, “But thou, son of man, hear what I say unto thee. Be not thou rebellious like that rebellious house. Open thy mouth wide, and eat that which I give thee.” This failure to hear, receive, and obey was Israel’s sin repeatedly in the Old Testament. God cried out against a rebellious people and cautioned Ezekiel not to be like that nation.

Nehemiah 9:26, still referring to Israel, says, “Nevertheless they were disobedient, and rebelled against thee.” How did they rebel? “And cast thy law behind their backs, and slew thy prophets which testified against them to turn them to thee, and they wrought great provocations.”

Rebellion is turning your back upon God, refusing to hear His Word. They cast His law behind their backs. They were not listening to God, receiving His Word, or honoring Him. When He sent prophets telling them to turn, repent, come back, and obey, they murdered the prophets. A failure to hear and obey the Word of God is rebellion.

Are you rebellious? Are your children rebellious? Are the people in your church rebellious? The answer is yes if they refuse to hear, heed, and obey the Word of God, because God classifies that as rebellion.

Illustration 1: Hananiah's False Prophecy (Jeremiah 28)

Jeremiah 28 and 29 give us further plain and simple illustrations of rebellion. Jeremiah 28 involves Hananiah, the son of Azur the prophet, who taught contrary to Jeremiah. Jeremiah had been warning about the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem. Hananiah said it would not happen; those already taken into captivity would return.

Nebuchadnezzar came against Judah and Jerusalem in 605 B.C. The first time, he did not destroy the city or the temple. He left people in the land and took a number of the major folks into captivity. When he came back in 586 B.C., he destroyed the city and temple, took everything out of the temple and the king’s house, and burned all the palaces.

This is before Nebuchadnezzar's second return to destroy Jerusalem. Jeremiah had been saying that he was coming back: we had better get right with God, or he would come back and destroy everything.

SCRIPTURE READING - Jeremiah 27:1-19 (KJV)

Hananiah was a false prophet. God told Jeremiah that He would give Judah and Jerusalem, and the surrounding kingdoms, into Nebuchadnezzar's hands. Anyone who submitted to him would live, and the city would not be destroyed. Anyone who fought him and refused to submit would die. Jeremiah 27 sets the stage for chapters 28 and 29. The first nineteen verses say:

"In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah came this word unto Jeremiah from the Lord, saying, Thus saith the Lord to me."

"Make thee bonds and yokes, and put them upon thy neck. And send them to the king of Edom, and to the king of Moab, and to the king of the Ammonites, and to the king of Tyrus, and to the king of Zidon, by the hand of the messengers which come to Jerusalem unto Zedekiah king of Judah. And command them to say unto their masters, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Thus shall ye say unto your masters; I have made the earth, the man and the beast that are upon the ground, by my great power and by my outstretched arm, and have given it unto whom it seemeth meet unto me. And now have I given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, my servant; and the beasts of the field have I given him also to serve him. And all nations shall serve him, and his son, and his son's son, until the very time of his land come: and then many nations and great kings shall serve themselves of him. And it shall come to pass, that the nation and kingdom which will not serve the same Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, and that will not put their neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, that nation will I punish, saith the Lord, with the sword, and with the famine, and with the pestilence, until I have consumed them by his hand. Therefore hearken not to your prophets, nor to your diviners, nor to your dreamers, nor to your enchanters, nor to your sorcerers, which speak unto you, saying, Ye shall not serve the king of Babylon. For they prophesy a lie unto you, to remove you far

from the land; and that I should drive you out, and ye should perish. But the nations that bring their neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, and serve him, those will I let remain still in their own land, saith the Lord; and they shall till it, and dwell therein. I spake also to Zedekiah king of Judah according to all these words, saying, Bring your necks under the yoke of the king of Babylon, and serve him and his people, and live. Why will ye die, thou and thy people, by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence, as the Lord hath spoken against the nation that will not serve the king of Babylon? Therefore hearken not unto the words of the prophets that speak unto you, saying, Ye shall not serve the king of Babylon: for they prophesy a lie unto you. For I have not sent them, saith the Lord, yet they prophesy a lie in my name; that I might drive you out, and that ye might perish, ye, and the prophets that prophesy unto you. Also I spake to the priests and to all this people, saying, Thus saith the Lord; Hearken not to the words of your prophets that prophesy unto you, saying, Behold, the vessels of the Lord's house shall now shortly be brought again from Babylon: for they prophesy a lie unto you. Hearken not unto them; serve the king of Babylon, and live: wherefore should this city be laid waste? But if they be prophets, and if the word of the Lord be with them, let them now make intercession to the Lord of hosts, that the vessels which are left in the house of the Lord, and in the house of the king of Judah, and at Jerusalem, go not to Babylon. For thus saith the Lord of hosts concerning the pillars, and concerning the sea, and concerning the bases, and concerning the residue of the vessels that remain in this city."

He goes on to say that He will take them all. These nations will serve Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar if they want to live. If they fight against him and do not submit, they will die.

In Jeremiah 28, Hananiah prophesies that within two full years all the temple vessels stolen by Nebuchadnezzar will return, and all the people taken captive will return. Verses 3-4 say, “Within two full years will I bring again into this place all the vessels of the Lord's house, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon took away from this place, and carried them to Babylon. And I will bring again to this place Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah, with all the captives of Judah that went into Babylon, saith the Lord: for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon.”

It was a wonderful prophecy, the end everyone desired. Even Jeremiah said amen to it. Verses 5-6 say, “Then the prophet Jeremiah said unto the prophet Hananiah in the presence of the priests, and in the presence of all the people that stood in the house of the Lord, even the prophet Jeremiah said, Amen: the Lord do so: the Lord perform thy words which thou hast prophesied, to bring again the vessels of the Lord's house, and all that is carried away captive, from Babylon into this place.”

Jeremiah would have liked that, but he continued:

"Nevertheless hear thou now this word that I speak in thine ears, and in the ears of all the people; The prophets that have been before me and before thee of old prophesied both against many countries, and against great kingdoms, of war, and of evil, and of pestilence. The prophet which prophesieth of peace, when the word of the prophet shall come to pass, then shall the prophet be known, that the Lord hath truly sent him. Then Hananiah the prophet took the yoke from off the prophet Jeremiah's neck, and brake it. And Hananiah spake in the presence of all the people, saying, Thus saith the Lord; Even so will I break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon from the neck of all nations within the space of two full years. And the prophet Jeremiah went his way."

Jeremiah would have loved to see the treasures and captives return. But when a prophet prophesies peace, the fulfillment shows that he spoke of God. If it does not come to pass, obviously he was not of God when he spoke it. Hananiah took the wooden yoke off Jeremiah’s neck and broke it, saying, “Thus saith the Lord, I've broken the yoke.” He seemed to have everything going for him. The problem was that his prophecy was not true. It was a lie.

Verse 12 continues:

"Then the word of the Lord came unto Jeremiah the prophet, after that Hananiah the prophet had broken the yoke from off the neck of the prophet Jeremiah, saying, Go and tell Hananiah, saying, Thus saith the Lord; Thou hast broken the yokes of wood; but thou shalt make for them yokes of iron. For thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; I have put a yoke of iron upon the neck of all these nations, that they may serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; and

they shall serve him: and I have given him the beasts of the field also."

What is the implication when God says, “Make a yoke of iron”? You may break a wooden yoke, but a yoke of iron is very difficult to break. God is saying that His Word will stand, not Hananiah’s. Hananiah prophesied a lie. The captives and vessels were not returning. Seventy years of captivity had been prophesied; they would remain captive seventy years, not two, three, four, or five.

Hananiah had prophesied, but God told Jeremiah differently. Verses 15-17 say, “Then said the prophet Jeremiah unto Hananiah the prophet, Hear now, Hananiah; The Lord hath not sent thee; but thou makest this people to trust in a lie. Therefore thus saith the Lord; Behold, I will cast thee from off the face of the earth: this year thou shalt die.” The reason follows: “Because thou hast taught rebellion against the Lord.” Hananiah died the same year, in the seventh month.

God charged him with teaching rebellion. Rebellion is failing to teach the truth, teaching a lie, and allowing and enabling people to believe a lie. Think of what happened with this COVID debacle. People not only allowed but enabled others to believe a lie. Many died because of it, and others suffered greatly because of that lie.

Rebellion Is Also Failure to Preach the Truth

Was Hananiah deceived? Why did he say what he said? A lie can be intentional. People deliberately lie to make you believe something else. All our children did that; you and I did that. A lie can also be based on ignorance: you simply do not know. It can be based on a desire for praise and recognition: you want attention. I regularly read about people saying and doing things that are not true because they want you to think more highly of them than they deserve. Sometimes they do it for money.

On the one hand, rebellion is a failure to hear, receive, and obey the Word of God. On the other, it is a failure to teach and preach the Word of God. A half-truth presented as the whole truth is an untruth. When you teach something from the Word of God dishonestly, giving what you think or what you have been taught

instead of what the text or the analogy of Scripture teaches, you are in rebellion. Pastors, preachers, and teachers who fail to proclaim and teach the Word of God teach rebellion.

That is what was said about Hananiah. He claimed to be God's prophet, representing God: "Thus saith the Lord, the Lord God of hosts." Yet he preached a lie. Rebellion is both the failure to hear and heed the Word of God and the failure to preach and teach the whole Word of God.

SCRIPTURE READING - Jeremiah 29:1-14 (KJV)

Illustration 2: False Prophets in Jeremiah 29

Jeremiah 29 gives the second illustration, involving Ahab the son of Kolaiah, Zedekiah the son of Maaseiah, and Shemaiah the Nehelamite. Jeremiah tells the people that their captivity will last seventy years. The first fourteen verses begin:

"Now these are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem unto the residue of the elders which were carried away captives, and to the priests, and to the prophets, and to all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had carried away captive from Jerusalem to Babylon."

