

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

BY

Calvary Chapel Outreach Fellowship

“But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant”

[Matthew 23:11](#)

Brought to you by:

The Blue Letter Bible Institute

www.blbi.org

A ministry of:

The Blue Letter Bible

www.blueletterbible.org

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

BY

Calvary Chapel Outreach Fellowship

Lesson 1

Characteristics of a Servant

By

Chuck Smith

Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa

Brought to you by:

The Blue Letter Bible Institute

<http://www.blbi.org>

A ministry of:

The Blue Letter Bible

<http://www.blueletterbible.org>

Servant Leadership – Lesson 1
Characteristics of a Servant by Chuck Smith

1

I want to talk about the minister in this lesson. And then next, I want to talk to about the ministry. I am certain that the reason why all of us are here tonight is because deep down inside we want to be used of God. I want God to use my life for whatever ministry He might have for me. And in desiring God to use me, I want to be used to the ultimate. If I am going to be in the ministry, I want my ministry to achieve its ultimate for God.

Years ago when I felt called of God to enter the ministry, I sought to study the lives of men who had been effective for God, in order that I might learn from them. I wanted to discover why they were effective for God because I wanted to be effective for God in my service to Him. And so, I studied the Book of Acts because to me it seemed that the church hit its peak in the first thirty years and has been going down ever since. In the first thirty years, the church reached the known world, at that time, with the gospel of Jesus Christ. It made a tremendous impact upon the world. The Pharisees (or the Sanhedrin) accused the disciples of filling Jerusalem with this man's doctrine. They were so effective they had filled the whole city with the doctrine of Jesus Christ. Then, later on when they arrived in Berea, some people reported to the leaders of the city, "These men who have been turning the world upside down have come here" (cf. [Acts 17:6](#)). The early church was very effective. It was turning the world upside down.

I think that there is a reason why the demise of the church came about. I do believe that the church began to substitute the abilities of the flesh for the enablings of the Spirit. When they started developing fancy structures, fancy programs, fancy schools; when they began to demand a certain amount of education, higher education, et cetera; when the men began to trust in their own trained abilities, then they ceased depending on the anointing and the guiding and the empowering of the Holy Spirit. And I think that, as we look at what God is doing today, we find that by far the most effective works are those that are just empowered by the Spirit. The church program church is dead. And all over the United States we get letters from people who say, "We love Jesus. We love the Word of God. But we cannot find a church where we can just learn the Word of God." There is so much *churchianity*. And people are hungry for just the work of God's Spirit.

Let us turn to Acts 3 and we will see many of the characteristics of these men who were so mightily used of God.

Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour
of prayer, being the ninth hour. ([Acts 3:1](#))

And here we have our first clue. They were men of prayer. The men whom God uses are men who are in contact with God, men who pray. You cannot do any true, effective work for God apart from prayer. Jesus told us that you cannot go in and just take the goods from a strong man. But you first go in and bind the strong man of the house and then you go in and take the spoil. (cf. [Matthew 12:29](#); [Mark 3:27](#)). Now through prayer we are binding the strong man. We are binding the work of Satan. And then all that our Christian service should be is going in and taking the spoils. We have already won the victory in prayer. We have already fought the battle in the closet and there we have taken the victory, binding the strong man of the house. And then when we go out, we just go out to take the spoils.

Prayer is, by far, the greatest outlet of spiritual power that we have. One of the mysteries of heaven will be why we did not pray more when God has given to us such a valuable tool for power. "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal they are mighty in God for pulling down strongholds [of the enemy]" ([2 Corinthians 10:4](#)). And a lot of people are getting battered in the battle because they have not really fought the battle in the closet, in their prayer life.

There are five outlets of spiritual power that I can think of. One is your words, what you say. God can use your words to touch lives. It is not necessary that they be eloquent words. It is necessary that they be anointed words of the Spirit. I have heard some of the greatest orators alive in the world today. They were so polished. They were so smooth. The words just rolled out of their mouths. But they just rolled right off of me as easily as they rolled out of their mouths. It did not stir me. It did not touch me. It did not move me though it was marvelous speech. Looking at it from a homiletical standpoint it was perfect, but yet there was nothing behind it.

Several years ago on vacation up at Bass Lake, we went over to North Fork to a little country church. The pastor was not there and some woman was speaking and she was from the hill country of Kentucky. She was a little hard to understand because it sounded like she has gravel in her mouth when she talked. She truly butchered the king's English. But as this precious saintly woman spoke, my heart began to burn. There was such an anointing of God's Spirit upon her life and upon her words that I was really ministered to that morning.

My words can be an outlet of spiritual power. God can use what I say.

The second outlet of spiritual power is your life. Every day your life, without saying a word, you are having an influence on other people for either good or bad. If your life is in tune with God and filled with the Holy Spirit, your life is having that silent influence for good wherever you go.

Now in looking at our words and looking at our lives, we realize that our words can never be any greater than our lives. A lot of times what a person says is totally disavowed by what he is. His life does not back up what he is saying. And therefore, what he is saying becomes meaningless because there is no real life behind it. So our words are important but they can never be greater than our lives.

Another outlet of spiritual power is our service—what I do for God, what I do in the name of the Lord. And God's Spirit can use even a cup of cold water given unto a prophet in the name of the Lord. My service for God can be a vital outlet of spiritual power.

My money can be an outlet of spiritual power—that which I release for the work of the Lord.

Several years ago there was a young girl here in the Los Angeles area going to Biola College. She felt called of God to go to China as a missionary—so she took all of the courses. She studied nursing and earned her RN. When she finally applied to the mission board to go to China as a missionary, they required that she get a physical. After her physical the doctor said, "There is no way you could ever go to China." And he rejected her because of a heart problem that she had that would have just been aggravated in China. And so, after all of those years of training and preparing she received the disappointing word that she could not go because of her heart problem. She cried before the Lord because of the frustration of her ambition in her life. But then she came across another girl, who also felt the call of God to go to China as a missionary. This young woman was qualified but lacked the funds. She said, "I have an idea. I will get a job and we can be partners. And half of what I make, I will send to you to support you in your work in China." So they made a pact together and she went out and got a job and took half of what she earned and sent it to the gal in China and supported her as a missionary in China. God began to bless her at her work. She began to get promotions. And before long she met another girl who felt called of God to go to China as a missionary. And she said, "You go and I will support you." God continued to bless her. She became an executive in that company and was, at one time, supporting five young ladies over in China.

Now, when the time comes for the Lord to hand out heavenly rewards for those Chinese who were led to Christ by the five girls that went over there, that one gal who stayed home and supported those five will share equally in the reward. She released her money and it became an outlet of spiritual power and it began to do a work for God over in China.

Paul, in writing to the Philippians, thanked them for the offering they sent, and then added: “I thank you for the offering that you sent to me. Not that I necessarily needed any money. But I desire that fruit might abound to your account” (cf. [Philippians 4:17](#)). The fruit of my ministry, you see, is going to go to your account because of what you sent.

So our money can be an outlet of spiritual power, that which we release for God.

But by far the greatest outlet of spiritual power is prayer. I can do nothing of real service for God, until I have first of all done it in prayer. You can do more than pray after you have prayed, but you really cannot do much more than pray until you have prayed.

Now, one of the problems that many people have faced in their ministry is that they go out unprepared. They have not prayed in advance and they just go into a situation without having a lot of backing in prayer. You may say, “But Chuck, it seems to me that what I do for the Lord in service is greater than what I do in prayer.” But we must face the fact that when we serve the Lord, our service is limited in location to where we are. Now I am serving the Lord tonight. I am sitting here, sharing with you the things of the Spirit, giving you help and understanding so that you will know what is necessary if your life is to be used by God. I am teaching you about the minister, what he is like, what he must do. But while I am sitting here, I cannot be ministering up at the conference center. Tomorrow morning I have to get up early, get in my car, and drive up to the conference center. And tomorrow I will be ministering to the students up there in school. But it will take me an hour and forty-five minutes to get my body from here up there, so that I can minister up there. My service to God is always restricted and limited to my body. I cannot be two places at once, so my ministry is limited in locale to where I am.

Whereas, when I release the power through prayer it is unlimited. I can touch a world for God. I can go into my closet and I can begin to serve the Lord over in China. And I can spend an hour of my life in China, strengthening the brethren there, helping them, protecting them, shielding them, giving them strength and power and support. Then if I get tired of serving the Lord in China, I can jump over to Africa, and I can start praying for the work of God in Africa, to open up the minds of people to understand the tract or the Word of God that has been given to them, creating a hunger in the hearts of those people to really know God and the fullness of God’s love. And then I can jump down into South America for a while, and then over to England. And you can just bounce around all over the world without ever leaving your closet, and doing work for God in each of these areas, putting in time, getting credit in God’s books for missionary work around the world, as through prayer I uphold them and I help them and I strengthen them. My prayer becomes a spiritual force and power, strengthening them and helping them wherever I direct it. So prayer is an exciting outlet of spiritual power because it is so broad, so unlimited.

These men that God used were men of prayer. They were going into the temple about three o’clock in the afternoon, which was the evening hour of prayer. And as we study through the Book of Acts, we find how often they resorted to prayer. We find out how much prayer is mentioned as a vital part of their lives.

Servant Leadership – Lesson 1
Characteristics of a Servant by Chuck Smith

4

Peter and John were going into the temple to pray. And there was a certain man there who was lame from birth, asking for alms. You go to Jerusalem today and you will find there at the Damascus Gate, people who are lame or blind or infirm who still beg. All the way out through the Damascus Gate you can see the beggars there. Peter said to him, “Hey fella! Look here.” And he turned, no doubt holding out his hand expecting to receive something. Peter said, “I don’t have any silver or gold. But what I have I’ll give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand to your feet and walk” (cf. [Acts 3:6](#)). Now it says that Peter took the man by the right hand and lifted him to his feet.

I would like to suggest that these men who God used were men of faith, because it would take an awful lot of faith to lift a lame man to his feet. I know that Satan was just whispering in his ear, “Peter, what are you going to do if this guy collapses? If he goes right down in a heap, what are you going to do? All the people are going to look at you and they are going to think that you are molesting this handicapped man.” It must have taken a lot of faith. And at this point we have to be careful regarding faith and presumption. If God tells us to do something then do it by faith. If God does not tell you then do not mess with it.

When we were over at the little chapel, a block away, after a Sunday morning service they wheeled this man up in a wheelchair to the front and they asked me to pray for him. They did not tell me what his problem was but, I assumed because he was in a wheelchair obviously he could not walk. And so we prayed for him. And the Lord spoke to my heart. I had just been reading this account of Peter, and the Lord spoke to my heart and said, “Lift him out of the wheelchair.” I thought, “What if he falls?” And so I said to the man after praying, “In the name of Jesus, stand and walk!” And I lifted him and put him on his feet. And the fellow began to walk! He began to walk up and down the aisle. Then he began to sort of trot up and down the aisle. And the family said, “We did not bring him here for that!” The guy was having some kind of a financial problem or something and they wanted us to pray for him. But he had not walked in over six years. And of course, they were going just berserk.

The following Wednesday evening I was speaking down in Tucson and at the close of the service there was a lady there with a wheelchair. And a guy came up and he said, “Would you pray for my wife?” And so I laid hands on her and prayed for her in the name of the Lord. I patted her on the shoulder and I said, “God bless you, sister. I just pray that the Lord will really touch your body and heal you.” And the guy wheeled her out. And my son said, “Hey Dad, why didn’t you lift her out like you did that guy last Sunday?” I said, “Because, God did not speak to my heart and tell me to do it.”

You see, there is a difference. When God lays something upon your heart, then dare to venture out. But if God did not lay it on your heart, then do not mess with it. If you do not have the faith for it, you see (and I just really did not) I just said to my son, “I just did not have the faith to do it and I did not feel impressed of the Lord.”

But these men that God used were men of faith.

Now in Romans 4, we have four keys given to us for faith. Speaking of Abraham’s faith, it is in about verse 19. Speaking of Abraham,

And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb. ([Romans 4:19](#))

So the first key to Abraham's faith was not looking at the human aspects. And really when we are considering God as the agent doing the work, we should not be looking at human difficulties. But it is interesting how, whenever any problem comes up, the first thing we try to figure out is humanly how we might be able to do it. That is always the first thing we consider are the human difficulties or the human impossibilities. And we are always measuring things by our ability or by man's ability. But that is absolutely wrong. Because it is not up to me to do it, it is up to God to do it. It is not my ability here that is going to be working, it is God's ability, you see. And yet, I am always measuring it by man's ability.

It is interesting when a person comes along with a headache and says, "Would you pray for me? I have this crazy headache tonight," you say, "Oh sure. God, heal this headache. Oh, thank You, Jesus. Praise the Lord. Amen." You know, if it does not go away, take an aspirin. Headaches go away and aspirin will help. They are not a big deal.

But another time a guy comes up and says, "I just came from the doctor and I have been having a lot of problems. He says I have leukemia and I have about two weeks to live. Would you pray that God will heal me?" Two weeks to live? Leukemia! Oh, man! And suddenly my prayers become more fervent. "Oh, God. Oh, God in heaven, Creator of the heaven and earth. Oh, God!" I have to really work myself up for this one, because the doctor has given up on him. And leukemia is a lot tougher than a headache.

What am I doing? I am carrying my human limitations over to God. I am considering the difficulties as measured by man. But if God is going to heal somebody, God can heal a person of leukemia just as easily as He can heal a headache. It does not take any more from God or any more of God to heal from some of these things that man is unable to do anything about. But if God is going to do it, it is no problem for God.

The problem lies in our faith. But the problem with our faith is that we are measuring it by our own analysis. Abraham did not consider his own body, almost dead at a hundred years old; nor yet the deadness of Sarah's womb. He did not take that into account, because you see, he was dealing now with the promise of God. Abraham is thinking: "God promised me a son through Sarah. So what if I am almost a hundred? So what if she went through the change of life twenty years ago? It does not matter. So what if I have been trying for seventy-five years? It really does not matter." He did not consider the human aspects, the human impossibilities, because God is the one who was going to be working here.

Secondly, he staggered not at the promises of God through unbelief. How many times do we find ourselves staggering at the promises of God?

Remember in the Old Testament Samaria, the capital of Israel, was being besieged by the Syrian army, at this particular time by Ben Hadad and the Syrian army. Things were really desperate and the king of Samaria was blaming the prophet of God, Elisha. And Elisha was sitting there in his house with some of his friends and he had a real keen insight. God just revealed to him all kinds of things. And as he was sitting there he said, "Well, how about that? Look what that son of a murderer is going to do now. He is sending a guy down here to get my head." Elisha said: "When he knocks on the door, open the door and pin him back with the door. For behold, his master's footsteps are right behind him. The king is coming down too." So this guy came down to Elisha's house and knocked on the door and Elisha's men opened the door and pinned him back. And pretty soon the king came up and said to Elisha, "Are you the one who has been troubling Israel?" And they said, "Come on. Get over that." Elisha said, "No, but you are the one that has troubled Israel. You are the one that brought the Ba'al worship and turned them away from Jehovah. Do

not blame me. It is your fault for the problems that they have, because they have turned away from the true and the living God” (cf. [2 Kings 6:32–33](#)).

Now there was a horrible famine going on. They were selling the jawbone of a donkey for sixty-five pieces of silver. But Elisha said, “Do not worry. Tomorrow morning they will be selling a bushel of fine flour of wheat for sixty-five cents in the gate of the city.” The man upon whom the king leaned said, “If God would open windows in heaven, could such a thing be?” (cf. [2 Kings 7:1–2](#)).

What was he doing? He was staggering at the promises of God because he could not figure out how God could possibly do that, unless He would go around in heaven and open up windows and dump flour out. He could not figure out how God might be able to do it. That is not my problem—how God is going to do it. That is not my concern. God said He was going to do it, so how God is going to do it is His business, not mine.

I so often get into trouble by trying to figure out how God is going to do it. And we often times stagger at the promises of God. “Well, that is all right, Lord, if I do not understand.”

Abraham staggered at the promises of God, when the Lord came to Abraham and said, “I am going to give you a son.” And here was Ishmael, thirteen years old, playing outside. Abraham said, “Oh thank You, Father. That is great. Let Ishmael live before You forever. You do not need to put me on anymore, God. Here is Ishmael, that is fine.” God said, “No Abraham, through Sarah shall thy seed be called” (cf. [Genesis 17:18–19](#)).

Now after that he did not stagger. But being strong in the faith, he began to give glory to God. What does that mean? He started praising the Lord for a son. And so here is this hundred-year-old man out there, just so happy. He is just sitting there sort of rolling and laughing. And he says, “All right!” Someone might go up to him and say, “Hey old man, what are you so happy about?” “Oh, I cannot believe it. My wife is going to have a son!” “Your wife is going to have a son?” “Yeah! Praise God! Oh bless the Lord. God is so good.” “How old is your wife, old man?” “Oh, I forgot. But she is somewhere above ninety.” “How long you been married, old man?” “Well, we had our seventy-fifth anniversary a while back.” “You have not had any children up till now?” “No.”

That person walks away saying, “Poor ol’ fella, but he is happy.”

Being strong in the faith he gave glory to God. Oh, what a key, what a key, what a key! Start acting like you have it before you ever get it. God is as good as His Word. And God’s Word is as good as He is. Do you have God’s promise? Do you have God’s Word? Then just rejoice. That is as good as having it.

Abraham did not stagger at the promise of God, but he, being strong in the faith actually began to give glory to God. He was praising God for what God had promised.

Several years ago when we had been in the ministry for about six years, I was working at Alpha Beta Markets in order to support the family because the church could only pay us about twenty dollars a week. We had three children, so it was necessary for me to work in order to take care of the needs of the family. And we looked at it as God providing our needs. He provided me with the ability to do grocery work and provided me good hours with the job at Alpha Beta. I was head of the produce department. I went in the morning at four o’clock and I could get off in the early

afternoon and had the rest of the afternoon and evenings were for the ministry. And so it was just a great deal because it helped provide for the needs of the family.

Then my mother-in-law died who lived in Phoenix, and I had to take a leave of absence from the job and we went on down to Phoenix. By the time we were able to get everything all wrapped up down there, taking care of all the affairs and all that you have to take care of with the papers, a couple of weeks had gone by. When I got back I went in to check my schedule to see when I was supposed to come back to work, and the manager said, “Well Chuck, I got a call from the union. You cannot go back to work until you first of all go over and clear it with them. I guess you are behind on your dues.” I said, “Oh yeah, I forgot to pay them before I left.” So I went over to the union hall and I said, “I want to pay my dues.” They told me that there was a fifty-dollar fine, plus the back dues, which I did not have. They said, “Well, we cannot give you a release to go back to work until you pay it.” I said, “Well, I cannot get it unless I am working.” They said, “Well, you cannot work until you get it.”

I was really in a jam because the church just was not paying adequate salary to get by on—with three kids, twenty dollars a week just would not cut it. So our debts began to pile up on us. We were praying. Alpha Beta had offered me a management position if I would leave the ministry. They promised me a great career with Alpha Beta Market. And they wanted me to come in and just to go into management with them. And so I was really discouraged because of the bills and everything else. I was thinking about leaving the ministry. I was thinking, “Well, Lord, maybe You want me to just be a good Christian businessman and just support the church. I really do not seem to be very successful in the ministry. And I was getting more discouraged every day and as the bills were mounting it was really tough.

One morning I got up early before everybody else. I went to the desk and pulled out all of the bills. I totaled everything up and we had \$416 in bills. And you know, twenty dollars a week was not even buying the food for the kids. I mean, we were going deeper every day. And I thought, “Well, this is it. There is no sense of trying to kid myself any longer. I cannot just, sit here and go deeper into debt all the time. I am going to have to, leave the ministry and get a job, or something. It just does not make sense.” And I was just really discouraged that morning. I just figured, this is it. I have had it, as far as the ministry is concerned.

Then the phone rang. It was a long distance call. The people said, “Hi, Chuck, how are you?” I said, “Oh great. How are you?” They said, “We called you to let you know that yesterday that we put a letter in the mail for you. We sent it special delivery airmail. You should get it today. It’s just because the Lord put it on our heart to send you a check.” I said, “Oh, praise the Lord! I am really thrilled about that.” They said, “Yes, the Lord laid upon our heart to send you a check for \$425.” I said, “What? Ooh, weee! Man!” When I hung up the phone after talking to them I ran into the kitchen and grabbed my wife and began to waltz her around the kitchen. Boy, was I happy, just praising the Lord. You never heard such praises. “God, You are so good! Lord, I love You! All right! Every bill I had is going to be paid. Ooh, God is so good.” And I was just so excited and so high.

And when I began to settle down a little bit, the Lord began to speak to me and say, “What are you so happy about?” I said, “Lord, You are so neat. Oh, how I love You. Lord, You are so good. Oh, I love You, Lord. You are just all right.” The Lord said, “How do you know they are going to send that money?” I said, “Come on, God. You have got to be kidding me. How do I know? They already sent it, Lord. They told me. These are good honest people. I would trust their word any place. They are just good people, God. And they gave me their word. And I believe it.” The Lord said, “Very interesting. You had My word this morning when you first got up. I did not see you

jumping around the place. I did not see you all happy and praising Me.” He said, “I saw you going around kicking the floor and murmuring and complaining. And you had My word I was going to supply all your needs. Now you have the word of man and you are so excited. You are so happy. Whose word is greater?”

I had to end up repenting and asking God to forgive me because He was right. I had God’s promise but I was discouraged and blue. We have the word of God. We ought to get excited over the promises of God. Abraham did. Part of his faith was, “God said it, I know He is going to do it. Hallelujah! Bless God!”

Finally, being fully persuaded that what God had promised He was able also to perform. The fourth key to Abraham’s faith—he just believed in the ability of God.

Now how big is your God? Tell me, what is too hard for God to do? Name something that is too hard for God. God said to Jeremiah, “Lo, Jeremiah, I have made the heaven and the earth. Is there anything too hard for Me?” ([Jeremiah 32:27](#)). Now look at that universe. He created it all. Is there anything too hard for Him?

You know, sometimes we come to God with sort of an apologetic attitude. “God, this is really a tough one. If You do not want to, I can understand, Lord, because this one is really tough.” Like it is going to put a real strain on Him to come through on this one. Being fully persuaded that what God had promised, He was able to perform (cf. [Romans 4:21](#)). Of course, I believe God is able to do it. Well, if He has promised He is going to do it then surely He will.

So, they were men of faith. Now, their faith had come because they were men of the Word. When this guy made his little pass through the temple, running, leaping, praising God, people inside the temple said, “Hey, did you see that guy just now? Isn’t that the lame man that has been out there at the gate all these years? Man, it sure looked like him. How could it be him, he was running? I do not know, but I will find out.” And this guy made one pass through the temple and 5,000 people followed him out to Solomon’s porch, greatly wondering. And he grabbed a hold of Peter and the people began to assemble around looking at Peter. And Peter said, “Ye men of Israel, why marvel at this? Or, why look on us as we through our own righteousness have done this good deed to this lame man?” (cf. [Acts 3:12](#)).

Now here is an important key for anyone who is considering the ministry at all. I believe one of the greatest dangers that exist in the ministry and I think that it will put you out of the ministry quicker than anything else, is taking the credit or taking the glory for the work of God. If you are going to have an effective ministry for Jesus Christ, you must first come to the cross and reckon the old man to be crucified with Christ. You must, as Paul, be crucified with Christ because the moment God begins to work in your life through the power of the Holy Spirit, there are a lot of naïve people out there who are going to start looking to you as though you are something special. Somehow people get their eyes upon man instead of God. They are looking at the instrument and they want to glory in the instrument rather than in God who uses the instrument.

Several years ago we were pastoring in Los Serranos and a lady started attending some of my Bible studies. Her husband was one of the most prominent psychiatrists in that area, but he was having a problem. He had gotten hooked on Valium and it was beginning to affect his practice. He was so loaded on drugs that when the patients would be there talking to him, he would fall asleep. And it was really beginning to affect his practice and yet he was hooked.—He was really in bad shape. His wife told me, “Chuck, he is an atheist but he is such a brilliant man.” But she said, “If anyone can reach him, you can.” So they invited my wife and me over for dinner on Friday

night. After dinner my wife and this gal headed off for the kitchen and left her husband and I alone. And so we started talking about God, and about the Bible, and about the world and about all kinds of things.

She kept inviting us over on Friday nights, and she and my wife would disappear and then I would have my shots at him. So after a while, one evening I said, “Well, we have gotten pretty well acquainted now through this time we have been able to share together. You are a psychiatrist and I recognize from some of your questions you have been seeking to analyze me. And you probably know a lot more about me than I know about you. Now having come to know me as you do and observing me, my attitudes, you know how much joy I have. And you know my whole philosophy of life. Tell me, what if Jesus Christ is not the Son of God? What if there is no God? What do you think I have lost by believing in Jesus Christ? As far as my lifestyle and the joy and everything like that, what do you think I have lost because I have believed in Jesus Christ?”

And he looked at me and studied me for a bit and he said, “Not a thing. I wish I were as happy as you are.” I said, “All right. Let’s turn it around. What if Jesus Christ really is the Son of God and He died? What if what I believe is true? What have you lost by not believing?” He said, “You trapped me.” I said, “No, I did not. God did.” So he knelt down and accepted the Lord.

The next morning his wife was in my office bright and early. She is a very emotional type. She is the kind that does not just walk into a room, she storms. She came bursting into the office and said, “Oh Chuck, I knew you could do it. I knew you could do it. I knew that if anybody could do it, you could do it, Chuck. You are the greatest.” And she just kept on. I said, “Wait a minute. Hold on here. Let’s get something straight. Your husband is a psychiatrist and a neurosurgeon.” She said, “That is right.” I said, “What if one of his patients had an aneurysm and he had to cut open the skull and took the little clips and clipped off the veins up there and stopped the aneurysm and put him back together? And when that patient had recovered he came back to your husband’s office and said, ‘I’d like to see the scalpel that you did the work with.’ And he began to hold that scalpel or the saw that they cut the skull with and said, ‘Oh, you are the greatest scalpel. You are so beautiful. I knew you could do it.’” I said, “You would think that it was time for your husband to take them from the operating room to the couch. There is something wrong when they start to praise the instrument. Lady, you are praising the instrument—All I am is an instrument. It is God who did it, not me. I was only the instrument that God used. Do not praise the instrument. Do not glory in the instrument. Glory in God who uses instruments to do His work.”

Now you must remember that you are never more than an instrument in the hand of God and therefore you, as an instrument, cannot take glory for what God does. The minute you take glory for what God does then God will set the instrument on the shelf and will not use it anymore. You will go on. Oh yes, you will go on with the motions, but listen, there will be a dynamic power of the Spirit that is lost. And one of the tragic things is that you see a lot of empty shells. A lot of guys around are still trying to do the thing. It has become mechanical and they are going through the motions, but there is no dynamic of the Spirit there anymore, because they have dared to take the glory that should only be given to God and they have accepted the glory and the praise and the honors for themselves that should be directed to God.

Now that will be a continuing danger to the ministry. People will seek to glorify you. People will seek to honor you and seek to give you glory for what God has done. Do not take it. “Ye men of Israel, why do you marvel at this? Or, why look on us as though we, through our own righteousness have done this work to this lame man?” (cf. [Acts 3:12](#)). Why do you look at me like I am so holy? Like I am so spiritual? Like I am so righteous? We are only men like you are. “Be it known unto you that it is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth that this man stands here

before you whole” (cf. [Acts 3:16](#)). Do not take credit. Point them to the one who has done the work, the one that should receive the glory and the credit for what has been done. You do not dare take glory for what God has done.

Many ministers have come to an end of their ministry in that point. That is the pitfall that has destroyed more ministers than any other pitfall I know. If you want to continue to be used by God, if you want God to continue His work through your life, then make sure that you are not in it for personal glory for you, you are not looking for your own glory or you are not taking and accepting the glory or the honors, the plaudits that people are wanting to heap upon you.

Paul the Apostle was in Lystra and as he was preaching there, there was a guy about thirty-eight years old. He had been lame from birth and Paul perceived the guy had faith to be healed. And he said, “Brother, Jesus of Nazareth makes you whole. Stand up and walk.” And the guy stood up and walked. And the people just gasped. This man had been lame all his life. He is walking! They ran down to the street, to the temple of Jupiter. And they said to the priest, “Hey man, your god is up here in the street. He came to earth! Along with Mercury and they are right down there in the street right now.” And so the old priest came pulling an ox up the street, going to sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas right there in the streets of Lystra. Paul and Barnabas ripped off their clothes. They said, “Hey look, we are not gods. We are men just like you are. Do not do this.” But scarcely were they able to restrain them (cf. [Acts 14:8–15](#)).

People want to honor the vessel. They want to give glory to the vessel. Do not take it. You do not dare take it. When Paul is writing Romans 12 about ministry gifts, he begins that portion of that chapter on ministry gifts by saying, “take heed that no man thinks more highly of himself than he ought” (cf. [Romans 12:3](#)).

Be careful for that. See that you do not start getting an exalted opinion of yourself. “Well, God used me because God knew that...” Do not get an exalted opinion of yourself. Do not take glory that belongs only to God. You have got to come to the cross. You have got to have only one ambition and that is to glorify God. The old man, the old life is dead. Ambition is dead. Just bring glory to my Master, not to me. I am just a servant bringing glory, seeking to bring glory to my Master. Jesus said, “Take heed to yourself that you do not your righteousness before men to be seen of men. For I say unto you, ye have your reward” ([Matthew 6:1](#)).

Be careful. We can contrast what we see today with what went on in Peter’s day. Those who go around claiming the gifts of healing, I have heard them say, “Oh well, I fasted for many days. And to have this kind of ministry takes tremendous sacrifice. You have got to be willing to give your all. You have got to give up everything. You cannot do this and that and the other. And it takes a real price. You have got to pay a price to have this kind of ministry.” That is just the opposite of what Peter said. “Hey, do not look on me as though through my righteous I did this.” You see, he was not even trying to say, “Hey, I am holy and I am righteous and I fasted and I did an awful lot to get this kind of power in my life.” No, it was, “Hey do not look on me. This is the work of Jesus Christ.” And then he does not even take credit for the faith. He said, “And it is through the faith of Him.” He did not even take credit. “It was not my great faith. God gave me the faith to do what I did. It is through the faith of Him.” Peter is not taking any credit at all. This is the work of God. Glorify God in it.

Now, when Peter began to talk to them he began to quote Scriptures. And as you read the quotations you find he is quoting out of several areas of the Old Testament. He is not having to turn and find it and everything else. It was just a part of him. He just knew the word and he starts quoting the word.

The men that God uses are men of the Word, men who have God's Word just tucked away in their heart. So if you want to be used of God, get into the Word, study the Word, learn the Word, know the Word. For as you really get the Word of God there implanted in your heart, then you are able to use the Word and also you will know the God that you are serving. And the more you know God, the more trust and faith you will have in God because you will know Him so fully and so completely.

Now the next day they arrested Peter for this and they brought him into court. They said, "Now tell us, by what name or by what power did you do this work on this guy?" Now this was really a tricky lead question. Under the law in Deuteronomy, if a man comes and does a miracle and he leads you to worship any other than Jehovah, then let him be put to death. So it was a trick question. "Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit"—There you have your qualifying phrase. The men that God uses are men that are filled with the Holy Spirit, men who have been empowered by the Holy Spirit. "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you" ([Acts 1:8](#)). And the men that God uses are men who are filled with the Spirit of God.

But then as you read on, he said:

If we this day are judged for a good deed done to a helpless man, by what means he has been made well, let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. This is the "stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone." Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. ([Acts 4:9–12](#))

Peter, you are pretty bold there, boy.

Yes, the men that God uses are men that have a holy boldness; men who will speak out in the face of all kinds of opposition, speak out forcibly for Jesus Christ; men who are not ashamed to speak out for Jesus Christ, even in the midst of the toughest adversity. These guys are ready to pounce on every word, and Peter just lays it out with tremendous boldness.

Well, the Sanhedrin was sort of stuck. The lame guy was standing there whole. What can we say? And seeing the lame man standing with them whole, they could say nothing. You know, when God is working and you have the evidence of the work of God, it is amazing how it closes a lot of objections of people. What can you say? Here are a bunch of messed up people who are now straightened out, a lot of lame people who are now whole. What can you say? It is the witness of that work of God and you cannot really say much about that.

So they beat them and commanded them not to speak anymore in the name of Jesus. So they returned to the other disciples rejoicing that they were accounted worthy by God to be able to suffer persecution for Jesus Christ. "Oh, Lord, we do not deserve to be punished and suffer for Jesus. Lord, You are so good. Oh God, how blessed we are that we were able to suffer for Jesus."

Hey, these men were the kind of men you cannot stop. They came back to their own company and they told them all the things that had happened, how that they had been beaten and commanded

Servant Leadership – Lesson 1
Characteristics of a Servant by Chuck Smith

12

not to speak anymore in the name of Jesus Christ. (cf. [Acts 4:23](#)). Now they were men of prayer. And so when the guys heard that they said, “Let’s pray.” And so they prayed.

Now their prayer is something else. And we do not have time to study it tonight, but it is a classic prayer. They do not jump right into the request. I think that a lot of times we just say, “Oh God, I need this and I need this and I need this. Amen.” We just come and lay the trip on God and we do not even bother to have any fellowship, communion, or lay any groundwork. They said,

Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them, who by the mouth of Your servant David have said: “Why did the nations rage, and the people plot vain things? The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against His Christ.” ([Acts 4:24–26](#))

“Lord, surely that is exactly what happened.” They prayed acknowledging first of all that God is God, and then secondly that God knew in advance the very stuff they were going to be facing that day. God was aware of what was going to be going on because through David He talked about the very things they saw that day. He prophesied the very experiences that they had that day. So they acknowledged to the Lord, “You know all about our lives in advance. You know everything about us, God. And through the mouth of Your servant David you talked of these very things that we experienced today, as the people had gathered together against You and against Your anointed One. Surely Lord, that is what they did. Now, behold Lord, their threatening.” And then they got to their request: “And grant unto Your servants that with boldness we might speak the word of Christ.”

Hey, I like that! What are they asking God for? They are asking for boldness to do the very thing that got them in trouble, not to back away from it, not to go hide some place because they had been threatened. “God, help us not to let down just because we have had a little persecution. Help us not to lay off, Lord, just because we ran into a little trouble. God, give us boldness that we might speak Your word, that we might speak in the name of Jesus.”

And the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the Word of God with boldness. ([Acts 4:31](#))

These are the men that God used to turn the world upside down. These are the keys of the men that God uses and will use today to turn the world upside down. If you will determine that you will become a man of prayer, a man of the Word, a man of faith, and filled with the Holy Ghost, and not looking for any glory or honor or whatever for yourself, but only as an instrument to be used of God, to bring glory and honor to Him, and will just commit yourself in reckless abandon for Jesus Christ, hey, you will turn the world upside down.

One day when Dwight Moody was a shoe salesman, a man that he was selling a pair of shoes to said to him, “The world has yet to see what can be accomplished through just one man who will totally dedicate his life to Jesus Christ.” That challenged Moody and he said, “God, I want to be that man.” Well, he came close, but the world has yet to see what can be accomplished through one man who will really dedicate himself totally to Jesus Christ. Why don’t you be that man, that woman?

Servant Leadership – Lesson 1
Characteristics of a Servant by Chuck Smith

13

The minister is an instrument and God uses instruments. God uses people to do His work. We have this glorious privilege. Paul said that we have this marvelous treasure here in earthen vessels ([2 Corinthians 4:7](#)). Now he is pointing out something that is quite ludicrous. You have got the most valuable thing in the universe—the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ. And what has God put it in? This dumb clay pot, cheap ol' clay pot. Why? That the glory may be to God and not of us. God commits His work of sharing and spreading the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ to these instruments, in order that the glory might be to God and not to man, not to us.

Now there is a glorious ministry. And this is what we want to get into in the next lesson as we talk about the ministry and what it is all about. So, God bless you. It has been a joy to share with you.

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

BY

Calvary Chapel Outreach Fellowship

Lesson 2

Requirements of Ministry

By

Chuck Smith

Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa

Brought to you by:

The Blue Letter Bible Institute

www.blbi.org

A ministry of:

The Blue Letter Bible

www.blueletterbible.org

Servant Leadership – Lesson 2 Requirements of Ministry by Chuck Smith

1

Father, we look to You to give us ears to hear what the Spirit would say to the church. Lord, we thank You for the many opportunities that You give us to know You better and to serve You. And Lord, we want to serve You in whatever capacity You have ordained. So we pray that You will guide us and You will teach us. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Previously we dealt with the subject of the minister. Now we would like to deal with the subject of the ministry. A couple of things that we did not mention when talking about the minister, is that Jesus said "If any of you want to be the chief, let him become the servant of all" (cf. [Mark 9:35](#)). And Jesus set the example for all ministry when He took and girded Himself with a towel and went around and washed His disciples' feet. And He said, "Do you see what I have done?" (cf. [John 12:12](#)). More than just merely washing their feet, He had set for them an example for everyone who wants to be in the ministry.

The word minister itself signifies servant. Now, I do not know how we have gotten things so twisted in our thinking, but there are many people who are involved in the ministry who think that people are to minister to them. And they come in with the kind of an attitude of "Well, who is going to shine my shoes and buy my gas?" They are looking for people to minister to them. "Don't I get a ten percent discount? I am a minister, you know." It is as though they should have special privileges and special treatment. Not so. The true minister is one who serves.