That would be the first captivity. The letter continues:

"After that Jeconiah the king, and the queen, and the eunuchs, the princes of Judah and Jerusalem, and the carpenters, and the smiths, were departed from Jerusalem; by the hand of Elasah the son of Shaphan, and Gemariah the son of Hilkiah, (whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent unto Babylon to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon) saying,

"Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, unto all that are carried away captives, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem unto Babylon." Here's what Jeremiah tells them: "Build ye houses, and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them; Take ye wives, and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; that ye may be increased there, and not diminished. And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the Lord for it: for in the

peace thereof shall ye have peace. For thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Let not your prophets and your diviners, that be in the midst of you, deceive you, neither hearken to your dreams which ye cause to be dreamed. For they prophesy falsely unto you in my name: I have not sent them, saith the Lord. For thus saith the Lord, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place. For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart. And I will be found of you, saith the Lord: and I will turn away your captivity, and I will gather you from all the nations, and from all the places whither I have driven you, saith the Lord; and I will bring you again into the place whence I caused you to be carried away captive."

Jeremiah is telling them to settle down. They have seventy years ahead of them. Build your house, plant your garden, get married, and let your children get married. It will be a long time.

God told them not to pay attention to anyone who spoke contrary to His Word or said anything different from it. Anyone doing so was a liar, prophesying falsely; God had not sent him. Jeremiah 23:28-29 says, “The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord.” His Word is wheat; their dream is chaff. Then He says, “Is not my word like as a fire? saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?”

Nothing and no one will stop God from fulfilling His Word. He decreed seventy years, and it will be seventy years.

Jeremiah 29:16 says, “Know that thus saith the Lord of the king that sitteth upon the throne of David, and of all the people that dwelleth in this city, and of your brethren that are not gone forth with you into captivity.” These are the people left in Judah and Jerusalem. The passage continues:

“Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Behold, I will send upon them the sword, the famine, and the pestilence, and will make them like vile

figs, that cannot be eaten, they are so evil. And I will persecute them with the sword, with the famine, and with the pestilence, and will deliver them to be removed to all the kingdoms of the earth, to be a curse, and an astonishment, and an hissing, and a reproach, among all the nations whither I have driven them."

"Because they have not hearkened to my words, saith the Lord, which I sent unto them by my servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them; but ye would not hear, saith the Lord."

God tells them why they are being destroyed: they have not hearkened to His words; they would not listen. That is rebellion. Now we come to some false prophets.

Ahab the son of Kolaiah and Zedekiah the son of Maaseiah were preaching. Verse 21 says, "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, of Ahab the son of Kolaiah, and of Zedekiah the son of Maaseiah, which prophesy a lie unto you in my name; Behold, I will deliver them into the hand of Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon; and he shall slay them before your eyes." It does not pay to be a false prophet when God delivers you to Nebuchadnezzar.

Verse 22 tells how he slew them: "And of them shall be taken up a curse by all the captivity of Judah which are in Babylon, saying, The Lord make thee like Zedekiah and like Ahab, whom the king of Babylon roasted in the fire." He put them on a spit and grilled them. He roasted them alive. Why? "Because they have committed villany in Israel, and have committed adultery with their neighbours' wives. And have spoken lying words in my name, which I have not commanded them; even I know, and am a witness, saith the Lord."

God caused Nebuchadnezzar to barbecue these two lying false prophets. They committed villany and adultery and spoke lying words in God's name. God had not commanded those words; He knew and was a witness against them.

Villany means doing what is senseless, immoral, foolish, and wicked. They were adulterers, immoral, foolish, senseless, and wicked, and they preached a lie in the Lord's name. They said, "Thus saith the Lord," when the Lord had not said it. Their punishment was that God had Nebuchadnezzar roast them in the fire.

Another false prophet in Jeremiah 29 is Shemaiah. Verse 24 begins:

"Thus shalt thou also speak to Shemaiah the Nehelamite, saying, Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, saying, Because thou hast sent letters in thy name unto all the people that are at Jerusalem, and to Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah the priest, and to all the priests, saying,"

“The Lord hath made thee priest in the stead of Jehoiada the priest, that ye should be officers in the house of the Lord, for every man that is mad, and maketh himself a prophet, that thou shouldest put him in prison, and in the stocks.”

He tells him that he used to be the priest instead of Jehoiada and that he is to imprison everyone prophesying contrary to this. Verse 27 says, “Now therefore why hast thou not reproved Jeremiah of Anathoth, which maketh himself a prophet to you?” He is saying that they should have gotten rid of Jeremiah. “For therefore he sent unto us in Babylon, saying, This captivity is long: build ye houses, and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them.”

Zephaniah the priest read the letter to Jeremiah. Then the Word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, saying:

“Send to all them of the captivity, saying, Thus saith the Lord concerning Shemaiah the Nehelamite; Because that Shemaiah hath prophesied unto you, and I sent him not, and he caused you to trust in a lie: Therefore thus saith the Lord; Behold, I will punish Shemaiah the Nehelamite, and his seed: he shall not have a man to dwell among this people; neither shall he behold the good that I will do for my people, saith the Lord; because he hath taught rebellion against the Lord.”

How do you teach rebellion? You do not teach or expound His Word. Shemaiah also tried to replace the priest with Zephaniah. He usurped God’s sovereign authority. God said He had not sent him or spoken to him, and thus he was condemned to death.

Application: Accountability for Preachers and Hearers

Rebellion is refusing to hear God's Word, submit to Him, and believe Him. It is also preachers, pastors, and teachers saying things that are untrue, causing people to believe a lie instead of showing them plainly, "Thus saith the Lord."

Preaching the Word of God is no light, frivolous, trifling work. Those who preach and teach must know the truth, have it, hold it, and communicate it. Preaching is not a job; it is a ministry. Study is mandatory. How can you know God's truth without studying His Word? Expounding and explaining the Word is a divine must.

Today, larger churches, even mega churches, are normally nothing more than feel-good entertainment centers. People do not really want the Word of God. They want to feel good, be entertained, and feel acceptable regardless of their sins and wickedness. When you are honest with the Word and say, "Thus saith the Word of God," people become upset, get mad, and leave.

Many preachers and teachers preach a lie, sometimes unintentionally, through ignorance and lack of study. Sometimes they do it to appear successful and build a big work. Whether through ignorance, laziness, or indolence, God calls it rebellion. Rebellion is a very serious sin.

Likewise, when a Christian refuses to hear, heed, and obey the Word of God, it is rebellion. Disobedience is rebellion; refusal to hear is rebellion. If God holds me accountable to teach the truth, He holds you accountable to hear, receive, and obey it. If I do not teach the truth, it is rebellion on my part. If you do not receive it, it is rebellion on yours.

"But I don't like it." That is immaterial. "But I don't understand it." That is immaterial. "But I don't want it." That is immaterial. As God's child, you are duty-bound to hear His Word, receive it, submit to it, and obey it. He holds you accountable just as He holds me accountable. If either of us refuses to bow and submit to the Word, it is rebellion.

Samuel told King Saul, “To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.” What was the penalty for witchcraft and idolatry? Death. “For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.”

Conclusion: The Plainness of Rebellion and Call to Faithfulness

I have used two wonderful passages for many years. In Mark 4:24, Jesus Christ says, “Take heed what you hear.” Make sure you hear the Word of God. God holds you accountable and responsible for that. How can you know you are hearing it? Be a Berean. Study and read the Word for yourself, through and through, repeatedly. When you hear something contrary to what you know is in the Word, dismiss it.

Luke 8:18 says, “Take heed how you hear.” Pay attention to God’s Word. Do not daydream, sleep, or plan next week’s work. Hear with hearing ears so that you may submit and obey.

If failing to hear the Word of God is rebellion, and failing to preach it is rebellion, where does that put America? Where does it put Germany, England, or any nation? And we wonder why we have so many problems and are in this situation. God judged Judah, Jerusalem, and these other nations for failing to hear and obey, and to preach and proclaim. That makes you wonder what we are in for in this country. He executed His perfect justice upon those who would not hear and those who would not proclaim His Word. We must hear, obey, and proclaim His truth.

When you enter any church, you should hear, “Thus saith the Lord. This is what the word of God says. This is truth.” We must bow to it, or we are in rebellion against Him. Rebellion is plain and simple. It is not just rioting and revolution. It includes refusing to hear, submit, and obey, and refusing to preach and teach the whole counsel of God.

How did the Apostle Paul in Acts 20 become free from the blood of all men? He said, “I take you to record this day that I am pure from the blood of all men, for I have not shunned to declare unto you

all the counsel of God." The only way a preacher can become free from the blood of all men is by preaching the truthfulness and entirety of God's Word. It is His Word, and we are bound to obey.

Father, I pray that You'll speak to our hearts, open our eyes, teach us how plain and how simple rebellion really is. We don't have to riot. We don't have to be in a revolution. We don't have to go out and get drunk. We just have to refuse to obey, refuse to preach and teach Your Word, and it's rebellion. Help us, Lord, not to be rebellious. Help us, Lord, to be faithful unto Thee, obedient unto Thee, and help us to be submissive. And, Lord, bow before Thee, for Thou alone art God. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 40

There is a Sin Unto Death

August 14, 2025

Introduction and Scripture Reading

The title of the message is “There Is a Sin Unto Death.” We will consider two passages, beginning with 1 Chronicles chapter 10 and later turning to 1 John chapter 2. First, look at 1 Chronicles 10:13–14.

I will bring an exposition of these verses toward the end, but there is a great deal of groundwork to lay before returning to them. The Bible says, “So Saul died for the transgression which he committed against the Lord, even against the word of the Lord which he kept not, and also for asking counsel of one that had a familiar spirit to inquire of it; and he inquired not of the Lord. Therefore he slew him, and turned the kingdom unto David, the son of Jesse.”

The Reality of Death and Degrees of Sin

We do not like to think about death. When we sin, knowing that we are sinning against a holy, just, and righteous God, we hesitate even more to consider death and dying. We know that when we sin we

deserve death, yet, in one sense, we are not struck down instantly or immediately. We do not expect death to come instantly, even when we sin.

The Bible declares very plainly in Romans 6:23 that “the wages of sin is death.” That is basically the reason each one of us dies: we are sinners. That is for sure. Yet I realize that not all sins are equal. Someone may say, “Well, sin is sin.” That is true in one sense, but some sins are more vile and wicked than others. If a man steals, God requires restitution; but if a man murders another man, God requires that his life be forfeited. The Bible says, “Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed.” Clearly, murder is more vile, heinous, and wicked than thievery.

There is indeed a difference in sins. All those sin is sin. Now, the Word of God makes it exceedingly clear that there is a sin unto death. If you look in your Bibles to 1 John chapter 5, and notice verses 16 and 17, the Scripture says, "If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death. I do not say that he shall pray for it. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin unto death."

Defining the Sin Unto Death from 1 John 5

Interestingly, three times in these two verses the Scripture tells us there is a sin unto death. Now, every sin in one sense of the word is a mortal sin, because that is why we die. But none of us have been struck down instantly and immediately when we sin. That is why we're alive today. If God did indeed strike us down instantly and immediately when we sinned, then no one would be around for long, that is for sure. But John, in 1 John chapter 5, is clearly conceiving and saying that there is a sin that is unto death.

Now, the little Greek word "unto" is the preposition pros, and it actually means "unto," "toward," or "to," and "with regard to." So actually, what he's saying is there is a sin which is leaning toward death or heading toward death. In other words, this is a sin where you're actually going to be losing your life. Now, the sin unto death, which I'm going to show you from the Scripture, is a sin which is of

such a character that it throws the offender beyond the reach of mercy.

SCRIPTURE READING - Matthew 12:22-32 (KJV)

It leads to death. It is a sin in which there is no turning back. The bridge is out, and you are going to die. That is all there is to it.

When we look at 1 John chapter 5, commentators will tell you that they think this sin is the unpardonable sin. I think the Scripture will show why that is not true. Look in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 12 and consider the unpardonable sin mentioned by our Lord. There is no way that this unpardonable sin could be accomplished today in the same sense. How can I say that?

The Unpardonable Sin vs. the Sin Unto Death

"Then was brought unto him one possessed with the devil, blind and dumb: and he healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw. And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the son of David? But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub, the prince of the devils. And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand. And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand? And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges. But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you. Or else how can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his house. He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad. Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be

forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come."

So here is the sin that is referred to as the unpardonable sin.

Jesus Christ has just performed a miracle. He has taken a deaf mute—one who was deaf and dumb and demon-possessed—cast out the demon, and the man hears and speaks. The Pharisees now ascribe this obvious, clear miracle, done by the power of God, to the power of Satan.

There are two things that we have to remember. First, Jesus Christ was endowed with the Holy Spirit without measure. The Bible says in John 3:34, "For he whom God the Father hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him." Jesus Christ walked and worked in the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

Second, we must consider what is known as the Economical Trinity. When we talk about the Trinity, there is the Ontological Trinity and the Economical Trinity. The Ontological Trinity is based upon the Greek word ontos, which means "being." It is the logical order of being: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Economical Trinity is how God works: everything is out of the Father, through the Son, and in the Spirit.

Jesus Christ, who had the Spirit without measure, performed this miracle in the presence of all these people, and the Pharisees ascribed this great power of God to Satan. That is why I do not think that this sin can be committed in this same line today. Jesus Christ was on the earth, in the flesh, performing the miracle. When the Pharisees saw Him, they said He did it by Beelzebub, by Satan.

Jesus Christ is not on the earth, here in the flesh, performing miracles. I suppose, in another sense of the word, that sin could be committed today if someone saw what was an obvious and clear miracle of God and then ascribed it to Satan. But since we have the completed Word of God, we ascribe the unpardonable sin to those who reject and refuse the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Because Jesus Christ did everything He did in the power of the Spirit, in John 12:48 our Lord said, "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I

have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day." Note that He said, "He that rejecteth me"—that is His person, the living Word of God—"and receiveth not my words"—that is the written Word of God—"hath one that judgeth him, even the words which I have spoken at the last day."

When you go back to 1 John chapter 5 and look at this passage, it is almost clear that it cannot possibly be what we would call the unpardonable sin, for several obvious reasons. Number one would be this: we cannot see someone's heart or mind, and we do not know what God does instantly or at the last moment. For instance, there is only one deathbed conversion in the Bible. Only one. That is the thief on the cross. Someone has aptly said, "There is only one that none may despair, but there is only one that none may presume." Like that thief, someone could be saved instantly by the Lord at the last moment of his life. Therefore, there is no way that we could say this is the sin unto death.

The sin not unto death is easily explained. It is any sin we commit for which God chooses not to execute punishment instantly or immediately. The fact and reality is that each of us deserves death; well, we may deserve it, but we are still alive. Therefore, He has not executed His judgment against us instantly or immediately.

John Calvin wrote:

"A sin which is not unto death. That we may not cast away all hope of salvation of those who sin, he shows that God does not so grievously punish their faults as to repudiate them. It hence follows that we ought to deem them brethren, since God retains them in the number of his children. For he denies that sins are to death, not only those by which the saints daily offend, but even when it happens that God's wrath is grievously provoked by them. For as long as room for pardon is left, death does not wholly retain his dominion."

Calvin is saying the same thing: as long as we are alive, it is obvious that we are sinners, but God has not judged us with the sin unto death instantaneously. The Word of God gives us two very clear illustrations of people who sinned in such a way that they deserved and merited the death penalty, but God pardoned them.

Illustrations of Pardoned Sins with Consequences

The first illustration is found in 2 Samuel chapter 12. This is the sin of David, when he committed adultery with Bathsheba and had Uriah, her husband, murdered by the sword of the children of Ammon. Note closely what God says.

Let us begin reading with verse 7. Nathan said to David, “Thou art the man,” after telling him the story about the one little ewe lamb. “Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul; and I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things. Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in his sight? Thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife. Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbour, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun.”

“For thou didst it secretly: but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun. And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan said unto David, The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die.” Did David deserve to die? The answer is yes, on two counts. Number one, adultery. Adultery merits the death penalty. Number two, murder. Although he did not physically murder Uriah, he had him murdered because he sent word to Joab to put Uriah on the forefront of the battle and retire from him that he may die. God has charged him very clearly in this passage with the murder.

First of all, God asks, “Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord?” Then, “Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised me.” A despising of the Word of God is a despising of God. You cannot separate God from His Word. God and His Word are one.

Even though God sovereignly and graciously pardoned David so that he did not die, he did not escape the consequences of his sins. The child that was born to him and Bathsheba died. Amnon, David's son, raped his own sister Tamar. Absalom then murdered Amnon, his own brother, for what he did to Tamar. Absalom rebelled against his father, ran him off the throne, and tried to kill him before he himself was killed. Then Adonijah, another son, tried to usurp the throne, having himself crowned as king without David's knowledge or approval.

Just because his sin was pardoned did not mean that he escaped the consequences of those sins. Clearly, then, just because God pardons you does not mean that you do not carry the consequences of those sins.

The second illustration is given to us in the New Testament, in 1 Corinthians chapter 5. There we find a very interesting and, at the same time, very disgusting illustration. This sin was so absolutely grievous that Paul said it was not even known among the Gentiles, or among the unsaved. He wrote, "It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife."

This was not the man's mother; it was his stepmother. He was having an affair with his father's wife, which was not only a violation of the law of God, but also another violation where God said a father and his son shall not go into the same maiden. Here he was committing this grievous sin.

In verse 2, Paul tells the Corinthian church, "And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you. For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus Christ."

This is church discipline: someone is turned out of the church and placed under discipline, where the body may be attacked and destroyed by the enemy; but Paul said that the spirit may be saved.

This was a very grievous sin. Yet here is the interesting thing: this man deserved death, very clearly and very obviously. But would you like to know what? God pardoned him and forgave him, because the man repented of his sins.

Paul is talking about the incident in 1 Corinthians chapter 5. He said, "For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears; not that ye should be grieved, but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you." He continued, "But if any have caused grief, he hath not grieved me, but in part: that I may not overcharge you all."

Concerning this man on whom they exercised church discipline, Paul said, "Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many. So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him." Evidently, the man repented, and the Apostle Paul urged restoration and reconciliation.

Paul said, "For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death. For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort"—that is, when he wrote them. He continued, "What carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter. Wherefore, though I wrote unto you, I did it not for his cause that had done the wrong, nor for his cause that suffered wrong, but that our care for you in the sight of God might appear unto you. Therefore we were comforted in your comfort: yea, and exceedingly the more joyed we for the joy of Titus, because his spirit was refreshed by you all."

Paul said, I wrote this for your own benefit, not just for the benefit of him that sinned, not just for the benefit of him that was sinned against, but for everyone. Although we have to understand there is

indeed a sin unto death, it appears that in these two illustrations God pardoned those individuals so that they did not die instantly. They did not die immediately.