Now, God prepares us for the work that He has in mind for us to do. Paul said, in talking about our salvation, that it is—

Not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. ([Ephesians 2:9-10](#))

Now, to me it is comforting to know that God knows exactly what He has in mind for me, for my life, for whatever ministry He might have for me. God already does know, has always known, that which He had planned and purposed for me to do and to be. And in the meantime, God is working in me preparing me for that work that He has already before ordained that I should fulfill for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now when you get to be my age and you are on the other side of the hill, it is easy to look back upon all of the trials, upon all of the hardships, upon all of the testings and say, "Oh, I can see what God was doing. I can see how God was working in my life. Oh, I see the reason for that experience." From my perspective I can look back and see how God was preparing me, working in my life, preparing me for that work that He had in mind for me to do. Now believe me, I had no idea what God had in mind for me. In my wildest imagination or dream or ambition or hope or whatever, I had no dream or idea what God had in mind.

In fact, when I was in seminary we were taught that you can only hold (on a consistent basis) five-sixths of the seating capacity of your church auditorium. So in designing your auditorium, you need to design it a little larger than what your actual needs are. In other words, you take your needs and add one-sixth and then you take what your goal is and then add a sixth, and you will be able to maintain only five-sixths of the seating capacity. So when we built the first chapel, we built it for 300 because my dream was to one day pastor a church of 250 people. That was my ambition—my life's goal and desire. Now I had been pastoring for about seventeen years and I

had never attained that. But I thought, “Oh how glorious it would be to have a church of 250 people!”

So according to the rulebook, we built our auditorium for 300. I had no idea what God had in mind, no concept at all. In looking back at the seventeen years of hard labor with very little to show for it, I can see how in all of that, God was preparing me for the work He was wanting to do. He allowed me to experience failure for seventeen years as I followed every program that came down the pike. I used all of my skills and abilities that I had developed and learned in college, and then later on through experience. And He let me run on the treadmill for seventeen years to prepare me for the work that He had in mind to do. I was so sick and tired of the treadmill, I was so sick and tired of church programs, I was so sick and tired of pushing people, and I was so sick and tired of artificial life-support systems for practically everything in the church. I determined that I was going to let everything die a natural death and not keep the life-support systems on anything. I thought, “If it does not and cannot function on its own, let it die. I am tired of trying to keep these programs alive in the church. I am tired of trying to build the church.”

When we came to Calvary Chapel, after seventeen years of pastoring, there were only 25 people. For the seventeen years that I had been pastoring, I always worked apart from the church in various jobs. When I first came down to pastor Calvary Chapel, I was doing mobile home repairs. I was building cabanas and cleaning trailers and repairing trailers, and all because the church could not pay me adequately to take care of the family needs. We had three kids in high school, so I determined that though we just had 25 people, I would make them the most knowledgeable people in God’s Word in the whole area. I was just going to teach them the Word of God.

There is a Scripture that describes it as teaching and showing. Paul is talking about his ministry to the Ephesians in [Acts 20:31–36](#). He is talking to the elders and he reminds them that for the space of three and a half years he taught and he showed them things (sort of a show-and-tell kind of thing) with the ministry. Your life has to be the example of what you are saying.

And God began to make these people the most knowledgeable people in the area, as far as His Word was concerned. And as they began to grow in the knowledge of God, they began to share that knowledge of God with others and others became interested. And of course, the rest is just a matter of history—what God has done.

And in looking at it I realize that the basic mistake that I had been making for so many years was that, number one: I was seeking to build the church of Jesus Christ through programs, through contests, and through all kinds of devices. I was seeking to build the church of Jesus Christ. And yet, when Jesus was talking about His church to Peter, He said, “On this rock I will build My church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” ([Matthew 16:18](#)).

Now, there are two ways to build a church. One is by programs. And if you are the “hype type” you can hype the people up in a program. You can set your goals and you can push and you can push and you can get a crowd of people. But I have discovered that if you strive to gain, then you have to continue to strive to maintain, and that can kill you. There are so many pastors around the county who are just being driven into the ground because they are striving to maintain since they strove to gain.

Now, when you do not strive to gain, you do not have to strive to maintain. So the words of Jesus are true when He said, “My yoke is easy and My burden is light” ([Matthew 11:30](#)). People are saying, “I do not know how you can pastor a church with that many people.” I do not know either, but in reality, I consider that I have an easy yoke. I have a light burden because we did not strive

to gain and thus, we do not have to strive to maintain. It is in the Lord's hands. He is the one who did it. It is His responsibility. Of course the seventeen years of failure were important, so that when God did His work there was no way that we could take credit for it. We now know all we can do with our best efforts is fail. And we know what God can do when we get tired and over the hill. We can see what God has done and rejoice in what God has done and not try to take credit for it.

Now, in the whole experience I came to a very drastic change of philosophy in regards to the church. And I think that this is extremely important as we talk now about the ministry, the church, and the purpose of the church. Once a year when we were in seminary, Oswald J. Smith, the pastor of the People's Church in Toronto, Canada, which was one of the greatest missionary giving churches in the world, would come to the seminary and have a missionary emphasis week. And I was very much taken by Oswald J. Smith. He was a very dynamic man. He had the People's Church that his son Paul now pastors in Toronto, which has always been a model church as far as its missionary giving. I read every book that Oswald J. Smith wrote. I availed myself of every opportunity to hear him speak. There was one thing that he kept emphasizing over and over again, and it was also emphasized over and over again in the seminary that I attended. I can just close my eyes and hear him say it now: "The primary purpose of the church is the evangelization of the world. The church exists to evangelize the world." And that was just drummed into my head and I believed it. I believed it for years that the church exists primarily to evangelize the world. That is the primary purpose of the church. And thus, for the first seventeen years of my ministry, I sought to evangelize the world. And most of my sermons were evangelistic sermons. I endeavored to preach God's Good News to the people.

My wife sought to help me and she would say, "Honey, you are just not dynamic enough. Now watch Billy Graham. He does not just stand behind the pulpit. He moves around." And of course, in those days he would pick up the microphone and walk back and forth across the platform with a microphone and stand there and hold it out in front of him. She said, "Now watch him. He moves around. He is active and he is dynamic and you just are not dynamic enough."

So I decided that I would try to be more dynamic. And as I was preaching my message, if I decided to emphasize a point, I would walk over to the side of the platform and give it the old emphatic hand gesture. And so, I walked on over to the side and started to give it the emphatic gestures and I became so self-conscious that my mind went blank. And I could not even remember the point I was going to make. I was just standing there and I really could not think of a single thing to say. I stood there for just a few moments, trying to think, but my mind was just playing games with me and just flipping up blank cards. So I had to walk back to the pulpit and look down at my notes and get myself back together. And that is the last pulpit walk I took and the last time I tried to be dynamic.

Now because the denomination we were in had evangelism as that constant goad, when we filled out our reports the very first little box was, "how many souls saved?" The second was "how many baptized?" And we were always measured by our effectiveness in winning souls to Jesus Christ. If ever we were to be considered for another church, a larger church, they would always get out the records and see how many people had accepted the Lord and how effective we were in our evangelism and all. And we knew that that was the criteria. So man, we really pushed to get people to accept the Lord and my sermons were all evangelistic. And we would count the little kids that raised their hands and all of this kind of stuff, so that we would look good on the reports.

Now one of the most frustrating things that I found in the ministry was that often times the Lord would give to me a fantastic evangelistic sermon. Oh man, it was so powerful it could convince

the hardest sinner that he needed to repent and receive Jesus Christ. And I would be so excited with the message because surely no one would be able to resist coming to Christ when they heard this message. I would go to church on Sunday night with this message burning in my heart and I would look around and I knew everyone by first name. There was not a sinner in the house! And if you want to know something that is really frustrating, it is to have a powerful evangelistic sermon burning in your heart and not a sinner to preach it to. They were all saints.

Well, that would upset me. And so, I would start adding a little bit to my sermon that was not in the notes about how they were failing in their Christian walk and life. If they were doing what God would have them to be doing, they would have been inviting their neighbors and friends to church that evening. “You are not really being witnesses for Jesus Christ. You are just taking it yourself, enjoying it yourself. You ought to be out witnessing to others and sharing the gospel with others.” And I was beginning to lay on them their failure. Well, they knew what I was saying was true. They knew that they were not all they should be. And of course they would start getting the guilts. There was no use asking people to be saved, so I would ask them to really commit their lives to the Lord and all. I knew I could get someone forward if I just made the appeal general enough because well, that was just the way it was. The success of the sermon was always measured by the amount of emotion that was demonstrated at the altar after the sermon. I mean, that was how we could tell whether the sermon was successful or not—how many people were saved and then how many were really crying. That was how they measured how powerful a sermon was preached.

Now, what I was very successful in doing was creating a lot of guilt-ridden, frustrated saints and they were guilt-ridden because I was laying a guilt trip on them. “You are not what you should be.” And they knew it. “Oh, I know. God, I am such a failure.” But also they were frustrated. “God, I want to be better. God, I want to serve You. God, I want to be a witness. But I just do not know how.”

And you see, it all came back to me. They did not know how because all they knew was Jesus died for their sins. All they knew was that they were to repent from sin and receive Jesus Christ. That is all I ever preached to them in a hundred various forms, but basically that was the message. So they did not know anything beyond repentance, receiving Jesus, and being baptized. That is about all they knew. Come get hands laid on you if you get sick. They knew nothing about walking in the Spirit. They knew nothing about growing and maturing in Christ because I never taught them those things. So I was guilty of keeping them in spiritual infancy and then jumping on their cases because they were still little babies when they should have been grown up. “You have been around here for years and you are still sucking your thumbs and shaking the rattles when you ought to be mature and grown up.” But you see, they could not mature on what I was teaching them or preaching to them.

Now, I only had a certain number of evangelistic sermons and so it was necessary that I change churches about every two years because in that length of time when you have services on Sunday morning, Sunday night and Wednesday night, I would just about run out of evangelistic messages. And I finally ended up in Huntington Beach and we were there for two years. I really did not want to move because we really liked Huntington Beach. I had a good job with Alpha Beta, working in the store in the packinghouse there. I had excellent hours. I was also working for Smith’s Mortuary in Huntington Beach and I was going out and picking up bodies. And it was pretty neat because I got five dollars a body which usually came in real handy. Then I was driving a flower car or preaching the sermons or singing the solos or whatever they needed at the mortuary. And we loved Huntington Beach. It was a small little town of 6,000 people. We knew everybody in

town and they all knew us. Of course, going down and surfing every morning was an extra blessing. And I did not want to leave, but I had run out of sermons. My two years were up.

Then I came across Griffith Thomas's book, *The Apostle John*, in my library and I began to read it. Now one of the hardest things I always had in the ministry was finding a sermon for Sunday morning and Sunday night. It was hard because when you are looking for a text and there is this whole Bible to look through, it is an awful lot to look through to find a text. And I would usually go through and just read and try and find a text for my sermon. The hardest thing was finding a text, finding something to preach on week after week. Well, Thomas had some real classic outline studies of 1 John. And I looked at those and I thought, "Wow, those are neat outlines." I counted them and I realized I had almost a whole year of Sunday morning sermons and I was really excited. So I announced to the people that we were going to start a study in 1 John on Sunday mornings. And I started this study of 1 John.

Well, the people started to grow. They started to mature. They were getting something besides evangelistic sermons now. I was not laying the heavy guilt trip on them anymore. And as they started to grow, their lives started being witnesses. And their friends started to come with them. They began to get excited about the Word. By the time I was through with 1 John, our church had doubled. We did not have to have any contests or anything, which we were always pushing in those days.

Of course, as I got into 1 John I found that I did not like all of Thomas's outlines, so I started making some of my own outlines. And man, this was exciting! I started buying other commentaries on 1 John. I started using *The Pulpit Commentary*, really doing some background study and all. And it really became, to me, a very exciting thing—I learned so much.

So then, a professor in seminary said, "If you want to revolutionize a church, study the book of Romans." So I thought, "Well, that will be exciting. Let's study the book of Romans." And I will tell you, it revolutionized me more than the church, because I came to an understanding of the grace of God that I had never had before. It also revolutionized the church.

But through this, I realized that I did not fit with the denomination. I knew that I was going to have to make a break. God was developing His work in my own life. I was reading in 1 Corinthians where one says, "I am of Cephas, another says I am of Apollos, another says I am of Paul. Is Christ divided?" (cf. [1 Corinthians 1:12-13](#)). And I saw that this "party spirit" was really spiritual carnality. The emphasis on denominational loyalty and all this kind of stuff, was only pandering to people's party spirit which is carnal. We were failing to see the whole body of Christ. I read where G. Campbell Morgan said, "I have discovered that the more spiritual a man becomes the less denominational he is." And I found myself becoming very nondenominational. Instead I was just seeking the kingdom of God, and seeking to serve the kingdom of God and not just our little church.

Well, God began to revolutionize, of course, my own ministry. It became a lot easier. I did not have to go through the whole Bible to find a text anymore. I knew where I was going to have to preach from, and so I would just do all my research and study in that area. It is a lot easier to preach out of just consistently going through books than it is to search the whole Bible. Suddenly we had a lot of baptisms and everything else, because the people were growing. And so the supervisor sent me to a larger church. And we had started this new method of teaching, so we just continued it. And God blessed this church that we were in. And so they sent us to another church. And about that time, I realized that I just did not fit their mold anymore. It was time to get out and go on my own.

Now all of this was a radical departure for me because somehow, I had slowly gone away from the concept of the primary purpose of the church being the evangelization of the world. And I almost felt subconsciously guilty because I was not preaching so many evangelistic messages. But this was so natural to me, so easy for me to just teach.

And then as I was reading in Ephesians 4, the Holy Spirit really opened up my eyes to the real purpose of the church. And I began to see what the real purpose of the church was not. The church did not exist for evangelism, but the church existed for the church's sake. Now, Paul is saying in Ephesians,

But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers. ([Ephesians 4:7–11](#), KJV)

So these various gifts, or ministry gifts, are for what purpose?— “For the perfecting of the saints for the work of the ministry” ([Ephesians 4:12](#)). And I began to see that the church existed for the purpose of the perfecting of the saints.

You see, unfortunately most of my sermons were for the person who was not there, the person who should have been sitting in that pew but was home. He was the one that I was really lambasting, but he was not hearing it. These poor, precious saints that came out to get fed were hearing it, but they did not need it! They did not need the beating that I was administering; they were there! I was decrying how horrible it was that the churches were empty, and who was I telling but these blessed people who were there.

And so I began to minister to the church, forgetting about numbers. From the time I was a little kid, we always had a Sunday school board up there and counted how many we had in Sunday school this Sunday, and how many we had last Sunday, and how many we had a year ago, and what the offering was. We took that board out. Of course there were a lot of cries. They said I was a revolutionary. And a lot of these people were traditional and they said, “We have always had a board up there.” I said, “Get your eyes off of numbers and get your eyes on Jesus. Let's forget about numbers. Let's just get into the Lord. Let's become perfected.”

Now the word “perfect” in the Greek is literally, “of full age or full maturity.” So the purpose of the church is to bring the saints into a full maturity in their walk and in their experience with Jesus Christ.

This is something I had never done for the saints. My messages were not designed to do this. There was nothing consistent about my preaching at all—except its inconsistency. It is because one week I would be inspired by a text in Genesis and the next week I would have a message out of Ephesians; the following week out of Jeremiah; the following week out of Revelation; the following week out of Isaiah; and the following week out of Mark. I was just jumping all over and the people were eating hodge-podge every Sunday. Nothing was consistent. There was no plan by which they could have a consistent growth in their knowledge and their understanding of the

Word of God. But when I started going through books and doing book studies, by the time we were through with that book, they had a good understanding of what that book was all about. There was a consistency in their growth now. They were being fed a diet that promoted spiritual growth in the believer.

And then of course, we started this through the entire Bible so that the people could get a bird's-eye view of the whole of Scripture. Most of my congregation had been Christians, going to church all of their lives, and the average age was probably 30 or so. I asked them, "How many of you have read the Bible all the way through?" And not one of them raised their hand. I said, "We are going to start reading the Bible all the way through together. We will start in Genesis and take the first ten chapters of Genesis and go straight through." Now the people began to get an overall view of the Word, and it helped them to better understand the particular sections of the books that we were studying.

You see, if you have a single piece of a jigsaw puzzle and you look at that one little piece and you try to figure out what in the world is this all about, it is difficult. You are thinking, "I do not understand these colors. I do not understand these little leaves. I do not understand this. That just does not make any sense to me." But if you have the whole picture and this is the last piece, when you fit it into its place, then you see how it relates to the total picture. You say, "Oh yes, I see. It all makes sense." Now you see, too often people are picking out one little verse and saying, "I do not understand this. I do not understand how God could command Abraham to offer his son as a living sacrifice." Well, you take that one little part and of course you cannot understand it. But if you fit it in with the whole picture, you see that it is beautiful. You say, "Oh wow! Far out! Whew!" It is exciting when you see how it fits in the total picture. But that is the problem. People are taking just isolated parts and trying to understand them, and you cannot. You need to see it in its whole.

So we started teaching people the Word of God, as it says here, "For the perfecting of the saints," bringing them into full maturity, "for the work of the ministry, for the edifying"—and the word means *to build up*—the building up of the body of Christ. I had never done that in my ministry before. I had never been interested in doing that in my ministry. I never thought of doing that in my ministry before because I had believed that the primary purpose of the church is evangelization of the world. I was more interested in the guys in the bars that were not coming to church than these people who were there faithfully Sunday by Sunday. And I was really neglecting the church because of this burning desire to win souls for Jesus Christ. But I was not really effectively winning souls for Jesus Christ, so I was frustrated and the people were frustrated.

Now, what we discovered is that as the people began to be strong in the Word, as the people began to understand the Scriptures, as they began to grow in their own experience in Christ, as they began to mature in Christ, Christ became their lives. Witnessing was no longer some difficult thing that they had to do. It became a very natural thing for them to do. Witnessing is just very natural because Christ is your life. So if you are going to share anything, what are you going to share? You are going to share your life. And as they began to naturally witness, rather than nervously—"Do you know the four spiritual laws?"—and going through the program, their witness became a very natural thing. And as a result, people began to come and accept Christ. For you see, the body was being perfected for the work of the ministry. They were beginning now to minister as they had come into this maturity in Christ.

So I came to a realization: 1) sick sheep cannot beget sheep. They cannot reproduce no matter how much you beat them. And what I was doing was beating sick sheep week after week.

I also found there was a corollary: 2) healthy sheep just reproduce naturally. It is the natural function of a healthy sheep to reproduce. So as the sheep became healthy and strong, they just began to reproduce. It is not something you have to push them to do or encourage them or coax them or whatever, it is just a natural function of healthy sheep, to reproduce. So evangelism of the world is the byproduct of a healthy body. If the church is strong and healthy, there will be evangelism. People will be brought to Jesus Christ. So my whole emphasis of ministry changed and the whole philosophy of the church changed. I saw the purpose of our gathering together. We do not gather here to evangelize the world. We gather here to be built up in Jesus Christ. We gather here to be brought into a maturity in our walk with Him and in our relationship to Him. There was a whole change of philosophy, as we began to develop healthy sheep.

Now, Paul says that this is why God has given evangelists, prophets, pastors, teachers, and apostles. This is the purpose of the whole thing: “To perfect the saints for the work of the ministry and the building up of the body of Christ, till we all come in the unity of the faith to the knowledge of the Son of God unto the complete man, into full maturity” (cf. [Ephesians 4:12–13](#)). We began bringing these people into full maturity.

Now if you have a Bible class, concentrate on those who are there in bringing them into a full maturity. May God deliver us from the bondage of numbers and counting heads. What is more important than the number is that there is the quality of the Word that is coming to them. That is what is important—to make sure that if there are one or two there—that they are being enriched in God’s truth and in God’s Word. This leads them unto the fully matured man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. We are to bring them on into the image of Jesus Christ, through the Word so that “they no longer are like children who are 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” (cf. [Ephesians 4:13–14](#)).

A church that does not have a strong biblical base, a strong biblical teaching, these people are going to be the prey for every pied piper that comes along tooting some new doctrine. And believe me, the world is full of these guys—guys that just sit and think of some new kind of a gimmick in order to attract people to themselves and to their ministries. And if people are not strong and taught in the Word, if they are experience-oriented and all, they are really easy prey.

There is here in Orange County, a floating congregation. They just float from one meeting to another. They hear that everything is “cooking” over here right now. They all float over there. And then they get sort of fed up with that one, or it gets old, and then they hear that something is happening at another church. And poof, they all go over there. And here this pastor is wondering, “What happened to my congregation?” And there are several hundred here in Orange County who are floaters. They have no foundation in the Word. They have no real understanding of the Word. Every new little gimmick or whatever comes along—there they go. It is sad because they become victims of these men who, through their cunning craftiness are just waiting there to deceive them, and boy, they get taken. These guys get up with these offering pleas and all. “God is just broke. He is filing bankruptcy next Monday unless you give tonight.” And these poor immature believers get fleeced everywhere they go.

Jesus said, “Feed My sheep” ([John 21:17](#)). But there are so many shepherds are out there to fleece the sheep. They measure a congregation and they can tell you just how much money they can milk out of that congregation. In fact, they come down here to Calvary on Thursday night and see this place full, and they cannot believe that we do not take an offering. “Do you know how much you could get?” We are not interested in what we can get. We are interested in what we can give.

Now, if we are faithful in giving, God will also be faithful in supplying for us. When God guides, God provides. God does not need our help. God does not need our support. We need His help and His support. I would not serve a God that I had to support.

“But speaking the truth in love...” And there is the secret. Sometimes the truth cuts, sometimes the truth is harsh, but we have to speak it. But it is important that when we speak it that we speak it in love. “Speaking the truth in love that they may grow up into Him, into Christ, in all things” (cf. [Ephesians 4:15](#)).

Now there is another passage of Scripture in Hebrews 6 that the Lord used to confirm this whole new philosophy of the church that He had given to me. It was such a change from what I had been taught in school and had been drilled into me, that it was awfully hard for me not to feel guilty for a long time for not preaching evangelistic sermons. But in Hebrews 6 he declares:

Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this will we do, if God permit. ([Hebrews 6:1–3](#), KJV)

Let us quit preaching the hell fire and the resurrection of the dead and all of this. Let us go on into a full maturity. Let us take the people into full maturity. Let us not be laying again over and over and over and over these first principles of the doctrines of Christ. It is important that we lay them. Let us lay them, but then let us go on. Let us develop the people into a full maturity in Christ Jesus. And that, of course, can only be done through the Word of God and a consistent study of the Word of God.

Now the early church was, by far, the most successful that the church has ever been in all of its history. The early church, within its generation, had reached the whole world with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul, in writing to the Colossians said, “And the word of Christ which has come to you, which it has in all of the world” (cf. [Colossians 1:5–6](#)). They had reached the whole world. They started out with just 120 on the Day of Pentecost, but soon the whole world was touched with the gospel of Jesus Christ. We have been going down hill ever since.

Now a part of the reason for this downhill trend is the fact that we have sought to substitute seminaries, education, and all of these things, for the Holy Spirit. “We really do not need the Holy Spirit anymore,” you will hear taught and declared. “They needed the Holy Spirit then because they did not have the seminaries and seminary training, and thus they needed the Holy Spirit. But now that we have these marvelous educational institutes and all, we do not really need the power or the help of the Holy Spirit anymore. God has just sort of turned the job over to us.” And that is, in my mind, one of the reasons why the church is failing.

Now, the unfortunate part is that those who claim the Holy Spirit, the gifts and the power, are so weak in the teaching of the Word that the people remain very shallow.

The Pentecostal Church’s greatest weakness is the lack of the solid consistent teaching of the Word of God. You can go and get preached at, but preaching is really for the unconverted. Once a person has received Jesus Christ they do not need to be preached at anymore. What they need is to be taught. “God has chosen that through the foolishness of preaching, men should believe the gospel” (cf. [1 Corinthians 1:21](#)). But once they believe the gospel, then they need to be taught the

walk in Jesus Christ. So there is a place for preaching—that is to the unconverted. But once a person is converted, then the teaching of the Word of God is what is so vital.

So we always look back at the early church as the model, the model of success. In [Acts 2:42](#), when the church was born, after the experience on the Day of Pentecost when all of these people had gladly received the word and were baptized (about 3,000 of them) it says: “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.”

These are the four functions of the early church: 1) is the apostles' doctrine, or the teaching, the solid teaching of the Word of God. They continued steadfastly in the teaching of God's Word.

2) They were in fellowship. It is an interesting Greek word that we cannot really translate into English. We do not have any English equivalent to *koinonia*. It means a oneness, it means a communion, it means a fellowship—all of them. Bunch them all up into one. It is the fellowship of oneness where you become really a part of each other, sharing together the life of Christ. And this is what we need to be developing within the church, the *koinonia*, or the concern in the body for one another. It is the recognition of the body and its inter-relationship to itself and the importance of every aspect of the body in order to be a total, whole body—a complete body. And what we need to be developing is this love amongst each other that comes into a godly concern for one another. The body, where one member suffers they all suffer, and where one is exalted they are all exalted. And we will begin to really develop this kind of closeness, communion, fellowship, care and concern for each other.

That is why I am so strong on home Bible studies. When I left the denomination and decided I was just going to start over again in the ministry, from the beginning, I was teaching five home Bible studies. And I thought that my ministry was going to be just a teacher in home Bible studies. I thought, “That is it.” I started contracting and building to supply for the needs of the family, and then in the evenings I would go out and teach these home Bible studies. And I was, at that time, saying, “Well, the church started in the homes and it will probably end in the homes,” because we were seeing such phenomenal results in these home Bible studies. We were seeing lives changed. We were seeing the real fellowship, the oneness, the *koinonia*, developing among these people within these home Bible study fellowships. They were fabulous. I loved them. The only problem is the home soon became too small, as more people were wanting to come than we could fit into the homes.

We were meeting in a home out in Corona. And these people said, “We are just getting fat in the Word. We are just being so blessed. We ought to be doing something. It is not right that we just sit here week after week and just get so fat in the Word. We ought to be doing something.” So, they said, “Let's form a corporation—Corona Christian Association. And we will start tithing into it. And we will sponsor a daily radio broadcast on KREL.” So they formed Corona Christian Association, started tithing into it and sponsored me for fifteen minutes on the radio out there in Corona. We had been announcing that there was a group of nondenominational Christians meeting together to study the Word of God on Tuesday evenings over at this home in Corona. When I got there Tuesday night for Bible study, there was no place to park my car in the neighborhood. I had to park it up the street on the next block. And I thought, “Wow, they must be having a block party here today, or something.” And when I got down to the house where we were having the meeting, I saw the people standing out in the yard, out in front and all, and I said, “What is going on?” And they said, “Well, there is a Bible study here tonight.” I said, “You mean you are all here for the Bible study?” “Yeah.” Well, we decided then that we better start renting the American Legion Hall there in Corona, and out of it a church grew.

These Bible studies are great, because they are an excellent way of developing this *koinonia*. You need the small groups for that.

3) Breaking of bread: Now this a beautiful thing about the breaking of bread; it was far more meaningful to them than it is to us today. Eating together is not something that you just do casually in the Jewish culture in society. Eating together is really a very significant act. Breaking bread together is an extremely significant act. It is an act that symbolizes your lives becoming a part of each other. Because I am eating a piece of this bread and you are eating a piece of this bread, so that the same bread that is nourishing me is now nourishing you. That same bread which is being assimilated by my body and becoming a part of my body is becoming a part of your body. And if a part of my body is now becoming a part of your body, we are becoming a part of each other because we are partaking of the same bread, we are drinking from the same cup.

That is why the Jew would never eat with a Gentile because there was no way that the Jew wanted to become a part of a Gentile, or to have a Gentile become a part of him. And that is why, even in the early church there was a big stink over this. When Peter came down to Antioch, he was eating with the Gentiles, before certain brethren came down from Jerusalem. But when they came down, he did not want them to know that he had been eating with the Gentiles because then they would not want to eat with him—since he had been eating with Gentiles. “And if I eat with you then I become a part of you and you are a part of a Gentile.” And so it was a heavy-duty thing. And Paul had to stand up and rebuke Peter openly over this because it created quite a dissention there in the church.

Now in this breaking of bread together, in the taking of the bread and taking of the cup, you see, it means that I am being nourished by Jesus Christ. But it also means you are being nourished by Jesus Christ. And if we are both being nourished by the same source—I am assimilating and He is becoming a part of my life. He is also becoming a part of your life. Our lives are becoming a part of each other through Jesus Christ, you see. This is what *koinonia* is all about, becoming a part of each other in Jesus Christ. That is true *koinonia* and it is expressed probably best in breaking of bread together, if you understand the oriental mind in that.

4) And in prayer: the fourth aspect of the early church was the prayers. Now of course, we pointed this out as the first characteristic of the man whom God uses; he is a man of prayer. And one of the vital functions of the early church was its prayer, the prayer meetings, praying together for the common good of the body, and praying together for the needs of the community. Prayer.

We have looked at four things: study the Word, which is the apostles’ doctrine; *koinonia*; breaking of bread; and prayer (cf. [Acts 2:41-42](#)). Now, this is what the church was doing. This is what the church was. It did not say anything about visitation committees, choir rehearsals, or all of the stuff that has become so much a part of the church today. It does not say anything about any of those—enlargement programs or pledge committees. But down at the end of the chapter it does say, “And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved” ([Acts 2:47](#)).

Now here you have the key for the success of the early church. But it is also a key for success for the church today. When the church becomes what God wants it to be—a place of the study of the Word, a place of the *koinonia* developing among it, as we enter into that covenant, breaking of bread together, and as we are praying together—as the church becomes what God wants the church to be, then God will do what He is desiring to do for the church. That is, He will add daily to the church such as should be saved.

That is not the church's task, to mobilize for evangelism. And yet over and over and over we hear of mobilization for evangelism. No! When we become what God wants us to be, God will do what He is wanting to do, He will add daily. That is God's business. Jesus said, "I will build My church" ([Matthew 16:18](#)). That is His business. My business is not to build the church of Jesus Christ. My job is not to go out and conscript people to come. My business is to minister God's Word, God's love, to God's people through the anointing of the Spirit. And the work of the Spirit through the Word of God in the lives of the believers of God, is the thing that makes for success in the church.

Now there are churches that have the Word, but no Spirit and they are sterile. There are churches that have the Spirit, but no Word. But when you get the Holy Spirit working through the Word of God in the lives of the believers of God, then you have a combination that will light a fire anywhere. And it will grow. God will add to the church daily those that should be saved.

Now this is not a "get rich quick" kind of a program. This is not one of those overnight phenomenal successes. This is more like the penny double. You do not see much at the beginning because you are laying a foundation. It takes a while to build these people up in the Word. It takes a while to bring them into maturity. And so you are apt to go along for quite awhile with just a smaller group, but you are all the while laying the foundation of the Word of God and you are praying and you are developing this *koinonia*. And God is working, perfecting the saints, building them up and bringing them into maturity. And then, when you hit this level where they begin to come into maturity, then is when they begin to share their faith with others and you get a new group in. And then you start the same thing again—laying the foundations, bringing them into maturity. And then, when they get to maturity, they start bringing their friends in and soon you are doubling again. And then you work with them as you build them up in Christ and bring them on into maturity. And then they go out and bring their friends. And you can look at Calvary's growth and it comes in sort of stair-step spurts. Where you start out, the first day you make a penny. Second day you make two pennies. Third day you make four pennies. Fourth day you make eight pennies. Fifth day you make sixteen. Then you make thirty-two. And by the end of the month, you are a millionaire, on the penny double system.

Now with the church, it is an exponential type of a growth. You do not see rapid, overnight kind of success. And that is why a lot of people do not follow this because they are looking for—"I want a hundred in church tomorrow." And so they get a big evangelist or get a big-name movie star or something to get a crowd. Well, you get all these little lookie-loos and these floaters that are going around, but the problem is then you have to get someone more sensational with a bigger name and all. And you get into a trap. And then you have to strive to maintain that whole thing and that becomes a heavy, heavy thing.

It is better, much better, to just follow the scriptural pattern. It is a little slower, but in the long run it is much bigger and much stronger.

Now Jesus said to His disciples,

"You have not chosen Me. I have chosen you and ordained you that you should be My disciples, that you should bring forth fruit and that your fruit should remain" (cf. [John 15:16](#)).

You see, there are two things I want: not just to bring forth fruit, but I want fruit that remains, lasting fruit from the ministry. And that will come through the Word. God bless you!

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

BY

Calvary Chapel Outreach Fellowship

Lesson 3

Walking with God

By

Chuck Smith

Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa

Brought to you by:

The Blue Letter Bible Institute

www.blbi.org

A ministry of:

The Blue Letter Bible

www.blueletterbible.org

Servant Leadership – Lesson 3
Walking with God by Chuck Smith

1

You know, it is a lot easier to get into a mess than it is to get out of a mess. And I have found that it is a lot easier to get people into the church than to get people out of the church sometimes too. And a lot of times, if our motivation is just to get people in and we are primarily concerned with numbers, we can actually coerce people into church whom God really had not intended to be a part of that particular body. Then we have to try to get them out.

People have come many times to men's prayer meeting and they wonder, "What in the world is going on?" We pray, "Lord, please keep away from the church those that You know should not be here, those that are coming for wrong motivations, those that You know are not to be a part of the body here. Lord, just keep them away from here."

So waiting on the Lord is a very important thing for us, as far as our position with the church, because we often times have the concept that it is our job to build the church. We are so busy trying to build up the church. But Jesus said, "Upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" ([Matthew 16:18](#)).

So for years and years I spun my wheels trying to build the church of Jesus Christ, and I wore myself out and never did accomplish very much. And then, I got out of the way and just started letting the Lord build His church. I was sort of standing on the sidelines and just watching what God could do, just waiting on the Lord. And I found that He was capable of doing a much better job than I ever hoped to do, or ever thought of doing.

The purpose of this message is really to just to provide you with enrichment, spiritual enrichment for your ministries. We are not going to try and lay a lot of heavy trips on you. We want to just give you things that will help you in ministering to the body of Christ. It is sort of a time for you to just come and get your batteries recharged and just to wait upon the Lord. It is a time for you to get into the Word, and to become refreshed in your whole spiritual walk and life. And so we are looking forward to the ministry of God's Holy Spirit to each of us while we are here. That is what it is all about, as we are just ministered to by the Spirit of God and equipped and enabled to go back to the various areas where we are serving the Lord, and become those servants that God would have us to be.

To me it is interesting that God was so pleased with the prayer of Solomon: "Lord, just give me wisdom that I may know how to really guide Your people" (cf. [1 Kings 3:9](#)). That is my prayer. God, give me wisdom that I may know how to guide Your people. They are not my people. They are not my flock. They are His flock. Now the Lord has me there to watch over His flock, but I will tell you that I need His wisdom, in order to know how to go in and out among them, and how to behave myself before them. Lord, I need wisdom in managing, and overseeing Your flock.

There is no biblical concept of the church that would be complete apart from the book of Ephesians, for as Paul is writing to the Ephesians, he is writing to the church. Ephesus was the church that Paul himself had founded and spent a couple of years in its early development, laying the foundations. The people were very dear to the heart of Paul. The book of Ephesians really brings you into some of the highest plains of the Christian experience. It is the church God intended, the church God has purposed.

And so in the sessions that I have with you, it is my desire to have sort of a study of the book of Ephesians, trying to understand the biblical concepts of the church—what God has intended for the church—so that we might become the church that God intends.

Now it is my conviction that God wants to bless every one of you and bless every one of your churches. I believe that is the will and heart of God. God is just looking for a place to work. He is just looking for people that He can bless. I do not believe that the lack of God's blessings ever stems from God's end. I believe it is the purpose of God and the will of God to bless you and to bless your church, and to bless your ministries more than you ever dreamed.

That is why I do not like to set goals. I think they limit what God wants to do. One time I had a goal to pastor a church of 250 people. And goals can be limiting, when they put limits on what God wants to do in your life. So I think it is important that we just know that God wants to bless us, and that we are open for those blessings of God.

In 2 Chronicles, the prophet said to Asa the king that when he was young and when he was weak, he recognized the fact that he was dependent on God, wholly and completely. And because he depended upon God, God delivered into his hands the great hosts of the Ethiopians and the Nubians. But he said, "Now that you have become strong, now that you have become powerful, you are relying now upon your strength, upon the alliances that you have made and you are not relying upon the Lord." And he said, "Don't you realize that the eyes of the Lord go to and fro throughout the entire earth to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose hearts are perfect towards Him? (cf. [2 Chronicles 16:9](#)). In other words, "Don't you know that God is looking for people to bless? Don't you know that God is wanting to work, wanting to demonstrate His power, wanting to demonstrate His greatness?" God is desiring to show forth to the world the greatness of His power and love, but what He needs is a heart that is perfect. And the "perfect" always means "complete," a heart that is completely toward Him. Now I believe that the only criteria necessary for us, in order to experience the fullness and the richness of God's blessing upon our lives, is that we get our hearts perfect toward Him, completely toward Him.

Jesus said, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" ([Matthew 6:33](#)). Now He is laying priorities. And in the ministry, one of the most important things is priority. You can waste days in stupid little nonessentials. "What kind of doorknobs are we going to put on the cupboards?" And there are committee meetings to determine the kind of doorknobs that go on the cupboards. And you can waste so much time in stupid nonessentials. "Oh, but that color does not go well with the carpet." There are so many silly things you can get involved in. And you can also become involved in seeking first your church growth and development. You can seek first the building up of your church. But if you will seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, He will take care of the rest of it.

Do not try to build your church. Do not even worry about how many come to your church. "Well, I'm sorry, you do not go to our church, therefore we cannot help you and we don't want to minister to you." No, you seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. Get your heart completely toward God, the work that God is wanting to do. And as you do, when your heart is completely toward Him, then you are going to find that your life is going to be a channel, and God is going to begin to flow His love and His blessing forth from you. And listen, you do not have to worry about building your church; the Lord will take care of that.