In the early church, individuals who committed such sins, even though they might have been reconciled and restored to the church, were known as the walking dead. Why? The church did not have, and still does not have, the power or authority to execute the death penalty, with the exception of church discipline. Neither can we expect a corrupt civil government that hates God to follow God's law and carry out an execution. The point is that they were called the walking dead because, although their sins had been forgiven and they had committed a sin worthy of death, the church could not execute them, and the state or government would not execute them. That would not stop God from executing them in His time and in His way.

There are consequences to sin. The sin may be forgiven, but that does not relieve us of the consequences. If someone came through that door and shot me before I could look or anyone could holler, I would be killed. The rest of you would draw your weapons, stop him, hold him, and wait for the police to arrest him. There would be a trial; he would be found guilty and sentenced to death in the electric chair.

Could God save him and forgive him? Yes. But just because God saved and forgave him, does that mean he would no longer be executed? No. He would suffer the consequence of murder. He would be executed by the state, which God requires. God forgave him, but he still had to face the consequences, just like David and just like this individual.

Adam Clarke said, “The sin unto death means a case of transgression, particularly of grievous backsliding from the life of power and godliness, which God determines to punish with temporal death, while at the same time he extends mercy to the penitent soul.” God forgives, yes, but God still executes. There is mercy to the penitent soul, but the sin was unto death.

The sin unto death is a sin directly against the Word of God and against God Himself. You cannot separate God and His Word. David

said in Psalm 138:2, “I will worship toward thy holy temple, and praise thy name for thy lovingkindness and for thy truth: for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name.” God's Word is elevated, and if God's Word ever fails, then God is not God. God has honored His Word. You are not going to sin against the Word of God without sinning against God, and you are not going to sin against God without sinning against His Word.

First John was written to Christians. It is one of the easiest books to read in the Greek and one of the easiest books to translate. I took Greek for three years, and when we first started translating, we started on 1 John. As you go through 1 John, John speaks to “beloved,” “little children,” “young men,” “fathers,” and “dear ones.” In other words, he is referring to Christians.

Look at verse 13 of 1 John chapter 5: “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God.” Verse 14 says, “This is the confidence that we have in him.” Verse 15 says, “And we know that he hear us.” Then verse 16 says, “If any man see his brother sin a sin not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death.” In the same context, he says, “There is a sin unto death. I do not say that he shall pray for it. All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death.” There is a sin unto death and a sin not unto death. In the context of 1 John chapter 5, the sin unto death is committed by a Christian brother, not an unbeliever. Therefore, it is not what is known as the unpardonable sin.

The Nature of the Sin Unto Death: Stubborn Rebellion

It is not dying without trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ. Because the unpardonable sin, according to our Lord in Matthew chapter 12, can neither be forgiven in this life nor the life which is to come. So what is the sin unto death? The sin unto death is a willful, continuous, unrepentant sin. God has called each one of us to holiness. He said, "Be ye holy; for I am holy, saith the Lord." God corrects us when we sin and chastises us when we sin.

We are not punished for our sins the way the ungodly are punished. We do not lose our salvation or end up in the fires of eternal destruction. We are disciplined. But this sin unto death is a

sin from which one refuses to hear and heed the Word of God and turn from it. It is someone who is stubborn, hard-headed, rebellious, who refuses to listen, will not take heed, will not obey, and will not submit himself to the truth of God's Word.

Proverbs 29:1 amply illustrates this: "He, that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." In other words, you try to rebuke him, reprove him, or teach him, but he will not listen. He is hard-headed, stubborn, and rebellious. He stiffens his neck and will not bow; therefore, he shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.

The Hebrew word for "suddenly" is pith'om, meaning suddenly, instantly, or in an instant. That would be a sin unto death. God says, "I'll destroy him instantly, suddenly." It will just happen.

There is another illustration of this. You can read it later, when you turn in your Bibles to Amos 4 and read through Amos chapter 4. You will find that the people had strayed away from God. God had sent judgment after judgment after judgment, and each time He sent a judgment, at the end of the judgment He said this: “And yet ye have not returned unto me, saith the Lord.” When you read through that, He sent the judgment of famine. He sent the judgment of drought. He sent the judgment of insects, plagues. He sent the judgment of war. Each time He said, “Yet ye have not returned unto me,” until you get to Amos 4:11-12. Here is what God said: “I have overthrown some of you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and ye were as a firebrand plucked out of the burning: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord.”

“Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God.” What did He just say? I’ll kill you. I’ll take you out. Prepare to meet thy God. This sin of being stubborn and hard-headed and sinning unto death not only can apply to individuals; it can apply to families, churches, or a nation. In fact, that is what Amos 4 was about: an entire nation that refused to hear the Word of God, and God just destroyed them. God took their lives.

Romans 6:16 says, “Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin

unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?" So he is still talking about sin unto death. The Greek word for "death" in Romans 6 and 1 John 5 is thanatos. We use a lot of Greek words and do not even realize it. Even the term euthanasia uses it: thanatos is the Greek word for death, and eu is a preposition meaning good or well. Euthanasia just means a good death.

The word thanatos is used several different ways in the Bible. First, it could refer to physical death, when we die. Secondly, it could refer to spiritual death in the sense that, as a Christian, we lose our testimony, the confidence of people, and everything that we have basically worked for. Thirdly, it is used in reference to eternal death, where death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. Fourthly, it could refer to all the miseries we face in this world by rejecting God, including physical death and even eternal death. So there is a sin unto death. Now, obviously in 1 John chapter 5, verses 16 and

The sin unto death would have to refer, number one, to physical death, or possibly include, since it is a Christian involved, the loss of our testimony, our honor, and being recognized basically as an obedient child of God. Dying in rebellion is a shame and dishonor for the child of God. So clearly God forbids that.

Look again at what happened to Saul in 1 Chronicles 10:13-14: "So Saul died for his transgression which he committed against the Lord, even against the word of the Lord, which he kept not, and also for asking counsel of one that had a familiar spirit, to inquire of it; and he inquired not of the Lord: therefore he slew him, and turned the kingdom unto David the son of Jesse."

Old Testament Example: King Saul

When you talk about King Saul, it is true that God used Saul to defend His people and deliver His people from the Philistines. There is also a debate as to whether or not Saul was genuinely converted.

The Bible says that when Samuel anointed him, as he left, God turned him into another man, turned his heart into another man. A lot of people try to say that means God saved him. No, it could also mean God just gave him a kingly spirit. I am not going to argue as to whether or not Saul was saved in that sense of the word. The truth is,

I really do not know. But what I do know is that Saul lost his life for his disobedience to the Word of God.

When Saul was chosen, the Bible says that he was head and shoulders above all the rest of the Israelites. Saul was a good-looking man, a very strong man, and very powerful physically speaking. But physical stature does not equal mental competence or spiritual reality. Saul turned out to be a very weak man, although he had great strength physically. He was a capricious man, unstable in many ways, and sinned against God many times. And so the Bible says, "And so Saul died for his transgression which he committed against the Lord."

Saul's sins were against God, but even more specifically, they were against the Word of God—that is, against God's plain, express, and positive command, which is a great aggravation to any sin. If you told your son, “Do this,” and he asked, “Dad, do I understand you mean to say such-and-such?” and you answered, “Yes, son. That's exactly right,” then it would be bad for him to disobey; but it would be even worse that he understood what you wanted and then disobeyed. This is what Saul did. He knew, but then he disobeyed.

A good illustration is found in 1 Samuel chapter 15, where God came to Saul through Samuel and said, “Thus saith the Lord.” He commanded him to fight the Amalekites and to kill man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and camel and ass—everything. But Saul spared Agag the king, along with the best of the oxen and the best of the sheep. He purposely and deliberately disobeyed God. At that point, God rejected Saul from being king, but He did not instantly slay him.

The Bible says, “So Saul died for his transgression,” which he committed “against the Lord, even against the word of the Lord which he kept not.” In other words, he deliberately and willingly walked contrary to what he knew. Here is a principle that we have to understand. The verse continues: “also for asking counsel of one that had a familiar spirit, to inquire of it, and inquired not of the Lord: therefore he slew him.” Yet if you read the rest of Saul's life, you will find that Saul did inquire of the Lord, and the Lord would not answer him. The Bible says he did not inquire of the Lord. Well, did he, or did he not? He did, but he didn't.

What do I mean by that? He did try, but he was a hypocrite, deceitful, and rebellious. There was no heart in his desire to find out the will of God. That was when he went to the witch of Endor and asked her to bring up Samuel.

Did she bring him up? Samuel came up and spoke to Saul, but she did not bring him up. In fact, she was shocked that Samuel came up. Samuel asked, “Why have you bothered me?” Saul answered, “Here is the reason: God will not speak to me. I have no vision or dream. He will not answer me by the Urim and the Thummim, and there are no prophets.” Samuel said, “If God will not speak to you, why did you bother bringing me up? I am not going to give you anything. All I could give you would be the Word of God, and you do not want that.”

In other words, Saul never really went to God with a broken, repentant heart. Here is the principle in Scripture: Proverbs 28:9, “He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination.” If you will not hear God, God will not listen to you. Why should God listen to you if you will not listen to Him? Why should He give you more truth when you will not obey the truth He has given you?

Saul refused to listen to God, and God would not answer him. So Saul inquired of a witch. He had previously driven all the witches and warlocks out of the land, and now he went to the witch of Endor.

Some of you may remember the television program Bewitched, with Elizabeth Montgomery. She was supposed to be a good witch. There is no such thing as a good witch. Do you remember her mother’s name? Endora—the witch of Endor. Isn’t that amazing?

Samuel refuses. He tells Saul, “By this time tomorrow, you're gonna be where I am. You're gonna be dead. God is going to kill you.” Clearly, then, there is a sin unto death.

John Trapp, speaking of Saul's death, says: “For his transgression which he committed, adding rebellion to sin. For he was not so very bad at first, as neither is any wicked person. He first neglected the Word of God, and then despised it, and then harbored in his heart hypocrisy, hatred, envy, cruelty. And here he is taxed for these three vices especially: number one, for flat disobedience, which is as a sin of witchcraft; number two, for consulting with a witch; and number

three, for not inquiring of the Lord. He did not draw nigh to God with a true heart and full assurance of faith, having his heart sprinkled from an evil conscience and his body washed with pure water."

Matthew Henry says, "Consulting with witches is a sin that fills the measure of iniquity as soon as anything else. Saul inquired of one that had a familiar spirit, and inquired not of the Lord, therefore he slew him. Saul slew himself, and yet it is said God slew him. What is done by wicked hands is yet done by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God. Those that abandon themselves to the devil shall be abandoned to him, so shall their doom be. It is said that Saul did inquire of the Lord, as he answered him not, but here it is said Saul did not inquire of God, for he did not till he was brought to his last extremity, and then it was too late."

When we think about the sin unto death, we normally tend to think of sins so wicked, vile, and heinous that God simply has to kill us. But that is not necessarily so. In 1 Kings chapter 13, there are thirty-two verses, and a prophet of God from Judah goes up to Jeroboam, who is at his false altars, and says, "Thus saith the Lord, There shall be a man born

The prophet declared that a man by the name of Josiah would come, take the bones of all these priests, burn them on these altars, and desecrate them. Everything that had been done would be gone. As a sign that this would come true, he said the altar was fixing to break and all the ashes would fall off. And it did.

About that time, Jeroboam stretched out his hand toward his men and said, "Grab him, stop him." When he did, his arm froze, and he could not retract it. He looked at the prophet and said, "Would you please pray for me?" The prophet prayed for him, and his arm was restored home. Then Jeroboam said, "Come home with me, and I will feed thee and give thee a reward." But the prophet answered, "I will not go home with you. If you gave me your whole house, God told me not to eat anything or drink anything here, and not even to return the same way that I came." He turned around and left.

An old prophet also lived in the land. His two sons went home and told him what had happened. He said, "Saddle me the ass." Since

they knew which way the man of God had gone, they saddled the ass, and he pursued him. He said, “Come home with me and eat and drink at my house.” The prophet from Judah replied, “God forbade me not to eat or drink in this house or in this land, and I am not going to do it.” But the old prophet said, “You do not understand. I, too, am a prophet. An angel appeared unto me and told me to bring you home and give you food and water.”

The man of God from Judah went home with him. Just as he finished eating and drinking, the old prophet jumped up and said, “Thus saith the Lord God, Because thou hast disobeyed my word, and hast eaten and drunk in this land, therefore lions shall meet thee by the way and shall slay thee.” The old prophet loaned him his ass; they saddled him up and put him on it. He did not get far. A lion came out, met the man, killed him, and stood over the corpse. It never touched the corpse or the ass. The man of God lost his life because he was deceived and listened to another individual.

Which brings me to this truth: You are responsible for what you know and for what God has showed to you. If somebody comes along and tells you something different, you better not listen to them. You better make sure you listen to God and hear His Word. So the sin unto death for this prophet was just disobedience. It was a grievous sin, but it was a sin of disobedience.

New Testament Examples: Ananias and Sapphira, and the Lord's Supper

Now, I want to give you another illustration. Turn in your Bibles, if you would, to Acts chapter 5. This one is in the New Testament. You talk about a sin unto death, and one being instantaneous, one being sudden—here you have it. Look in Acts chapter 5, beginning with verse 1: “But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, and kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles’ feet. But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart?”

"Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God." And Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and gave up the ghost. Great fear came on all them that heard these things. The young men arose, wound him up, carried him out, and buried him. About the space of three hours later, his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. Peter answered her, "Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much?" And she said, "Yea, for so much." Then Peter said, "How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out." Then she fell down straightway at his feet and yielded up the ghost. The young men came in, found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband. Great fear came upon all the church and upon as many as heard these things.

Now look at this husband and wife. They had certain land, sold it, and received the money. They contrived in their hearts a plan to pretend that they were giving everything to the apostles to distribute to the widows and the orphans, while in reality they were keeping back part of the money. They were lying to God and lying to everybody. Peter said, "When you had the land, you did not have to sell it. When you sold it, you could have kept all of it; it was yours. Why would a husband and wife lie and contrive such a wicked plan, trying to deceive the apostle, the church, and God?"

Let me show you why. In Acts 4:36-37, Joses, surnamed Barnabas, a Levite of Cyprus, having land, sold it, brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet. Barnabas sold his land and gave all of it to the apostles to distribute to the widows and the orphans. Eminently, Barnabas was praised and held up as an example.

Ananias and Sapphira wanted that praise and recognition, but they also wanted the money. When God struck Ananias dead for lying to the Holy Spirit, and Sapphira came in, Peter realized that if God had killed the husband, He was going to kill her as well. He said, "Tell me, did you sell the land for so much?" "Yep. That's exactly what we sold it for. We wonderful Christians."

Peter said, "Why in the world has Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost? Thou hast not lied unto man, but thou hast lied unto God. Behold, the feet of the young men who carried thy

husband out shall carry thee out as well." Was that a sin unto death? Very obviously. They were simply lying, and that was it. It does not necessarily have to be some grievous, heinous, vile, and wicked sin. It has to be a sin that is basically unrepented of, and one against God and His Word.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 11, we find another illustration of a sin unto death, one that you and I would never think about. This is in reference to the Lord's Supper. Our Lord says, "Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world."

There are people who are sickly and people who are asleep—that is, dead—because they partook of the Lord's Supper unworthily. How does a person partake of the Lord's Supper unworthily? The wine represents the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the bread represents His body. When we observe the Lord's Supper, we are saying that we remember the Lord Jesus Christ in His great sacrifice, where He gave Himself to save us from our sins.

Yet we may have known sin, wickedness, and rebellion in our hearts, which we refuse to repent of, and take the body and blood of our Lord in the symbols while pretending, "Oh Lord, we're living for You. We're forgiven," when we are lying.

We are deceitful and hypocritical. Notice what he said: "For this cause"—from this specific cause—"many are sickly and many sleep." Then he went on to say, "If we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged of God." The way not to partake of the Lord's Supper unworthily is to judge yourself, confess your sins, acknowledge your sins, judge them as deserving of death, repent of them, and turn from them. He said, "If we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged of God. But when we are judged of God, we are chastened that we might not be condemned with the world." Here, then, are

two sins unto death that are not vile and heinous as we would normally think.

Applications and Conclusion

Let me make some applications and try to tie this together. First, each of us must die. I do not care how young or how old we are. Each of us must die, and we know that we should prepare ourselves for death. We will meet the Lord; there is no question about that. I wish to die in obedience and not in disobedience. I have often thought about people going to places and doing things that they should never go to and should never do. I have often thought, "Lord, if I went to that place and did those things, that would either be the moment You came back or the moment You killed me. I sure would hate to face You with all that on my heart." We do not wish to die in rebellion to His Word.

Second, in order to be right with God and to stay right with God, we must be willing to give Him the benefit of the doubt in all things. What does that mean? Have you ever wondered, "I wonder if this is wrong. I wonder if this is sin. I wonder if I could do this and get by with it. I wonder if this would impact my Christian testimony"? If there is any doubt, do not. Romans 14:23 says, "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin." Whatever you cannot do in faith to honor and glorify God, God says not to do it. It is sin. If you cannot do it in faith, it is sin.

I never will forget reading about Lorenzo Dow, a Methodist, circuit-riding preacher. He had his peculiarities, that is for sure. While staying at a tavern or inn, he was eating when they started dancing. A young woman came to the preacher, intending to pull him out and make him dance with her. He said, "No.

"No," he said, "I can't do this." "Yes, yes, you can." She kept pulling him and begging him to come out and dance with her. At last he said, "Okay, I'll do so. But there's one thing I require first. I never do anything without asking the Lord's blessing." He hit the floor on his knees, pulled her down with him, and began praying, asking the Lord whether He wanted him to dance with this girl.

Of course, that stopped the whole scenario. So when in doubt, don't. It is just that simple.

Here is the third thing: in order to be right and stay right with God, we must be willing to acknowledge, confess, and turn from our sins daily—sometimes hourly, or even minute by minute. Proverbs 28:13 says, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." I would rather confess and forsake my sins and have mercy than try to cover them. As we saw in the life of David, that does not work, because God knows everything about it. The truth is that Scripture says there is a sin unto death.

It could be something heinous or vile, or something as simple as lying to God, being deceitful, or being hypocritical. Whatever it is, it occurs when God says, "That's it. I've had enough. You're not going to do this to Me any longer." It is like a parent. My father had a great philosophy concerning discipline: "If you do it right, you don't have to do it often." When my dad got hold of me, I did not want any more of it.

I did not mind my mother as much, because she was a piece of cake; she would not hit me that hard. But Dad? No. I have seen parents keep rebuking a child while the child continues on and on, until finally the parent has had enough. The parent snatches the child up and whales the living daylights out of him. Well, God the Father puts

He puts up with a lot of things like we do, but there comes a time when He says, "That's it. You'll not do Me this way any longer." It is over.