I am convinced that when the church becomes what God wants the church to be, God will do for the church what He has been wanting to do all the way along. Just get your heart completely toward Him. All these other things—they will be taken care of. But in our misplaced priorities, we are spending so much time in the other things, we do not have time for Him or our relationship with Him.

Let us turn to Ephesians and begin to see the biblical concept of the church as it is revealed here in the book of Ephesians.

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints
which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus:
([Ephesians 1:1](#), KJV)

“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God...” Now we are encouraged to make our calling and election sure. God has called each of us for a full-time ministry. Every person, I feel, is called of God for a full-time ministry. Now it may be that for the time being your salary is paid by Shell Oil Company, because you have to eat. But that does not take away from the fact that God has called you to a full-time ministry. I think that we have made a tragic mistake in the church, classifying full-time ministers as only those who are paid by the church for the ministry that they do. Somehow if you are drawing your salary from a church or para-church organization, then you are considered full-time minister. But if you are drawing your salary from someplace else, then you are not really considered a full-time minister, part-time minister, or whatever. And I think that that is a bad concept. I think that the people need to realize that they are *all* called by God to a full-time ministry. Their lives belong to Jesus Christ. Now everybody has to eat. So someone may be paying your salary that is not a church or para-church organization, but still, your life should be totally given over into a full-time ministry to the Lord. I am serving the Lord. And the people need to have this concept, the fact that they are serving the Lord, and they should not be made to feel second rate because they are getting their salary from someplace else.

It is an interesting thing when a man is a dentist and he signs up with a missionary organization and goes down to Central America, and there he is in a clinic. And all day long he is checking the teeth of the little children or of their parents, filling teeth and all of this kind of stuff. It is interesting because the mission board back here is paying his salary, we say, “Well, he is a full-time missionary, a full time minister.” Now we might have a man who is up here in the States. He loves the Lord, and he has a home Bible study in his house. He is teaching in the Sunday school class, and he is helping in the church. He is witnessing all the time, but he spends his days filling teeth, pulling teeth and all. And we say, “No, he is not a full-time minister because his customers are paying his salary. The patients are paying his salary.” Well, in reality he may have a more valid full-time ministry in that he is not drawing out from the funds of the Lord.

We need to get away from this idea of full-time ministry or part-time ministry and know that each of us has a full-time calling to serve God. No one has been called to serve God part time. We have all been called to serve the Lord in a full-time service.

Now it says, “Paul an apostle.” It might well be “Paul a service station attendant,” or “Paul a fisherman,” or “Paul a carpenter by the will of God,” because the Lord knows people have to live in houses and people have to eat food. “Whatever you do in word or deed, do all to the glory of God” (cf. [Colossians 3:17](#)). If I am just a farmer, God needs farmers. People have to eat. If it were not for the farmers, I could not be doing what I am doing. I would have to be out in the fields growing my own food.

So God has a place for each man and no one should feel like a second-rate servant of God just because he does not have a pulpit ministry, or just because he is not drawing a full-time salary from a church or a para-church organization. We are all full-time ministers.

Now of course Paul has always been my model. He said, “Be ye followers of me even as I also am of Jesus Christ” ([1 Corinthians 11:1](#)). And he has always been a model for me. I was always

encouraged that Paul was willing and able to go out and make tents. Though, he says, “Paul an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God,” even as an apostle of Jesus Christ, he could draw a salary by making tents.

While Paul was in Ephesus, it was there in Ephesus where they came and they took handkerchiefs from Paul. The word is actually *sweatbands*, because Paul was working and he had a sweatband around his head. And they would take these sweatbands from Paul and lay them on the sick and people would be healed. Now that does not sound as glamorous as a little piece of cloth with perfumed oil, but to me it is glorious to realize that here is a guy who is willing to get in and sweat to provide his livelihood. But during the siesta time in the afternoon when people took time off and just rested, then he would be teaching the Word of God. Come evening, he would be teaching the Word of God. And so: “To the Ephesians, Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God.”

Paul tells us in Ephesians 4 that God has placed in the church apostles; and then He has also placed prophets, and evangelists, and pastors and teachers. And as we look at Paul’s life, he actually wore many hats—the hat of an apostle, for sure. There were other times when he wore the hat of a teacher. To the church at Ephesus, he was its pastor for a time. He began his work in Ephesus in evangelism. And he surely exercised a prophetic ministry among them, speaking forth God’s truths to them.

Now I believe that there are ministry gifts and I believe that the listing here is of ministry gifts. Men have been called of God as apostles, called of God as prophets, called of God as evangelists, called of God as pastor/teachers. And these are the various ministries or administrations within the church, along with governments, and helps, and so forth. And I believe that for each of these callings there are certain gifts of the Spirit that enable us to fulfill that particular calling that God has placed upon us for the ministry that we have. And I believe that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are to enable us and to empower us to fulfill the particular ministry that God has called us to fulfill. And thus I think for a pastor/teacher, the gift of the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, and prophecy are very important. For an evangelist perhaps the gift of faith, the working of miracles, the gifts of healing are given. Gifts vary according to the calling of God upon our lives for that place of ministry within the body that we are to fulfill.

So, “Paul an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus and”—notice he does not limit it to just the saints at Ephesus—“and to the faithful in Christ Jesus.” I believe that if there is a theme that runs through the book of Ephesians, it is: In Christ Jesus. And thus, Paul introduces the theme of the book very early. And if you are going to ever make a thorough study of the book of Ephesians it is important that you underline every time he makes a reference to the relationship in Christ Jesus, in Him, by Him, for Him, and through Him. He shows that the believer’s life is totally bound up in the person of Jesus Christ and that we are nothing, really, apart from Him. It is in Him. It is through Him. It is by Him and it is for Him that our lives exist.

Naturally when you start talking about this kind of a relationship, your mind must go back to the words of Christ in John 15 where He talks about that relationship. “Abide in Me. My words abide in you.” There is a necessity for this if we are to bear fruit for Him. And the purpose of the Father is not that you just bear fruit, “But that you bear much fruit. Herein is your Father glorified...” (cf. [John 15:8](#)).

Now God wants to bless you. God wants to work in your life. God has a work He wants to do in your area, in your community, a greater work than you have yet seen, a greater work than you can

even imagine. And God wants to use you as His instrument in accomplishing His work in that community. But relationship is first. And thus, your relationship with God has to be the first priority of your life. And may God just really help you to draw close to Him, to be open to Him, to get that relationship established; so that God can begin to do the work in your life that He wants to do. He will do through your life what He wants to do.

But here again, you have the vertical and the horizontal relationships. The vertical is always important because it is the axis upon which your life revolves. Your relationship with God (the up and down) is so vital because if this is out of kilter, your horizontal plain is going to be out of kilter. You have a fixed axis, and there is no way that you can have a well-balanced life on the horizontal plain unless you have a corrected vertical axis upon which your life is revolving. And thus, the problems always come back to our relationship with God. That relationship is established and maintained in Jesus Christ and through Jesus Christ; as that relationship is right, then this horizontal plain becomes right and you become effective. God is looking, first of all, for what He can do in you.

But God never stops at that point. God is interested in what He can do in you because He is interested in doing work through you. But it is important that He first of all works in you. And when that work of God has been accomplished in you, then God can do through you what He has been wanting to do. If God started doing through you what He is wanting to do before first of all doing *in* you what is necessary, that can lead to problems. We are all so stupid and dumb and flesh oriented that we would go around boasting and parading what we were doing for God and we just totally blow it. So God works in us first, and this relationship must be established first.

And thus, the top priorities in my life must be the Word of God, my relationship with Him, a heart perfect toward God, or a heart that is completely toward God. And this is something that you do not do once and then say, “Well, I did that already. Where do I go from here?” It is something that you must maintain. It is something that is a continual thing.

The Apostle Paul is speaking of his own ministry and said, “I beat my body,” literally until it is black and blue, until it is bruised, “to keep my body under, lest having preached to others, I myself would be set aside” (cf [1 Corinthians 9:27](#)). In other words, be put on a shelf, cast away, no longer fit for the Master’s use. Toss it out; it is a vessel that no longer can be used for the Lord. And I look at the broken vessels along the side of the road, men who one time had an effective, powerful ministry for God, and I realize the importance of keeping the body under. For the body, the area of my flesh, desires praise. It desires adoration. It desires the glory of man. And if you do not keep the body under, it is going to be doing little antics to draw attention to itself.

As a minister, it is important that I be spiritual. But one of the problems is that I like to appear to my people more spiritual than I really am. And thus, I like to give forth little innuendoes of deep spirituality. I let little things sort of slip out so that they will understand how deeply spiritual I am. So they will say, “Oh my, isn’t it wonderful? Our pastor is so spiritual.” My flesh loves to have people think that I am a deeply spiritual man of God, and so I like to just sort of let it slip out once in a while. “Well, this morning as I was in meditation, I figured it was getting close to morning because I could hear the roosters crowing. The Lord just seemed to reveal to my heart...” “Oh man, isn’t he spiritual? Wow, he is up before the roosters, praying and getting revelations from God. Wow!” What they do not know is that I was stupid enough to have onions on my hamburger the night before and I could not sleep, so I was just tossing when I heard the roosters crowing. And the Lord revealed to me that I should not have onions so late at night! But let me tell the story and it is going to come off deeply spiritual, so that people are going to stand

in awe and wonder of me. No, they need to stand in awe and wonder of our Lord, and in awe and wonder that our Lord would use one such as me to do His work.

You see, what we do is we sort of close off from the mind of people the concept that God can use them. God only uses deeply spiritual, committed people. What does that mean? They are never available for God because they are thinking, “I know I am not worthy. I know I do not deserve it. I know I am not deeply committed and spiritual and all, so how can God use me? Well, God blessed the pastor. And God used the pastor. He is a deeply spiritual man, but God cannot use me because I am not.”

But it also comes down then to me, because I know the truth about me. Though they may think that I am deeply spiritual, I know the truth about me. And I think, “Well, how can God use me, because God only uses deeply spiritual people?” And as a result, God has nobody to use. Nobody is available. We must realize that God is willing to use anyone He can get His hands on, who is just available for Him to use, and that He wants to use me. And He begins by working in me, and as He has worked in me, He is able to work His works to others through me.

But in God’s work I must remain in that position of spirit, soul, and body and keep the body under. The minute you become body, soul and spirit, then man, you are going to get set on a shelf. You have to maintain the spiritual balance of spirit, soul, and body in order to maintain that usefulness for God.

“In Christ Jesus” is the theme of the book of Ephesians. “Grace be unto you, and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ” ([Ephesians 1:2](#)). Grace and peace are the Siamese twins of the New Testament. They are always coupled together. You rarely find them apart from each other. But they are always in this order. You never read “peace and grace,” because that is out of order. The proper order is always grace and peace, because no one can really experience the real peace of God until they have experienced the grace of God.

Now I had peace *with* God years before I had the peace *of* God in my life. The peace with God was established years ago when Jesus Christ came in and cleansed me from my sin. I had peace with God, but it took years, years actually in the ministry, before I ever experienced the peace *of* God within my life. And I never did experience the peace of God in my life until I discovered the grace of God towards me. As long as I was trying to deserve and merit and earn a place in God’s kingdom, I was striving and I never did know the peace of God. It was only after I discovered the glorious grace of God and accepted that grace of God that I then began to experience the peace of God. So there is a peace of God you can only know once you have really discovered the grace of God in your own life. “Grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” ([Ephesians 1:2](#)).

Some people look at the Lord Jesus Christ and think of that as His first, middle, and last name. Not so. Actually they should have put a comma after the word *Lord*, to get the correct understanding. Lord is not His name at all. His name is not Lord. Lord is not a name, Lord is a title. It is a title that signifies relationship. Jesus is His name. *Yeshua* means “Jehovah is salvation.” Christ is His mission, you might say. It is the Greek of the Hebrew word *Mashiyach*, the Messiah, the Anointed One. It denotes His mission, but Lord is His title.

Now there are many people who, when speaking of “the Lord,” use that title as a name. But it does not truly signify a relationship. And Jesus tells us that many are going to come to Him in that day saying, “Lord, Lord, [a repetition for emphasis] did we not prophesy in Your name and do many mighty miracles? We cast out devils. Lord, Lord, we did all these things.” And He is

going to say, “Depart from Me, ye workers of iniquity. I never knew you” (cf. [Matthew 7:22–23](#)). He never knew them in that relationship. He was never really the Lord of their lives.

Now Jesus points out an important inconsistency when He said, “Why callest thou Me Lord, Lord and yet you do not do the things I command you?” (cf. [Luke 6:46](#)). Lord is a title. If I use that title of Lord then that means I am the servant. I am the slave. I am the *doulos*, the bond slave. He is my *kurios*, my Lord, my Master; and thus, I have no rights of my own. I cannot say where I am going to serve, or how I am going to serve, or what I am going to do and not do. I have relinquished those rights to my Lord. That is what the title means, that I have relinquished my rights of self-determination to Him.

This is relationship. Relationship is vital. If I am going to be a servant, the relationship has to first of all be established, and it is a Lord/servant relationship. But so many of us are like Peter, when the sheet was let down from heaven and he saw all of these various unclean animals on it and the Lord said to Peter, “Arise Peter, kill and eat.” And Peter said, “Not so, Lord! I have never eaten anything that is unclean” (cf. [Acts 10:13–14](#)). That is the most inconsistent statement in the Bible—“Not so, Lord.” You cannot say that. That is a perfect inconsistency. You can say, “Not so, buddy. Not so, friend.” But you cannot say, “Not so, Lord.” If the Lord tells you to do something, if He indeed is Lord, then you have no place of argument. You have no place of question. Yours is just to obey and to do, because He is the Lord. “Why callest thou Me Lord, Lord and yet you do not do the things I command you?” You are inconsistent.

The Lord Jesus Christ—this is where I think a lot of people get confused in [Romans 10:9–10](#). As far as salvation, they make salvation actually easier and simpler than it really is. Though I think most of the time we are making it more complex; but yet, “If thou shalt confess with thy mouth [King James says] the Lord Jesus Christ.” Literally, from the Greek it is: “If thou shalt confess with thy mouth that Jesus Christ is Lord, and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead.” It is actually a submission of myself to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, which is so important.

Especially if I am marked as a servant of God, what does that imply? It implies the Lordship of Jesus Christ? So above all others in your position as a servant, you should have that “Lord” concept in regards to Jesus Christ. He is the Lord in the relationship. Get that relationship established. Until it is established, you cannot go to point B.

I do not know how much truth there is to it, but some people say that you have certain developmental tasks that you must fulfill psychologically within a certain period of time. And if you do not fulfill it then you stay stunted until that is fulfilled. In other words, during your teen years there are certain developmental tasks and all that must be accomplished during your teen years, in order for you to really enter into your twenties. And while you are twenty, there are certain other emotional, psychological, and developmental things that need to be established before you can enter into the maturity of the thirties. And if you do not accomplish them while you are in your twenties, you are going to remain stunted in that area of development until that is finally accomplished. You will never be able to mature into the thirties and so forth, in judgment and all, until you have fulfilled these developmental things in the twenties.

One of things people say is that you are supposed to get married in your twenties and get that part of your sociological development taken care of or you are never going to fully develop beyond that. And you grow older and you are still going to be a kid and undeveloped in a certain area of your structure and all. This is what some people are saying, but I do not know if I believe that.

I do know this: there are certain spiritual developmental tasks that need to be experienced before you can go any further. And before you can really be effective or go any further in your service toward God, the relationship must be established in Christ Jesus. And until you are submitted to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in that proper relationship, until that is established, you are going to stay in this limited area of service to God. You will never be able to go beyond that particular point until this is first of all established.

Now in [Ephesians 1:3](#) Paul said,

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.

There you have it, “in Christ.” All of the blessings that God has for you are in Christ.

This is the record. God has given to us eternal life. And this life is in the Son; and thus, he who has the Son has the life. (cf. [1 John 5:11](#))

You have no life apart from “in Christ.” You have none of the blessings of God apart from “in Christ.” So in reality it is in that relationship that you realize the appropriating of all that Christ was intended to be for you. All of the spiritual blessings that God has for you will never come to you apart from Christ or your relationship with Him.

Ephesians 1 says it is, “God the Father, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” Relationship. If I am going to experience and know—no matter what blessing you may be talking about—it has to come through that relationship in Christ Jesus.

Now notice he does not even talk here of physical blessings. He is talking of spiritual blessings. It is tragic that we so often want to reduce things to the physical plain as though the physical plain were the more important plain of existence. And many people would opt for the physical blessings over the spiritual. And I think there is a great danger today in a lot of the teaching on physical prosperity. They ought to go to Red China and preach that doctrine to the Christians over there. They would not find such a popular ear.

Paul warns us about perverse teachers who teach that “godliness is literally a way to gain” (cf. [1 Timothy 6:5](#)). That is literally what Paul says. He calls it perverse—that godliness is a way to gain. “You want to be rich? You want to be wealthy?—godliness, man.” Paul says it is perverse.

The blessings that God has for us (spiritual blessings) they are ours in Christ Jesus.

Now, as you go through chapters 1, 2, and 3, you are going to find these spiritual blessings. He is going to start listing them for you. We sing: “Count your blessings. Name them one by one. And it will surprise you what the Lord has done.” Hey, it really will. You can go through and see what Paul pulls out here, all of the spiritual blessings wherewith God has blessed you.

You say, “Oh, it has been a long time since I have been blessed by God. Oh, I feel so dry. I have not been blessed.” Hey, wait a minute! You are blessed every day and the first blessing is the fact that God chose you.

And so Paul said, “According as He hath chosen us.” [Where?] “In Him.” [When?] “That we should be the first fruits.” But we are “chosen in Him before the foundation of the world” ([Ephesians 1:4](#)). The first spiritual blessing that you have is that God chose you. Do you ever wonder why you were not born a Chinese? One person in four is Chinese. The odds for you being born Chinese are much greater than being born whatever you are. Had you been born in China and reared there, it may be that you would have never known about Jesus Christ. But God foreknew you and He chose you that you should be in Christ, before the foundations of the world.

I think that the Scripture utterly repudiates this doctrine that is being propagated in some organizations regarding the limited knowledge of God. They say that God does not know if you are going to be saved or lost until you make up your mind for Jesus Christ. And God does not know what you are going to do until you make up your mind to do it. They say that God did not know Adam was going to sin until Adam sinned. It took God by surprise. I cannot accept that, because God chose me before the foundations of the world.

A lot of people get upset with God for choosing. But goodness, I personally want the power of choice and I like to choose the people I am going to be with. When we were kids and we used to play scrub football, we would choose up teams. And quite often I was the captain. I got to choose my team and I liked that power of choice. And you know what? I always sought to choose winners when I was making my choices. I would always try to choose the guys that were the best. You are not going to deliberately choose a loser. That would be sort of dumb. God chose me and that excites me. He is not going to choose a loser, and so it is thrilling to me that God chose me. It is a blessing to me. He chose me before the foundations of the world.

Now herein, we enter into a realm that we do not understand fully. One of the problems in the ministry is that people expect you to know all that God knows and to understand God. And thus, so many of the questions that I am being asked to answer are questions that begin with, “Why did God?” And I have come to a place where when a person says, “Why did God?”—I will say, “Do not ask any more. I do not know. I do not know the “whys” of God. God said I would not even know them.” He said, “My ways are not your ways. They are higher than your ways. They are beyond your finding out.”

When I was a young minister, I felt it very important that I know all that God knew and was at least able to give an answer for every question. I used to try to answer the most difficult questions. In fact, in my own life I was trying to answer questions that were in my own mind. Then if God chose me, where did my choice come in? If He chose me before the foundations of the earth, then why did I have to choose to submit my life to Jesus Christ? If I was predestined by God, according to His foreknowledge, then what part do I have? And for years I sought to understand the place of human responsibility in the plan of God.

When I looked at one side, the sovereignty of God—He chose, He ordained, He called, He predestined. And then I looked at the other side which says, “Choose you this day”—and the human responsibility—I could not put them together. I could not reconcile them. I could not reduce them to my understanding until one day, in frustration, I put my Bible down and said, “God, I cannot understand it.” And I was disgusted. Hours and hours I had wrestled with these things. And the still small voice said to me, “I never asked you to understand it. I only asked you to believe it.” And from that day I have not sought to understand; I only believe. You say, “But how can...?” I do not know. “Well, what part does your choice have?” Well, it has a part. I am told to choose, therefore, it has a part. And I have chosen. “Yeah, but how can you choose if God has already...?” I do not know. I know He chose me before the foundation of the world. No, I

cannot understand it and I do not understand it, but I believe it. I believe both sides of the truth, but I believe by faith, not by understanding, but by faith.

Now faith is believing what I do not understand; reason is understanding what I believe. But faith is believing, even though I do not understand it. Now God has called me to faith in some areas. I do not understand where these truths meet or balance, but I believe that they do. I do believe in what, in my mind, are irreconcilable positions. Now I do not have to understand them to believe them. I need the faith to believe that God said it, and He definitely said it, so I believe it. And God is honored by my believing, in faith, that which I do not understand.

Do not try to understand the whole thing. You never will. There are going to be areas that God is going to deliberately leave unexplained, and you are going to have to just, by faith, believe them in order that God might be honored by your faith. We will get on into this in our next lesson, as we look at the blessings that we have in Christ. The spiritual blessings, how glorious they are!

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

BY

Calvary Chapel Outreach Fellowship

Lesson 4 Spiritual Blessings

By

Chuck Smith

Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa

Brought to you by:

The Blue Letter Bible Institute

www.blbi.org

A ministry of:

The Blue Letter Bible

www.blueletterbible.org

Servant Leadership – Lesson 4
Spiritual Blessings by Chuck Smith

1

Turn in your Bibles to Ephesians 1. As we noted in our last lesson, the first thing is relationship. Our relationship must be established with God, and that relationship is in Christ Jesus. Apart from Jesus Christ you can have no true relationship with God. And any thought of relationship with God apart from Jesus Christ is only a pseudo-relationship. There is no true relationship with God apart from Jesus Christ.

So the first thing that He establishes is relationship and then come the blessings of that relationship—all that is ours through that relationship. We are chosen in Him, and all of these blessings come as the result of that relationship in Christ Jesus. As we mentioned in the previous lesson, you should go through Ephesians 1 and note the blessings that are yours.

According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself. ([Ephesians 1:4–5](#) KJV)

You see this blessing of being predestined and adopted as God’s child is by Jesus Christ.

In the sixth verse it says, “accepted in the beloved.” God accepts you in Christ. He cannot accept you outside of Christ. There is no basis for you to be accepted outside of Christ, but you are “accepted in the beloved”—I love that. It says,

In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, ...[that] he might gather together in one all things in Christ...even in him. (cf. [Ephesians 1:7, 9, 10](#), KJV)

In whom also we have obtained an inheritance...that we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. [So all of these are the blessings.] In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise. ([Ephesians 1:11–13](#), KJV)

So these are the spiritual blessings, Paul enumerates them. And they are all as a result of relationship in Christ Jesus—by whom, through whom, in whom—we have received all of these wonderful things.

Then Paul closes off Ephesians 1 with a prayer. I think that the prayers of Paul deserve a study in themselves. I have no intention of going into that now because that is not the direction we are moving in these studies. We are looking at the church, the purposes of the church, and the ministry of the church in a biblical setting with Ephesians as our pattern. So this prayer though, is something that deserves a lot of meditation. And I would encourage you to get in and really meditate on this prayer.

Now in Ephesians 2, we are going back to the subject of the blessings that we have through relationship. There is an interesting balance in the Christian life. God has done many things for you and for me—that work of God on our behalf. Now corresponding to that, there is always our work for God in response to what He has done for us: our responding to the grace of God, our

responding to the goodness of God. And you will find that the Scripture lays out what God has done. Paul, in the first three chapters, is going to lay out for us what God has done for us. Then he is going to lay out what we are supposed to do for Him. You will find this pattern throughout the New Testament, God's work and then man's work. Now as we study it, we find that God's work is always the greater and is always more, and ours is just sort of the response to that which God has done.

For instance, Peter said:

Thank God who has begotten us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is incorruptible, undefiled, that fades not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God. (cf. [1 Peter 1:3-5](#))

That is all God's work. He has begotten you again to a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, to an inheritance that is incorruptible, undefiled, fades not away. He has reserved it in heaven for you, who are kept—He even is keeping you for that. And then he gives us our part—"through faith." But God's part has to be first. The faith would not have validity unless God had already done these things. This is God's part. So in Ephesians the first three chapters, we are dealing with God's part.

The Scripture is always interested in, first of all, what God has done for you; then you respond to God for that which He has done for you.

Now many times in our preaching, we frustrate the Church because we are emphasizing their part—what they should be doing for God. And so often you will find that the minister is putting greater emphasis upon what the people should be doing for God. And he even has worked it out for them in a neat little program. "Now you ought to be witnessing for God and this is how you witness. You ought to be giving to God, and this is the amount. You ought to be serving God, and this is how you should serve." Preaching usually is putting an overemphasis on man's part, and not enough on God's part.

Now the Scriptures always emphasize more God's part, and then there is our automatic response to what God has done. But in our desire to get our program rolling, and our desire to get the church going, we start laying upon people their part—what they should be doing for God. And here we find people trying to do for God something that they have not yet been equipped to do or enabled to do by the Spirit, because they do not yet know fully the relationship and the benefits of that relationship. So many times people are pressed into service for God because they *ought* to serve the Lord without first of all realizing what they are, what they have, what they can become through their relationship with God in Christ Jesus.

So Paul does not say a thing about the walk, until he first of all establishes what they are. He gets them positioned in Christ Jesus first. Once he has them thoroughly positioned in Christ Jesus, then he says, "Now walk worthy of the vocation wherewith you were called."

In other words, here is all that God has done for you, here is all that God has given to you—now respond to it. Any work that is not a response to the grace or the goodness of God is a work that, in its end result, is going to produce a tendency in my heart to say, "Well, look what I have done for God. I have given this to God. Look what I have sacrificed for God." This is because I have put the works first. Any work that I do that comes from the response of God's grace in my life

after I have done it, I will say, “I am an unprofitable servant. What I have done is the least that could be expected.” Now I am responding to all God has done for me. I am not then resenting it. I am not becoming embittered.

I have met so many people who are bitter against God, and against the church because the church made workaholics out of them, made slaves out of them. They were pushed into all kinds of service unto God, but they resented what they were doing for God. It became a heavy obligation. They chafed under the load. God does not want you to give anything to Him that you cannot give willingly and hilariously. And that is not just money, it is of time or service or anything else. God wants whatever you offer to Him to be offered willingly, out of a free heart. And if you cannot give your life to God that way, then do not give it. If you cannot give your money, then do not give it. If you cannot give your time that way, then do not give it. It is better that you not do it, than to do it and gripe about it, or to do it and then go around and moan about all you have sacrificed or given up for God. I am sure that God says, “Keep it! I do not want it. I do not want any griping service.” The important thing is that whatever you give to God, you give willingly, cheerfully, and hilariously.

Now I can only do this as I recognize the greatness of God’s love and what God has done for me. And when I look at all that God has done for me, oh, the least I can do—as the song says, “How can I do less than give Him my best and live for Him completely, after all He’s done for me.” But you see, people are not always shown what God has done for them. That is not the emphasis always in our ministry. We are emphasizing what you can do for God, what God wants you to do for Him. And actually what you are doing is creating a congregation filled with guilt-ridden, frustrated saints because you are telling them what they ought to be doing for God. They bow their heads and say, “Yes, I know. I ought to be doing that.” As you tell them what miserable Christians they are, they bow their heads and say, “Yes, I know I am a miserable Christian. I am a miserable witness. I am a failure. I do not love as I should. I do not pray as I should. I do not give as I should. I do not serve as I should.” And you are laying it on them week after week, and they are just getting more guilt-ridden all the time. But along with the guilt feelings, there is a frustration. “Oh God, I want to serve You. Oh God, I promise I am going to do better.” And there is frustration because they want to do it, but they cannot and they fail.

Guilty, frustrated saints are all over the country. Why? It is because they have never been taught the resources and the blessings that are theirs by relationship with Jesus Christ. They have never thoroughly been established in Christ Jesus. They are not aware of all of the resources that are made available to them by God, because man’s part has been emphasized rather than God’s part in their lives. They have tried to do it in their own strength, in their own abilities, and they just have never come to that realization that God does not require us to do a single thing but what He will and has enabled us to do.

I am certain that we have pushed many people into works that God never intended for them to do. No wonder they were failures at it! And then they feel like they are failing at Christianity. I can be so anxious to see this program go that I am conscripting people, I am pressuring people, I am pushing people to get involved. Maybe God does not want them involved. Maybe that is not what God has for them.

I was reading in 1 Samuel where it said, “For by strength shall no man prevail” ([1 Samuel 2:9](#)). That is, by our own strength, and yet we have been trying to push people into these things before establishing them in who they are.

So, as we get into Ephesians 2, we continue now in what God has done for us. “And you hath He quickened, [or made alive] who were dead in trespasses and sins” ([Ephesians 2:1](#)). Once you were totally dead unto God, dead because of your trespasses and your sins. God said, “The soul that sinneth, it shall surely die” ([Ezekiel 18:4](#)).

Notice He uses trespasses *and* sins, and there is a difference between the two. Sin has as its root meaning, “missing the mark.” Now I would like to suggest that many times I have done my best to hit the mark, but I am just a poor shot and I missed it. In other words, sin is not always a willful, deliberate act. Sin can result from just a weakness, a weakness that I hate, a weakness that I detest, an inability and a failure in myself to hit the mark. You say, “Well, shame on you.” Well, if I tell you what the mark is, then shame on *you*. It is perfection. “Be ye perfect even as My Father in heaven is perfect” ([Matthew 5:48](#)). So, if you can hit that mark, great. Now we try, and the fact that I am weak and have missed so many times is not an excuse to not keep trying to hit the mark. We are never to excuse our weaknesses. Just the recognition of the fact that sin means missing the mark, and thus it is not always a willful, deliberate missing of the mark, can be a heartbreaking experience. I am doing my best, I am trying my hardest, but still, I have failed.

Whereas, a trespass is a deliberate, willful disobedience to God. It is not even trying. It is almost defiant. God may say, “Do not cross over that line.” I step over it and say, “Okay, what are you going to do about it?” I have trespassed, knowingly, willfully. That is a trespass.

Now trespasses and sins, either or both of them, alienate me from God. I cannot make God a party to my sin or to my trespass. And yet, in this relationship in Christ Jesus, actually Christ has become a party to my life. Paul, in writing to the Corinthians, shows the total inconsistency of bringing Christ into an ungodly relationship because He is indwelling you. In other words, with Christ dwelling in you, as Paul wrote in [1 Corinthians 6:15–16](#), if you actually have sexual relationships with a prostitute, then you are making Christ a part of that horrible act. You are bringing Christ into that, and he shows the inconsistency of that. You have been made one with Christ. Now if you are joining yourself to a prostitute, you are making Christ one with a prostitute. That cannot be. We need to realize that this relationship with Christ, being one with Him, makes Him a party to what we do. We are drawing Christ into this.

Now, the effect of sin and trespasses is death. “But you has He made alive who were dead in your trespasses and sins.” And of course this is a reference to your life prior to coming to Jesus Christ.

For now,

If we walk in the light as He is in the light— having come to Him, the blood of Jesus Christ, God’s Son, is continually cleansing us from all sins. And if we say we have no sin we are only deceiving ourselves. The truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. And if we say we have not sinned then we make Him a liar and His truth is not in us.
(cf. [1 John 1:7–10](#))

So this relationship is a great relationship because it is one of continual cleansing. “You hath He made alive.” You were dead in your trespasses and sins and now you are alive unto God through Jesus Christ. “Wherein in time past, ye walked according to the course of this world...” ([Ephesians 2:2](#)). In Greek there are more than a couple of words for “walk,” but this particular word for walked is a word which means, “to meander.” Now there is another Greek word for

“walk” which does speak of a gait—of a directness with a steady gait. You see a fellow walking down the street with a fast gait, head up, shoulders back, straight down the street and you say, “Well, he is going somewhere.” There is purpose expressed even in the way he is walking. He is on his way someplace. But you might see another fellow just sort of hands in the pockets, looking in the window, going out and examining a tree, looking at the fire plug, and then looking back in the next window. He is just sort of meandering back and forth. You would say, “Hey, he is not going anywhere. He is just killing time.” There is no purpose. He is not really headed anywhere.

And that is what this particular Greek word is, you meandered. In other words, life was lacking real purpose. You were not going anywhere. Life, apart from Christ is without purpose and meaning. You are going nowhere. You are just passing time till your time comes. Your life is lacking in definition and in purpose. So, you at one time were meandering, living a life without real meaning or purpose, going nowhere, getting nowhere. As you meandered according to the course of this world—the word “course” is the word used also for weathervane. Now you see the weathervane on top of the barn and what does it do? It points in whatever direction the wind currents are flowing.

Now as you look at some people, their lives are just turned whatever direction the current or the flow of the world is going. Whatever fad comes along, wherever the world’s pressures are pushing, they just turn with it and they just sort of flow with it. They are meandering according to the weathervane of the world. This is life without purpose, life without meaning.

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; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.
([Ephesians 2:3](#), KJV)

The word “conversation” there is our manner of living. Our manner of life was this way prior to Jesus Christ, in times past. He is describing our past life apart from Christ, the former life before this new relationship, as a life without purpose, a life without meaning, a life that is governed by the desires of our flesh and of our minds.

Man is a three-fold being: body, soul, and spirit in his fallen state. In the original state in which God created man (Adam) he was spirit, soul, and body. God is a superior Trinity of Father, Son, and Spirit. Man is an inferior trinity of spirit, soul, and body. And as God originally created man spirit, soul, and body, with the spirit uppermost, man had communion and fellowship with God because God meets man and fellowships with man in the area of the spirit. His Spirit bears witness with my spirit. God does not come and deal with me in my flesh in a direct way. He deals with my spirit, and from the spirit through the flesh. He does not deal even with my intellect in a direct way, but with my spirit and from the spirit, to my intellect. My place of meeting God and fellowshiping with God, is in the spirit. No man, by searching, can understand God to perfection. My intellect is not an adequate tool in the discovery of God and in my relationship with God. It must be a spiritual relationship; thus, His Spirit with my spirit.

What precipitated the Fall? Eve saw that the fruit was pleasant to eat, the lust of the flesh. It was pleasant to look upon, the lust of the eyes. And as she ate it, it would make her wise even as God, the pride of life. So in following the suggestion of Satan and eating of this fruit of which God said she should not eat, she allowed the fleshly desires to dominate. And in allowing the fleshly desires to dominate, she became then inverted, and became body, soul, and spirit. The mind was now no longer being ruled over by the spirit, but the mind was now being ruled over by the flesh.

And the spirit was subjected and subdued, it died actually. The consciousness or the awareness of God was gone. They found themselves, hiding from God, running from God.

What is the new birth? It is again an inversion. It is God putting man back into his proper order. As they reported to the magistrates in Berea, “These men who have turned the world upside down have come here” ([Acts 17:6](#)). That is what the gospel is to do. It is to turn men upside down. Well, let’s correct that, it is to turn men right side up. They have been upside down for a long time. It is to bring men back into a spiritual dimension of life. It is to awaken and make alive that spirit which was dead because of trespasses and sins. And that alive spirit can now again be in fellowship and in harmony with God.

But the former life is described as a life that is living after the desires of your flesh and the desires of your mind. Now as we look at man apart from Jesus Christ today, what are the controlling factors of that man’s life? The psychologists have the word *homeostasis*, by which they describe the body needs or the body drives or if you please, the body appetites. And they have listed the body needs, the biological needs or drives of man. The strongest is your air drive; then comes your thirst drive; then comes your hunger drive; then comes your bowel and bladder drive; and then comes your sex drive. And they have listed all of these drives of the body, the biological desires or appetites of the body.

The Scriptures describes man, apart from this new relationship with Christ, as a man who is controlled by his body drives. His mind is in control and he is thinking always of how to fulfill the body needs. He is dead in his trespasses and sins, living after the desires of his body and of his mind. And so they have listed the sociological drives: the need for attention, the need for security, the need for love, and the need to be needed. And they have described these lusts of the mind or the drives of the mind. And these are the things after which the natural man lives; this is the life of the flesh.

Now, this life of the flesh is actually right on the animal plane. It is exactly what a dog does. He lives only to satisfy his own physical needs. And many men are living as animals, living only to satisfy their own biological and sociological needs. They have no awareness of God, no fellowship with God and no relationship with God. It is no wonder natural man seeks his best to identify himself with the animal kingdom, and looks to the ape for a relationship because he is living as the animals live.

But the Bible teaches that God created man in His image and in His likeness. And rather than man being a highly evolved animal, he is a fallen creature. And the missing link is not on the scale downward; it is on a scale upward. Man was intended to be related to God, not to the animal kingdom. And that is, of course, exactly what happens when we become quickened or made alive. By this relationship in Christ Jesus, we come now to a new relationship with God. “You hath He made alive.” And that missing link is found. Jesus Christ has become the missing link, and He links us back to God by making our spirits alive again. And with that quickened spirit, we now have this beautiful relationship with God.

Life is no longer without meaning or purpose. I am no longer meandering through life, following every whim of the world. Now there is direction, there is meaning, and there is purpose. And thus when Paul says, “walk worthy,” he uses the other Greek word for walk. We are not to just meander, not to walk or meander according to the course of the world, but now we are to walk with direction and purpose.