I know that I am going to die a sinner, because the wages of sin is death. But by God's grace and mercy, I do not want to die as a stubborn, hard-headed, rebellious, stiff-necked reprobate who will not listen to the Word of God or to God. If I die, I want to die as a sinner. I do not want to die as somebody who simply refuses to hear His Word, refuses to hear Him, and refuses to repent. John said there is a sin unto death. We need to make sure that it is not in our life, that we die as a sinner, not as a rebellious brother or sister who refuses to hear the Word of God.

Father, we pray in the name of Jesus Christ that You would help us, teach us, build us up in the most holy faith, and help us to understand Your Word when You say there is a sin unto death. May this encourage us to holiness, obedience, and self-examination; to give You the benefit of the doubt in all things; and to seek to honor and glorify Thee in every area of our lives. Lord, help us to be holy, godly, and to give Thee the praise. In the name of Jesus Christ we ask, amen.

CHAPTER 41

Christian Metamorphosis

September 15, 2025

Introduction: The Question of Maturity

Let us open our Bibles to 2 Corinthians chapter 3, verse 18. The title of the message is “Christian Metamorphosis.” Thursday was a week ago, I taught a Bible class, and many who may be listening were in tune to that Bible class, because we have been teaching through Arthur W. Pink’s book on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

The last lesson I dealt with was the Holy Spirit transforming. I thought it was such a wonderful truth after I got through teaching that night. I thought about it during the night and early in the morning when I got up, and so I prepared this message as the Lord gave me light on it. I want to go over some things that I hope will be very, very beneficial.

In 2 Corinthians chapter 3 and verse 18, he says, “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” So I want to begin by asking a question. Listen carefully to this question: Are you a butterfly yet?

Now you are going to say, “Pastor, that’s a silly question.” No, it’s not a silly question, because it has direct influence upon the subject that we are going to be looking at. Something similar happens to those who are regenerated and converted by the grace, mercy, and power of God. I could ask the same question another way. I could ask, “Are you a father in Israel yet?” Or, “Are you a mother in Israel yet?”

So what is a butterfly? A butterfly is a mature and fully grown insect that has gone through changes commonly known as metamorphosis. The life cycle of a butterfly begins as an egg, then there is a larva, which is the caterpillar, followed by the pupa, or the chrysalis, or what we would call the cocoon, and then from that cocoon there comes an adult butterfly. Butterflies begin life as an egg, and that egg hatches into a larva. The larva then pupates into an immobile state, and finally an adult butterfly emerges.

The complete cycle is known as metamorphosis. It is interesting that the word for metamorphosis occurs four times in our Bible. In fact, there are four stages as well to Christian metamorphosis. I want to show you the stages; we have just gone through the stages of the butterfly.

The Four Stages of Christian Growth

In 1 Peter 2:1-2, the Word of God says, "Wherefore laying aside all malice and all guile and hypocrisies and envies and all evil speakings, as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word that you may grow thereby." The word "babes" is the Greek word brephos, which means a newborn child, an infant, and a baby. So Peter says, "as newborn babes." Here, then, is the word for a newborn child.

In 1 John 2:12, John writes: "I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake. I write unto you, fathers, because you have known him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because you have overcome the wicked one. I write to you, little children, because you've known the Father. I've written unto you, fathers, because you have known him that is from the beginning. I've written unto you, young men,

because you are strong and the word of God abideth in you and you have overcome the wicked one."

So actually what John does is delineate three more stages. We have just seen that the first stage is that of an infant, a newborn child, a babe. Now John talks about little children, young men, and fathers. The word for "little child" is technion, and it occurs nine times in our Bibles; each time it is translated as "little children." Then he talks about "young men." The Greek word there is neoniskos, and it refers to a youth or to a young man. Then, of course, the word "fathers" is pater. It occurs 417 times and refers to an adult, one advanced in years, a senior, one who stands in the father's place and looks after another in a paternal way.

Just like the butterfly had four stages, there are four stages here in the Christian life: the babe, the little child, the young man, and the father. The stages go from birth to maturity. The goal of a baby is maturity, and the goal of the Christian is maturity as well. It is not pleasing to God for His children to remain as babes, little children, or even young men.

The Problem of Spiritual Immaturity

The Word of God tells us that God expects us to be children only in two ways. Number one, we should be as a little child when we receive the kingdom. But before considering that, notice what is happening. This is the problem we have in Christianity. It was the problem back in New Testament times, and it is the problem today.

We have many professing Christians who refuse to grow up. They refuse to become adults, and consequently they cannot be treated as adults. In 1 Corinthians chapter 3, the apostle Paul writes to the Corinthians, “And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ.”

He said, “I fed you with milk and not with meat, for hitherto you were not able to bear it, neither yet now are you able.” So now he is talking about babes in Christ. The word “babes” happens to be the word napios, and it refers to an infant, a little child, or someone that is childish and untaught.

The same truth is given to us in Hebrews chapter 5, beginning with verse 12. The apostle says, “For the time you ought to be teachers, you have need that one teach you again, which be the first principles of the oracles of God.” The word means: you should be teaching, but now you need to be taught again. He said, “and are become such as need of milk and not of strong meat.” In other words, you have reverted to babyhood.

He said, “For everyone that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even of those who are by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”

The word "babes" in Hebrews chapter 5 and verse 13, or "babe," is exactly the same word in 1 Corinthians chapter 3 and verses 1 and 2. It means an infant, someone who is untaught. A babe is someone who is unskillful in the word of righteousness. He does not have his senses exercised to discern both good and evil. Babies and little children do things that should not be done because they have no sense to discern good and evil.

My father told me—and I remember exactly the house in which we were living, the yard, and where I was sitting—that when I was just a little child, I sat on the ground with my legs spread open, holding a butter knife and hitting the ground between my legs. My father asked, "What are you doing?" Of course, I could not speak plainly. I was probably two or three.

I said, "Killin' a snake, killin' a snake." He said, "What?" He walked over, and between my legs was a pygmy rattler. I had probably hit him twenty or thirty times, but never hit him. Daddy snatched me up and killed the snake. It was a baby pygmy rattler, just as poisonous as a big one. I had no idea that the snake was poisonous; I was just trying to kill him. Children do unwise things many times.

God's Expectation of Maturity

There are only two areas in which God will allow us to be His children. The first is when we receive the kingdom of God. He said it like this in Luke chapter 18 and verse 17: "Verily, verily, I say unto

you, whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, shall in no case enter therein." It is wonderful to believe simply as a child, receive what is given to us, and understand it to be truth. That is what He is talking about. But look in your Bibles at 1 Corinthians chapter 14.

Here is the second area in which we are allowed to be children. First Corinthians chapter 14, verse 20, says, “Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be ye men.” So we may be children in malice.

How long does it take a child to forgive and forget? How many little children plan on hurting their playmates? None. They may hurt one accidentally, but they do not plan on hurting anyone; they are simply playing. Your child could be playing with another child, then come running in and say, “Mama, Mama, Johnny hit me.” She asks, “Where did he hit you?” “Here on the arm.” She looks at it, dusts it, and says, “Well, it’s all better now. Go back out and play.” The child goes right back out and plays with the same child who he thought had hurt him.

So God says that in malice we can be children. We need to get over everything very quickly, forgive very quickly, hold no grudges, and try not to hurt anyone at any time.

Here is what I am trying to tell you: maturity is the goal for the child of God. God says we cannot be children except in receiving the kingdom and in malice. He does not desire for us to remain babies, little children, or even young men. He expects us to be mature—to be a father or mother in the faith and to be mature in obedience as well.

Remember that when God created Adam and Eve, He created them mature. He created them as adults. They were never children or babies; He created them fully grown. They were mature at creation. Therefore, a Christian should have no desire to remain a baby, a little child, or even a young man.

Would you not suspect that something was wrong with a physical child that never changed or grew? How long would it take you to say, “There’s something wrong with this child. He’s not growing”? Is there not something wrong with a child who remains a child for thirty years? You would say yes. How is it that we have people who

profess to be Christians—some for thirty, forty, and fifty years—who still act like little children? They have never grown up. There is grievously something wrong with a Christian who never matures, or with a professing Christian, whether he is a Christian or not.

So how then does the egg of a butterfly turn into a butterfly? And the answer is it goes through changes. It goes from an egg to a larva to a chrysalis or cocoon, and then it becomes a butterfly. Well, in each of these stages, the butterfly is different. And so it's true like this in the Christian life. There's a difference between a baby and a young man or a little child. And there's a difference between a little child and a young man, and a difference between a young man and a father.

So God then expects us to reach maturity. So let me put it to you very bluntly. Change is not optional, according to the Word of God. Change is absolutely necessary. Change is inevitable, and change is absolutely demanded and commended by God.

He says in verse 14, "That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ." We are not to be children, tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine. Somebody says, "Let me tell you this new doctrine," like those Athenians in Acts chapter 17, who did nothing except sit around and try to conjure up some new thing. No, we are not to be children, deceived or led astray.

We are to be mature and grow up in our head, who happens to be the Lord Jesus Christ. For every Christian, your goal, your objective, your end is to grow up and become mature in Jesus Christ. How do you grow up? How do you become mature in Jesus Christ? The answer is through Christian metamorphosis.

How does a butterfly become mature? It goes through changes. In the butterfly, those changes are natural because that is the way God created it. But when it comes to Christians, our change is supernatural: it is the work of God the Holy Spirit in us.

There is a difference between the immediate work of God and the mediate work of God. "Immediate" does not mean something that

happens instantaneously, though it may. The theological meaning is that God works immediately, without means. When God created the world, He spoke it into existence, creating everything we see out of nothing. That was an immediate work of God. But how did God create Adam? He created Adam out of the dust of the earth which He had created. That is the mediate work of God, where God uses means.