Then he goes on to say, concerning the past life, that not only were we meandering according to the course of the world, according to the desires of our flesh and mind, but we were actually by nature the children of wrath even as others.

This is the sad, sad picture of the history of every man apart from Jesus Christ. No exceptions. You may say, “Oh, but he is such a good man.” He is walking according to the course of this world, according to his own desires of his flesh and mind. And he is by nature a child of wrath. You see, he is in the kingdom of death and darkness and I do not care how high he climbs in that kingdom. There is a wide spectrum. You have the streetwalker to the lady in purple, or whatever; but they are all in the same kingdom. It makes little difference. This still describes them.

Verse 4, of course, is always glorious. This is in spite of all of this focus on our flesh, and in spite of what we are.

But God, who is rich in mercy for His great love wherewith He
loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath made us alive
together with Christ. ([Ephesians 2:4-5](#))

God reached down to you, into your helpless state. It is God’s work. Salvation is God’s work. It was God who reached down to you. Man had attempted to build his towers to God. That always ends in confusion. It is interesting that Jacob, on his flight from his brother Esau when he came to Bethel, laid down his head on a pillow and went to sleep. He dreamed that he saw the heavens opened. He saw a ladder that was going up to heaven and the angels of God were ascending and descending on that ladder. And the Lord spoke to him and he woke in the morning and said, “Truly the Lord is in this place and I knew it not” ([Genesis 28:12-16](#)). But what did he see? He saw a ladder that went from earth to heaven. Men have been searching for that ladder. Men have been trying to make a ladder. Men have been trying to build their towers of philosophy, their towers of religion. But man’s efforts have failed to bring him to God because you cannot start with an earth base and reach heaven. God has built a ladder. And Jesus declares that He is that ladder that Jacob saw. When He began His ministry He said, “Henceforth you are going to see the heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man” ([John 1:51](#)). God has built the ladder. Jesus Christ is that ladder whereby men may come to God.

But God, who is rich in His mercy, established the basis of our salvation. “For by grace are ye saved.” It is not something that we do merit or even can merit. By grace are you saved, which is God’s glorious, unmerited favor in Christ Jesus.

“And He hath raised us up together.” Now again we get back into the blessings. These are the blessings which are ours. He has “raised us up together and made us to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:6). We are returning to the theme of [Ephesians 1:3](#), our spiritual blessings in the heavenly places in Christ. He has raised us up together, made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus; for it is there that we have these spiritual blessings that God desires to bestow upon each man.

Now, this is looking out to the future.

That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of
His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ([Ephesians](#)
[2:7](#))

These blessings are ours in Christ Jesus. Why? It is because of the marvelous, exceeding riches of His grace.

Now I would like to suggest that God's love and God's grace for you is so great and so vast that it is going to take all of eternity to reveal it. Through the ages to come, He is going to be revealing the exceeding richness of that grace and love that He has for you through Christ Jesus. I sit down sometimes and bemoan the fact that I just cannot comprehend it all, as I seek to understand God's goodness, God's grace, and God's love toward me. I drink it in, and I seek to get more. But listen, it is so vast that it is going to take all of eternity to reveal. Throughout the ages to come, God is going to be revealing new dimensions of the vastness of His love and grace toward us through Jesus Christ.

For by grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is a gift of God. ([Ephesians 2:8](#))

What is a gift of God? The faith. You see, we are so anxious to get our part in there. We are so anxious to do something worthwhile, that we are often prone to exalt and magnify our faith because we want some credit somewhere along the line. But God gives me no place for boasting, except in Him. God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of Jesus Christ. I cannot even glory in my faith whereby I believe. Where did that faith come from? It was a gift of God. "For by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Ephesians 2:8–9).

God came to Gideon and told him that he was to lead the children of Israel into victory over the Midianites, and Gideon objected because of his family's background and so forth. And when he was assured that it was God who was calling him, then Gideon gathered the men of Israel together (32,000 of them) in Mount Gilboa. Gideon looked at the 135,000 Midianites spread out in the plains like grasshoppers. They were well-equipped, well-trained armies that were camped out there in the valley. And here was Gideon over in Mount Gilboa, with 32,000 scraggly fellows that had come in off the farm. God said, "Gideon, you have too many men. I know these people. I know the wickedness of their heart. If I would deliver the Midianites into the hands of the 32,000, they would go around glorying and boasting in what they had done. So you go out to the men, Gideon, and you tell all of those who are fearful, to go home." Gideon went out to his men and said, "Fellas, all of you that are afraid to go into battle, you better go on home." And twenty-two thousand of the guys packed their bags and headed home—that left him with 10,000 men. Now Gideon looked at the Midianites out there like grasshoppers covering the valley, and he looked at his 10,000 men. And the Lord said, "Gideon, the men that are with you are too many." Gideon thought, "Oh, wait a minute, Lord. That is thirteen-to-one odds." God said again, "If I would deliver the Midianites into their hands, they would be boasting in what they had done" (cf. [Judges 7:1–3](#)).

What is God saying? He is saying, "I want the glory for the work that I do." God does not want you going out and taking bows for Him. And one of the greatest dangers in the ministry to a man used of God is that he starts to take the glory or the credit for what God has done. And the moment you start taking the bows for God, you are in big trouble.

It is not of works lest any man should boast. God has eliminated boasting. By what? By works? No, but by the fact that His grace has done all of this for me as I believe in Him. And thus, through faith and the fact that faith is the agency, it eliminates boasting because even that faith came to me as a gift from God. So God has wiped out any area of boasting or glorying in my flesh at all. He has just totally wiped it out, giving me no place for boasting.

Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are His workmanship. ([Ephesians 2:9–10](#))

The word there in the Greek is *poema*. And it is a word that expresses more than just a work. It is a word that expresses a work-of-art—*poema*. Now we actually get our English word “poem” as a transliteration of this word *poema*. Our word “poem” comes directly from it, which is a work-of-art.

Now, when an artist is producing a work, what is the purpose of the artist? The purpose of an artist is always to express himself in his work. Whether it is a feeling, a thought, an inspiration, or something that is within me of beauty, I want to express it. And if my fingers are gifted, I may express it in a sculpture, or I might express it in a painting. It is something that I can see in my mind, a form of beauty. I want others to be able to share that beauty that I can see within my mind. If I am a musician, I hear it. It is beautiful. I want others to hear and to enjoy the beauty; and so, I compose, and I arrange that beautiful melody and the instrumentation that I can hear in my mind. I always admire the work of artists. People who have been gifted, express themselves in their work. I love to see them really get into it as they are expressing themselves in their art.

Now, God seeks to express Himself in this world. God has thoughts, ideas, and He wants to express those thoughts and ideas before the world. And you are His workmanship, or His *poema*. You are the expression of God. Your life is to become the expression of God. God seeks to express Himself in you and through you. You are God’s work-of-art, the expression of Himself before this needy world.

It is interesting that in at least three places in the Scriptures, the figure of the potter and the clay is used to express the relationship of God and man. In Jeremiah 18:2–6, the Lord said, “Go down to the potter’s house and watch him work a work on his wheel” (paraphrased). And so Jeremiah went down to the house of the potter and he watched him as he made a work on his wheel. And the work was marred in the hands of the potter and he crumpled it all up and put it back on the wheel and began a second work, forming it all over again. And the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah the Prophet saying, “Is not Israel like clay in My hands? Though it has been marred, I am going to remake it into a vessel that is pleasing” (paraphrased). Paul uses this same illustration in his chapters in Romans in which he is speaking of the sovereignty of God over man. “And what right has the clay to say to the potter, ‘Why hast thou made me thus? Why did you form me like this?’ Hath not the potter the power over the vessel to make of it however he wants?” (cf. [Romans 9:20–21](#)). He uses it as an illustration of the awesome sovereignty of God over man.

That is a figure that would frighten me if I did not know the Potter. But when you tell me the Potter is love, and that His purpose and His plan for my life is love, then I can yield to the touch of the Potter. Otherwise I would be prone to challenge and resist because I do not always understand every circumstance in which I find myself. There are times when I am prone to complain about the conditions in which I find myself and say to the Potter, “Why hast Thou formed me thus? Why God, did You allow this? Why Lord, did this happen? Why, God?” And I would be prone to challenge the Potter if I did not know that the Potter loves me. Every pressure that He brings against me is to form and to shape me according to the design in His mind and the purpose in His mind, as I become His workmanship, His *poema*, His expression of Himself. God wants to use my life as the expression of Himself in this world in which I live.

The Potter has in His mind a plan, a purpose, for that piece of clay. Apart from the Potter’s touch, that clay will always be worth very, very little because it is so common. One of the most common

materials in all the earth is clay; and thus, the value is so small in its native state. Yet the Potter is able to take a piece of worthless clay and by the deft touch of His hand, He is able, by His mastery, to make of it a priceless vessel. And when the Potter begins His work on that piece of clay, the Potter has in His mind what He wants to do with it.

Now the clay can only discover the mind of the Potter by submission to the hand of the Potter. The minute I start getting my own self into it, the minute I start resisting the work of God, the minute I start going my own way, then the purpose of the Potter is thwarted. The type of vessel He is seeking to make can be changed. I must remain yielded and surrendered to God if I am going to understand what God has purposed and planned for me as He works in me His work-of-art, His work of love, as He expresses Himself through me.

So you are His workmanship. God is working in your life today, forming, developing, shaping, and molding. God is working in you today. You are His workmanship created together in Christ Jesus. You cannot get away from it. It is all in Christ Jesus.

Created together in Christ Jesus unto good works that God has
foreordained that you should walk in them. (cf. [Ephesians 2:10](#))

God has already foreordained that which He has planned for your life, the purpose, and the work that you are to accomplish for the kingdom. Your ministry has already been completely foreordained by God. God knows exactly what He is bringing you to and God knows what He is preparing you for.

Now it is after you get to my age that you can begin to look back at some of those experiences in the past that, while you were going through them, you could not understand what God was doing. There were times in my life I felt, “I really missed the leading of God in this one. God, You get me back on the track and I promise I am going to be more careful in the future how I listen to Your voice.” And while I was going through those experiences, I could not understand them. I was complaining, I was kicking, and I was screaming against God. But now as I can look back, I can see why God led me through that path, why God brought me to that situation, and why this had to happen. I began to see what God was doing because all the while He was preparing me for the work that He had already prepared for me.

I did not know the work God had prepared for me. I had no idea, no dream at all, of the work that God had prepared for me. It was so far beyond anything I had ever hoped, or thought, or conceived. If just ten years ago you would have told me about the work that God had prepared for me, I would have laughed and said, “Blessed are they who dream. Dream on, brother.” And yet I can see where God’s hand was in my life in even those discouraging, difficult experiences that I could not understand while was going through them. All the while God was working, God was forming, and God was faithful, as He was preparing me, working in me in order that He might prepare me for the work that He had foreordained that I should accomplish in Christ Jesus.

It is so glorious to be a servant of God. You are His workmanship, His *poema*. You have been created in Christ Jesus unto these good works that God has already foreordained that you should accomplish for His kingdom. It is glorious to know that God has a plan for your life because sometimes our lives look like chaos. We cannot always understand and it looks so confusing. But it is glorious to know that God already had the plan. He has the work that He wants you to do and this is just necessary preparation as He is equipping you, and preparing you for that work that He has down the line.

I found that some of the greatest works of God in my life were during the times wherein He wrought total failure in me. He worked through those times when I sought to take over and do the work of God myself with my own ingenuity, my own genius, my own drive, and my own determination. God let me go ahead and use my genius, my drive, and my determination to build the body of Christ. And God let me fail utterly and completely during all of those great years of my life, when I still had a lot of hair, a strong physique, a good physical condition, all of these natural characteristics going for me. God let me fail utterly in every effort that I endeavored for His kingdom in the energies and the abilities of my own flesh. He allowed them to all come to dust, in order that after I had expended all of my genius, all of my powers, and all of my good years, then He accomplished His work. He brought me to the work. But knowing what I can do, having it proved to me over and over again—there is no way that I can boast in what I have done. I can only glory in what God has done through an old, worn-out man, whose stomach hangs over his belt, who is out of shape, out of condition and out of gas. Really, as far as the energies, powers, drives, and ambitions that I once had, they are just gone, or ready to go.

So God's purpose in your life is to bring you to that relationship in Christ that He might work in you as He prepares you for the work that He has already ordained that you are going to accomplish for His glory. Now what is He going to do? He is going to turn around one day and reward you as though you did it. That is so unreal, but He is just so good!

Father, we thank You for Your goodness and for Your work in us today. And we pray, Lord, that we might abide in Christ, and have His Word abide in us. Lord, help us not to resist that work of Your Spirit in our lives; but may we yield ourselves to Your touch, to Your hand today, so that You might accomplish, Lord, in us Your full purposes through Jesus Christ. Amen.

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

BY

Calvary Chapel Outreach Fellowship

Lesson 5 Leaders of the Church

By

Bob Hoekstra

Living in Christ Ministries

Brought to you by:

The Blue Letter Bible Institute

www.blbi.org

A ministry of:

The Blue Letter Bible

www.blueletterbible.org

Lord, teach us, feed us, build us up, enlighten us, and open our eyes. Lord, we pray that You would speak to us now on this matter of church leadership, being used in the church to help others along the path. Unfold the Word, Lord, and make it living to us. Protect us from the deadness of the letter and bring to us the newness of the Spirit. And we just thank You that Your words are Spirit and life. And we ask You to protect us from the words and thoughts of man. Just speak to us through Your Holy Spirit through Your living and abiding Word. Please fill us with Your Spirit even as we receive Your Word that You might fill us with Your life. More and more we are learning that we can only live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. Speak Your word in Your holy Scriptures into our lives now. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Leaders of the church is our subject. Too often the leaders of the church are patterned after the leaders of the world. Now there are those who have learned things in their walk with the Lord and even learned things as the Lord taught and disciplined them in the world. The Lord can certainly use these people in the church to show the spiritual application, if it is there one, for things that He is developing in their lives. But too often we take our pattern of church leadership right out of the world. We think if a man was greatly used in the world, he will automatically be greatly used in the church. This is not necessarily so at all. In fact sometimes it is quite the opposite. Sometimes those who are greatly used in the affairs of man just never become really fruitful in the affairs of God because they keep operating in the ways of the world. And the division of spirit and flesh does not develop in their lives by the sharp piercing sword of the Word of God.

On the other hand, sometimes those that the world looks on as so insignificant, they come to follow Jesus Christ and they become mighty in spirit and they become enormously fruitful in the church. Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world" ([John 18:36](#)). We want a biblical, spiritual perspective on leadership in the church. We are going to ask the Lord to speak to us in those ways. Under three headings: leadership positions, leadership qualifications, and leadership priorities.

First concerning leadership positions, let's look at [1 Timothy 3:1](#). In going through this, we want to make it very clear that no one in the church of Jesus Christ needs a title or needs to hold a recognized, biblical office or place of functioning, in order to be a leader. And the reverse is true also. Just because someone has a title, it does not make them a leader. So we do not want to get distracted on that dead-end street. This is really about letting God speak to us regarding things that He wants to do in our lives to make us all more useable. We can then press on and say to others: "Let's go. Let's follow the Lord."

But the Scriptures do speak of some leadership positions. The Scriptures and the church are not heavily packed like the American military. We are the army of God, but it is pretty simple. We basically have God as the captain of the host and then all of the troops. It is quite simple. And He may have a few lieutenants, but He does not have fourteen grades of leaders. What are you?—Colonel, Lieutenant Colonel, Lieutenant, or Second

Lieutenant? What are you? It is so simple in God's army. I just love the way God works. He makes it where we can just be His children. In fact, we must be that.

[1-Timothy 3:1](#) addresses leadership positions. "This is a faithful saying. If a man desires the position of a bishop [or that word could and most often is translated overseer] he desires a good work." If a man desires to serve the Lord as a bishop or overseer—now of course in the American church you have your bishops and you have your overseers. We will break down any word we can to a new position, but in the Scripture it is the same word. Bishop or overseer is the same person.

"If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work." If a person desires to serve God that way, he is desiring a good thing; yet, it is impossible to know whether he desires it for good reasons or not. But what he desires is a good work. And if the desires are for good reasons, and the person lets the Lord do a good work in him, that good desire may be fulfilled someday. "This is a faithful saying." And this is speaking about a bishop or overseer in the church, an office of leadership.

Now we will read some other verses and then bring them all together. [1 Timothy 5:17-18](#) says, "Let the elders who rule well be accounted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. For the Scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain' and 'the laborer is worthy of his wages.'" This quote is from the Lord Jesus Himself, actually, as well as from the Old Testament.

Now we have another term, in addition to bishop and overseer, there is the term "elder." And we notice here that elders are to rule. Now that has to be put in the whole context of the Word of God. Who is the head of the church? Who is the Master? Who is the Captain? Jesus is. So the elders must rule in His name, by His Spirit, according to His Word. They become His instruments to guide His church.

People will ask, "Who runs this operation around here?" And they are usually looking for the pastor or board member or something. The ultimate answer must be that Jesus runs this operation, if you want to call it that, because He is in charge. But the people He uses in the church leadership are elders. The term "elder" implies a spiritual maturity. Just as bishop or overseer implies a spiritual accountability, looking over and then answerable to God.

So we have the term bishop or overseer, who is the same person; it is the same word or the same office. Then we have elder, and the elders are to rule. Now those who rule well are spiritually fruitful, Christ-like, humble, and obedient; and they are to be accounted worthy of double honor. See the elders rule. Why? It is because the church of Jesus Christ is not a democracy. It is not even really an oligarchy where a few rule. It is a theocracy. It is God in charge of His people. And He has ordained to work that primarily through the leadership of the elders. Since we are all in one family and minister to one another, we all end up taking a part in the process, in a spiritual process, not a Roberts Rules of Order process. The rule of order is right here—the Word of God. And as we live together in it, we all have a part in it because we all counsel one another. Leaders need to be led of the

Lord and by the counsel of the Lord also, through anyone who is walking according to the Word by the Spirit of God.

But the Lord leads primarily through His elders. And those who do that well in a God-pleasing way, they are to be accounted worthy of double honor. Double honor has kind of a play on words here. It is saying that they are to be considered appropriate to be given two kinds of value and one is obvious. The first thing you think of regarding honor is that of respect, a compliance with leadership, kind of a cooperative attitude. It is that kind of honor—a yielding to their place where the Lord has put them—as you yield to the Lord.

But then the other type of honor in the next verse, “For the Scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain’” ([1 Timothy 5:18](#)). The first type of honor is obvious that you give to leaders, kind of a respect. Lest we miss what this other honor is, the Lord just calls it “double honor” because the Scripture says: “You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads on the grain and a laborer is worthy of his wages.” And that value given to leaders in the church is actually a financial remuneration. First is respect, then if they lead well, there is financial compensation. But notice what it says: “Especially those who labor in the Word and teaching.” A church family, if they are led of the Lord and are prospered and blessed to do it, can by the Lord’s guidance set aside those among them to compensate their time to serve the Lord in specific areas and ways in the body, as the Lord leads the church. There can be all kinds of compensated servants or workers from secretaries, to staff members, and other positions. But where does it start, biblically? It is especially for those who labor in the Word and doctrine.

To give you an example, we did the dumbest thing in Dallas. This is so obvious, but when you are blind you just do not see it. Four of us teamed up as a leadership team in this church that started in our home. And we were each given twenty-five dollars a month because the church body just wanted to give us something. They just wanted to show some double honor. Actually back in those days, that sometimes meant the difference between “sink or swim.” As we went to the cupboard and the cupboard was bare, well twenty-five dollars, boy! In those days we were paying ninety-five dollars for our house payment, so we could live a long ways on twenty-five dollars and that was a blessing.

But the Lord began to prosper us and we were in this big facility and we knew that we didn’t have the funds for any of us to fully be set apart to minister. So this place was so big and it needed a lot of paint. It was big enough to handle a congregation of 600 and at that time we were 50 people. So we had this great idea to have just one of the four, who was the leader over the facilities, we would start giving him \$100 a month. And though we would kind of work him into a full-time position as fast as we could, we looked at what he had to take care of, you know. Wrong! There were many in that body who would do anything if you would let them take care of the facility. They would be thrilled. So we were already doubly wrong.

“Let the elders who rule well be accounted for double honor, especially those who labor in the Word and doctrine.” Out of all of us, I was the one that was called there to put the most labor in getting in the Word and teaching it. And yet here I am, by my own human

logic and good old American religious tradition, I focused on how important the facility is and we took the man gifted in the facility care out! That is how dumb you can be when you do not take time to find out what the Word says about the church.

That is why Bible-committed churches are generally going to compensate somebody to give more of their time directly to the ministry of the body and building it up. They start out with compensating the pastor/teacher. And it is not just a custom or a tradition. In fact, some churches violate that, like we did. But this is the way the Lord has arranged it. Why? It is because that's the strategic issue in the church life. The Lord shepherds us through under-shepherds who feed us His Word and His will. That is how He leads His church and it is uppermost in importance. So if you have someone who can give more attention to the need and well-being, the health, growth, and spiritual vitality of the church, then you start by compensating the pastor/teacher. He is the shepherd who is feeding you the Word of God. All right, that is a leadership position of the bishop, overseer and elder.

And eventually our church in Dallas caught on before I did. They said, wait a minute, Bob. We sense something is a little askew here, you know. We would like you to stop painting houses while you are trying to study at the seminary and raise two kids. We would like you to give more attention to shepherding this flock. And they shifted things around. And many people dove in to help take care of that facility and this one brother who had been doing it praised God, because he felt awkward with how we had taken him out of that position. And it wasn't long before they started blessing us financially. We never, ever told them in twenty-five years of ministry what we should get for serving. Nothing is fine. Anything is better. But I remember the day that they said, "We are committed to giving your family \$400 a month." And the day that happened, I said to my wife, "You know, I think I just painted my last house. This body needs more care than I can possibly give it and there are plenty of other people out there waiting to paint people's houses." And the family soon increased to five, but before you know it, they said, we want to give you another hundred a month. And man, then we were even clothing our kids! It was tremendous.

Acts 20 is a great chapter on church leadership in itself. We will just look at two verses in Acts 20. Paul is on his last trip toward Jerusalem which is going to end up taking him eventually to Rome and to prison. This is his last pass by Ephesus. "And from Miletus [sort of a seaport city and Ephesus inland there in what we would now call Turkey] he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church." Okay, we have already come across that term "elder" in 1 Timothy 5 and we will see more of it later.

Paul called for the elders of the church. Verse 28 is part of what he told them: "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers." These are not all kinds of multiple offices, are they? The elders of the church are the overseers of the church. These are just two different terms over the same position, the same office, signifying different aspects of what they do. The elder, the more spiritually mature, and the overseer—they are to see over the entire flock. And a

synonym for overseer is bishop. So bishop, overseer, and elder are all talking about the same person or people. It says, “Among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.”

In the world, leaders get their positions through all kinds of means. It is often by ability, giftedness, personality, talent, drive, deception, deceit, and coercion. There are all kinds of paths to leadership in the world. In the church, there is only to be one. The Scripture says, “Over which, or among which, the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.” The developing and placing of leadership in the church of Jesus Christ is to be the will and choice of the head, Jesus Christ, implemented by the Spirit of Christ who works on us, in us, and among us. “Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock among whom the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood” ([Acts 20:28](#)).

So the elder/overseers are to shepherd the church of God. You know what that word is? Pastor sounds like pasture. A pastor is a pasturer—he leads the sheep to pasture. That is hard to say and sometimes hard to do too. A pastor pastures the sheep like the good shepherd described in John 10 and Psalm 23. He leads them to green pastures, particularly the luscious, spiritually green pastures of the Word of God. So the elder, the overseer/bishop is to be a pasturer. In other words, he is a pastor. Pastor, elder, overseer all three terms appear in one passage where one apostle is speaking to one group who are all the same. And of course, the world and religious systems have divided these up into all kinds of things.

Basically in the church, the primary leaders the Lord has ordained were also called undershepherds. Why? It is because Jesus is the chief shepherd. Why that term? Because we are like sheep. We are the flock of God and we have to be led. And oh, we have a good shepherd. He laid down His life for the sheep. And He raises up undershepherds who are willing to lay down their lives for the sheep. And they pasture His sheep in His name in the green pastures of the Word.

But the elder, the overseer, the pastor are the same person. It is much simpler than we have made it seem today. In the church-world you can get many groups who have all of these different offices and even in those offices, hierarchies of categories. God has a much simpler approach. Praise the Lord for that! We need it as simple as we can get it. And then we need to hear it over and over again, which is the wonderful ministry of reminding.

Remember Peter said, “I write this epistle to you to stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance” ([2 Peter 3:1-2](#)). One of the greatest ministries one-to-another is reminding each other of the simple, clear things taught in the word that we too easily forget. It is a tremendous ministry.

All right, these are leadership positions. We see elder, overseer, pastor and [1 Timothy 3:8](#) says, “Likewise deacons must be reverent.” So now we are talking about deacons. In the early verses of chapter three, which we will look at in a moment, we were looking at elders or bishops or overseers or pastors. Now starting at verse 8, we are looking at

another position of leadership called “deacons.” Literally the word means “servants.” It is interesting in the American church how people often fight and lobby to get voted on the servant board. You sometimes wonder if they know what it is supposed to be? I mean, you do not have to lobby for something if it is appointment by the Holy Spirit. And you do not have to crave after it because of the prestige and power if you realize it means servant. Deacons are servants.

[Acts 6:1-6](#) could perhaps be called the prototype of the deacon ministry in the early church. The early church was being led in Jerusalem which was the only place it existed. It was led by apostles, who were the only real leaders at that time. Eventually they would go out, evangelize, plant churches, and come back to appoint elders—that is pastors and overseers. But in Jerusalem, the church was led by apostles.

Now in these days the number of the disciples was multiplying into the thousands on the Day of Pentecost. Later a miracle, the response to the gospel brought thousands more. There arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists. That is, against the Jewish Christians by the Christians with Greek backgrounds, the Gentiles. The Gentile widows, were being neglected in the daily distribution of the supply of resources for the family of God. Then the twelve apostles, who were leading the church there, summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, “It is not desirable that we should leave the Word of God and serve tables” ([Acts 6:2](#)). See, they were giving themselves to ministering the Word and the problem was in the serving of tables. It was not being done sufficiently, carefully, godly, or fairly. So it needed attention.

The Lord wants to give attention to every issue and need in the church. They might not all be of the same critical or basic fundamental priority, but they are all important to God. “Therefore brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom whom we may appoint over the business.” In other words, share with us the godly people you see in the body. We will take a look at them and we will appoint them over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and the ministry of the Word. “And the saying pleased the whole multitude” ([Acts 6:3-5](#)). This was a blessing, it was direction from the Lord.

“And they chose Stephen a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Tyman, Parmenus and Nicolas a proselyte from Antioch. Whom they set before the apostles and when they had prayed they laid hands on them.” What is being appointed here? Basically and practically they were appointing servant-helpers to meet some basic needs that the leaders, who were called to minister the Word, would have to make a trade-off to do. They would have to leave what they were primarily called to do in order to take care of the need at the tables, the distribution of supplies. And God wanted all the needs met, from the feeding of the Word to the feeding of the body. But He had appointed some to do one thing and some to do the other.

And one of the serious mistakes that happens in the American church, is those who are called by God to lead the sheep into the green pastures of the Word are just consumed with other valid needs. And sometimes those needs are invalid. But it is as though they

are waiting on tables all the time. It is important in the eyes of God that those needs be met and supplied. This requires helping people where there is lack. But some are called to do one thing and some are called to do another. And the apostles were functioning as the shepherd, overseers, and the elders of the first church in Jerusalem. And as it exploded in size, they could not meet all these individual needs which got to be more involved very early on in the ministry. These other duties started to cut into their time in prayer and time in the Word. So God wants to sort out some servant-helpers to assist the elders, overseers, and pastors.

A real distinction in the elder-pastor ministry and the deacon-servant ministry is that the deacons help out in a given area as servants. They take care of those widows' tables by the grace of God and under the oversight of the elders-pastors they help in those given areas. Whereas the overseers, the elders, the spiritually mature, the pastors, the feeder-teacher-guiders, they are to be responsible for the whole church. That is a strategic difference in the two positions. And they both have a critical role, but you cannot just indiscriminately mix the two. They are distinctive in their own purpose and calling and we will see that even in some of their qualifications, though not all.

It is very obvious in Acts 6 that those men who served tables had to be godly, led of the Spirit, disciples. They are not elders. Maybe they are not into all of the areas and arenas of spiritual maturity that the Lord wants to keep developing in them. In fact, no man on earth will ever be fully matured. But deacons have servant hearts and they want to be led by God and used of God. And they have a wonderful opportunity.

In Dallas we had a young church and I was the pastor at age twenty-nine. There was only one man in the church older than me and he was the father-in-law of the assistant pastor. And so we thanked God and gave him the treasury to keep. We praised the Lord because there was someone who knew something about taking care of financial responsibility. I sure did not. Before I was saved I was the most financially irresponsible person I knew of. I knew some pretty irresponsible people and even though God can change those things in people, He will not have one person doing everything. And He did supply us with someone we needed. But everybody else was younger and I was like the old man around town. The world would say that they stay one week ahead of the hounds, I was just trying to keep one week ahead of the sheep, you know—lest they grazed right up my back!

But we had a young church and a lot of babies. I remember times when there were eight women pregnant in the church at once and it was a church of 300 or so. You know that is a lot of women pregnant at the same time. Then in the nursery we would have explosive church growth. We had two deacons whose full-time ministry was the oversight of the nursery and they were deacons. These men had godly wives and all four of them worked together as a team. Believe me, it taxed them. They were fully stretched right there just in that area. I remember early on, making many emergency nursery calls myself to stamp out fires and change diapers. Sometimes even on the babies! But praise the Lord when servants are raised-up who will help the overseers in given areas like the sound ministry, the out-reach ministry, and the home Bible study ministry. That is what was happening here in Jerusalem as seen in the book of Acts.

The primary leadership positions designated in Scripture are the elders-pastors-overseers, all one category. Each church might have one or more. And even if they have more, only one of them might be the pastor-teacher and the others are shepherd-elders that do some feeding, but they are not the feeding leader that leads by feeding the sheep of God. And then you have the deacons, the servants, the willing-hearted helpers. But all of them are to be spiritually minded and spiritually hearted persons. They are to be committed to the Lord, growing and willing to keep growing, sacrificing and willing to keep sacrificing, learning and willing to keep learning.

Now what about leadership qualifications? Let's look in the book of 1 Timothy 3 to find what kind of lives the Lord develops in order to use in these positions. Or to put it another way, if we are serving in these roles, practically or officially, what does God want to be making us more and more like? There is not man or woman on earth in the church who would perfectly fit 100% of the details in all of these qualifications. In fact, just reading them is very humbling. I think the devil loves to show up at the reading of the leadership qualifications. You know it is like he says, "Whoa man read them. You read them, I'll shoot them. You tell them what God wants them to be. I will remind them what they are not." You know it is that kind of a thing. We are not ignorant of the devil's schemes, praise the Lord. So we can press on in this, knowing that there is to be a significant reality of these qualities in the lives of leaders.

After twenty-five years of being an apostle, Paul said in [Philippians 3:12](#), "Not that I have already attained or am already perfected." Do not think that I and Christ have exactly the same kind of life. I am still growing. And so it must be in this picture too, we must beware of the condemnation. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" ([Romans 8:1](#)). The accuser of the brethren has a great heyday here if we let him.

On the other hand, we do not take these without a serious concern. It is not that we just take them lightly. Oh, not at all. We know these represent things God wants to do in people's lives, as He brings them on to leadership. And these qualities appearing in any of our lives will further equip us to be more fully used by God to touch other lives for His glory.

Leadership qualifications. First for the elders (the overseers, pastor-teachers) [1-Timothy 3:2](#) says, "A bishop then [an overseer, elsewhere called an elder, a pastor] must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach." Blameless, now that is not in the sense of sinless perfection. There was only one on earth who ever fit that role. That is Jesus Christ. But we are to be growing unto His image so that when a person is spoken of or viewed, the first things that come to mind are not issues of obvious short-comings. He is to be blameless in the sense that there is no clear, on-going violation of the standards and the ways of God. And if there is, that person is so quick to want to have it dealt with, removed from his life.

“The husband of one wife”— there has been debate in the church on this one and I am sure we will not be able to settle that in three minutes of exposition. But obviously, how leaders relate to their wives is critical. He is to be the husband of one wife. It would obviously rule out any religiously foolish man in church life who is trying to relate to more than one woman at once. It would also clearly relate to those who have been divorced and remarried and have those cycles going on with the world’s reasoning.

Now the Lord has prescribed, by mercy, two exceptions to “That the two shall be one flesh for life, and what God has joined together let no man tear asunder.” Basically that is the physical, sexual unfaithfulness which is taught against in the gospels. And in 1 Corinthians 7, the other exception is desertion, the turning their back on the marriage, especially when there is a believer there and they just will not take their responsibilities toward that family.

So it is not referring to someone who has treated marriage lightly and is continuing to treat marriage lightly. Now it doesn’t mean that someone who has failed in this area cannot ever be a church leader. It just has to do with other issues. Is he the husband of one wife now, really? Was he married? Well, why isn’t he still married to that wife now? Well, if there was a biblical exception for that dissolution of the marriage, fine. Then they are not disqualified from being an elder is what the Lord is saying. They are not the husband of two wives. If God says you are no longer bound, then they are not bound. This does not mean that sexual unfaithfulness or desertion automatically cause you to jump to divorce. God can turn those things around too; but sometimes people will not let Him. And God is merciful in spite of the hardness of your heart. He said I will grant you mercy here, though My will and desire is that life-long partnership.

One other thing is that leaders in the church are not to be men who are flirtatious and develop all kinds of on-going physical, emotional, or carnal relationships. They should not even have relationships with the women of the family of God. That is dead wrong. That would violate this principle because they are not really being the husband of one wife. They are saying they are monogamous, while they are subtly betraying it through all kinds of innuendoes and other things. So, the husband and wife relationship is critical in leadership.

Temperate means that they have moderation about their behavior. Sober-minded does not mean that they don’t have the joy of the Lord. They are not to be Pastor Lemonface, you know. Their favorite hobby should not be chewing lemons. And just every time you look at them it is like the judgment of God is etched on their face forever. But being sober-minded means that we have the joy of the Lord and we have a great time in the Lord. But it is having a seriousness for the things of God and gravity toward the eternal stakes of heaven and hell. And they know the difference between man and God and the carnal and the spiritual, and it brings a sobriety to their lives, gravity. And that is a mark of a leader too.

Of good behavior means that He not only wants the leader to stay away from things that are obviously ungodly, he wants him to stay away from things that can become foolish. He wants the elder to stay away from foolishness

The elder must be hospitable. Show me a pastor that does not like to open his life and his home to people and I would say this person was called to something else in the body of Christ. A non-hospitable pastor, because of personality or human loyalties or maybe just his own personality and human charisma, has ended up in the wrong ministry. The elder is to be hospitable. Shepherds are to love to hang out with the sheep. We are not to be like the guy who said, “I would love pastoring, if it weren’t for the people.”

All of us can understand that we get on each other’s nerves and we can disappoint and frustrate each other no matter who we are. But a man who really believes that people are the worst part of ministry and he is not just kidding that man should not be a pastor. Being hospitable was one of the joys of shepherding in the flock of God for twenty-five years before the Lord sent me out to the flock around the world. And hanging out with the people of God was a blessing. And I still love it and I can do it unto exhaustion. It is just a joy!

But pastor-teachers, elders, overseers, are to be able to teach or apt to teach. There should be some aptitude in teaching. We will not find this listed in the qualifications for deacons. There are a lot of common qualifications or characteristics in the two lists for elders and deacons. This one does not recur. That does not mean that deacons cannot teach, it just means they do not have to be able to. It also doesn’t mean that pastors, elders, teachers cannot do things that are of a non-teaching ministry. They can but the elder, pastor has to be able to teach. The deacon does not have to be able to teach. The elder is a pastor, a feeder. And they are to be feeding the sheep the Word of God. There has to be that capacity to get in the Word, feed on the Word and serve up meals from the Word of God. There has to be that ability, it is critical. And very often in the American church this is violated or misunderstood or just not given any attention. And you have dynamic human leaders leading in human religious operations. And sometimes you have good-hearted servants who love God, who should be turned loose in the area of their gift and calling, instead of being urged or allowed to be pastors. This is because they are not apt to teach and it is a critical issue.

The elder is not to be given to wine. We are to be filled with the Spirit, not drunk with wine. This addresses leaders having their lives influenced not just by alcohol but things like that—anything that would have a strong influence on us. The Lord is saying this person should not be leading officially or formally. Now listen, a lot of those who are leaders now at one time were heavily given to wine. You know. The only reason I wasn’t is I couldn’t stand it. I guarantee that if I had liked it then I would have been given to it. This is because every other wrong thing that I liked that much, I totally gave myself over to it with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength. I gave myself to sin in the areas that I like. There are people that the world would call total dope heads who are now great spiritual leaders in the kingdom of God. And in many of them are in churches that we fellowship with a lot. Praise the Lord! That is wonderful. That is the evidence of the

transforming grace and the power of God. But they are not to be guzzling wine between Sunday services.

And elders are not to be violent. You know there is a violent streak in some church leaders. They are just lashing out at the sheep. You would think that they are not shepherds. Shepherds do not growl at the sheep. Dogs and wolves do that, you know. Now I am not saying that everyone who has ever growled at a sheep is a dog or a wolf, but they are acting like it at the time. And when we are in Christ and we do not act like Christ, we are acting in the flesh, the world, and the devil. But leadership is not to be characterized by violence. Church leaders are not to be banging heads.