When we think about our changes, we must understand that God is going to use means to change us, which we are going to look at.

The Meaning of Metamorphosis in Scripture

The Greek word from which we get our English word "metamorphosis," metamorpho, is the verb meaning literally to change from one form to another, or to transform and transfigure. In our Bibles, it is translated as "transfigure," "transform," and "change." The word is used of Jesus Christ twice when He was on the Mount of Transfiguration.

He went from the appearance of simply a man to the appearance of God in the flesh. His glory shined through His human body. Matthew 17:2 says, "And was transfigured before them, and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light." Mark 9:2 says, "And after six days Jesus taketh with him Peter, James, and John, and leadeth them up into a high mountain, apart by themselves, and was transfigured before them."

This is the same Greek word: metamorpho. It means to transfigure, transform, and change. The third time it is used is in Romans 12:2: "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." Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed, transfigured, and changed.

Finally, this word is used in 2 Corinthians 3:18: "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed." We are metamorphed, transposed, and transfigured into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of our Lord. In the context of 2 Corinthians 3, the apostle Paul is comparing and

contrasting the Old Covenant and the New Covenant, while showing the difference between the saved and the unsaved.

The Old Testament is just as much the Word of God as the New Testament. Each testament has its own distinctive and particular glory. The old saying is that the new—that is, the New Testament—is in the old concealed, and the old is in the new revealed. That saying demonstrates that the two are one. We have one Bible, not two Bibles, and it is impossible to understand the New Testament without the Old Testament.

In 2 Corinthians chapter 3, the apostle Paul labels the Old Testament as “the letter.” He does so because, when God gave the law, He wrote it in tables of stone. Unhappily, most people considered the letter of the law and not even the spirit of the law. But in the New Testament, he says in 2 Corinthians chapter 3, it is “spirit.” He says this not only because of the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ in fulfilling and finalizing our redemption, but also because the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, and He is the one that applies everything.

The glory of God revealed in the Old Testament is primarily the law. That which is revealed in the New Testament, the glory of God, is the gospel. Thus, in 2 Corinthians chapter 3, he is comparing the law and the gospel. In verse 18 he says, “But we all…” Who in the world is “we all”? The answer is those who are regenerated, those who have been saved by the grace of God. We know that we are saved. Looking back to 2 Corinthians chapter 3, verse 1, he writes to these Corinthians: “Do we begin again to commend ourselves? Or need we, as some others, epistles of commendation to you, or letters of commendation from you?”

Exposition of 2 Corinthians 3:18

"You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men." Verse 3 continues: "Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in the fleshly tables of the heart." The "we all" refers to those who have been regenerated, who are now the living epistles of God because the Spirit of the Lord has written God's law in our hearts.

In 2 Corinthians 4:4, the Bible says, "In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine into them." Thus, the "we all" in verse 18 are those in whom the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ has shined. Verse 6 says, "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." The "we all" therefore refers to all believers, those who have been truly regenerated and converted by the grace of God.

Secondly, verse 18 says, "we all with open face." The words "open face" literally mean unveiled. The enmity that we had against God as natural, unsaved individuals, and the prejudices that we had against God and His law, have been removed. We can now see the truth of God and the Word of God as it is revealed.

In 2 Corinthians 3:13-14, Paul says, "And not as Moses, who put a veil over his face that the children of Israel could not steadfastly look to the end of that which is abolished: but their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the Old Testament; which veil is done away in Christ. For even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart."

The veil covers and conceals. Even those who profess to believe the Bible, though unsaved, cannot see the truth; all they see is the letter. They see no spiritual application and no spirituality in it. They simply view it as the letter. Their minds are blinded, and the veil is still upon them. Their prejudices and their enmity remain.

You remember that passage in Romans 8 and verse 7: "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." So the veil is there. The unregenerate hate God. They hate His law. They hate His sovereign power and authority. They cannot see. They are blind. It is only Christians that can see with unveiled faces or open faces.

So look at what he says now: "But we all, with open face..." this next statement, "beholding as in a glass." What in the world is that? "We all, with open face," or unveiled face, are "beholding as in a

glass," or a mirror. The mirror is the Word of God, both the Old and the New Testaments.

James chapter 1, verse 22, shows us the mirror of the Word of God: "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is likened to a man beholding his natural face in a glass" or mirror. "For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was."

Now watch verse 25: "But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty," that is the Word of God, "and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed." The man who looks in the mirror and forgets what he looked like is a forgetful hearer. You could look in the mirror and say, "Oh man, I got this big lump of mud right here on my cheek. Well, I'll get a washcloth and I'll wash it off." Then something else happens and you forget, going through the day with a lump of mud on your cheek. Everybody looks at you. You looked in the mirror, saw it, and immediately forgot. God says the man who looks into the mirror of the perfect law of liberty and does not forget what he sees—

And he acts upon it; that man is the doer of the word. So the glass then in 2 Corinthians 3:18 is the Word of God. We are looking in that. With our prejudices removed, we are willing to receive it as the Word of God and as truth, and willing to bow to it because we understand God's sovereign authority. So, fourthly, look again at verse 18: “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass…” What are we beholding?

“The glory of the Lord.” Now, I pointed out in the introduction that there is a specific glory of the Old Testament and a specific glory of the New Testament. In fact, if you read 2 Corinthians 3, he talks about the Old Covenant being glorious and the New Covenant being more glorious or exceeding in glory. Because you have to remember that the law was given by Moses, but Scripture says, “grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” Jesus Christ is far greater than Moses. He came to enforce God's law and to obey God's law.

Now, at this point, I want to stop and read to you three paragraphs from Arthur W. Pink's book on the doctrine of the Holy

Spirit. I read these paragraphs Thursday was a week ago, but listen carefully today because he shows us the distinctive glory in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. Here's what he says: “In the glass of the law, the Lord gave a most wondrous revelation of his glory. The law has been aptly and rightly designated a transcript of the divine nature.

Though, as is to be expected, some of our moderns have taken serious exception to that statement, thereby setting themselves in opposition to the Scriptures. In Romans 8:7 we are told, “The carnal mind is enmity against God.” The proof furnished of this declaration is, “for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be,” which manifestly is another way of saying that the law is a transcript of the very character of God. So we read, “the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good,” Romans 7:12.

What is that but a summarized description of the divine perfections? If God Himself is holy and just and good, and the law is an immediate reflection of His very nature, then it will in itself be holy, just, and good. Again, if God Himself is love (1 John 4:8), and the law is a glass in which His perfections shine, then that which the law requires—all that is required—will be love. And that is exactly the case. In Matthew 22, verses 37 through 39, the lawyer asked, “What is the great commandment?” Our Lord answered, “The first and great commandment is, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy might, with all thy soul. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.”

He says, “What a word is that in Exodus 24 and verse 16, ‘And the glory of the Lord abode in Mount Sinai.’ Yes, the glory of the Lord was as really and truly manifested at Sinai as it is displayed now at Mount Zion. That man in his present state was unable to appreciate the awe-inspiring display which God there made of His perfections in no way alters the fact, for He is a God to be feared as well as loved. In the glass of the law, we behold the glory of the Lord’s majesty and sovereignty, the glory of His government and authority, the glory of His justice and holiness, yes, and the glory of His goodness, in framing such a law which requires us to love Him with all of our hearts and for

his sake, his creatures, our neighbors as ourself. In the gospel is displayed not only the amazing grace and infinite mercy, but also and mainly the manifold wisdom of God. Therefore, we learn how grace is exercised righteously, how mercy is bestowed honorably, how transgressions are justly pardoned, how God did deem it suitable to the honor of his majesty to sovereignly pardon sinners, not without a satisfaction being offered to himself, and therefore did he appoint a mediator to magnify the law and make it honorable. The great design of the incarnation, life, and death of Christ was to demonstrate in the most public manner that God was worthy of all that love and honor and obedience which the law required, and that sin was as great an evil as the punishment threatened supposed. The heart of the glorious gospel is the cross. And there we see all the divine perfections fully displayed in the death of the Lord Jesus. The law was magnified, divine holiness vindicated, sin discounted, the sinner saved, grace glorified, and Satan defeated.

The distinctive glory appears not only in the Old Testament, but also in the New Testament. In both the Old and New Testaments, we cannot help but see the glory of God. We believers, with unveiled face, beholding as in a glass, the mirror of the Word of God, behold the glory of the Lord in all of his perfections.

We are changed into the same image. There is the word metamorphosis. It means we are transformed, transfigured, metamorphosed into the same image. We are certainly not changed into divinity or into God's incommunicable attributes: His eternity, His infinity, His omniscience, His omnipotence, or His omnipresence. We are not changed into those incommunicable attributes. But we are changed into His communicable attributes: goodness, love, mercy, truth, righteousness, honesty, honor—all of the moral excellencies that we see of God in Scripture. We are actually changed into the same image. Looking into the mirror of the Word of God, we are to be changed into the same image.

Sixthly, we are changed into the same image from glory to glory.

When he says that we are changed into the same image from glory to glory, that does not refer to what we would call an instantaneous, immediate change. It means that our change is slow, progressive, and continuous. “From glory to glory” is the same as in the Psalms,

when He says we go from strength to strength, and the same as when the apostle Paul said we go from faith to faith. In other words, it is a slow, gradual progression.

You should be more holy today than you were yesterday, more obedient this week than you were last week, and more submissive this month than you were last month. You should be conformed more to the image of Jesus Christ this year than you were last year. We are constantly, consistently, and continually being changed.

One of the problems we have is that we do not see the change in ourselves. One reason is that we know our sins, our thoughts, our lusts, and how our flesh wants and desires that which is contrary to God. Sometimes we do not see the changes or the progression because of the blindness of our own flesh.