Elders are not to be greedy for money. Many of the world's leaders are in those positions because of their covetous drive to get the bucks. That is what got them to the top. It must not be that way in the church of Jesus Christ. "Freely we have received, freely shall you give" ([Matthew 10:8](#)). We are just there to give out with no strings attached what God has given to us. We are not there for the money. God does provide and I am amazed how He has provided for us. In twenty-eight years of service, He has not allowed me to ever put a monetary value on any service; whether it is preaching, teaching, counseling, marrying, funerals, you name it. He has just absolutely prevented me from both the desire and even the temptation to do these things for the money.

Praise the Lord, He has blessed us; and He not only supplies all our needs, He gives us things that we do not need but just enjoy! My wife and I have been committed to a simple lifestyle all of our lives. It seems like the more we have walked with Him, the more material things we have had that we really did not need to have. It just makes you want to give more to others and plow it back into the kingdom of God.

And then the elder is to be gentle. When Jesus needed, He could confront in a godly, holy roughness, the hypocrisy and deception present in people. But for anyone who was humble, meek, needy, and repentant He was the gentle shepherd. A good shepherd will beat away the destructive things with His rod while He pulls the sheep to safety with His staff. He is gentle and we need to be gentle with people, not roughing each other up. Leaders that are roughing each other up are either patterning after the world or are have not let God crucify that part of their flesh. God help us to be gentle with each other.

The elder is not to be quarrelsome. He is not to be leading by fussing at people. "I'm telling you, you shut up. I'm right; you're wrong. I'm master; you're slave. If you don't believe it, tell me why and I'll show you you're wrong." That is not leadership. That is just berating and beating and God help us just to avoid quarrelsomeness.

And the elder is not to be covetous. Again not trying to gather and collect material things.

[1 Timothy 3:4-5](#) says, "One who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence, for if a man does not know how to rule his own house how will he take care of the church of God?" How we function in our household speaks to the opportunities, the dimensions and doors that God opens for us in the bigger family of

God. We have little household families of believers led by those who might become spiritual leaders in the bigger household. And what does or does not happen in the home has a direct relationship to what will or will not happen in new opportunities of service in leadership in the large church.

Now this is an exceedingly humble section to read for anyone. Again no one is exempt in a fallen world where there is the world, the flesh, and the devil. Every household, including the kids and especially the teenage kids, are very vulnerable to these things. This is not a call to perfection. It is just that there is an obvious demonstration of spiritual leadership necessary in the home. That is, bringing the issue of submission before the children and building it into their lives. And when there is rebellion, as there will be in any place where there is flesh, the leader of that home will be used of God to begin to deal with that rebellion. There must be a real demonstration of spiritual leadership. And you can see that there are a few verses on this because it is a critical issue. And again it can be so discouraging and condemning when you read this yourself in Scripture and you think: “I was just hanging on by a thread and you just clipped it!”

God gives grace to the humble. Just keep that in your heart. There is the question of how perfect does our family life have to be? And people say, where do you draw the line? Well, you do not draw the line, God draws the line. We have to seek the Lord on these issues as leaders. And you know in the early church the people all came out of paganism, those who were not from Jerusalem. And Paul went throughout the Mediterranean world and evangelized. Those new believers came out of pagan homes. Yet he goes back four months later and appoints elders from among them.

So this issue is somewhat relative. There is an absolute, which is Christ-likeness, but there is another relative factor. If you are in a city and there are fifty people in the church, God will probably appoint the most godly man as the leader. You might think that he has so many areas where he needs to grow. But he obviously has been growing. And if he keeps that heart, he will be conformed more and more to these things. So, God draws the lines in every fellowship. But these are seriously sobering things to pray about. But again this is not a demand for perfection. That is so clear from just the general context of the whole Word of God. But family life is a critical issue for knowing who is going to lead, where, and how much.

Next: “Not a novice lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil”—which was pride. We see in Isaiah 14, and Ezekiel 28 that pride is what devastated Satan. Pride is what devastates man now. A novice, a new convert, or a new believer might have a heart aflame for God, he might have all kinds of talent and abilities and zeal, but we are not to have them saved today and appoint them as elders tomorrow. And we blow this in so many ways.

Someone comes out of the world, who is a famous football hero and he is saved one weekend and he is speaking before 10,000 people at a rally the next weekend about the joys of the Christian life and how to serve God. Why are they allowed to do that? It is because we are impressed with their fame. And we do not take seriously the spiritual

qualifications from Scripture. And you know what we often do? We destroy those brethren because many of them do fall into the snare and reproach of the devil. While they are testifying, the enemy has his troops there shooting arrows, flaming missiles at the young converts head. And he is testifying of how much he loves God and he is so thankful that God saved his soul. He had been so prideful and rebellious and worldly and the devil is just pumping in arrows. “Man, you are hot stuff. Boy, is God blessed to have you! Man, you are going to be the greatest thing to ever hit the kingdom of God. Look at that 10,000 people hanging on every word you say.” Often it is not too many weeks and there is a fall. So may the Lord lead us and guide us in these things.

When you get into the deacons in verses 8-10, just notice: “Likewise deacons must be reverent, not double tongued, not given to much wine, nor greedy for money, holding the mystery of faith with a pure conscience. But let these also first be tested then let them serve as deacons being found blameless.”

With some of the early deacons we appointed in Dallas, it was kind of like, “I guess they might work, let’s take a shot. This looks like the best gamble we’ve had yet.” Oh, we made some tragic mistakes for those men and for the church. One day we were praying about some of these things and this phrase leaped out at us. “Let them first be tested.” We thought: “Lord, maybe you would want us to let them be tested this way. We will just all seek and serve you, minister to one another the best we know how. And we will ask You to show us those among us who are functioning as servants. And then we will give You the glory by saying, ‘God’s raised up a deacon among us. Glory be to God.’” Then there were no guesses, no gambles, no shot in the dark. We just recognized what God had done. Wow, camp on that phrase, “what God has done,” when you are in prayer over such things, brethren.

And by the way, if we want to be recognized as servants for the sake of having more opportunity to serve, and we have a godly desire not just for prestige or power—then just serve. Just serve the Lord. That is how God is recognized as working in someone’s life. It says, “Let them serve as deacons being found blameless. Likewise their wives must be reverent not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things.” That husband-wife relationship again is critical. It says, “Let deacons be the husband of one wife ruling their children and their own houses well, for those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness of the faith which is in Christ Jesus” ([1 Timothy 3:12-13](#)).

Don’t you see how many similarities there are there between elders and deacons in spiritual qualities of life? In other words, as one brother said, “The Lord is calling us all to Christ-likeness.” Really the main difference is the range of responsibility and the aptitude of teaching. Those are about all of the differences. We are talking about spiritual people being used by God, who is Spirit, to build a spiritual kingdom by the work of the Holy Spirit. So that is why these qualifications are critical. We are looking at spiritual character and spiritual fruit and in a sense that is what God wants to develop among us. The more we see of this in people’s lives, the more God wants to use them in church ministry.

Now this is our last section on leaders of the church. We have looked at leadership positions, leadership qualifications, and now we will look at leadership priorities. We will take a quick look at them and then maybe read some of them.

[Luke 10:38-42](#) says that we are to be living and serving with our hearts abiding at the feet of Jesus Christ.

Acts 6:4 says that leaders are to be given continually to the Word and to prayer.

Matthew 20:25-28 says that servanthood characterizes all that we do in the name of the Lord.

1 Corinthians 11:1 is the last one which says that we are to be letting God make us increasingly into Christ-like examples. As I follow Christ, follow me. It is that sort of thing—being a demonstration of Christ among the flock.

There are leadership priorities. [Luke 10:38-42](#) is a high priority for instruction in leadership.

“Now it happened as they went [the disciples] that He [Jesus] entered a certain village and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary who also sat at Jesus’ feet and heard His word. But Martha was distracted with much serving and she approached Him and said, ‘Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me.’ And Jesus answered and said to her, ‘Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed and Mary has chosen that good part which will not be taken away from her.’”

This is teaching about the one necessary thing and it came out in the lives of these disciples—Martha, Mary, Lazarus. Jesus is in their home and Martha working hard to prepare a place to bless and serve the Lord. Mary is out there seated at the Lord’s feet. Martha is worried and troubled about many things. It is so easy for church leaders, church workers, church servants, to get so into their “doing of service,” that they forget what they are doing, why they are doing it, and how it is to be done. And the very serving becomes a distraction.

They may begin to think: “Oh, I have to set these chairs up again. What happened to the three people who used to help me? Lord, get them!” That is kind of the way Martha was as she labored in the kitchen. As hostess she was going to bless the Lord with a meal and all. But she was getting all uptight and then it comes to her mind: “Why isn’t Mary in here serving the Lord? She is out there sitting in the living room talking. Give me a break.” Martha goes out there to the Lord knowing she is going to get a confirmation. “Lord, don’t You realize that I need help and Mary has left me here to serve alone. Tell her to get in the kitchen.” You know she was expecting, the Lord to say, “Come on,

Mary, be practical. You cannot sit here like a mystic. You are so heavenly minded, you are no earthly good. Get in that kitchen.” This thinking is backwards. It is being heavenly minded that makes us earthly good—like Jesus. Martha must have been shocked when the Lord said, “Martha, Martha, you are worried about many things. One thing is necessary and Mary chose it.” She must have thought: “Oh my goodness. I blew it. Mary chose the God-part by sitting at His feet, receiving His word.”

Leaders must keep that as a top priority. We have to live life and serve at the feet of Jesus Christ. Oh, we may be sent to the kitchen. We may be busy in doing this and that, but we have to have our heart always at His feet. [Acts 6:4](#) says that we have to give ourselves continually to the Word and prayer. Others may serve the tables and help and we praise the Lord for them. We might on occasion do it directly ourselves but particularly for the shepherd (pastor, elder) we have to devote ourselves to the Word and prayer. Everyone who is going to serve God has to live in His Word and by prayer.

[Matthew 20:28](#) says that we have to be servants. “Jesus came not to be served, but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many.” This means we are not in ministry to get but to give. It is so easy on the leader when people want to help and they love you and they encourage you. And praise God for that. But it is so easy for the flesh to think: “Hey, they are here to bless me. Man, I can get a lot out of this.” And it perverts the whole thing. We are servants and that is how we lead, as servants.

And then 1 Corinthians 11 tell us that we are to follow others as they follow the Lord, becoming examples of Christ to others.

In conclusion, God does not expect us to be perfect but He wants us to be spiritually mature and maturing. That is what He wants for leaders and He wants us to understand we are servants and not “big shots.” “Oh you are a big shot in the church, huh?” “Yes, I get the privilege of sweeping it out every week—God has blessed me.” That kind of big shot sure is great. But when you are a big shot and you tell everybody what to do and they just jump and do it—no! The Lord tells us where to go and how to serve Him, but He is not sitting off like some barking sergeant. He went down the servant’s path ahead of us and He is right with us continually, as we are serving Him. That is the kind of leadership we want to live out.

Let’s pray together.

Lord, make us more and more the kind of people with this kind of heart and vision. Lead us more into leadership as You make us what You want us to be. And where we fail and come short, give us humility of heart, calling out in repentance for Your grace and cleansing. And then just keep transforming us into the image of Christ. It is in Jesus’ name we pray.
Amen.

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

BY

Calvary Chapel Outreach Fellowship

Lesson 6 Leadership Issues

By

Bob Hoekstra

Living in Christ Ministries

Brought to you by:

The Blue Letter Bible Institute

www.blbi.org

A ministry of:

The Blue Letter Bible

www.blueletterbible.org

Lord, we come once again, open, hungry, delighting to hear from You, and wanting to meekly receive the implanted Word which is able to deliver our souls. Speak to us again, by Your Holy Spirit, Lord, on just the various leadership issues in Your church that You want to bring to our attention now. And then work to conform us to the image of Your Son. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

We are going to look at various leadership issues in this study on church leadership. Leaders face many opportunities and challenges. The more God uses us, the more opportunities there are, but the more challenges there are also. And there are various common issues and really vital issues that we are going to look at: ministry to our own family; relationships with other leaders; relationships with the church; equipping for ministry and leadership; intensified spiritual warfare; inevitable opposition; and setting up the proper spiritual banner.

First of all we will look at ministry to our own families. [Matthew 10:37](#) says, "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me." Now let's just hold that thought in our minds for a moment. Alongside of that and in a way almost in tension with that, we will look at [1 Timothy 5:8](#). "But if anyone does not provide for his own, especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever."

On the one hand, if our families are more important to us than the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, we should not really be calling ourselves true disciples of Jesus Christ. "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. He who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me." The Lord Jesus Christ must be the centerpiece. He must be the highest priority. We must love Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. And even something as precious to us as our families, and as important in the plan of God as our families, must not eclipse the person of the Lord Jesus Christ and our loving and serving Him.

So that is a danger on the one hand. Especially if we have a godly love for our kids and want to be responsible toward the family, we can let the natural and even the God-given love for them run unleashed to the point where nothing else matters. It can lead one to say, "Don't bother me, I'm taking care of my family. That's your problem; I'm taking care of my family. No I can't get to that meeting; I'm taking care of my family." And it can eclipse everything.

But, there is another problem on the other end of the spectrum. And that is being so involved in what we think is service for the Lord that we do not provide for the needs of our household. In that sense, it is as if we are denying the faith by our wrong priorities. The Lord has commanded us to love and cherish and nurture and take care of our family. And again, the question that comes to the human mind is: "Wow, where do you draw the line?" This is the classic question of humanity, once they are saved. Before that, you

draw the line as far out there as you can draw it, you know. But when you get in the kingdom and these things come into tension, you must determine where you draw the line.

Again, we do not draw the line. That is what produces self-rule or legalism when you try to rule others. God draws the line. That is why we need a shepherd to shepherd us down the line, down the path. But God wants us to know that there is guidance needed in this because He knows if He does not draw the line, we will draw it in the wrong place. That is for sure. So we want Him to be leading and guiding us and showing us how to love Him without reservation and not let our devotion to family start to supersede that, but rather be an expression of our love for Him. And He wants to show us how to love Him fully but not neglect our families. And the Lord is not challenged by this at all. We are often challenged but we must not be consumed or obsessed with our family. We must not neglect our family. The tension is in us, not in God.

The more church leaders are used of God to help others press on, the more this issue gets in tension. It just pulls. We see these priorities and think: “Oh, I’ve got to do this in Your name, Lord. And there are these people, and that message, and that meeting, and that group!” And your family may be just dying for love, nurture, guarding, feeding, and caring. Or we can go the other way and say, “Lord, You’ve given me this family, I’m going to be responsible for it and I kind of like it anyway.” We dig into it and everything is family. And the Lord is asking: “What about the rest of My sheep? What about just Me? It’s been a long time since you have poured out your heart toward Me in any other way than, ‘Thank You for my family and help me with my family.’ Do you have any time just to love Me and to adore Me?”

It is a real healthy tension, in a sense, because both are the will of God. But only God can put them together, which means we need to heed His Word, and walk by the Spirit. “Here is what You say, Lord, now guide me through it.” But it is an area that we need to be attentive to, aware of, and praying about—ministry to our own family. We must neither be obsessed with them, nor neglecting them. We must be putting them in that right special priority in His name and in His love, but not letting it eclipse Him or displace His will.

Another issue is our relationship with other leadership. [Mark 3:14](#) addresses leaders, relating to leaders particularly within the local fellowship, but also meeting like this—where leaders in various fellowships minister together. Having a relationship with other leadership is a very important issue. In Mark 3:14, Jesus is calling the disciples to Himself. “Then He appointed twelve that they might be with Him and He might send them out to preach.” So Jesus appointed the twelve apostles. There were other groups, the seventy, the hundred and twenty, and in the twelve there were the three, and even John the one, whose head was resting on Jesus’ shoulder and all.

There are all kinds of relationships in the Lord of discipleship groups who lead in the church. The same thing happens in the local church. Why does He spend so much time with those two? Why did He take them on the mountain and show them His glory? I

mean, come on. They are not better than us. Well no, none is good but God alone. He just chooses us and guides us and leads us in different experiences, different aspects of service, different kinds of friendships and relationships. The same thing happens in the local church and we are all involved in those kinds of leadership and fellowship issues. And we need to let God develop them as He wills.

And here He chose twelve that they might be with Him. In a big way the Lord worked to mold, shape, lead, guide, and equip the lives of those who would lead the early church. They hung out with Jesus together and that was the basic discipleship format. They hung out together with Jesus. That is still basic to the church and discipleship today, though we often miss the simplicity of that. And these were the leaders, for our context of study, these were the leaders of the church that was about to be birthed. What are they doing most of the time as they are being equipped? They are hanging out together with Jesus.

It is critical for leadership in a local church to hang out together with the Lord. Just spend time together in the Lord. It might be misread by some as: “They are just in some little clique and they think they’ve got a red-line phone to heaven or something.” Well, leaders can act like that sometimes and that is wrong. When they only show love and interest and attention to each other that is wrong. But leaders need to spend time hanging out together with Jesus. It is one of the mighty ways God works in their lives, molding them, shaping them and leading them so that they might lead others. And this would apply to every one of us in the body of Christ. If we are going to be used of God to lead others, we need to hang out with those we are laboring with in the Lord. And let Him work in our lives so that we might touch other lives. This applies to Sunday school workers, outreach team members, you name it—if they are in an area of leading and serving—they need to have times of hanging out together in the Lord.

Look how this began to work in the early church after the birth of the church. In [Acts 13:1-2](#) it says,

“Now in the church that was in Antioch [This is the first big Gentile church, up kind of to the northwest, when you are looking from Jerusalem right on the Mediterranean coast and in that church] there were certain prophets and teachers: [Here are the leaders of the church] Barnabus, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucious of Cyrene, Maneon who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. [These are the leaders in the church at that time in Antioch.] As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, “Now separate to me Barnabus and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”

Are we aware of the strategic importance of this particular meeting that day or that season? This was going to affect the extension of the church throughout the Mediterranean world. Here were these leaders in the church. What were they doing at this time? Basically, it is another example of how they were hanging out together with the Lord. They were ministering to the Lord. Remember, that is always our primary ministry. It is too easy to think of ministry as being primarily to the lost or hurting or to other

believers for edification. Those are critical ministries but our primary ministry is always to the Lord; worshipping Him, serving Him, adoring Him, and thanking Him. Then as He works in our lives, we take that love and insight and share it with the family of God. Not for selfish ingrown reasons, but that we might be built up to live in this world more like Christ. We need His light, life, love, and truth to reach out to touch other lives.

That is what the disciples are doing here. They are hanging out, ministering to the Lord in praise, worship, adoration, and waiting upon Him. And that is when the Holy Spirit said, “These two men in our circle as you hang out with Me and you minister to Me, set those two men apart. I have called Barnabas and Saul to a special work.” And they were sent out to take the gospel seeds and plant the church as it was birthed around the world. What a significant moment that was, that those leaders of the church were hanging out together before the Lord.

This is how it all started out. Jesus called twelve to be with Him. And then, from that He sent them out to preach. That is what is happening here, still. And that is still what is to be going on in the church today. Leaders should hang out together with the Lord Jesus Christ. They will hear from the Lord in those times as in no other time. It is the way the Lord did it when He walked on the earth. It is the way He did it after His Spirit was poured out on the church. He is well able to do that now. In fact now, we are so graced and blessed to be able to gather together as leaders in the Word before the Lord and just listen to what He has said and what He wants us to hear.

In Dallas after it began to dawn on us what the purpose and function of the church was, we began more and more to diminish the separation of the so-called practical business, legal operations, and the spiritual body life functioning. And before long it was all blended into one whole. By then the Lord had raised up more spiritual leaders to facilitate that kind of direction. And we met regularly but we did not have prayer meetings, business meetings, or annual meetings. We just had hang-out times for the leaders in the Lord. We always started it with something from the Word for each other, praying for one another, praying for the church and in that if decisions arose, what the world would call business matters, we just treated them like everything else, with prayer and a seeking of the wisdom of God in the Word. So the whole thing was just spiritual family life. And oh how we saw the leadership and the congregation just take a new burst of spiritual growth in those days as the leaders just hung out together in the Lord. It is a place where He works and leads in leadership for His people.

To apply some other Scriptures and principles elsewhere to this kind of a setting is a fun thing to do. Take a given reality in the Word of God, since it all fits together as a whole. And then with that given reality, think of the implications of other truths and principles. Like [Romans 12:10](#) which is not specifically speaking about leadership per se, but in light of the fact that leaders should hang out together in the Lord, listen to what this might say to leaders as they are doing this.

[Romans 12:10](#). “Be kindly affectionate to one another, with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another.” Boy can you see a group of leaders gathered in the

name of the Lord treating each other like that with the laughter? Are you talking miracle, or what? Really.

The Lord took us from such a humanistic business-world approach to making decisions in the church where the Robert's Rules of Order was actually written into our church constitution. Boy, we eventually repented of that. Why are we letting the world tell us how to run our meetings? We wanted Jesus' rules of order and we prayed, "By Your Spirit, according to Your Word, we will just gather in Your name. You teach us how to treat one another as we seek You in how to walk together in making decisions." And the Lord started laying things like this on our hearts. Let's just be kind and affectionate to one another. You know, we are brothers. We are not businessmen called here to make decisions. We are brothers gathered here to please the Father. So let's treat each other that way and in honor give preference to one another.

There was to be none of this, "Man, you just got on the board two months ago, will you be quiet. I have been here seven years; don't you think I know what I'm doing?" Just ask the Lord to purge all of that kind of stuff. And prefer one another in honor. "Hey brother, God called you to this team last week, what's been on your heart? We are just dying to hear. Tell us." This is an example of preferring one another in honor, you know. Letting each person know how much we appreciate him. And how we know there is a valuable input of ministry there because God put you here. That is the kind of an attitude that is part of the godly hanging-out in Christ Jesus for leadership. This is good for Sunday school workers, outreach workers, mercy ministries, deacons, and elders.

There is another example in [Ephesians 4:3](#). Since leaders are exemplified by hanging out together in the Lord that is basically how the Lord has touched and built leaders and led them. Ephesians 4:3. How about this truth for leaders to consider in that context? It applies to all believers, but how about leaders? They are to be "endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Wow!

You know, early on as a pastor, the time of the month I hated the most was when the church leaders got together. I could tell when it was approaching by what was going on in my stomach. I felt physical anguish because I knew it would be appropriate. Oh in the early years, I tell you, there was so much foolishness and so much worldliness. Oh, we had zeal, but it was not according to knowledge. And it got to where I just dreaded those meetings. Afterwards I would thank God that we had four weeks to recover before the next leadership meeting. Do you know what happened? God so transformed our vision for the church and leadership that it got to where we could not wait until the next meeting. It got to where we had a meeting every week. And if we could have done it responsibly, we would have done it more often than that. We came to love one another's company. We just anticipated it. There was such joy, laughter, tears, earnest prayer and a real endeavor to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. There was a real attentiveness.

When the Holy Spirit has given us oneness, let's guard it. How? It is done in the bond of peace. Let's be careful with one another not to stir up unnecessary strife. Sure the spirit

and the flesh war against each other and there will be things within and sometimes among, but let's aim in prayer and faith to be an instrument to avoid it, and not cause it. What a joyful way to gather, looking for unity and peace. Knowing that God is a god of both and He can keep building it.

Then in [1-Peter 3:8](#), we find that leaders hang-out in the Lord's name with each other. "Finally all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another. Love as brothers. Be tender-hearted. Be courteous." Boy, how is that for some counsel for leadership. Some of these things we are looking at in what you call an average American church setting, not normal but average. Normal being what is in the Word, that's the norm. Average is found in settings where every one of these things has been violated. I know whereof I speak because I have led them! This makes total sense to me, these warnings. But look how God calls us.

We used to have eleven board members and a six-to-five vote carried everything. Man, the strife that produces, and the lobbying, and the religious politics. Then one day the Lord gave us a vision as leaders, to reach out for one-mindedness. "All of you be of one mind." Let's not ask the Lord to get a majority to stomp over a minority. But let's ask God to put us all in submission to what He wants to do. And if we have strong differences, it is obviously time for a season of prayer and waiting on the Lord. If we cannot act in oneness of mind, then let's not act at all. There might be unusual exceptions to that where a leader drifts from the Lord and gets into carnality and becomes an obstruction to what God is doing. God can give wisdom. This is not a law, you know, it's just a direction. But what a direction to reach for!

And the Lord gave us, particularly during about seven straight years, what to me was like Camelot Community Church. Flesh was not allowed to rain on that parade, you know. It was unreal because it was so heavenly and so sweet. We found out later, we had some other lessons to learn and often they were learned in the midst of great strife, you know. And we learned some deep, heavy ones. But we walked in amazing measures for seven years together. And after experiencing some big lessons a lot of us got back into this form of leadership and we had more years of godly fellowship and direction.

But what a way to go in church leadership with one-mindedness, compassion, love, tenderness, courtesy. Wow! The flesh cries out, what does that have to do with running a church? Everything. This is the character of Christ. He is the godhead. There is no arguing in the Trinity. They are not pulling the universe into sectarian camps. And this is the God who lives among us. We can learn more and more to walk in these ways. Often it involves dying to self, yielding to Christ, and forbearing one another. Sometimes it means being firm on an absolute unyielding issue, but doing it gently and lovingly.

There are lots of aspects of growth in leadership but what a glorious way to hang-out together in Jesus Christ. It is a big part of leadership really. I think it is often underestimated. I know of certain church fellowships where the leaders never hang-out together in the Lord. It is monumentally displeasing to the Lord. It diminishes fruitfulness

and it is headed, if there is not change, for eventual disaster. Fellowship among spiritual leaders is just built-in to the way God does things.

Now having relationships within the church means having leaders that relate to the whole family of God in the local fellowship. [1 Peter 5:1-4](#) says, “The elders who are among you, I exhort.” That would be an elder, bishop, overseer, pastor. Peter is writing and he was also an apostle. He also functioned as an elder, pastor. He said, “I who am a fellow elder.” Part of Peter’s ministry was a pastoral and not just apostolic ministry—that is, a shepherding, feeding ministry. He continues, “And a witness of the sufferings of Christ and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed.” He is speaking to other shepherds or pastors.

[1 Peter 5:2](#) says, “Shepherd the flock of God.” In other words, pastor them or pasture them. Be an under-shepherd of the Chief Shepherd to them, verse 4. Care for them. Love them. Guide them. Guard them. Protect them. Help them to grow up. Feed them a healthy diet. “Shepherd the flock of God, which is among you, serving as overseers.” Here again, we see synonymous terms - elder, overseer, shepherd—just like in Acts 20. “Not by compulsion, but willingly.” You should not serve because you are forced to, coerced or think you have to; but willingly, because you want to. If we do not want to shepherd the flock of God, then God would have us doing something else. “Not for dishonest gain, but eagerly.” Your service is not done to get, but because you just cannot wait to get in there and give.

“Nor as being lords over those entrusted to you” ([1 Peter 5:3](#)). Do you know why some men want to be leaders or pastors? They love to exercise authority over people. They love to say, “do this” and people do it. Or they say, “don’t do that” and they do not do it. They are just high on power. We are to function as leaders not as being lords over those entrusted to us. Do you get the implication there? God has trusted these lives into our care. God has entrusted this Sunday school class to my leading. God has entrusted this nursery ministry to my leadership. God has entrusted these people to my pastoring. In other words, we are accountable to Him and we are not to “lord over” the Lord’s sheep. Let Him be the Lord. Let us just be servants in His name.

But being examples to the flock, not saying: “Do this, do that, and don’t do this,” but become that example. “Lord, make me what You are telling me to teach to Your sheep to be.” And then when the chief shepherd appears, and He is coming back for us, praise the Lord! It could be any time now. “And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.” These are not the glory days. Glory days are coming. We will all be glorifying Him in glorious splendor and blessing and privilege. Some day, if we will serve Him now, He will say to us, “Well done good and faithful servant” ([Matthew 25:21](#)). And that will probably be the most astounding thing we could ever have fall on our ears because we will know anything done was by His faithfully working in and through us.

C. S. Lewis wrote about this verse in Matthew 25. It is like the artist stepping back from the painting and saying, “Oh painting, you bless me. Good job.” “Lord, Lord, I am Your

handiwork.” And we will just give Him all the glory. You talk about a love relationship for eternity! He says to us, “Well done servant.” Praise the Lord!

Another leadership issue is equipping for ministry and leadership. Leaders are to equip others to serve. Leaders are to produce leaders. [Ephesians 4:11-12](#) says, “And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists and some pastors and teachers for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry for the edifying of the body of Christ.” God’s leaders are to be busy about outfitting all of God’s people for ministry. It is not that a few people are “in the Ministry” and all the rest of Christendom just partakes of their ministry. We are all called to the ministry. It is just different kinds of ministry and different positions. And the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastor/teachers, they are primarily to give themselves to outfitting the saints, the children of God, for the work of ministry. Why? So that the whole body might be built up as the whole body serves one another in the name of the Lord.

And then [2-Timothy 2:2](#) on this very issue of equipping for ministry and leadership says, “And the things which you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” This is the apostle Paul writing to Pastor Timothy. There is a good example here for all of us about being used to touch other lives and how we are to do that. Paul said, “I shared with you many things of God, commit these things to other faithful men who will take it and be able to teach it to others also” (cf. 2 Timothy 2:2). So we are to just keep receiving from God through others, and passing it on to those who will pass it on to others. That is how leadership is developed. Leaders should be equipping and raising-up other leaders.

Praise God for the example of Pastor Chuck Smith in this area. He faithfully passed on what God gave him to others that he realized would be faithful to pass it on to yet others. And now it has been going on for thirty years and it has been passed on and on to multiple generations spiritually in many parts of the world. That is exactly what God is ready to do with any life that is willing to have Him work to the extent that God wants to do it. The equipping for ministry and leadership is a very important leadership issue.

Here is another one from [2-Timothy 2:3](#) that relates to intensified spiritual warfare. Every Christian lives on a spiritual battlefield. The more we serve and lead, the more obvious it becomes that we are in a battle. Here is Timothy, now a pastor and he says, “You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.” We are all soldiers of the cross. We are all in a spiritual battle. The extent of our involvement in leadership does not matter, whenever we are used to touch other lives and lead people in God’s direction, the spiritual battle is intense. The stakes just get higher. Illustrative from a physical, literal, military band is the fact that the more responsibility in the battle, the greater the pressure and the impact of all of it. Every private on the battlefield knows he is at war. But you get men making decisions involving the lives of other men and then you get a general looking over of the whole thing and I mean the magnitude of the warfare is tremendous.

In the battles in the Old Testament sometimes they said, “Forget everybody else, just find the king and shoot at him.” Is there a parallel there, brother pastors? The whole church has enough hassles, let’s just aim at the pastor. Let’s all shoot at him from the hosts of hell. Listen, we wipe him out with one shot or one volley, we can get a whole gang maybe. It is inevitable that there is an intensifying of spiritual warfare when we take leadership positions. Leaders are on the frontlines of battle must endure hardship.

One brother who was appointed a head usher at our fellowship in Irvine, when I was still pastoring there, seemed quite helpful. He seemed to have a servant’s heart in many ways. And another brother was in charge of the ushering arena and he was a deacon. He said, “Let me appoint this one brother over the ushers.” And we prayed about him and I had a little hesitation. I thought it might be a little early, but yielded. And for a few weeks things were going fine. The man was just really enjoying it, you know. “God bless you. Good morning. Good to see you,” you know. “Can I help you here?”

Well, he called me on the phone about two or three weeks into his new ministry, just stirred of heart. “Pastor, this thing is not going right.”

“Well tell me, what’s going on?”

“I thought this was going to be fun. This is a hassle.”

“So, what happened?”

He told me that one of the ushers he was leading had kind of looked at him cross-eyed when he had asked the young man to be stationed in a certain place and do this particular thing. The young man was very young and he kind of took his own initiative on a few things and things got a little chaotic that Sunday morning. And when he mentioned it to the young man, he was doubly offended.

When we serve the Lord we are not signing up for the cake walk at the church picnic. We are signing up for more battle responsibility. Sure there is joy in serving the Lord. But this man thought it was just going to be fun and he had not faced the realities of the Word of God. Sure there is joy in serving the Lord. But also, you therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. The more we are willing to take up the cross during the battle, there will be that much more difficulty to deal with. That is not designed to be discouraging or depressing. It is to prepare us and to equip us.

You know we do not want to give literal soldiers helmets and guns and pretend that when they get out in the battlefield, there will be nothing but marshmallows and maybe a few deer to shoot at. You tell them, be ready to duck. They are going to be shooting back at you. And often in church ministry we are kind of coaxing people into helping take the load off of you. You will like this. This will be so much fun. You will be so glad I let you do this. Come on, you will love it. This is kind of a worldly sales pitch. We kind of talked them into it. And they kind of want to somehow be used of God. And they get out there and do it and the enemy comes at them with a spiritual machete. And they then come back to you saying, “You didn’t tell me... What is this?” Well, we should have told them that it will be a privilege to serve the Lord, but you are going to be startled at the battle flack you get.

And that kind of relates to the next one and that is, inevitable opposition. I entered into pastoral ministry with the illusion that no one would ever oppose anything I ever suggested or any direction I ever pointed. Boy, what a rude awakening! And I thought I knew the Bible. I mean, seminary taught it to me from cover to cover and made me get back into parts of it many other times. But I never noticed, and no one ever really pointed out specifically when God is calling to lead His people that there will be many other people out there who do not like that. Even some who you would never believe will end up opposing you.

[Exodus 16:1-3.](#)

“And they journeyed [the children of Israel] from Edom and all the congregation of the children of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin which is between Elam and Sinai on the fifteenth day of the second month after they departed from the land of Egypt, then the whole congregation of the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. And the children of Israel said to them, oh that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt when we sat by the pots of Mede and when we ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness this whole assembly with hunger.”

Boy, what a day for Moses and Aaron. Leadership had become a bummer. How wonderful to march out of Egypt. God is victorious. Hallelujah. Come, children. And two million marched together in the mighty army of God. Oh, it is great to serve God's people. Oh what a mighty God we serve. They were not out there very far and the whole congregation who had their groanings to heaven gloriously answered with mighty power and signs and wonders with a good man of God set before them, now the whole congregation is complaining. “You know, Egypt was not that bad—the onions, the leeks, the flesh pot. And all we've got is manna-burgers.”

Sometimes in ministry, it is like the whole congregation opposes you. Thank God that does not happen every day because it would just wipe you out. At times, even if it is not the whole church, it seems like it. You get five or six well-placed voices and the spiritual acoustics of it is like the whole congregation wants to go back from whence I led them. Listen brothers and sisters, if it happened to Moses, who do we think we are? “Oh, that will not happen to me.” Yeah, I thought that too.

In Numbers 16 Moses just kept leading, seeking God, and pressing on. The direction is the Promised Land. Finally they got there. But there were many changes on the way. These must be the rebellious chapters and verses. First Exodus 16 and now [Numbers 16:1-3](#)

“Now Korah, the son of Etsar, the son of Koath, the son of Levi, with Dathan and Abyrom, the sons of Eliab and Om the son of Pelah, the sons of Rueben, took man.” [Now some people are rallying some opposition.]
“And they rose up before Moses with some of the children of Israel, two

hundred and fifty leaders of the congregation [which was in the millions. So this is not like the whole congregation, but this is a pretty formidable opposition] representatives of the congregation, men of renown.”

So first we have the whole congregation in opposition, now we have just the other leaders in opposition.

“They gathered together against Moses and Aaron and said to them, you take too much upon yourselves for all the congregation is holy, every one of them and the Lord is among them. Why then do you exalt yourself above the assembly of the Lord?”

Why are you teaching and preaching? Why are you sitting on the board? This is nothing new brothers and sisters. This has been around since the flesh was on the earth. It is inevitable. God can work in our lives to where we less and less cause opposition and we take part in it less and less. But as long as there are the immature, the babes, the learning or the carnal or rebellious, it will be there. And there will be some of those until the kingdom comes.

How about this? [Matthew 16:2](#) shows us it is not just the congregation that was against Moses. Not just jealous, rebellious leaders against the leader. But Matthew 16:22 says, “Then Peter took Him [Jesus] aside and began to rebuke Him saying, far be it from You, Lord. This shall not happen to You.” Now think of the implications of this. We are talking about the Chief Shepherd Himself being opposed by one of the major early leaders of the early church. Who in fact, had just received and passed on one of the greatest insights from heaven yet given to man. “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. That is who You are, Jesus.” “Oh flesh and blood did not reveal that to you.” Well, flesh and blood did reveal this to him: “Oh no, You will never go to the cross!” Jesus says, “Get behind me, Satan. You are an offense to Me for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men” (cf. [Matthew 16:23](#)).

Sometimes even godly men working with us (and sadly even we) might be like Peter, opposing the work of God at a given time. It is part of leadership issues and that is why we always need to be led by the Spirit. The Father reveals the plan and the Lord Jesus is the incarnation of it for us to abide in and walk in and follow. Or we can have even godly men oppose us, who are seemingly in the will of God at times maybe, while God is still working in their lives. Or we might find out we got tripped up and we took something we learned of the flesh and the world and resisted something God is doing. It is a leadership issue that we need to be alerted to and be sensitive to.

Listen, if the congregation of jealous, rebellious leaders opposed Moses—and if Jesus Himself was opposed by some of His closest circle, we cannot be absolutely blown off the face of the earth if we find ourselves in the same place. Not that we want to cause it. Not that we are looking forward to it saying, “Yeah, I knew it was coming. Watch me deal with these clowns.” I mean we are not to have that attitude, but just be spiritually prepared and alert. Pray: “Lord, but for Your grace I could be a Peter talking You and

others out of Your will. I find someone I never dreamed would oppose me over something that is so clearly of You and yet it is happening.” It is one of the various leadership issues God wants us to be alert to, aware of, and asking Him to protect us from, but also guide us through.

Then the last principle: we are to be setting up the proper spiritual banner. Again, we are not talking about decorating the sanctuary. We are talking about spiritual ministry and the flag we fly as we serve God. [Psalm 20:5](#) says, “We will rejoice in Your salvation and in the name of our God we will set up our banners.” In the name of our God, we will set up our banners. We can praise God for His work in and His grace upon the Calvary Chapel fellowships that so many of us have been a part of over the years. And we give Him the glory and thank Him. We can even see that He has certain ways where He has worked as He wanted and men and leaders allowed Him to work. And God has used this ministry and extended it. But on the other hand, we cannot make Calvary Chapel our banner. We must set up our banner in the name of our God.

Oh, we went through this in the church I pastored in Dallas. We had seven years of “Camelot Community Church,” which rose from the ashes of two years at “Clone Community Church.” We had a couple of years of chaos, heart-breaking chaos, as schism and division struck this blessed land. It had to do with hyper-dispensationalism and hyper-charismania. And lo and behold, all of the extremists lived in our church. We had been so into love and unity and receiving and accepting, like [Romans 14:1](#) and not getting into doubtful disputations, that we had totally ignored some things that are right and wrong. We ignored some things that you cannot compromise on. You do not have to be mean, nasty, or self-righteous, but you must be true to the Word of God. We had not learned that lesson yet. But boy, when the lessons started coming, they were deep. Praise God what we learned has lasted and become critical in the subsequent eighteen years of ministry.

There were folks in our church who wanted to fly this banner. They said, “Bob, you are the pastor, you see the diversity in this church. It is too much for the unity. The base of unity is collapsing under all this diversity. You have to declare your cards. You have to fly your flag.” And the heavy dispensationalists insisted that there are no spiritual gifts now of any consequence and there are no great moves of the spirit. You know, they just kind of box God in. They reminded me: “This church started Dallas Seminary Bible Church and it has to remain one. It is the only future God has and you have to fly that flag.”

And then we had others who had come out of the Kenneth Hagin, Kenneth Copeland, and the Benny Hinn charismania arena. This is not to say that there was no love of God and that there were no souls saved. I am not saying that there was an absence totally of the kingdom at work, but there were just a lot of things that man brought in. And they needed to be purged and cleansed and brought back to the light and the truth of the Word of God. On the other hand they would come saying, “No, you cannot let that become... You saw how dead that was as a seminary Bible church. Here is the life. Here is the vitality. Here

is the kingdom now.” And you know, they were yanking and fussing and proselytizing each other. And that represented two significant groups.

Well, there was a big group, at least a third of the church, who did not want to fly either of those banners, including myself. My passion was to raise the banner of Jesus Christ and all be devoted to Him and His Word and let Him change all of us in conformity to His will and His way for that church. The opposition said, “Oh no, no. That’s crazy. That’s so idealistic. That’s impossible and anyway it’s wrong. You fly my banner, or you are wrong.” And oh, we had agony there.

I tell you the Lord taught us some deep lessons: that even though friendships change and that breaks your heart, and people come and go until you weep all night long and you get so helpless and pained that you think you are going to die. But nothing is worth flying any other banner than the name of our God. In the name of our God we will set up our banner. People want to pressure leaders to fly banners they like. We ought to all love to fly the banner of Jesus Christ. It is the name above all names.

Praise God that the Lord sorted it all out! That is a long story in itself and it required some awful dying that some day we might practically live again. And now many of us who went through that have been together for fifteen years. Even though we are in many different places in the church world and the geographic world, it is always right to stay true to the banner of Jesus Christ. It is always wrong to compromise even for good but lesser banners. And it is never right to even consider for a moment to shift to carnal religious banners.

In [Colossians 1:18](#), concerning setting up the proper spiritual banner it says, “And He [Jesus] is the head of the body, the church who is the beginning, the first-born from the dead that in all things He might have the preeminence.” We must give Jesus Christ first place in everything. Let His name be on the banner we fly spiritually over our lives and ministries.

And [Colossians 1:28](#) says, “Him we preach.” What is our message? That is our banner. What do we preach about? When we gather together are we on the Rock? These are the things we need to ask. If you say, “Oh when we are together, no body on earth ever cried or laughed like we did.” Well then maybe you should not be doing it, you know. Check it by the Word of God. Is it holy laughter or is it carnal, shallow frivolity? What banner are we flying anyway? We fly the banner of Jesus Christ. He must be our message. Him we preach. We are not preaching the greatest experience we ever had or hope some day we will have, or that sister so-and-so is having as she rolls through the church. We preach Him! Not come here, and you will really loosen up. No, come here, you will be set free by the truth of Jesus Christ. We preach Him. That is the banner we fly and it must be clear in our message.

Then last of all, [Colossians 3:17](#) says: “And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.” Personally, I thank God for the Calvary Chapel ministries and that of Pastor Chuck Smith, as well as

various other kinds of inter-denominational, non-rigid, non-legalistic ministries throughout the country and the world. But especially, I thank God for the Chapels and Pastor Chuck. But we don't live in the name of Pastor Chuck. And no one on earth would be more grieved over it than Pastor Chuck himself. Thank God for it. No single man, other than perhaps my own father, has had a greater spiritual impact on my own life, than him. I love him dearly. I appreciate him. I respect him. In many ways, I am in awe of him. But he is not our banner. He is not the name we live in. That would pervert the whole gospel. That would destroy what he has given his life for and what the Lord gave His life for.

We must set up the proper spiritual banner. That is one of the wonderful things God has done through the movement of these hundreds of fellowships that are across the country and now outside the country. It is based on a desire to exalt the Lord Jesus Christ in all things, walk in the reality and vitality and liberty of the Holy Spirit, and all of it on the solid rock of the path of the Word of God. May we just keep setting up the proper spiritual banner. It is a real challenge to leadership and the temptation to fly bad banners, and there are a lot of them being flown in the church world today. They range from rigid, dead legalism to just a charismaniac craziness, and there is temptation to fly those banners. But there is also the more subtle temptation, to fly the better banners, but the ones that could never be up on top of the flagpole where Jesus belongs. It is a critical issue in leadership.

Well, let's pray together.

Lord, on all these various issues You want us to be learning, so please be speaking to us and teaching us, Lord. Above all, we want to do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus and no other. Just in Your name and not in the name either of other fruitful, blessed, exemplary disciples. Protect us, Lord, in these manners. Lord, show us how to let You develop all these matters more and more we pray. Work them in and through our lives. Teach us how to hang out together in Jesus Christ. Teach us how to be servants. Teach us how to equip others. And teach us above all else, how to be faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ and everything that pertains to Him. Raise us up as leaders. Use us to raise-up others and may the leaders of the church of Jesus Christ in this day and age become increasingly mighty in the Spirit as declared by the light and truth of the Word of God. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

BY

Calvary Chapel Outreach Fellowship

Lesson 7

Know Your Calling

By

Chuck Smith

Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa

Brought to you by:

The Blue Letter Bible Institute

www.blbi.org

A ministry of:

The Blue Letter Bible

www.blueletterbible.org

Servant Leadership – Lesson 7
Know Your Calling by Chuck Smith

1

Father, how thankful we are that we have this opportunity of gathering together to spend this time with You and with one another. John said that he wrote that they might have fellowship with us, and truly, our fellowship is with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ. As we gather together we want to acknowledge the lordship of Jesus Christ in our lives and over the church. We recognize that Christ is the head of the church. We look to the Holy Spirit for the guiding and directing of the church's ministry and activities. Lord, what a privilege and blessing it is for us to be instruments through whom You can accomplish Your purposes.

And so Lord, again today, afresh and anew, we want to present our bodies to You as living sacrifices. We want to yield our members to You as instruments of righteousness. Lord, we want You to know that we love You and because of our love for You, we want to serve You. Lord that same desire and commitment that we felt in the beginning is still there in our hearts today. Lord, as with Peter, we have no place to turn because You have the words of life. And so Lord, we thank You and we praise You that You have counted us worthy of the ministry. We thank You, Lord, that we can enter into that area of ministry to which You have called us, realizing that it is necessary for the steward to be faithful. Lord, help us to be faithful to the ministry that You have given to us.

Now Lord, bless this time that we share together. Let the Word of God dwell in our hearts richly through faith, and help us, Lord, with all the saints, to be able to comprehend the length, the breadth, the depth, the height of Your love for us as You reveal it to us during this time that we share together. Lord, we want to just commit this whole thing to You. We have an agenda, but if You have a different one, Lord, just toss ours out and do Your work in our midst while we are here. Lord, we have gathered to honor You and to hear from You what the Spirit would say to the churches in these days. We are looking to You for the guidance and the direction of our ministries. In Jesus' name. Amen.

What we plan to do in the sessions here is to look at the ministry through the book of Nehemiah. We will discover in Nehemiah, instruction on the building of the church and the work of the ministry. I noticed that I have been given the title, "The Burden for the Ministry" and I will be talking about that because I think that there is a very close tie between the burden for the ministry and the call to the ministry. In talking about any ministry at all, the first thing on the agenda is whether you are called to the ministry. It is important that you have a true calling to the ministry.

Paul, in the opening of his various epistles, makes mention that he is "called to be an apostle by the will of God." In one of the epistles he declares, "I am an apostle by the commandment of God" ([1 Timothy 1:1](#)). He knew his calling was that of being an apostle. He knew that that was the will of God for him.

The most difficult and frustrating thing in all the world is trying to be something that God has not made you, or trying to do the ministry without a call. There are many people who are in the ministry today because someone has said to them, “Oh, you would make a great minister.” That planted a bug in their ear and they thought, “Hmm, maybe I should be in the ministry.” There are men in the ministry today because they were not happy in the work that they were doing. They felt that they could be happy in the ministry.

Now there are many different ministries within the church. Paul was called to be an apostle by the will of God, but even Paul said, “Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all evangelists? Are all pastor/teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all speak in tongues?” ([1 Corinthians 12:29-30](#)). He recognized that there are different callings as far as the ministry is concerned. God has set into the church, first of all apostles, then the prophets, then the evangelists, and the pastor/teachers, for the perfecting of the saints for the work of the ministry (cf. [Ephesians 4:11-12](#)).

It is not only important that I am called to the ministry, but that I know what my calling is in the ministry. Has God called you to be an evangelist? Has God called you to be a prophet? Has God called you to be a pastor/teacher? What is your calling in the ministry?

We are told, concerning the calling and the gifts of the Spirit, “that it is the Holy Spirit who divides to each man severally as He wills” (cf. [1 Corinthians 12:11](#)). Our calling is not something that is by the will of man, but by the will of God. I cannot determine what I am going to be for the Lord. I cannot determine what ministry I am going to have and then learn how to minister.

I think that we make a real mistake in thinking that we can teach people how to heal or we can teach people how to be a prophet and go through the various degrees of prophetic proficiency. I thoroughly reject prophets of the fourth order, who have a partial percentage of prophecy coming to pass. Prophets of the third order are accurate about fifty percent of the time. Prophets of the second order get about seventy-five percent right. Prophets of the first order they claim have become infallible. I do not read of that anywhere in the Scripture, nor do I read that you should just say whatever comes into your head and see if it comes to pass. I do not think you can be taught how to be a prophet. I do not think you can be taught how to be an evangelist or how to be a minister. I think you have to be called.

Now, once called, then I believe that you can enhance yourself for that calling through study. The calling is essential—without the calling you are spinning your wheels. We have to know the call of God upon our hearts.

The question concerning the call of the ministry is: Have you been called? Do you know what your ministry gift is? I speak out of personal experience because for years I felt the call to the ministry but I did not know what my calling was. I knew I was called of God to the ministry but I did not realize that there are many different ministries. Because evangelism was the chief thrust of the group that I was associated with, I sought to be an evangelist. I was totally unsuccessful as an evangelist. My churches that I pastored suffered greatly as the result of my desire to be evangelistic when I was not called as an evangelist in the body of Christ. In fact my book, *Charisma vs. Charismania*, was dedicated to the people I pastored in the early years of ministry. I apologized to them and thanked them for bearing with me during the frustrations of the early years of the pastorate. I was trying to be something that God did not make me. I was frustrated in it and these blessed, dear saints put up with my frustrations. It was years down the road in the ministry when I realized my calling in the ministry was that of a pastor/teacher and I began to fulfill my calling as a pastor/teacher.

Now the interesting thing is that when I began to fulfill my calling as a pastor/teacher, I was no longer frustrated in the ministry. No longer was it a pressure or a push; it became a blessing.

You feel called to the ministry and that is good. What is your calling? What has God gifted you to be? You need to get a little more specific than just, “I am called to the ministry.” Everybody is called to the ministry. What are you called to do in the ministry? We are all called to be servants of Jesus.

He has called me to be a pastor/teacher. Now the interesting thing is that when I did begin to fulfill my calling as a pastor/teacher, I began to see evangelistic results through the ministry. I began to see hundreds, thousands of people coming to Jesus Christ. I had the privilege and continue to have the privilege of baptizing hundreds of people, though I disclaim being an evangelist. That is not my calling. My calling is a pastor/teacher.

Know your calling. There are fellows whom God has called to be evangelists, and they are having a struggle being pastors and teachers. Now I do believe they can be combined. I think that Greg Laurie does a great job of combining those gifts. Mike MacIntosh does a great job of combining them. I think that both of these guys have evangelism on the heart. At a drop of a hat, they will go over to Africa or any place else if there is a chance to preach to a crowd. Evangelism is part of their being and it is their calling. I recognize that. And yet they are able also to be pastors and teachers. I think that is wonderful.

It could be that God does give crossover networks in the calling that a man can have. “He divides to each man severally as He wills” ([1 Corinthians 12:11](#)). It does not mean that you just have one gift. You can have a multiplicity of gifts and a capacity in many areas. I feel completely out of place trying to be an evangelist. That is one of the most difficult things in the world for me. I quit trying. I used to accept invitations to go and speak at big rallies and I absolutely hated it. I was uncomfortable. I knew going in that they were going to be disappointed. I knew they wanted to get all hyped-up and excited. They wanted the kids to all go marching out of there looking for someone to collar so they could witness to them about their need for the Lord. I knew that this was what they were looking for and I am not that type. That is just not my ministry. Now there are many other men who can go in and do it, but that was not my gift. Know your place. Know your calling.

How do you know the call of God? The glorious thing about the Lord, and the thing I love so much is that there are diversities of gifts and there are diversities of operations but there is one Lord, one Spirit (cf. [1 Corinthians 12:4–6](#)). And God does not get locked into a pattern. We are so often trying to lock God in or we want to formulate God. Be careful of spiritual formulas because God will not be confined to just one method or one way of accomplishing His purposes. Here is a true formula—most of the disciples were called by just an invitation from the Lord. “Come, follow Me,” Jesus said to Peter and John as they were mending their nets. “Come, follow Me. I will make you fishers of men” ([Matthew 4:19](#)). To Matthew, sitting at the receipt of customs, the Lord said, “Come, follow Me” ([Matthew 9:9](#)). Your calling to the ministry can be unexciting—if you want to call that unexciting. To me it is very exciting. Jesus said, “Hey, follow Me.” That is an exciting thing but there may not be any big kind of emotional experience, just the call of the Lord—“Come and follow Me.”

Paul the Apostle had a little more exciting experience in [Acts 22:11](#). There was a bright light, brighter than the noonday sun, and there lying on the ground, he got his calling. That was an exciting calling, no doubt. There are some people who speak of their call to the ministry and they have had visions. Some have seen fire in the sky and different things, and that is fine. That is

good. I do not discount that at all. I think it is wonderful. There are other people whose calling is no more than just a burden, a heavy burden that the Lord has placed upon their heart to do a particular work for Him.

My calling was quite unique, as I believe they all are. There were no lights. There was no bright light from heaven. There was no falling on the ground. There was no handwriting on the wall. It was just simple logic. My ambition and desire was to be a neurosurgeon. I was taking courses to prepare me for the fulfillment of that ambition. And at a time in just seeking the Lord and seeking the fullness of the Spirit in my life, the Lord impressed me with the thought; “You can go ahead and become a neurosurgeon. You can tie off the aneurysms and so forth and help people physically, but at best it will be temporary. They are going to die, ultimately. There is a deadly malady that has struck mankind and it is fatal and permanent. That is the malady of sin. So in healing men’s bodies, at best it will be a temporal healing. In the healing of men’s souls, it will be eternal. Do you want to invest your life in something that is temporary or something that is eternal?” Those were the thoughts that came to my heart while I was praying. And I said, “Lord, I want to invest my life in something that is eternal.”

A fellow made this statement: “You have only one life. It will soon be past and only what is done for Christ will last.” That hit me hard. And from that, this logic came. I have only one life to live. It is short at best. And from my life, the only things that are going to last are those things that I do for Jesus Christ. And so, that was my call to the ministry. As I said, it took me a long time to define just what God had called me to do. I spent years struggling with the second part.

I had a burden for people. I had a burden to share with people. I had seen abuses in the ministry and I was troubled by many things that I saw. I saw a heavy emphasis placed upon money by so many of the evangelists. It was there that I developed my first proverb: “If God guides, God provides.” I made a covenant with God that I would never make money an issue in the ministry. I would never ask people to give. I would trust God to guide and if He did guide I knew He would provide. And if He did not provide, then I figured He was not guiding. It was that simple. I figured that God was not dependent upon man; man was dependent upon God. I would never represent God as being on the verge of bankruptcy or ready to go to the poor house unless people would come in and bail Him out.

I wanted to be a minister who people could identify with and not think of as some holy person that is untouchable, but a very normal person just like them. I did not want to put myself on any kind of a pedestal before the people. I had seen too many men fall from pedestals. I wanted to just be me and to be natural. I did not want to try to be something that was unnatural to me—though I did fall into that category of trying to be an evangelist, which was not me. Wearing suits really is not me. Obviously, it is not you either and that makes it comfortable.

I am saying what is right for me, may not be right for the next guy. God made us all as individuals. God calls us not as a mob, but He calls us as separate individuals. God relates to us in an individual way, according to our temperament and our nature. One of the glorious things that I love about God is that He relates to us where we are and how we are, and then He seeks to conform us into the image of Jesus Christ. So it is God who gave me a burden for the ministry.

At this point I would like you to turn with me to [Nehemiah 1:2-3](#). Nehemiah says that certain men of Judah, some of his brethren, had come back from Jerusalem. He said,

I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped which were left of the captivity and I asked them about Jerusalem. And they

said unto me, “The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire.” (Nehemiah 1:2-3, KJV)

They told them of the sad and tragic condition. The people were greatly afflicted and discouraged. They were under pressure, duress, and strain. The walls of the city were destroyed and the gates were burned with fire.

And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven. ([Nehemiah 1:4](#), KJV)

Hearing the need, hearing the condition, Nehemiah’s heart was touched. He had a tremendous burden for the people. This burden that he had constituted the call of God upon his heart to do something about it. He was weeping. He mourned for days. He fasted. He prayed. Note that he was not thinking about himself. It was not searching for a job. It was not, “Well, I wonder if I belong in the ministry. I think maybe I would like to be a minister.” It was such a deep burden and concern for these people and their needs that it was ripping him up inside. He could not think about them without weeping. He was being torn because of the report that he had received. He said, “I was praying night and day.” Nehemiah was mourning, fasting, and praying.

That is the basis for the ministry—to have such a burden for the need that you weep, that you mourn, that you fast, and that you pray. It is not, “Well, I got fired from my job. I was not really crazy about it anyhow and I am not very happy. Maybe I would be happier in the ministry.” Nehemiah’s call was not like that at all. It was not directed towards himself. “I think I want to be in the ministry. That looks like a good profession.” It was, “Oh there is a need. God, help those poor people. Oh God, You have promised that if Your people would turn back to You, You would bring them back into the land and You would bless them there. Lord, they are in need of Your help.”

No doubt Nehemiah had watched Ezra. About fourteen years earlier, Ezra had taken some priests and some people to go back and encourage those who were in the land. It had been almost ninety years since the first expedition went back from the Babylonian captivity. Zerubbabel, Jeshua and other fellows rebuilt the temple. Haggai was encouraging them and yet the people had become discouraged. They had forsaken the temple. They had started putting together their own little houses. You remember Haggai rebuked them and said, “Is it time for you to forsake the house of God while you are giving yourself to your own places?” He said, “This is why you are not being blessed. This is why you are not prospering. You are not putting God first. You are putting your own interests and desires first” (cf. [Haggai 1:1-11](#)). And let me tell you that it will always stop the blessing of God from your life or from your ministry.

Nehemiah was probably there to wave good-bye to Ezra. He had collected a lot of money and he had the commandments of the king to give to the governors who were harassing the people. So Nehemiah and the priests were going to join them, seeking to bring some kind of a spiritual renewal.

Now fourteen years later he asks them, “How is it going?” They tell him, “Nehemiah, it is a mess. The enemy comes in and harasses the people. They do not have walls to protect them. The people are so discouraged and so demoralized. It is not a pleasant place. It is just really a place of misery.

The people are just sort of surviving as best they can.” And it was more than he could bear. He had such a great burden that Nehemiah began to weep and mourn.

How great of a burden do you have for the people that you are ministering to? How long has it been since you have wept over the people and over the condition of the church? I have seen many pastors get angry at their sheep. I have heard them say cutting things to their sheep. I have seen them whip the sheep. I have watched them as they have used the rod against the sheep because perhaps they were saying something negative about the pastor. He got word of it and he used the pulpit for exercising his rod. But I have rarely seen pastors weep over the sad plight of the sheep. We have become reactors. We react to the criticism. We react to the strain of the sheep. Our reaction should be in prayer, weeping, with hearts broken.

What was the reaction of Jesus when He saw the people who were just sort of wandering as sheep without a shepherd? They were going astray. What was His reaction? “And being moved with great compassion towards them...” ([Matthew 9:36](#)). That is the reaction of the true shepherd.

Nehemiah mourned for days. The burden was so heavy on his heart that it just would not leave. And then he fasted and he prayed. Though it does not declare it, yet it surely is inferred in the whole context, that his prayer was the offering of himself as an instrument that God might use. His desire was that he might go to Jerusalem and head up a group of people to rebuild the walls. This is his prayer, basically, as it is recorded for us in [Nehemiah 1:3-11](#).

It is interesting to me that so many times the major part of our prayers is just straight petitions. “Oh God, this is what I need today.” And I have my list out and I lay out my petition. It is also interesting to note that in the Bible, personal petitions really come way later in the prayer, usually toward the end. They do not really form the bulk or the major part of the prayer.

So Nehemiah, as he is praying, says,

You are the God that keeps covenants and mercy to those that love You and observe Your commandments. Now I ask You, Lord, to listen to me, because I have been praying day and night for the children of Israel. I confess their sins. What they have is what was coming. I am not challenging or questioning the justice of God in this. Lord, we have all sinned. We are guilty. And You even said to Moses that, if the people would forsake You that they would be scattered. We are wrong. We are guilty. We were dispersed and You were faithful. You keep Your covenant and that is a part of the covenant that You made. And You are faithful God. But You also said that if they would turn and begin to keep Your commandments and do them, though they were cast out to the uttermost parts of the earth, You would bring them back into the place that You have chosen to set Your name. Now, I want You to remember, Lord, these are Your servants. They are Your people whom You redeemed with Your great power and by Your strong hand. (cf. Nehemiah 1:3-10)

And now he finally gets to the petition. The rest of it is just talking to God about the faithfulness of God but now he gets to it.

Servant Leadership – Lesson 7
Know Your Calling by Chuck Smith

7

Oh Lord, I beseech Thee, let now Your ear be attentive to my prayer, to the prayer of Your servant, the prayer of Thy servants who desire and who fear Thy name. [And this is the prayer:] Prosper, I pray Thee, Thy servant this day by granting him mercy in the sight of the king. (cf. [Nehemiah 1:11](#))

That is all he prayed. “God, give me mercy in the sight of the king because I was the king’s cup bearer.”

Now when the king observed his sad countenance and said, “What is wrong?” Nehemiah was sort of taken by surprise. He did not know that what he was feeling was showing. It was not good, it was not healthy to be sad in front of the king. And so when the king said, “What is your problem?” Nehemiah threw up a quick prayer and then he asked the king for permission to go back. That is the whole burden that he had. “I want to go back and help get this thing going.”

Now at that time and at that point, Jerusalem was not the most desirable place in the world to live. I am always sort of amazed and shocked at the requirements that many people have for entering into the ministry. “It must be somewhere in the Sunbelt, Lord. I need a housing allowance and a car allowance. And I think my salary should be commensurate with the industry standard. For if I were a chief executive in an industry, then I would be making so much, and thus my salary should be commensurate.” Well, I advise you to go get a job in industry and tithe to the church.

Nehemiah was willing to leave the comfort and the luxury of the Persian court, to make the long and arduous journey back to Jerusalem and put up with the primitive and dangerous conditions that existed there, in order to help these poor people of God. He was that burdened for them. He was willing to go and to share with them. It is like he said, “I sat where they sat.” He was willing to do that.

No sacrifice is too great if God will just use me. It is sad and tragic how a little comfort and a little success can spoil us. “Yes, I will be glad to come and minister to your people. I require three motel suites with cable TV and a swimming pool. I will need a rented car, preferably a Lincoln Town Car and please arrange to have the food catered to the rooms. I will do no meetings Wednesday night because HBO is having a movie on that I have been wanting to see for a long time.” Well, you would be better off to go do your act at a nightclub and forget the ministry. I resent it when these music groups or others write and give me the list of requirements. Whenever that happens I always write back and say, “Well, unfortunately we are not able to go ahead with your meetings here.” I cancel them. I will not have them if they cannot come on faith. I am not going to starve anybody and I have never starved anybody. I have no intention of ever doing that. But when you start making demands, I am just independent enough to say, “Hey, go fly your kite someplace else, man.”

When you have the true call of God and the burden of the ministry on your heart, you do not care where it is. It can be up in upstate Michigan where it gets cold in the winter. The burden for the ministry becomes such a heavy thing that you can relate to what Paul the Apostle said: “Woe is me if I preach not this gospel of Jesus Christ” ([1 Corinthians 9:16](#)).

Now let me say that there are a lot of fellows in the ministry who should not be. The Bible encourages us to examine ourselves. “For if we judge ourselves we will not be judged of God” ([1 Corinthians 11:31](#)). Take a look at your own life. Take a look at your own ministry. Let the Holy Spirit really search your heart. As David, pray: “Lord, search my heart. Know me. Try me, Oh Lord. See what is there. My heart is deceitful and desperately wicked. Who can know it? God,

Servant Leadership – Lesson 7
Know Your Calling by Chuck Smith

8

Thou knowest the hearts. Thou searchest the reins. Search me, O God. Reveal to me, Lord, my motives. Lord, if my burden has somehow slackened, if other things have sort of crowded into my life and I am no longer excited and thrilled about the ministry, I no longer have that heavy burden, I am no longer weeping over the needs of the people, I am no longer spending nights and days in prayer, mourning, fasting, waiting on God, but my life and my schedule have become routine, then God, help me either to be revived or to give the people a break and get out.”

The call of God is essential for the ministry. It says in [2 Peter 1:10](#) to “make your calling and election sure.” In context, I am certain it is talking about salvation there, yet I think that it is important that we make our calling sure. Do I still feel called to the ministry today? Am I still burdened over the needs that are there? Am I willing to make any sacrifice necessary in a personal way in order to fulfill the calling and the burden on my heart?

Father, we thank You for this opportunity of gathering and looking at our ministries and being better equipped to fulfill Your calling upon our hearts. Lord, we pray for a fresh vision, a fresh burden, a fresh calling of God, and a certainty in our hearts that we are where You would have us to be and doing what You want us to do. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

BY

Calvary Chapel Outreach Fellowship

Lesson 8 **What is Revival?**

By

Chuck Smith

Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa

Brought to you by:

The Blue Letter Bible Institute

www.blbi.org

A ministry of:

The Blue Letter Bible

www.blueletterbible.org

When Nehemiah heard of the condition that existed in Jerusalem from those who had come back to Persia, he was very grieved. He heard how demoralized the people were. The wall was broken down, the enemies were attacking them, and the people were greatly discouraged. So Nehemiah prayed, he fasted, and he mourned. Then as he was bearing the cup to the king, the king observed that there was something wrong and he questioned Nehemiah. Nehemiah was sort of shook-up that the king would observe that his countenance was not bright and happy. He said, “How can I be happy when the city of my people is in ruins? The walls are destroyed.” The king asked him what his desire was, and Nehemiah said, “Well, I would love to go back and lead the people in the rebuilding of the wall.” The king said, “How long will you be gone?” He gave him an estimate of time that he felt it would take to get things restored. Nehemiah said, “Perhaps it will take twelve years.” The king gave him the papers, appointed him governor over the land, and sent him back that he might oversee the job of the rebuilding of the walls, which went rather fast. He remained in Jerusalem for a period of time to establish the leadership among the people.

We read that when they rebuilt the walls, it was a time of great rejoicing. It was a time of spiritual uplifting. In the last few lessons we have had in Nehemiah, we have seen this revival. We have seen this excitement among the people as God has been working. And there was great rejoicing. The people got into the Word of God again and in the Word they saw so many things. There was first conviction, as they were reading the words the people began to weep before the Lord with a consciousness of their sin. Then the priest said, “Do not weep. This is a day unto the Lord. It should be a day of rejoicing” (cf. [Nehemiah 8:9](#)). And the people made the renewal of their commitment to God.

Evidently the king liked Nehemiah very much. Nehemiah felt honor-bound to return to Persia because he had told the king he would be away for a specific period of time. No doubt Nehemiah had been reporting to Artaxerxes the success of the mission and all; yet having been to Jerusalem, his heart was in Jerusalem. He remained with the king for certain days, but no doubt he requested to be able to go back and just remain in Jerusalem. His heart was not there in Persia.

When he got back to Jerusalem, he met with some very unsavory conditions. The people had quickly turned from their excitement that they had felt for the Lord. Do not mistake religious excitement for true revival. Often during a time of special emphasis people can get all excited. It is the continuing work that I am interested in, not how many came forward during a meeting. A year later how many are still going on with the Lord? That is where the true measure of a revival is discovered. It is not in the excitement of the meeting itself, but in the lasting fruit.

Jesus said to His disciples,

You have not chosen Me but I have chosen you and ordained you that you should be My disciples, and that you should bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain. (cf. [John 15:16](#))

The lasting fruit of the ministry is what is important. And that is really what thrills me when I am gathered with you because God has worked marvelously in our midst. No one can deny that. This is an exciting move and work of God. But if the Lord tarries, one of these days I am going to be blessed and the Lord is going to keep His promise to me. He said,

If I go away I will come again and receive you unto Myself, that where I am, there you may be also. ([John 14:3](#))

The Lord is going to keep that promise to me.

Dr. Orr was a walking encyclopedia on revival. This man could just start at any date in history, and tell you what the Lord was doing. He was very interested in what God was doing at Calvary Chapel because revival was his thing. We had many wonderful times together. He would say, “Chuck, what are you doing to perpetuate this? There are so many revivals that spring up, but when that instrument that God has used passes on, then so many times things just sort of slough off. What have you done to perpetuate this?” I said, “Well, it is the training of the young men.” And I can go and rest in peace tonight. If the Lord should say, “Okay Chuck, it is time to come home,” I could go tonight and be at perfect peace that the work of God is going to continue. That it is lasting truth of men who have caught the vision of the teaching of the Word, and have gone out and have established work upon the Word of God. I know that the fruit is lasting fruit because it has been built upon the Word. They have caught the vision and they are continuing to follow the model of just teaching God’s Word to the hungry hearts of His people.

When Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem it was a great disappointment. Nehemiah 13 tells us of some of the conditions that he discovered. The problem is that a corrupted priesthood means spiritual decline. Eliashib, the high priest, had oversight of the temple. He had prepared for Tobiah (of all people) a great chamber which used to be one of the big storehouses in the temple. He refurbished it, remodeled it, and made a lovely chamber for Tobiah! Tobiah was the man who was angry when Nehemiah came because he was one who was seeking the good of the people of God. Tobiah was the one who said concerning the wall, as they started to build it, “If a little fox would go up against it, he could knock it down.” He was the one who, by ridicule, was seeking to discourage the people. Tobiah was one of those in the conspiracy to kill Nehemiah. Now here he is comfortably quartered right in the temple itself, as an accommodation to him by Eliashib.

Nehemiah explains in [Nehemiah 13:6](#), this all happened because he was not around. He had gone back to Artaxerxes.

I came to Jerusalem and I understood of the evil that Eliasheb had done for Tobiah in preparing him a chamber in the courts of the house of God. And it grieved me sore; therefore I cast him out with all of his household stuff. (cf. [Nehemiah 13:7-8](#))

He took the furniture and everything and tossed the whole thing out. He tossed Tobiah out on his ear. Sometimes situations call for drastic action among the people. And there was a need here for drastic, decisive, immediate action.

Now what was the problem? People can be all excited, returning back to the celebration of the feast, worshipping God, weeping before God, fasting, praying, and then how is it that so quickly they can just return back to the old ruts that they were in? Sometimes they even become worse. [Nehemiah 13:1-3](#) perhaps gives to us a hint or an indication of what the problem was. It tells us that they discovered in the law of Moses that God had said that the Ammonites were never to come into the temple of God. When the children of Israel were passing through their land in their journey to the Promised Land, they did not come out to help them, but stood against them. And so God ordered that they were not allowed to come into the temple of God forever.

What had happened is that the people had begun to intermarry with those from Ashdod, those from Amman, and those from Moab, so that the kids were sort of half-breeds. They were speaking half the language of Ashdod and half the language of the Jews. They were what were called “the mixed multitude.”

We find in the book of Exodus that when the children of Israel came out of Egypt, there came with them a mixed multitude from Egypt. We read in the book of Numbers that as they were there in the wilderness, the mixed multitude began to lust after the things of Egypt. They began to cry and complain. They said, “We are sick of this bland, yucky manna. Manna for breakfast. Manna for lunch. Manna for dinner. We don’t even have any garlic or onions to cook it with. We are sick of it!” They began to mourn for the garlic, the leeks, and the onions of the flesh pots of Egypt. They cried, “Oh, remember those delicious onions. Man, what I would not give for an onion now.” It spread throughout the camp of Israel, and they began to murmur and complain against the Lord. God began to plague them. It was the mixed multitude who fell to lusting after the flesh.

In our churches, we have a mixed multitude who are mixed with the people of God. You know that it is true. You have those people in your church who are dedicated and committed to following Jesus Christ. They are full on. They are ready to go. They are eager and wanting to just have more and more of the Lord. They just cannot seem to get enough.

But then there is also that mixed multitude who are lusting after the flesh. They are there on Sunday mornings unless there is something better to do. On Superbowl Sunday you are not apt to find them, or on especially sunny days, or on rainy days. It takes just a special kind of day in order for them to come to church. The mixed multitudes have a detrimental effect upon the whole body because they are the ones who complain. “Can’t we have more entertainment? Can’t we have more parties? All you want to do is study the Word and that is not very exciting. Don’t you find that sort of bland sometimes? We need some excitement. Let’s get a prophet here who can call out our names.” The mixed multitudes are always a problem that has to be dealt with.

Do not let the mixed multitude hold back the people. Do not cater to them. Minister to those who want to go on with the Lord, and if the mixed multitude happens to fall away, rejoice! God often subtracts in order that He may multiply.

Tobiah was an enemy of the work of God, comfortably quartered in the temple of God. That just seems to be totally incongruous.

Another problem is shown in [Nehemiah 13:10](#). Nehemiah said,

I perceive that the portions for the Levites had not been given to them; for the Levites and the singers that had done the work had fled every one to his field.

In other words, the people had quit tithing. They had quit supporting the work of God. Now before he left they had set up the singers again like they had in the times of David and Asaph. They had set up the order of the priests and everything was functioning and going great. Nehemiah thought, “Oh, it is all fine. I can take off for a while and go back to Persia. It would be nice to see the king. The king loves me so much. I get a lot of perks back there in Persia. I will go back to Persia for a while.” And he went back, but when he returned, the whole thing had just deteriorated. It has gone to pot. The priests and the singers that had all been established and set in order were all back again working in their fields because they had to survive. The priests had their own property and would work their fields and come and spend some time doing the priesthood. They had to forsake the ministry of the temple in order to survive, and they were back in their fields.

So Nehemiah said, “I called the rulers and I contended with them.”

We have company that takes care of our arrangements when we are in Israel. They take care of all our hotels and the buses. That is their responsibility. And this one gal, Anna, who works for the company over there, is always telling us about the problem that she has with these hotel managers who are wanting to cut corners or whatever. She says, “I fight with him.” She is always talking about how she is fighting with them.

That word “contend” is the same thing as fight.

I contended—[or fought]—with them, and I said, “Why is the house of God forsaken?” I gathered them together and I set them in their place. Then brought all of Judah the tithes of their corn, the new wine, the new oil, the treasures. ([Nehemiah 13:11-12](#))

He rebuked them and got things going again. And the tribe of Judah began to bring again their tithes. He made the treasurers over those treasuries. He put faithful men in the office of distributing of the goods to their brethren.

Nehemiah saw another problem.

In those days I saw in Judah some who were treading their wine presses on the Sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and loading down their donkeys with wine, grapes, figs, and all manner of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. And I testified against them in the day wherein they sold the victuals. ([Nehemiah 13:15](#))

He saw people bearing burdens on the Sabbath day, weighing down their little donkeys with wares, treading the wine presses.