I very seldom go to reunions. In fact, I have never been to a family reunion, although my family has reunions. You may ask why I do not go to my family reunions. Am I on the outs with them? No. The only reason I do not go is that they have them on Sunday. I preach on Sundays. I go to church on Sundays.

They may not, but I do. So I don't go to my family reunions. I did go to our fiftieth high school reunion a number of years back. Here's the astounding thing I noticed at that reunion: the people I graduated with whom I did not see regularly had most obviously changed the most. Those who lived around me and whom I saw from time to time did not appear to have changed that much. But those I had not seen in ten, fifteen, or twenty years—man, I didn't realize I went to school with such old people. They really changed.

The interesting thing is that they would always vote on who had changed the most. By the way, I won that vote because it was the first reunion I had ever attended in fifty years, so they thought I had changed the most. I thought many others had changed far more than I did. But we can look at pictures and see physical changes.

Years ago, when Lacey, our youngest grandchild, was three or four years old, she asked me one day, “Papa, what happened to your hair?” I said, “Well, Granny Alice pulled it all out. All I can say is, I had a full head of hair when I married her, but look at it now.” I was just teasing her and let it go. That very same week, we were in a

restaurant, and she was there with us. All of a sudden, a man I knew, whom I had not seen in probably twenty or thirty years, walked up. The first thing he did was put his hand on the top of my head and say, “What happened to all that hair that you used to have?” Before I could say anything, Lacey blurted out, “Granny Alice pulled it all out.”

Well, she didn't really pull it all out. He was recognizing that I had changed; I had lost that head of black, wavy hair. You say, “It was wavy?” Yeah, wave goodbye. Anyhow, we can see those changes. Why is it that we cannot see our other changes? I'll explain and answer that momentarily.

Look at what else it said in verse 18: “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory.” Here's the seventh one: “even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” Wow. It is God the Holy Spirit who enables us to go through spiritual metamorphosis. He's the one who changes us.

Our responsibility, accountability, and obligation are to use the means that God has ordained: the Scriptures, prayer, fellowship, and anything and everything that God has commanded us, in order that the Spirit of God will convict us, continue to convert us, and continue to change us. It is by the Spirit of God, “even as by the Spirit of the Lord.”

In 2 Timothy 2:7, the apostle Paul wrote Timothy, “Consider what I say, and the Lord give thee understanding in all things.” It is God who gives understanding, but it is our responsibility to do the considering. God is not going to consider for us. He is not going to meditate for us or think upon the Scriptures for us.

We must be obedient, and yet we must seek Him to make application of that truth to our life. What Proverbs 2:6 says is, “The Lord giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh understanding.” We have to seek Him for understanding and seek Him to work in us. He has to open our understanding, set our affection on things above, and release our will from its bondage to sin.

The changes under consideration actually begin at regeneration. They continue through sanctification, but they are not ultimate or

finalized until glorification. Consequently, we have to be continually changing. How do we know that we are being changed? “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed.” That is present tense. We are being changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

Evidences of Spiritual Transformation

How can we discern this when we understand that our flesh is still flesh? First, the Holy Spirit works in our lives and transforms and transfigures us so that we willingly and readily receive the law of God as our rule for life. In other words, we adopt God’s law, not for justification, but for our sanctification. The truth of the matter is this.

1 Thessalonians chapter 4, I think it's verse 3, says this: "For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication." That's the will of God. Where do I understand that I am to abstain from fornication? From the seventh commandment: "Thou shalt not commit adultery." Also, "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, or maid, or anything." In other words, God's law is our standard for our life.

It is how we are sanctified. A drunkard is not a sanctified individual. A thief, a murderer, a whoremonger—these are not sanctified individuals. The Bible says it like this in 1 John 2, verses 3 and 4: "And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments." How do I know that I know God? Because by His grace, by His power, by His Spirit, He is enabling me to keep His commandments. Keep them perfectly? No, no one can keep them perfectly except our Lord, and He did for us. But our hearts, like David, are after God's law. David was a man after God's own heart, yet he was a sinner. "He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." Clearly, then, we who keep God's commandments have received them as the rule of our life.

In 1 John 5 and verse 3, the Bible says, "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous." If I love God, I am going to keep His commandments, and it does not grieve me to keep them. I am not grieved that I cannot

steal, murder, or commit adultery and fornication. So it should never grieve a child of God that he cannot do those things that the unsaved do.

Oftentimes, while I am driving to church on Sunday morning, I see people pulling boats to the ocean or the river. It does not grieve me that I cannot take Sunday off and go fishing. I do not want to go riding in a boat anyhow. I am simply pointing out the fact: we receive God's law as our standard and our rule of life.

Secondly, when the Holy Spirit of God changes us, He works in us a life of self-loathing. The apostle Paul said that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal. When we understand that God deserves all of our love, all of our life, all of our being, and all of our service, yet our flesh desires many things contrary to Him, we fight so many times to stay right. Sometimes we get tired of fighting and think we need time off, and therefore may indulge our flesh. No, no, no. There is no time off in this warfare. There is no discharge in this war.

The sad part is that when we know our thoughts are wicked and our desires are wrong, we are not brokenhearted over them. They do not grieve us as they should; we do not mourn because of them. You have to come to the realization that your flesh is not going to cooperate with you in the worship, service, or obedience of God.

Your flesh actually hates God and hates God's law because it cries to be satisfied and fulfill all its desires. It is never, ever going to lie silently upon the altar. I may be ready to die, but I do not really want to die. I want to keep preaching, and I do not really want to leave Alice. But when I do die, I will not have any more problems with my flesh. It will be over and done. I will not have to fight anymore.

When we are being transformed by the Holy Spirit, we see the wickedness of our flesh and its animosity against God. Thirdly, the Holy Spirit of God transforms us by working in us a genuine humility. The Word of God tells us to walk humbly with our God. Those who are proud, arrogant, and haughty know nothing of the grace of God. Nothing exposes a man as an unconverted individual more than the excessive pride, arrogance, and haughtiness of his life.

You remember that passage in Luke chapter 18 where our Lord said that two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and

the other a publican. What did the Pharisee do? He stood and prayed with himself, saying, "Lord, I thank thee that I'm not as other men are. I'm not even as this publican over here. I fast twice in a week. I give tithes of all that I possess." He was thankful that he was not like that man. The old publican would not even lift his eyes toward heaven, but smote his breast and said, "God be merciful to me, a sinner." Our Lord said, "Verily, that man, that publican, went down to his house justified rather than the other man." Pride, then, is a giveaway that we know nothing about the grace of God.

Moreover, those who have been changed by the Holy Spirit, and are being changed, understand the principles and questions in 1 Corinthians chapter 4 and verse 7. There God asks, first of all, "For who maketh thee to differ one from another?" Why are you saved and someone else not saved? Why do you know truth and they do not know truth? Who makes you to differ? The answer is, it is God. Then he says, "Who maketh thee to differ one from another? And what hast thou that thou didst not receive?" Everything you have, God gave you. He gave you faith, life, and everything. "If thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received it?"

The true grace that the Holy Spirit of God reveals in us and transforms us into produces a spirit of humility, because we know that everything we are and everything we have is nothing more than the grace and mercy of God in our lives.

Fourthly, how do we know that we are being transformed slowly, surely, and gradually? The Holy Spirit works in us an appreciation for divine goodness. The more a convicted or quickened soul sees his own sinfulness and depravity, the more he appreciates the grace, mercy, and goodness of God. He asks, "Why does God even allow me to live?" Yet He does. "Why does God continue to bless me?" Yet He does. "Why does God give me health?" And yet He does. When I am sick, why does God heal me? He does. Those in whom the Holy Spirit of God is changing come to a real, genuine appreciation of all the mercies and goodnesses of God in their lives.

That passage in Lamentations 3:22 and 23 ought to be not only in our hearts, but in our mouths every day: “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.” It is the work of

God the Holy Spirit in changing us that makes us more grateful, more thankful, and more appreciative of all God's goodness to us. We have everything we have by the grace of God, the goodness of God, and the mercy of God. He has not left Himself without witness, in that He gave us rain in due season and fruitful lands, fulfilling our hearts and filling our mouths with good things. Just stop and think: every good thing that you have is from God. So it is the work of the Holy Spirit in transforming us to make us more thankful, more appreciative, and more grateful.

Conclusion: Pressing Toward Maturity

Are you a butterfly yet? You understand that question now. Have you come to full maturity in Jesus Christ? Think about it. God does not wish for us to stay babes, little children, or even young people. He desires that we be mature in Him. The goal of the Christian life is maturity. When you look at your life, you need to say, “Lord, help me to be more mature, to be more godly, to be more submissive, to be more obedient, to be more pleasing unto Thee. Transform me, transfigure me, metamorph me into the image of Jesus Christ.” Maturity is where God wants us. We need to go through stages.

Dr. Bowen in our church is 90 years old. He did not reach 90 years in a week, a month, or a year. It took him 90 years to get there. We may not be mature adults in the faith now, but we surely do not want to stay babies, little children, or young people. Remember, that butterfly is different in every stage, and Christians are different in every stage. But if a baby stops growing, if that insect stops growing, something is wrong.

God has ordained that we live a life of change, and that change is obedience to the Word of God: greater obedience, more effectual obedience. It is done only by the Spirit of God. Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we thank You for Your Word and for Your truth. We pray that You would indeed change us and make us what we should be in the Lord Jesus Christ. Give us Your grace and mercy, and may the Holy Spirit of God work in our lives and change us by His infinite grace, mercy, and power. In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

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