Mark Martin has done a series of tapes on the covenant. If any of you have people who are Seventh Day Adventists or others who are hung up on the seventh day worship, I would recommend that you get these tapes. They are masterful. They are outstanding. Coming from his background, understanding the position of the Seventh Day Adventist and having been freed, he has done a masterful job on this subject. He deals with the covenants that God has established with man. In every covenant that God has established with man, God has had a sign of that covenant. He established a covenant with Noah. What was the sign of the covenant? It was the rainbow. He had established a covenant with Israel. He gave them the law. “You keep this law, I will be your God, and you will be My people.” Now what was the sign of the covenant? The sign was keeping the Sabbath day. You can read it in Exodus, keeping the Sabbath day was the sign of the covenant with Israel throughout all their generations. He made a new covenant with us through Jesus Christ. What is the sign? It is the cup, the blood of Christ. A new covenant in My blood, shed for the remission of sins” (cf. [Matthew 26:28](#)).

Keeping the Sabbath day was a sign of God’s covenant with the people. The fact that they violated the Sabbath then was indicative of a broken covenant. They had broken the covenant of God by treading out the grapes, loading down the donkeys, and bringing in the wares on the Sabbath day. He testified against them and said, “Stop that now! You are not going to do it again.”

Now there were men from Tyre that were around there, who brought fish and all manner of wares, and they sold these on the

Servant Leadership – Lesson 8
What is Revival? by Chuck Smith

5

Sabbath day to the children of Judah in Jerusalem. So I fought with the nobles of Judah and I said to them, “What evil thing is this that you do? You profane the Sabbath day.” (cf. [Nehemiah 13:16-17](#))

He got back, he found things in a mess, and jumped right into the middle of it, started grabbing everybody and dealing with the issue. He said, “Do you not realize that your fathers did the same things and because they did, they brought on all of this evil and their captivity? The whole problem came out of this kind of stuff. Didn’t you learn? Don’t you know? What is wrong with you guys?” And he contended with them over these things.

So he ordered them to keep the gates closed until the Sabbath day is over. “Do not open the gates. We are not going to have any kind of traffic going in and out of the gates of Jerusalem. Keep them closed until the Sabbath day is over” (cf. [Nehemiah 13:19](#)).

Now, the merchants and the fellows with all these kinds of goods, just sort of stayed outside of the city of Jerusalem one or two Sabbaths after he had ordered the gate closed. And so he said,

I went out and I testified to them and I said, “Why do you lodge here around the wall? If you do it again I am going to lay my hands on you. [I am going to beat you up, man.] (cf. [Nehemiah 13:21](#))

Evidently he really seemed serious to them, because they quit coming. They knew that this guy meant business. Then he commanded the Levites that they should cleanse themselves, that they should come and make sure that the gates were closed, so that the Sabbath day would be kept holy.

It is amazing that all these problems could arise in so short a time. Nehemiah notices another problem.

In those days also, I saw Jews that had married wives of Ashdod and Ammon and Moab. Their children spoke half the speech of Ashdod. They could not speak in the Jews’ language but they were speaking according to the language of each group: Moabite, Ammonite and so forth. [This really got him upset.] I fought with them, I cursed them, I hit certain of them, I plucked off their hair, and I made them swear by God that they would not give their daughters or their sons to the other nationalities, nor would they take daughters or sons from them for their own children. (cf. [Nehemiah 13:23-25](#))

He made them swear and had them by the hair of the head. “Promise me you are not going to do it!” He yanked their hair out. “Promise me!” Boy, I would love to take action like Nehemiah sometimes. I think that there is a time for righteous indignation. Surely Jesus was indignant when He came into the temple and saw how they had made a profit in the temple courts by selling the oxen and the sheep. He made a scourge out of cords and He began to drive them out, overturning their tables, rebuking them.

I think that sometimes we are a little too soft, a little too weak in making a very firm stand against evil that exists within the church. I think sometimes we have to be very stern with people. There

have been people who have disturbed services here and we have told them, “If you come on the grounds again and we see you on the grounds, we are calling the police immediately.” And when they come on the grounds again, we have called the police immediately and we have held them, some of them by force, until the police got here. Some people only seem to understand force.

A man came to my door when our oldest child was just a little girl. The fellow declared that he was Elijah the prophet that was to come in the last days. And when I was obviously skeptical of his claims, he said, “What would you do if something would happen to your little daughter?” I looked him in the eye, grabbed him by the shirt and said, “If something should happen to my little daughter, I would search the world until I found you, and I would kill you with my bare hands.” I knew the guy was mentally off and I did not want him to get any ideas of trying to harm my little girl. I was serious.

Nehemiah took drastic action in order to get things back in order.

You would think that you could come to a place as a minister, where things would just be smooth from here on out. The wall is built. We have celebrated. “Glory, hallelujah!” Everything is wonderful and everybody is excited, rejoicing, praising God. “We have done it!” And here they are in such a mess so soon. “I was gone just for a year and come back and oh, look at this mess!” You would think that somehow you could hit a plateau or arrive at a place, where you would have no more problems, where everyone would live happily ever after. Oh, we will, but as long as we are in these bodies and as long as your people are in those bodies, we are going to have to contend with and deal with the problems that arise from the flesh.

The incidents of Nehemiah 13 point me to the necessity of strong leadership. The people need strong leadership. When Moses brought the children of Israel out of Egypt with many signs and wonders and they came to Mount Sinai, Moses went up on the mount to meet the Lord. Moses was on the mount for forty days, and that is not very long. But before Moses could get back with the two tables of stone upon which God had engraved the laws—the Ten Commandments—the people had come to Aaron and said, “Make us gods that we might worship them. As for this man Moses, we do not know what has happened to him.” Moses came back with this tremendous spiritual experience, having talked with God, having met with God, and having God inscribe with His finger on these two tables of stone, the Ten Commandments. “Thou shalt have no other gods before Me. Thou shalt not make any graven image to bow down to them to worship them.”

Moses comes back with these holy commandments of God, to present them to the people and before he even gets there he hears all of this noise. Joshua says, “What in the world is that? There must be a war.” And he says, “That is not the sound of war. That is the sound of partying.” And when they came in sight of the tents, here they were all dancing around this golden calf. It was a big orgy as they were worshipping the golden calf. Right there on the tablets it says, “Thou shalt have no other gods before Me. Thou shalt not make any graven image” (cf. [Exodus 20:3-4](#)). And Moses, literally and symbolically, took those two tables of stone, threw them on the ground and they broke in pieces. The law had already been broken by the people. The covenant had already been broken by the people. Moses had only been away forty days. He came back to find things in chaos. The people were worshipping a golden calf (cf. [Exodus 32:19](#)). The people need strong leadership.

If God has made you a leader of His flock in your community, take care of the flock of God. The words “feed My sheep, translated into Greek mean “to tend, take over, or oversee”. “Take care of My sheep,” Jesus said. And when Peter was writing to the elders, as an elder himself, he used that

same word. “Take care of the flock of God that is among you” ([1 Peter 5:2](#)). Tend them. Do not forsake them. Do not neglect them.

If you are gone from them for too long or too much, all kinds of evils will start springing up. I believe that Satan often seeks to divert our attention to other fields. We soon find ourselves neglecting the basic call of God upon our lives. There is something rather heady about having people weep as you leave and say, “Oh, please come back. Oh, we need you desperately here.” Or, “No one can minister to us like you can. We need you desperately.” There is something heady about having invitations to come speak to giant rallies, to speak in soccer stadiums in Romania, to address 5,000 youth in Hungary. There is something heady about that when they write and say, “Oh, we have heard your tapes and we feel that you have the message. We feel that you can do a lot here.” There is a strong temptation to say, “Yes, I need to go.” There is something very heady about being there, having all of the excitement, and being taken to the hotels while people say, “Oh, you cannot believe how wonderful it is to have you here.” There is something very heady about all of that.

Watch out! You can neglect the basic call that God has upon your life to minister to that flock of yours. If you spend too much time away from the flock, you will find that without strong leadership they can get into all kinds of evil.

Years ago God called Dave Wilkerson, a country preacher, to New York to minister to gang members who were deeply involved in drugs. He went with all of his naiveté, into this sophisticated metropolitan area where there were all of these gangs, corruption, beatings and everything else. Led by the Lord and divinely protected by God, he went right up against the gates of hell and began to shake them. God blessed Dave Wilkerson there and gave him tremendous fruit. As the result, the book *The Cross and the Switchblade*, was published to share what God was doing in the streets of New York, and invitations began to come to Dave Wilkerson from all over the United States to come and speak to these great youth rallies. David Wilkerson began to travel around the United States, speaking at these giant youth rallies. He began to wear white jackets, suede shoes, and styled hair. He was successful.

He was no longer on the streets of New York, but he was now an authority in youth problems and was speaking at giant rallies all over. His name drew a crowd, but his heart became empty. Why? It was because God did not call Dave Wilkerson to speak at giant rallies around the country. God called Dave Wilkerson to the streets of New York. Dave began to flounder spiritually. Not that he left the Lord, but he was just empty. He was just miserable. He had left his place of calling. Satan had diverted him into these other activities. They were legitimate activities, of course. Kids were coming to Christ in these rallies, of course. He started this big ranch in Texas. He started Teen Challenges all over the United States. He began to sit in this fancy office as an administrator, and jetted around the country. But that is not where God had called Dave Wilkerson. The call of God was to the streets of New York. I am happy to say that Dave is back on the streets of New York and happy again, but he went a long, circuitous route.

There is always that danger of leaving the basic, primary calling of God because of the attractiveness, the allurements of far away places with strange sounding names, with hungry hearts and hands that are outstretched, waiting for you. But many a pastor has come back from these places and found that the church that he was pastoring is in shambles. Divisions have come up and since there was not any strong leadership to deal with it, the people had become fractured.

The Lord has been dealing with me and perhaps this is why I am so into this. The Lord has been dealing with me personally on this subject, so I am just talking out of my own heart. That is why

this year, I have sort of taken a sabbatical from going out. It is not a sabbatical from the church here. I am spending more time right here. This is the first summer in years that I am going to be home. This is where God has called me.

The fellows who have the pastors' conferences around the country, know that I have not come this year. The only one I went to was Hawaii and I needed a little vacation. But last year, I think there were thirty weeks that I was gone Monday through Wednesday, speaking at various conventions and conferences and all. Tuesday is my day that I usually take off. I was not keeping the Sabbath. I was taking one in seven. I would get home on Thursday, do the Thursday night study, work all day Friday and Saturday to catch up with things that are in the office, do the services on Sunday and take off either Sunday night or Monday morning early for the next convention or rally or conference. I was hardly home last fall at all, except I was always careful to be here Thursday night and Sundays. But the Lord began to speak to me. Thank God for good assistants. We still had leadership and things did not go to pieces, but some things did arise that I probably could have dealt with had I been here. You see, Nehemiah was the recognized leader of the people. The people looked to him for leadership. People look to you for leadership. People look to me for leadership.

Some of you are going to return from this conference, and though you have only been here a few days, you are going to find some problems have arisen since you have been gone. You may even find that they have voted not to have you as their pastor any more. Do not neglect the flock of God.

Being a leader, Nehemiah dealt decisively with the situation and with the problems. He was stern. He was severe. And because he was their leader, they received his rebuke. Had anyone else tried to take those same stern measures that Nehemiah had taken, it would have created a revolution. If anybody else had grabbed and pulled their hair out and smacked them across the cheek, there would have been some real problems. But because they recognized Nehemiah as the God-appointed and ordained leader, they received his rebuke and his correction.

If God has called you to be the shepherd over a flock, no one else can take the necessary actions to protect that flock and the purity of the flock. Beware about neglecting that flock of God over which the Lord has made you the overseer, because often projected periods of absence will take their toll. Limit your times away from the pulpit. Be there for the people.

That is what the Spirit says to me out of Nehemiah 13. Take care of the ministry to which God has called you.

Father, we thank You that You have called us and ordained that we should be Your disciples, that we should bring forth fruit and that our fruit should remain. We thank You, Lord, that You have anointed us, shepherds over Your flock. Help us, Lord, that we might be shepherds that are pleasing to You, tending the flock, feeding the flock, loving the flock, and nourishing the flock. In Jesus' name, Amen.

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

BY

Calvary Chapel Outreach Fellowship

Lesson 9

Surviving Opposition from Within

By

Chuck Smith

Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa

Brought to you by:

The Blue Letter Bible Institute

www.blbi.org

A ministry of:

The Blue Letter Bible

www.blueletterbible.org

Servant Leadership – Lesson 9
Surviving Opposition from Within by Chuck Smith

1

We have been looking at the opposition to the work of God in [Nehemiah 4](#), and there is one thing you can be certain about—if you are doing anything at all worthwhile for God—Satan is going to oppose it.

I heard of a pastor who was constantly talking about how he was meeting up with Satan on the way. “I was going down the road the other day and I met up with Satan. What a tussle we had!” He was always testifying that every time he was going somewhere he would meet up with Satan. There was a liberal pastor in town who said to him, “Young man, I am sick of hearing you talk about meeting up with Satan. Every time you go someplace or do something, you are meeting up with Satan.” He said, “I want you to know I have been pastoring for thirty-five years and I have not met Satan yet.” The young fellow said, “Have you ever stopped to consider you might be going in the same direction?”

If you are doing something right for the Lord, you can know that Satan is going to try to oppose that work.

Satan sought to oppose the work of Nehemiah and others by ridicule, which is a very cruel and effective tool of Satan. He tried to oppose the work by inciting Sanballat and Tobiah, who became very angry at what was being done. And he sought to oppose the work of God by threatening to stop it. Unsuccessful in stopping Nehemiah with ridicule and threats, as we get to Nehemiah 5, we see that Satan becomes more subtle in his attack against the work of God. The opposition now comes from within.

Satan generally uses open opposition as his first tactic against you. When that fails, then Satan comes with a more subtle strategy. He says, “Let’s join hands together in the work.” And then problems begin to come from within. We often know how to recognize and deal with the problems that come from the outside; but when the problems begin to come from within, we are not always equipped to deal with them. We do not know how to handle that.

When the Lord first established the church, Satan tried to destroy it by a direct, frontal assault. We are well aware of *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs* and the history of the early church with that direct frontal assault by Satan. He sought to destroy the church through persecution. We know the history of the church and it was during this period of persecution that the church flourished, it grew, and it prospered.

So then Satan changed his tactics. He began to work from within the church. He began to introduce into the church all kinds of corrupting Babylonian practices from the ancient Babylonian religion. Satan was far more successful in destroying the effectiveness of the church from within, and in bringing in compromises and corrupting the church from within. He was far more effective and successful with this approach than he was in the direct frontal assault from outside the church.

It is interesting to me that today the Mormons are seeking to join the church. The Mormons have a tremendous campaign on right now to change their image from a cult to a denomination. They want to be known just as another denominational church. They are doing their best to shed this cult mantle that they have had through the years so that they appear to be just another denomination. They are saying, “We believe in Jesus and we believe in God. We believe the Bible. We are just another church.” The Mormons believe in Jesus, but what Jesus?

Paul speaks about those who would preach another Jesus. The Jesus that the Mormons believe in was the brother of Lucifer. That is not the Jesus that I believe in. The Jesus that I believe in is the

only begotten Son of God. And He can say, “I am one with the Father. I and My Father are one” ([John 10:30](#)). Now I hardly think that Lucifer can say that. And thus, the Jesus I believe in is not the brother of Lucifer, as is the Jesus of the Mormon Church. The God that I believe in is not Adam, who came to this earth with one of his celestial wives, Eve. He was not a good Mormon in another era on another planet, who began to populate this world and oversee its development. Nor do I believe that one day my wife and I are going to head for some planet in the universe to begin to populate it. She is the only wife I have. By the grace of God, I am going to hang on to her and she will be the only wife I ever have, if she will stick with me. It has been a good forty-two years, but I do not expect to spend eternity on some planet doing our own thing. Adam, according to Brigham Young, is their god—the only god with whom they have to do.

Do you see how Satan tries to come in the back door? You close the front door on him and here he is. He says, “Hey, good buddy, how much will it cost me to join this church?” Satan is using this same tactic here in Nehemiah 5. Having failed at the direct opposition from without, he now seeks to oppose the work of God from within. Satan seeks to create a disgruntled people and conditions that are not good. As he so often does, he is using the greed of man to oppose the work of God.

They brought to Nehemiah their grievance.

There was a great cry of the people, and of their wives against
their own Jewish brothers. ([Nehemiah 5:1](#))

Now the problem is all within the family. The outside forces have been dealt with. He has prayed. He has set up the guards. They are working with the trowel in one hand and the sword in the other. They have the trumpet ready. They have the whole thing set up. Now the problem is from within and they come with this grievance to Nehemiah concerning their brothers.

The rich Jews had begun to oppress the poor. There was a drought and a scarcity of corn. Haggai, who was prophesying about this time, spoke of the tremendous drought and the shortage of corn and fruit that they were experiencing. With this shortage many of the people, in order to buy corn, were beginning to mortgage their property, their land, and their houses. The rich people were loaning the money to them to buy the corn, but they were charging usury. The interest that they were charging amounted to twelve percent a year. The people, being impoverished, began to spend the money that they were reserving for their taxes to the government. Not being able to pay their mortgages and not being able to pay their taxes, they were in desperate straits. Some of the people had begun to sell their children as slaves. The whole thing began to blow up because here they were with mortgages against their property that they could not pay. The twelve percent interest was just eating them up. They were going deeper and deeper into debt while the rich people were becoming richer and richer, taking advantage of the poverty and of the desperate need of those poor people.

Money is one of the chief weapons that Satan will use against your ministry to destroy it.

I believe that the chief weapon that Satan uses against ministers is women. Solomon said that she searches for the precious souls. And he tells us that “A whorish woman can bring a man to a crust of bread” (cf. [Proverbs 6:26](#)). I know many pastors whose ministries have been destroyed because of their involvement with women.

The next two dangers rank very close. They are money and pride. The minute you begin to have a modicum of success in the ministry, look out for these two snares of the enemy. As you begin to

have some success in the ministry and there is perhaps a little surplus now in the budget, watch out! You begin to look around and think, “My, I am the pastor of this large church. Look how it is growing. My, I really have the secret and I really am able to make it work.” Look out! Satan begins to use his snares the moment you begin to have success. As long as you are struggling, without success, you do not have that many problems from within. It is when you begin to have a little success that you have to really watch out. That is when the enemy is going to really come against you.

Now we know that it takes money to operate a church. There never seems to be quite enough money to do all of the things that we would like to do; and thus, it seems there is that constant desire for more money in order to expand the work of God. We seem to have a fallacious philosophy that money is the cure for all evils. That is not scriptural. In fact, the Scripture says something about money being the root of all evil (cf. [1 Timothy 6:10](#)). Somehow we think that all of our problems will be solved—“I could do such a great work for God, if I just had the money.”

You would be amazed at all of the mail that we get from people all over the world who have the most fantastic ideas of how to reach the world for Jesus Christ. All they need is the money to finance this idea. “It is sure fire. It will surely do it. If God will only wise up and finance this one, we could reach the world for Christ.” I believe that the church is guilty of funding a lot of ideas and programs that were not inspired by God. I believe that God is perfectly capable of providing for the work that He wants to do. I believe strongly when God guides, God provides.

I also believe that if you strive to gain, you are going to have to strive to maintain. Many tremendous projects have been built through a lot of strife, through a lot of begging, and through a lot of different conniving ways of getting people to give. They were able to build these vast monuments, but they could not maintain them because ultimately you get worn down, and the people get worn out.

Here is where people so often get into real trouble in the ministry. At this point they begin to buy into the false philosophy that the end justifies the means. “Let us do evil that good may come of it” ([Romans 3:8](#)). Paul said, “God forbid!” And people begin to develop all kinds of schemes and dishonest ways of raising money in the church.

I do not believe for one moment that God has ever shown a man how many people are going to give \$500 in a given service. I do not believe God does that. I do not believe God has ever done that. I believe that any man who stands up and declares, “God has shown me there are ten people here tonight that are going to give a thousand dollars,” that that man is a liar, a fraud, and a false prophet. I do not believe that you can buy the salvation or healing of your loved ones through a donation, as is often intimated in some of the telethons. “Their son was out living in sin and they pledged a hundred dollars a month, and bless God—He saved the son! If you have a relative that you want saved, send in and pledge.”

I believe that the computerized letters that are sent by some of the leading TV personalities, promising personal prayers or healing, are an abomination in the sight of God. After receiving one of these letters, I sat down and wrote to the sender. Among other things, I mentioned in my letter that I was awfully glad that I did not have to stand in his shoes when he stood before the Judge of all the earth. Personally, I am glad I do not have to stand in my own shoes. I am glad that Jesus is going to be standing in my shoes for me. I am not sure if that evangelist knows that or not, but at least he took me off his mailing list. Unfortunately, it did not stop him from sending these same types of letters to other poor people.

When God begins to bless and prosper the church financially, then even greater problems begin to arise in the proper expenditure of those funds. I do not believe that any minister has one scintilla of an excuse for living a lavish lifestyle on money that he has received through the ministry. Now if you have a separate, outside income, an inheritance or whatever, you can do whatever you want with it. It does not bother me. You can drive the fancy sports cars and cover your wife's fingers with diamonds. That is fine. I do not believe that you should take money that people have given for the work of God and use it for yourself and for a lavish lifestyle. I believe in simplicity of lifestyle. I do not believe that we are setting a good example before the people when we live lavishly.

You will find an interesting thing about money—there is never enough no matter how much you have. Even Donald Trump is finding that out, isn't he?

In the days of Nehemiah the rich were living by the golden rule, but it was a different golden rule. They were living by the golden rule that says: "He who has the gold, rules." They were using their money to oppress the poor.

I have a problem with people who are endlessly taking advantage of other people's problems. I have a problem with doctors, professionals, lawyers, psychiatrists, and ministers, who take advantage of people who are going through severe problems—maybe legal problems, maybe medical problems—and they charge them undue amounts of money. No man is worth \$18,000 an hour. I do not care how delicate the operation. Men who take advantage of the misfortunes of other people to enrich themselves, I believe that they are going to have to answer to God for it. That is what was happening in Nehemiah's day. These people were going through unfortunate circumstances. There was a drought and things were hard. There was a shortage of corn. The rich people began to take advantage of those poor people in this condition and they began to charge these unreasonable rates of interest.

I believe there is a legitimate place for charging interest. I think that if a person is going into a business venture and he has the opportunity of perhaps making a lot of money, if you lend to him financially, then you should share in the profits that the person is going to make. I think that is legitimate. You can buy a house today and it can be worth twice as much in a couple of years. To charge interest on those kinds of loans, I think is legitimate. But to charge interest when a person is borrowing for their very livelihood, I think is wrong. Under the law, the Jews were not to charge interest to their brothers. It was contrary to the law of God. And thus, what was going on was something that was definitely disobedience to God. It was the oppression of the poor and it created this problem that brought the whole building process to a halt. They had to, first of all, deal with this problem before they could go on.

Nehemiah said in [5:6](#), "I was very angry when I heard their cry and these words." I am so glad Nehemiah was angry. I am so glad that he got angry at wrong things. We are living in sort of a soft age where people do not want you to say anything bad about anybody. Every time I say something bad about somebody I get letters. "You should love, brother." I love David because he said, "Lord, break their teeth in their mouths. Smash their noses, Lord. Do not I hate them, Lord, that hate Thee? Yea, I hate them with a perfect hatred" (cf. [Psalm 58:6](#); [139:21-22](#)). I think we should be angry over sin. We should be angry over abortion. We should be angry over child pornography. We should be angry over these types of sins.

Jesus looked with anger upon them because they were holding back people from the work of God. That should tell us something. Be careful that you do not stand in the way of people coming to the Lord by your attitude or your actions. Do you remember the Sabbath day in Capernaum?

Jesus came in the synagogue and there was a man there who had a withered hand. And immediately they looked at Jesus to see what He was going to do, because it was a Sabbath Day. It says, “And Jesus looked with anger upon them” (cf. [Mark 3:1-5](#)). Why was He angry? Because of their religious traditions, they would keep this man from the work that God wanted to do in healing him.

Nehemiah was angry. The complaint that was brought to him was a legitimate complaint. These men were wrong. He sat down and consulted with himself. I think that is always wise to do when you are angry. Do not react immediately. You can really mess things up if you go out in anger. Plato said to one of his servants, “I would beat you, but I am angry.” So, Nehemiah sat down and consulted with himself, as he mulled things over. He thought upon the course of action that he needed to take. Then he said, “I rebuke the seven, the nobles, the rulers” (cf. [Nehemiah 5:7](#)).

It goes on to speak of his rebuke. He gets after them for charging usury. He gathered the great assembly against them, gathered them all together, and then he talked about how he had set an example for them.

Nehemiah said, “After our own ability we have redeemed certain of these men from their captivity. They are your brothers. And now are you going to sell them as slaves and take advantage of their poverty?” They had no answer. And he said straight to them, “It is not good what you are doing. You ought to walk in the fear of the Lord.” (cf. [Nehemiah 5:8-9](#))

And there, my friend, is the key. As I look at these people who are using all of these gimmicks and devices to get money from the people, and as I see the horrible abuses, I wonder: How can they write those things? How can they send out that little cloth and say, “Send this cloth back to me with your request and I will anoint it with oil, return it, and God will heal you. Just be sure to enclose a check!” How can these guys write all of that stuff? How do they sleep at night? How can they do that? The answer is that they are lacking a fear of God. They do not have a real fear of God in their hearts.

That is one thing we need to examine in our own hearts. Do I have a genuine fear of God in my heart? Do I realize that one day I am going to answer to God for what I have done? We are even warned in the Scriptures about being ministers, knowing that we will have the greater responsibility or accountability. “To whom much is given, much is required” ([Luke 12:48](#)). I do not take the ministry lightly because I know that one day I am going to stand before God and give an account of myself. I surely do not want to be one of those who say, “Lord, Lord, did I not prophesy in Your name? Did I not cast out devils in Your name? Did I not heal the sick in Your name?” I do not want to hear Him say to me, “Depart from Me, ye worker of iniquity. I never knew you” (cf. [Matthew 7:22-23](#)).

The fear of the Lord is the issue. Their problem was that they were lacking the fear of the Lord—that consciousness and awareness that one day they would have to answer to God. I am responsible to God for I stand before the people as God’s representative. They are looking to me as God’s representative. They are judging God by what they see in me. They are judging the validity of the gospel by what they see in me and what they hear from me. I feel this awesome responsibility of standing before the people as God’s representative to give them God’s Word. I want to be careful that I do not give them vain speculation but that I give them the Word of God, just as pure and unadulterated as I possibly can. I want to proclaim God’s truth without hypocrisy.

Servant Leadership – Lesson 9
Surviving Opposition from Within by Chuck Smith

6

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” ([Psalm 111:10](#)). “To fear the Lord is to hate evil” ([Proverbs 8:13](#)). And that was the problem, they lacked the fear of the Lord.

Nehemiah pleaded with them.

I pray you, stop with usury and restore to them their lands, their vineyards, their olive orchards, their houses and the interest that you charged them to buy the corn and the wine. (cf. [Nehemiah 5:10-11](#))

A glorious thing happened. The people hearkened to Nehemiah and they said, “We will restore to them and require nothing from them. We will do as you say.” Then he called the priests and he made them take an oath that they would also keep that promise ([Nehemiah 5:12](#), paraphrased).

Then Nehemiah again set the example, even as we are the ones to set the example for the people. He said in [Nehemiah 5:14](#),

From the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year, even to the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes the king, that is twelve years, neither I nor my brethren have eaten the bread of the governor.

Even though he had the right as governor to receive the taxes and to receive salaries as governor, Nehemiah did not take a salary. He did not eat the bread of the governor.

But the former governors that had been there before me were chargeable unto the people. They had taken from them the bread and the wine, besides forty shekels of silver. And their servants even bore rule over the people, but I did not do this—[Why?]
—because of the fear of God. (cf. [Nehemiah 5:15](#))

Oh how important it is to have the fear of God. Nehemiah, knowing that he was responsible to God, allowed the fear of God in his heart to keep him on the right path. It will keep you on the right path too.

“But yes,” he said, “I continued the work of this wall and I did not buy any land. And all of my servants were gathered together unto the work.” (cf. [Nehemiah 5:16](#))

They all got into it. They set the example themselves. And then he tells that he even took care of 150 people, the Jews and the rulers who sat at his table. He tells of the provisions that it took and then he says, “Lord, think upon me for the good, according to all that I have done for this people,” (cf. [Nehemiah 5:19](#)).

He did not know the grace of God. He was presenting to God his works. I would not dare do that because I am thankful for the grace of God. “Think upon me, Lord, for the grace and mercy that You have given through Jesus Christ.”

The practical result was that the people took the oath to quit their evil practices. It says, “And all the people praised the Lord and the work continued.” When the opposition from within is dealt

Servant Leadership – Lesson 9
Surviving Opposition from Within by Chuck Smith

7

with, people rejoice and praise God; and the work of God continues, as God builds up the defenses to protect His people from the enemy.

Father, we thank You for the privilege of laboring for You. Thank You, Lord, that as Nehemiah You have called us to lead the people in the work of the Lord. Lord, we are cognizant of the enemy. We are not ignorant of his devices. We have faced the open opposition and we have seen You defeat him. We have faced the ridicule, the attacks, and Lord, by Your strength we have stood. Lord, we have seen how the enemy has tried to come in and corrupt from within, and we thank You that You have given us wisdom in dealing with those corrupting influences from within. We thank You that the work continues. Help us that we might always walk in the fear of the Lord and not be careless or carried away with diverse lusts, but may we feel that heavy sense of responsibility as Your representatives, delivering Your Word to Your people. May we do so faithfully. In Jesus' name, Amen.

I like how Paul, so many times says, “That which I have received from the Lord I also give unto you” ([1 Corinthians 11:23](#)). I believe that you should be able to make that the preface to every sermon you preach. I do not think that you should say it, but I believe that you should be able to say it. When you stand before the people, I believe that you should have had such preparation, prayer, and waiting upon God, that as you stand there and look over the congregation and as you open your Bible, you would be able to say: “That which I have received from the Lord I will also deliver unto you.”

Wait on the Lord for your ministry. May God bless you and prosper you in building the walls and the defenses for the people of God.

Though we are now in a moment of world's history that is exciting and doors seem to be open all over, I believe that we are probably in one of the most dangerous periods of the history of the world. Paul said, “And when they begin to say, ‘Peace and safety,’ beware for sudden destruction is coming” ([1 Thessalonians 5:3](#)). I really believe that is what we are seeing today.

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

BY

Calvary Chapel Outreach Fellowship

Lesson 10

Self-Promotion in Ministry

By

Jon Courson

Brought to you by:

The Blue Letter Bible Institute

www.blbi.org

A ministry of:

The Blue Letter Bible

www.blueletterbible.org

Have you heard the latest? Faberge Incorporated announced recently that they were producing and promoting a new product, a new fragrance. It is called, “Scent of the Stars.” Now the word is not S-E-N-T in this particular product. It is S-C-E-N-T. This is a true story. What they are doing is gathering the scent from various stars like Sylvester Stallone and Madonna. They are actually gathering true perspiration and analyzing that perspiration, seeking to duplicate it and market it so that you can smell like Sylvester Stallone, Madonna, or whatever stars are being used in this program. There is something kind of crazy about a society that wants so badly to be like the stars, even if it is just to smell like them.

But it is not just in our society; it also can creep very subtly into ministry. We can want to take on the fragrance of stardom. “Oh Lord, give me a greater authority, a larger ministry, a brighter visibility. Oh Lord, it is all for Your glory, ostensibly.” In reality we desire to be a star in the firmament of ministry. Something in us wants to shine brightly. Something in my flesh wants to be acknowledged and wants to be noticed, so I want to shine brightly. I am tired of being in the *Who’s He?* I want to make the *Who’s Who* eventually, and I really hope that someday people might take notice of me. My flesh cries for it, yearns for it. You may think, “My goodness, if it does not happen soon, I am in trouble. After all, last week I turned forty. I am getting old.”

As we get older there are some physiological changes that inevitably take place. It used to be that I could eat whatever I wanted. Now I am a member of “Calorie Chapel” and I cannot. You eat something and you gain weight. But the Lord has built in a way to make up for that because even though at this point in life when I am starting to gain weight pretty easily, something happened to me about eight months ago now. I was eating popcorn and I hit a kernel. My tooth cracked and half came out. So it is almost as though the Lord has built in this way to kind of neutralize that fact. When you start gaining weight more easily, your teeth start falling out.

You may say, “Oh, that is terrible because then you look kind of funny with your teeth falling out.” Not really, because at the same time your teeth start falling out, your eyes start going bad as well, so you cannot see yourself when you look into the mirror. You do not even notice how bad you are looking. “Oh, but Jon, other people do and they talk about you that you are not looking like you used to.” At the same time your hearing is not quite as keen as it once was, so you do not hear those conversations as easily. Even if you hear them, you do not remember them the next day anyway.

We are getting older and it is causing stress. Did you see this article in Thursday’s paper? This is from the Associated Press.

Doctors have uncovered what must be one of nature’s crueler ironies. People, especially men, are about twenty percent more likely to suffer a heart attack on their birthday than any other day of the year.

That is incredible. Why? They go on to say that it is because of the stress of realizing you are getting older. It has something to do with this midlife crisis mentality, or whatever. I suggest to you that it has more to do with the free dinner you get at Denny’s.

At this point, though, a lot of us start thinking, “When is it going to happen?” It is like the father who talked to his son who was always playing Nintendo. He said, “Son, you know what? Here you are, glued to that game. When Abraham Lincoln was your age, he was studying every night

by the light of the fire.” The boy looked up from his Nintendo game and shot right back to his dad. “Yeah, well, when Abraham Lincoln was your age, he was president of the United States.”

When I was younger and used to hear the stories about Calvary Chapel, I thought, “I am in my twenties and that did not happen for Chuck until he was forty.” And now, a lot of us are beginning to wonder, “When is it going to happen?”

Thus, many of us fall at this point into the very real vulnerability, the very real temptation, to make it happen in our own energy—self-promotion. “The clock is ticking. Man, I have to do it now.” Consequently we go to seminars that are given entitled, “Marketing the Church,” and we try to figure out how we can better present ourselves.

Let me tell you, self-promotion paths lead to the pit. Literally, self-promotion brings you to the pit. Ask Lucifer. He was in heaven. He had a rip-roaring ministry. He was a worship leader. He was not only a worship leader, he was a worshipping machine. His body was an instrument. His hands were tambourines. His vocal cords were like organ pipes. He was really a lean, mean worshipping machine. He had a significant ministry and then he decided to promote himself a little higher. You know the story. Right there in [Isaiah 14:14](#), suddenly Lucifer said, “I will ascend and I will be like God.” It led him down. He will find himself in the pit for a thousand years, escatologically. Literally, it is the bottomless pit. Satan shows us very clearly that self-promotion will lead to the pit.

Jude here in this little letter—this little postcard of an epistle—also points out that fact when he begins to give us some really wonderful warnings. I like that. As pastors, we need it. We need to receive it and we need to share it. As shepherds, if we only feed the flock and never warn them, we are just fattening them up for the kill. And here Jude is giving a strong warning so that we would not be fattened up for the kill and devoured by the enemy.

He talks about some very real examples of what can happen to those involved in ministry. The one that I am to share on is found in [Jude 11](#) as Jude says,

Woe to them! They are gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily
after the error of Balaam, and perished in the gainsaying of
Korah.

I want to share with you about this third individual mentioned in verse 11. “Woe to them that perished in the gainsaying of Korah.”

Korah also, like Lucifer, found that self-promotion is the pits. That is exactly where it will lead him. You know the story. Turn with me to Numbers 16, would you please, as Jude reaches back to this Old Testament example. Watch what happens as Korah begins this process of self-promotion, wanting to elevate himself beyond his called ministry and how it leads him to the pit, quite literally.

Now Korah the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi,
with Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, and On the son of
Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men; and they rose up before
Moses with some of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty
leaders of the congregation, representatives of the congregation,
men of renown. ([Numbers 16:1–2](#))

Here Korah is leading a rebellion, an insurrection. Did you know that Korah, whose name means “bold one,” is showing some boldness here? It is not based in purity. It is based in self-ambition. I suggest to you that part of this problem between Korah and Moses is because they were first cousins. Korah’s father was Amram’s brother. Amram is the father of Moses. Consequently, these two were related. They were first cousins. Could it be that Korah was tired of watching Moses get all the press; that Korah was tired of seeing Moses gain all of the prominence? He was his first cousin and he knew him. He perhaps spent time with him in earlier days and it must have been hard for him to see what was happening. He may have wondered, “Why is Moses getting all the attention?”

Familiarity can indeed, bring contempt. The Lord can use that in a big way, when you say, “Why is my brother, why is my cousin, why is my colleague getting all the attention, all the glory, all the opportunity? It does not seem fair. What about me? Why should he be mister big shot? Why are they the big time? Why not me? I know them and I have spent time with them. I am certainly as good as they are. Why do they get all the attention?”

The Coptic Church has an interesting story. It is a legend, in which there was a holy man, a desert father who was living righteously in solitude, monastically. Satan sent several demons to try to seduce, tempt, and pull down this holy man. Nothing worked. The demons came back and reported to Satan saying, “We cannot get to him. He is a holy person.” Satan says, “Watch this.” According to that legend, Satan went to that holy man in the desert in disguise as a messenger and said to the holy man, “Did you hear the news? Your brother has just been named bishop of Alexandria.” That holy man’s mouth turned down, his eyes tightened up, and Satan knew that he had him. He could not get to him with the obvious temptations, but instead incited jealousy and ambition. He wondered why his brother was exalted to be the bishop of Alexandria and thus, Satan got him.

I suggest to you that this is partially what is happening here. Korah is wondering why his cousin Moses keeps getting the attention. What about him? And so he gets 250 men together, men that were famous, men that were of renowned. They gathered themselves together against Moses and Aaron. It was not just Moses, but Aaron too. I wonder what Aaron thought when he saw Korah, Dathan, Abiram, and 250 famous men, powerful individuals, coming towards him, instigating and launching rebellion against Moses and against him.

I wonder if he was sort of burdened, haunted, and convicted. You see, a couple of chapters previously, Aaron did the same thing Korah is now doing. He and his sister Miriam went to their brother Moses and began to question and judge him. Because of that—and again, you know the story—Miriam was smitten with leprosy. Even as Aaron was launching a semi-rebellion and judging Moses, now he is on the receiving end of rebellion and judgment. The birds are coming home to roost. That is always the way it is.

I wonder if we really believe the Scripture which tells us so pointedly:

Be not deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows,
that shall he also reap. ([Galatians 6:7](#))

What we sow is going to come back to us. The measure that we give out—either in love and mercy, or in judgment and rebellion—is going to come back to you and it is going to come back to me.

You say, “I thought the Lord was forgiving.” He is! “I thought the Lord was gracious.” He is. When I sin, the moment there is confession there is also absolute forgiveness. He declares to us, “Your sins and iniquities will I remember no more.” [Micah 7:19](#) tells us they are buried in the sea. For the people of Israel, the open ocean was a place they did not go poking around and digging stuff up in. The people of Israel were not a seafaring people. So when Jesus told them that if they offended a child, it would be better for them that a millstone was hung around their neck and they were cast into the sea, that caused a terrifying image to be conjured up in their minds (cf. [Matthew 18:6](#)). We explore the sea. We scuba dive. We send submarines down and film Jacques Cousteau specials and all of that. I suggest to you that a present-day kind of application would be to have your sins put in the bottom of a toxic waste dump where nobody wants to go poking around. Nobody should go poking in a toxic dump.

When I sin, because of the work of Jesus on the cross, I am forgiven. The moment I make confession—with confession comes forgiveness—right then, I am forgiven.

I need to remember that there is a serious thing about sin. The seeds that I sowed in my sin will still come up. It is inevitable. With confession comes instant forgiveness. In fact, it is already done. The price has already been paid. It has already been taken care of, as far as the Father is concerned, because of the propitiating work of Jesus Christ. Now I am declared justified. It is just as if I never sinned. I am free, but the seeds I planted in that season are going to come up.

That is why a lot of us are beginning to learn to hate sin. The beginning of wisdom is to fear God, we are told. And the fear of God is to hate sin. We begin to realize that even though we are recipients of grace and joyous forgiveness, sin brings some real stinking repercussions. The birds come home to roost inevitably. It is not God’s doing. He is not punishing me. That has been taken care of at the cross of Calvary. It is the results of the crop that I planted. The birds come home to roost.

This story in our newspaper last fall cracks me up.

The birds come home to roost. A man showing off a turkey he thought he had killed, was shot in the leg when the wounded bird thrashed around in his car trunk and triggered his shotgun. Sheriff Warren Silk said, “The turkeys are fighting back.” The accident occurred last week after Lan shot the turkey, put it in his car along with his loaded shotgun. They drove to a neighbor’s house to show the bird off. While the son was pulling the turkey out of the trunk, it began struggling, according to the sheriff, and his claw fired the gun. The shot went through the side panel of the car and shot the senior Lan’s leg.

The story goes on—

He shot this turkey a week before turkey season began. So not only was he shot in the leg, but he also was stiffly fined for doing it. The turkeys are fighting back. The birds come home to roost.

And here is Aaron seeing these turkeys, 250 of them, coming to gobble Moses and him up. Here they come, 250 in number, and watch what happens. As they gather around Aaron (who had previously launched a mini-rebellion himself) and Moses, they said to him, “You take too much upon you” ([Numbers 16:3](#)). The Targum translates it this way, or renders it in this fashion: “You have ruled too long.” That is an interesting implication. “Hey Moses, you have had your time. It is somebody else’s turn.” That is the idea here. “You take too much upon yourself. You have had your time. It is now time to step aside.” The implication is that Korah is saying, “Let me come in.”

You take too much upon you. The congregation is holy,
wherefore lift you up yourselves above the congregation of the
Lord? What are you doing? We are all equal in ministry. Who
gave you the right to rule so long and have such authority? (cf.
[Numbers 16:3](#))

Now watch what Moses does. I love it. “When Moses heard it, he fell on his face” ([Numbers 16:4](#)). He did not get in their face; he fell on his face.

Before I can really get in somebody’s face, I better first fall on my face. I think that we are going to recognize Moses quite readily when we get to heaven. He will be the fellow with the flattened face. This was a common practice for him. He was the meekest man on the face of the earth. How do we know that? He told us. The Spirit inspired him to pen that truth, in Numbers 12. He was a man of meekness and he falls on his face—not getting in theirs, but falling on his. He seeks the Lord for instruction and direction in dealing with this rebellion. By the way, this is the kind of heart that I want in my life. Lord, help me not to fight back, get in the face, or come unglued. That is a sign of a Saul-like mentality.

Saul was king but he was threatened in his ministry and in his position by this young upstart, David. People were talking about him and singing songs concerning him. And when Saul saw David play his harp, something stirred in him of jealousy, of envy, and so he grabbed a spear and fired it at David. David did a very wise thing—he ducked! But David, being a young man, could have easily taken that spear and hurled it right back at Saul, and probably had a good chunk of people behind him, saying, “Saul has gone crazy. David, you are our hero.” Three times Saul fired a javelin at David. Three times David ducked and he never hurled it back.

Now, how do I know when I am moving in anointed authority and ministry, or I am carnal and fleshly and ambitious? It is very simple. It is when I am firing back at the people who are firing at me. Am I looking for every opportunity to make my point as I grab that spear and hurl it? It is amazing to me that you can always tell when somebody is threatened, intimidated, or not truly anointed because he will throw spears.

David, a man after God’s own heart, did not do that. In fact, the one time he came even halfway close to something like that (when he clipped the garment of Saul), it grieved him greatly. It grieved him that he would actually clip the garment of the one who David says was anointed. “Hey, David, I thought Samuel poured the oil over you.” David realized it was not yet time for him to take authority; that was left in God’s hands.

Brothers, when we start chucking spears, or when you are trying to make your point and nail somebody to the wall, you can be sure that there is probably a factor of carnal intimidation or fear. And we need to repent of that.

Moses was not firing, not initially. He was falling on his face in humility, seeking God. The weapons of our warfare are not carnal. They are not argumentation or proving our point philosophically or theologically. It is not that.

Paul says, “We wrestle not against flesh and blood” ([Ephesians 6:12](#)). Any time that I wrestle against a person, I am inevitably fighting the wrong battle. There are spirits at work that are manipulating or exploiting that situation, and there is where the true battle is to be fought, in prayer, in intercession. Whenever I am fighting against a brother, struggling against a person, it is proof that I am fighting the wrong battle and I am moving out of fear and intimidation.

Moses here falls on his face, then he spoke unto Korah.

And he spoke to Korah and all his company, saying, “Tomorrow morning the LORD will show who is His and who is holy, and will cause him to come near to Him. That one whom He chooses He will cause to come near to Him. Do this: Take censers, Korah and all your company; put fire in them and put incense in them before the LORD tomorrow, and it shall be that the man whom the LORD chooses is the holy one. You take too much upon yourselves, you sons of Levi!” Then Moses said to Korah, “Hear now, you sons of Levi: Is it a small thing to you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel.”
([Numbers 16:5-9](#))

Do you not realize the opportunity that you have in your present situation, Korah? Do you not realize the calling or the glorious position that you are in right now? Why are you desiring, Korah, to take on more, and to climb the ladder higher, when you have a great opportunity presently to minister?

I think that all of us need to regularly be adjusted in our understanding of the priority of ministry. I do. We so often say that the key to ministry is speaking before the masses or evangelizing before the heathen. I suggest to you there is a different key. There is a higher priority.

Ezekiel 44 gives us that very pointedly. There we are told,

The Levites, who went astray when Israel went astray and caused Israel to fall into idolatry,” the Lord says, “they shall bear their iniquity. They will pay the price. They shall stand before the people, to minister to the people, to offer sacrifices for the people, for they caused Israel, the people, to fall into iniquity,” saith the Lord. (cf. [Ezekiel 44:10–11](#))

Now when I first read that it seemed very perplexing and confusing. Wait a minute. Lord, You are saying that these Levites who caused Your people to fall into iniquity and into idolatry are going to pay the price by standing before the people, sharing with them, and offering sacrifices on behalf of them? That is not punishment, Lord, that is privilege. But wait, the Lord then goes on to say,

“But the sons of Zadok (a subset of the Levites), those who went not astray, they shall come near to Me and they shall offer Me the fat and the blood. They shall come near to My table and minister to Me,” saith the Lord. (cf. [Ezekiel 44:15](#))

In so declaring, the Lord is showing that the true priority is not standing before people, but ministering to the Lord. That is what these guys were called to do. That is the opportunity that they had. And so do you, and so do I. The true priority of ministry is not to stand before people. That is punishment in comparison to the high calling of the Zadok. And that is ministering directly to the Lord, which can often be done more easily with less distraction, in smaller kinds of ministry.

Somehow we got into this mindset that numbers always indicate the success of the ministry. I am not convinced that is true at all. I believe that the Lord does raise up mega-churches—churches that have 20,000 people coming—because the Lord wants to say something to His whole body. Quite frankly, we are all too carnal to hear what the Lord might want to say through a church that has fifty, seventy, or a hundred people. It is just the sheer numerics of it that makes us stop, wonder and say, “What is going on down there?” We come to conferences and listen to leaders. When the Lord wants to say something to a generation, He will cause a church to blossom and grow incredibly in order to catch our attention because we are so carnal. We need that kind of bump on the head.

As I looked at Calvary Chapel, the Lord spoke to my heart. Coming out of Biola University frustrated, quite frankly, Calvary Chapel drew me because I was reading about it in the newspapers and *Time* Magazine. I was wondering what was going on and I was warned not to go there by my professor of theology. I came to understand some very important things that the Lord was saying to the church through that ministry; the beautiful balance between the teaching of the Word and the presence and power of the Spirit; the importance of systematic study; and the priority of love. Some key, foundational understandings were given in that large, exploding, growing situation.

I am not convinced that it is necessarily the easiest way or the best way to pastor people individually in a mega-church setting. You pastors that have a hundred people or two hundred people or seventy people, you are doing the work of the shepherd. That is where the action really is, in shepherding the sheep individually. As the numbers grow it becomes increasingly difficult to do that. And perhaps the Lord is saying, “That is the size I want your ministry. I want eighty, one hundred, or two hundred people to be loved-on and cared for. That is the parameter.” You are not a failure for having a church that size. That can be right where God wants you to be, tending, caring, and loving those precious people that He is in love with. He died for them, and cares about them so deeply. “Yeah, but I want to be in the inner circle.”

I wonder what the disciples thought when Peter, James, and John were always being called away by Jesus. On three occasions they were called away. Jesus took Peter, James, and John—the inner circle—into the house of Jairus, where he resurrected that twelve year old girl to show His power over death. Then He took them probably to Mount Hermon, the Mount of Transfiguration in Matthew 17. Peter, James, and John got to go and see this glowing thing happening. He was shining. Jesus was showing them His glorification through death, as Moses and Elijah talked to Him about what would soon be—His exodus, His death. And then He took Peter, James, and John into the Garden of Gethsemane where He tried to show them His submission to death. The inner circle. Three times they were pulled together and Jesus showed them power over death,

glorification through death, and submission to death. Why did He do this? Who was the first to die of the disciples? It was James. Who was crucified upside down, so brutally taken where he would not want to go? It was Peter. As for John, history tells us that they put him into a caldron of boiling oil that did not kill him, so they exiled him to a living death on the Island of Patmos.

I am not sure I would sign up for the inner circle when I see the full story. Jesus pulled those guys away because He knew what they would soon go through. I suggest to you that whatever circle you are in, whatever sphere that you are orbiting in with the ministry, do not strive to move closer because there is some weight there. There are some challenges that might not be beneficial for you, but distracting to you and to the ministry that God really has for you. Which is what? “Lord, it is to minister to You, to walk with You. Lord. You know that I needed to be in Oregon these years, where I would have perhaps a more limited amount of distractions in certain ways, so that I might just minister to You, Lord.” The Lord knew that and that is where He stuck me. That is where He placed me. That is where I needed to be so that I might minister to Him. I can do it there, real easily. There are lots of nice places. The atmosphere is conducive for it.

So rejoice wherever you are. “It is not good,” Moses was saying, “trying to move up or get closer. You do not understand the opportunity you already have right where you are, Korah. You can minister to the Lord in that special kind of way.”

There is one more thing I just want to interject here, and I think it is important. This lesson was not just for Peter, James, and John in New Testament times, but also for Joseph in the Old Testament story. “Hey son, you get the coat of many colors (or big sleeves, literally). You have authority.” What did that do to Joseph? First of all, it caused him to have a severe headache. There is a thing called sibling rivalry and a lot of us know what that is about. His brothers were jealous of his authority and they decided to throw him in the pit. It gave him a headache and it caused his father to have a heartache.

Joseph’s brothers took that coat of big sleeves, that sign of authority, and they smeared blood on it and sent it back to their father. Jacob saw that coat and thought for sure his son, whom he gave that coat to as a sign of authority, was devoured by the beasts. It broke Jacob’s heart. It caused a headache for him, it caused a heartache for his father, and it caused a double-take for the wife of Potiphar. Joseph found himself once more in a place of authority in the house of Potiphar. It is a new coat. His old one is gone, so he gets a new coat. This woman has eyes for Joseph. She flirts with him and tries to get to him. Finally she has an opportunity when she is alone with him and she grabs him by the what? She grabs that coat, that symbol (cf. [Genesis 39:11-13](#)). I will bet he was starting to wonder about coats at that point. He did something wisely which we all need to consider constantly. He slipped out of the coat and he ran for his life! He did what we are all told to do. He fled those youthful lusts (cf. [2 Timothy 2:22](#)).

I want to suggest to you something a little more subtle that a lot of us have either discovered personally or observationally. It is a funny thing about authority—it attracts women. It is interesting that spiritual authority draws the women. It is amazing. Here is Joseph with his coat of authority and here are you in ministry. Do you know what happens, brothers? We know experientially or we know observationally, that what happens is not that a woman comes in the slinky negligee. It is the spiritual sister who loves God deeply, who is impressed with your spiritual authority and wants to pray with you. She wants to receive counsel from you. You have no interest in her romantically. There is no draw to her sexually; you just share with her. You listen to her struggles and you hear her prophecies or biblical insight. You share with her. And then a funny thing begins to happen. Jesus talked about it. Jesus said, “Wherever a man’s treasure

is, there will his heart be also” ([Matthew 6:21](#)). You pour your treasure into her, your insights. Or she pours her insights into you. A transfer of treasure begins to take place. Suddenly, unexpectedly, amazingly, your heart follows.

Now Jesus would go on to say, “No man can serve two masters” ([Matthew 6:24](#)). Then what does she do? She goes home to her husband and she wonders why he does not have these spiritual insights, the tenderness, and the wisdom that you do. He can do nothing right. You go home to your wife and you wonder why she is not interested in ministry and spirituality like this woman. No man can serve two masters. You find yourself inevitably hating one, judging one, or condemning one. It is amazing.

Now the man, seeing that his wife is receiving help from a pastor at church or from you, perhaps feels castrated spiritually; so he pulls further away from ministry. Your heart is now beginning to be softened toward her, maybe even romantically. Watch out, you are in trouble!

I suggest to you as ministers, it is not just enough that we flee youthful lusts and slip out of the coat. I suggest to you that we do that indeed, but take it a step farther. Take what Paul said literally, at face value. He said, “If a woman has a question, let her ask her husband at home,” period (cf. [1 Corinthians 14:35](#)). I personally do not believe that is just cultural. I believe that is very practical. If a sister has a question, you tell her as a pastor, “Would you ask your husband?” There should be no counseling—not one session, not five minutes. You lovingly, but firmly say, “Talk to your husband.” Then the husband comes to you and you have the opportunity to disciple him. He then goes and shares with his wife. He is not being castrated spiritually and you are not putting your treasure in a woman that will cause your heart to inevitably follow. You just do not answer questions in that way—in depth with women—period.

You say, “Well Jon that sounds pretty legalistic.” No, that is just wisdom. It is just wisdom. “But what if the husband is not a Christian?” Tell her to go ask her husband anyway. We have eight or nine men now at Applegate Christian Fellowship who were saved because we sent the women to ask their unsaved husbands. They were so blown away that their wives were asking them questions about spirituality that they called us up and we began to minister to them. Now they are born again. This is the way it should be.

You may ask, “What if her husband will not come and talk to you and he is not saved? What if she is single, divorced, or going through an estrangement of some sort?” I suggest to you that, again, Paul makes it perfectly clear in Titus. The older women are to counsel and teach younger women about being keepers of the home, loving their husbands, and good godly things (cf. [Titus 2:4-5](#)). Women are to counsel women. Men are to disciple men.

I believe that we need to realize that this coat that we carry in ministry has a strange effect on people and we better be very careful. Take Paul’s admonition literally and say, “We just will not answer questions in depth, at length, even in one session.” I throw that out for your strong and prayerful consideration.

Joseph had his coat. James, Peter, and John were in the inner circle. With those privileges come certain distractions, headaches, heartaches, double-takes, death, and all that kind of thing. Korah, you should relax and be happy where you are presently. Why are you seeking for more?

Then Moses calls these fellows together and says, “The Lord is going to show who is His. Take censers.” And they took censers and put incense therein and lit fire. The censers that they

brought, we are told, were made of brass. The Levitical law said that censers in ministry were to be made of gold. Why didn't they have gold, these 250 rebellious men with Korah, Dathan and Abiron? Maybe they used it all in making the golden calf in another rebellion. Brass is that metal that speaks of judgment. Gold is beaten. Brass is molded. What are we being told?

The flyers you get in the mail all the time for the conferences you are invited to about how to mold your ministry—it is brass, man. It is brass. Cultural relevancy, tricks, dancing bears, lighting, action and everything else—it is brass. It is molded. Mold yourself. Mold yourself so that you might be used and have authority, fruitfulness, and success in ministry. Gold is not molded. Gold is beaten. Gold is carefully hammered out.

That is the difference between Korah and Moses. With authority there comes, under the surface, some real difficult times of preparation and some stretches. Moses was a man who could speak with authority because he had spent time with the Lord on the mountain. Forty days and forty nights this man spent with the Lord. He did not eat a thing or drink any fluids. It was not because he was trying to prove some kind of spirituality. Do you know what happened? He was in the presence of the Lord and he just forgot to eat. He was just blown away by God's goodness. He was just enjoying the Lord.

Meanwhile, do you know what the people down below were doing? They said, "What are we paying the pastor for? Aaron, you be our leader. You are the assistant, so you take over. Where is Moses? We cannot find him. We cannot get a hold of him. He will not answer his beeper. What is wrong with him?"

But Moses knew something which Korah never understood and that is that there is a difference between brass and gold. Moses knew, "I need to be on the mountain no matter what is happening down below. I need to be with the Lord in order that I might have a word from the Lord for the people of the Lord. I have to be in touch." For forty days, he was gone. When he came down—speaking of gold—what happened? He was glowing. He came down with the law and the people said, "Whatever you say, we will do." Why? It was because he was glowing. They could see that there was something unique that was happening—he was coming with the word of the Lord.

There is a better example still. There is one greater than Moses by far. Jesus, on the Mount of Transfiguration, what was happening with Him? That which was inside of Him was bursting out from Him. The real miracle of the Mount of Transfiguration is not that Jesus glowed that day, but that He did not glow for the rest of the days in His thirty-three year life. That is the real mystery. He just started glowing. Notice what they were talking about on that mountain. They were talking about death.

I suggest that we can talk to our people, we can talk to our fellowships, we can lay down the law, we can give the heavy word, the life and death kind of exhortation; but if we are not glowing, the people are not going to be receiving. They will take it as though they are being beaten or manipulated. They will interpret it as being pressured. Whether you are talking life and death-like transfiguration or laying down the law like Sinai, the fact of the matter is: if we are shining because we have been in the presence of the Lord—not some brass thing—then people will receive from us. It makes all the difference in the world.

The men of Korah had their brass censers. They were the wrong censers with the wrong fire. They are going to get burned, literally—[Numbers 16:35](#) points that out. When the judgment did come down, the fire of the Lord consumed those 250 men. Again, we know from Leviticus 10

where fire was to be taken from. Fire was to be taken only from the altar. They ignited their own fire.

A lot of guys are talking these days about being burned out in ministry. This is the ultimate burn out. They were consumed by fire, literally. “I am so burned out.” Whenever I hear that I always say, “Hey, you know what? If you are burned out it is indicative that the fire is not from the altar.” What does the altar speak of? It speaks of one thing—the cross of Calvary. The cross motivates us to serve the people or win the lost. Just say, “Wow. Lord, You have been so good to me in dying for me. My sins are forgiven. I am going to heaven. I am so appreciative of that fact I cannot help but serve You, Lord.” That is the fire that will cause you to glow. With any other fire, you will burn out. You know that.

These guys did just that. It was fire that was not from the altar. They lit it themselves. It was the wrong fire in the wrong censers. They were brass instead of gold. They were the wrong brothers. None of these guys, at least the 250, were Levites. Korah was, but these guys that stood with him and marched behind him, were not. They had no business attempting to do this because they moved into a sphere that they were not called to and they ended up being destroyed. They ended up being wiped out, and literally burned out.

What about Korah? Moses said, “The Lord is going to show today what is really happening.” Sure enough, the Lord made a new thing take place, even as Moses said would happen.

The Lord caused the earth to open up and they went down quick
into the pit. They were swallowed up in the pit, and the earth
closed over them and they perished there in the midst of the
congregation. (cf. [Numbers 16:30, 33](#))

Do you want to get in the pits in ministry? Let me tell you how. Push yourself, leave the ministry God has called you to serve in—the sphere, the size, the priority, and start saying, “I am going to challenge this brother or that one. I am going to throw spears at them. I am going to show my brass. I am going to show my stuff. I am going to prove my point.” You will end up depressed. You will go home and say, “I am really in the pit. Why am I in the pit?”

Now let’s move into the Gospel of Matthew where there was excitement in the air. There was great anticipation. You could sense something was about to happen. Indeed, a few hours later the whole city would be lining the streets crying, “Hosanna! Blessed is He that comes in the name of Yahweh, the Lord” (cf. [Matthew 21:9](#)). You could feel it. You could sense it.

Now a woman came to Jesus, fell before Him, and she began to worship. The worship, though, was kind of interesting. It was kind of like mine is sometimes. Maybe yours is too, occasionally. It was to manipulate Him. Jesus saw that her worship was not because of her simple adoration of who He was, but because she was wanting something from Him.

We come into the Lord’s presence, sing songs, lift hands, bow knees or whatever we might do. “Lord, I love You. I lift my voice. I worship You. Oh my soul—by the way, Lord, now that I am here, now that You are listening, I have a little problem, a little burden, a little financial need.” We act like the Lord does not see through that. He sees. He must get the biggest kick out of me, the biggest chuckle out of you. We think that we are setting Him up, softening Him through worship to get something from Him.

Well, that is what she did that day. She falls and worships Him. Jesus says, “What do you want?” I suggest to you that there was a smile on His face and an understanding tone in His voice. “Well, now that You are asking,” she says. “Since You brought it up, Lord, two boys, Your disciples, James and John, can they be on Your right hand and on Your left hand when You come into Your kingdom?” (cf. [Matthew 20:21](#)). It seemed like a good thing to ask. “Can they be exalted? Can they have a place of visibility? Can they be lifted in a higher place physically? Can they have that kind of ministry on Your right hand and on Your left hand the day You come into Your kingdom?”

Jesus answered this woman rather quizzically, “Are you able to drink of the cup that I am to drink from, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am about to undergo?” ([Matthew 20:22](#)). James and John were standing there, no doubt feeling the glares from the other disciples who were disgusted with them trying to get ahead. They said, “Oh, we are.” And Jesus went on His way. His answer seemed rather odd to her that day. “What kind of an answer is that? What cup is He speaking of? What baptism is He talking about?”

It was not too many days later that same mother, Salome, was on a little hill outside of that holy city. She looks up and sees her Lord crucified, nailed to the tree. There are the Marys with her as she is standing there. The other disciples had all fled and hidden except for John who was hanging around. It must have hit her like a ton of bricks, a bolt of lightening, what she saw there that day. He said, “Today you will be with Me in paradise.” That day He came into His kingdom in a certain kind of way. It must have hit her brutally when she saw on His right hand, in a place of high visibility, and on His left hand, there were two men being crucified. She must have realized that was what He was talking about. “No wonder He did not answer me in the affirmative. I could have seen my two boys crucified today. I thought I was asking for something right. He did not answer me in the way that I wanted and now I see that He was right.”

Oh brothers, you have asked. You have talked to the Lord about a greater ministry. Leave it with the Lord because He loves you. If it does not work out in the way that you are desiring, in the way that you are requesting, I know that if He does not do it, it is best for you. “Seek first the kingdom of God and everything else will be added to you” ([Matthew 6:33](#)). I know this. He proved His love on the cross of Calvary. And if He spared not His own Son, will He not freely give all good things? (cf. [Romans 8:32](#)). In other words, I can just relax. I am at peace in the place of cross-examination in my own ministerial situation.

Lord, I love You and I know You are in love with me. Here are some thoughts, some ideas, and some burdens. I will talk them over with You. But now I leave them in Your hands completed because I see in Your hands the proof that You do love me. The holes in Your hands and feet prove unequivocally, irrefutably that You are in love with me. Therefore I leave it with You. If You do not do what I am suggesting, Lord, I know that You see it would not be good for me and I just leave it with You.

The place of peace is at the foot of the cross, realizing that the Lord loves you so much. He died for you and wants nothing but the best in your ministry, in your life personally. Be at peace. Do not make the mistake of Salome, demanding your way. Just be at peace with what the Lord wants to do.

Well, let's pray, shall we?

Father, I pray that my brothers and I together might not be those who, like Korah, are striving for a different position, a higher ministry, but would just be what You want us to be, knowing, Lord, that You want the best. You proved it on the cross and there we rest completely. I pray, Father, for these precious guys, for my brothers, that Lord, if there are spear throwers, if there is in our hearts a rebelliousness, a restlessness, even right now, we might give it up, let it go, and trust in You as we see what You did on the cross. May we understand that You love and want the best for us. Father, we reaffirm our belief that You know what is best. We choose to do whatever You want us to do, serve wherever You want us to serve to however many it might be. We leave it with Thee, truly. In Jesus' name. Amen.

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

BY

Calvary Chapel Outreach Fellowship

Lesson 11 **Bitterness and Hatred**

By

Skip Heitzig

Calvary Chapel Albuquerque

Brought to you by:

The Blue Letter Bible Institute

www.blbi.org

A ministry of:

The Blue Letter Bible

www.blueletterbible.org

Servant Leadership – Lesson 11
Bitterness and Hatred by Skip Heitzig

1

All Scripture References are to NKJV unless otherwise noted in the text.

As you look at Jude, the book begins by saying, “I intended to write you a letter about our common salvation” (cf. [Jude 3](#)). But Jude found it necessary to write exhorting us to defend the faith, or to stand firm. And, you know, there is a serious tone about this conference. I have had the Holy Spirit just slam me a few times, but always in a very encouraging kind of way with the desire to make me stronger.

We have to remember that though we might not like exhortation—and I heard some of the winds blowing around, saying, “Oh I don’t know. This conference is going to be pretty heavy. I don’t know what’s going to happen.” Remember, “to exhort” means “to encourage.” And sometimes it is a kick in the pants to encourage us and I have been kicked a few times so far. But I am glad to know that it is God’s foot, as He is seeking to restore and build us up.

You know, Jude was angered in a righteous way because the faith was being hindered in some. It was being attacked by the Gnostic heretics. And in that anger he knew that these guys, and the church, needed to be exhorted to stand firm, to hang tough. We need that exhortation; we need to stand up for the faith, the ministry that has been delivered to us. The baton is being passed to all of us and we need to see the danger signs.

Let’s open up in prayer.

Lord, it is a privilege, nothing less than an incredible privilege, to be called ministers of the gospel. Lord, we have the goods. We have the greatest message heralded to human beings, and You put it in clay pots. And we remember, Lord, that we have feet of clay, and nothing more. Father, I pray that we would be faithful to the message, not only to proclaim it, but by Your grace that we would be conformed to it and be changed by it. We ask it in Jesus’ name. Amen.

I have a six-year-old son named Nathan. He thinks he is the hottest hockey player in New Mexico. We have an ice rink there and just last Sunday he won the State Championship in his division in ice hockey, so he thinks he is really tough. He is at that age where he is going through these things like: “I’m better than so and so” and “we’re the best.” He is the worst hockey player on the team, but he thinks he is the best. And I have not told him otherwise; I want to encourage him. He is getting to be that age where he is learning about love and hate and I am really trying to steer him toward love and away from the way of Cain, which we are covering today—the way of hatred.

When the elections were going on and it looked like a certain candidate was winning, Nathan started crying when he had found out. His mother and I were telling him about the candidates and he started crying because he was so mad. As I tucked him into bed that night and I said, “Nathan, we need to pray for our new president.” He said, “I’m never going to pray for him.” I said, “Well Nathan, he’s going to be our president. We need to do that.” “I’m not going to do it.” And so I was trying to do everything I could to explain the importance of lifting up our leaders in prayer, talking to a six-year-old can be difficult. So he just said, “Lord, I just pray that You would stop him from killing babies.” And you know, there was some insight in that little fellow. However, he still had a little bit of animosity and anger in his voice.

The feelings that are common to men are common to ministers. And we have been talking about some of the standard forward attacks of the enemy: lust, greed, lack of faith. But there is that back door which for some of us is a front door approach. Some of us have a real problem, as we are going to see, with the way of Cain.

Well, if you will turn with me to the Book of Jude, we will just notice a couple things. [Verse 11](#) says,

Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and [they] perished in the rebellion of Korah.

Jude has basically been running of a theme and that is: keeping yourself in the love of God, which he really ends up with. He starts by saying, “I wanted to write a letter of our common salvation but I found it necessary to exhort you because there have been snakes that have come into the fellowship, called gnostics, who are turning people aside, away” (cf. [Jude 3-4](#)). And so he gives example after example. He gives several groups: Israel—those who failed in their faith; and the angels—those who left their first estate. After giving examples of groups, in [verse 11](#) he gives three examples of individuals who failed to keep themselves in the love of God.

Cain is mentioned three times in the New Testament, always negatively. There is nothing good said about Cain. And the verse starts out by saying, “Woe.” This is the denunciatory kind of judgmental proclamation that the Old Testament prophets would often use. “Woe to them.”

Now how would you like to be a guy about whom nothing good is said? And the woe is not like the surfers, “Whoa.” This is like, “Woe!” You know, it is like Isaiah said, “Woe is me for I am undone” ([Isaiah 6:5](#)).

Cain is number one on the list as an example because he is the first one in Scripture to depart from the love of God through anger and bitterness and hatred.

I am going to be looking at a couple of verses in [Genesis 4](#), so we opened up with Jude, but let’s turn to Genesis 4. And as you are turning, you might think, “Jude? Why did he pick Cain?” Not only is he an example to the gnostics, but why would we choose to go through the way of Cain? Why is Cain chosen in this pastors’ conference as an example to ministers? It seems strange, but it is not. Cain was the second generation after experiencing one of the greatest works of God in creation. God had manifested Himself in creation through Adam and Eve. His parents were directly molded by God, creatively made by God. And already in the second generation, a man is filled with bitterness and hatred to go and to kill his brother.

I was given a William Granall book years ago. And in it he says, “None sink so far as those who come near heaven, because they fall from the greatest height.”

Remember years ago, when the television evangelist scam was going around, of course, the world made a mockery of that. It was in all of the newspapers and it was on CNN Nightly and on Nightline. They had some of their biggest ratings on Nightline over the fall of these characters. There was an article in a national newspaper entitled, “People Who Love.” And the article said,

TV evangelists profess their affection, but they throw bombshells. No word is more often mentioned in the babble of television evangelists than “love.” However [the article goes on

to say] this person is slamming this person and this person hates this person, but they are all saying that they love each other.

The way of Cain is a pattern that ministers have taken. It is a serious stumbling block. It is recorded in Genesis 4 that Cain departed from the presence of the Lord. God kicks him out of the garden, but you know what happened to Cain before he was kicked out of the garden was that he departed from the presence of the Lord in his heart. And what happened to Cain outwardly was merely a reflection of what was going on in his heart already.

And you know, the problem right there. Whenever you see a problem in a person's life, in a minister's life, the problem always begins with that person's relationship to God. In some way, he has departed from God. In some way, his relationship with God is not what it ought to be. And because of that, it becomes manifest in his relationships with other people—in the myriad of relationships that pastors have with other people. There are a lot of people in our lives as ministers, aren't there? I mean, think about your own little inner circle and work outwards. You have your wife and your children, your staff and your congregation. You have other pastors in town, other congregants in town that hear about you or might come to visit the church. If you have a radio ministry, you have people in different towns who have heard you and know of you. With all of those relationships, besides just the idea of, "I'm a minister giving the Word of God, speaking for the Lord." All of those things add pressure to a pastor's life. We all know that this is a very vulnerable spot. The ministry is very, very vulnerable. Whenever a person steps out in a public ministry, he is in a different kind of an arena.

I have a report. It is a 1991 survey that was given by Fuller Institute to pastors around the country. The results of this survey are interesting. It says that:

- 80% of the pastors in ministry believe the pastoral ministry has affected their families negatively.
- 33% say being in the ministry is an outright hazard to their family.
- 75% report a significant stress-related crisis at least once in their ministry.
- 50% feel unable to meet the needs of the job.
- 90% feel they were inadequately trained to cope with the ministry demands.
- 40% report a serious conflict with a parishioner at least once a month.
- 37% confess being involved in inappropriate sexual behavior with someone in their church.
- [Listen to this one.] 70% don't have anyone they consider a close friend. [70%!]

Now they probably have close friends, but because of the image that you build around the ministry, and you do not want to show yourself, or expose the weak spots because people think that you are less than maybe you think you are. There are close friends, but you do not consider them that way.

Now for a minute think of Cain's advantages. Before we get into the way of Cain and what happened to him, think about his advantages. He had quite a spiritual heritage, didn't he? I mean, his parents were molded by God, a direct creation as God formed man. Out of the ground He created him. He breathed life into his father, into Adam and God made a man. And God looked at

Adam and saw that he was good and then He made Eve. And then God spoke directly to Adam. God spoke directly to Cain. With all of these advantages of hearing direct revelation, of being so close to the power of God, and yet, Cain turned to bitterness and hatred.

My point is that we have an incredible spiritual heritage. You know, if we were all to tell our stories and trace the histories of our churches, and where we came from, we would probably all say, “Well, I used to go to Chuck’s church in Costa Mesa. And I used to sit down and listen to the Sunday evening Bible studies, and I would get fed.” I saw a role model and I thought, “I want to teach the Bible.” You know, we can go back to the early days and remember the miracles that have happened and the movement of the Spirit in the communities. But you know, a history of the movement of the Holy Spirit is not enough. What happened in the past is nothing to rest your laurels on. Chuck always taught, “Don’t look back for your spiritual experience.” I love what he said yesterday. He said, “I’m in a place now where the best is yet to come.” I am more excited about ministry than ever before. And it is dangerous if we are always looking back to our history of what has happened, instead of forward to what God is doing now going to do.

Spiritual heritage is not enough. It was not enough for Cain. Cain had such a background and yet he was destroyed because of anger and bitterness that led to murder.

And a well-known name is not enough. Calvary Chapel is a great name to put on the church because when people leave California and they look for a place to fellowship, they will walk into a place that says “Calvary Chapel.” But the name is not enough because what goes on there should produce what goes on here. It may not produce exactly the same fruit as Chuck, but that church better have the teaching of the Word, a love of the sheep, and a quality, healthy fellowship.

Paul wrote to Timothy and said, “Timothy, guard what was committed to your trust” ([1 Timothy 6:20](#)). And in the second letter to Timothy he said, “You must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them” ([2 Timothy 3:14](#)). Those were his advantages. Cain had the advantages of being close to the creation of God and yet he went the way of Cain, which simply means the way of thinking or the path that led to his destruction.

So let us look at a couple of verses in Genesis 4, and we will scoot through this thing. Cain took a series of downward steps before he murdered his brother. I do not think it was just out and out rage of the moment, but something had been going on behind the scenes. And first of all, he was self-willed in his service to the Lord.

In the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the Lord. Abel also brought of the firstborn of the flock and of their fat. And the Lord respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.
([Genesis 4:3–5](#))

You know, the first qualification to becoming a good shepherd is to be a good sheep. Cain was called by God to render a certain kind of service unto the Lord. He was called to bring an offering along with his brother. And although he brings an offering, it is an offering after his own accord. It is self-willed service—selfish service. He kind of made it up himself.

Now there is a lot of controversy and talk about these verses, as to what kind of an offering it was. What exactly did Cain offer and why God did not respect Cain’s when He respected Abel’s.

Suffice it to say that both boys, Cain and Abel, were taught well by mom and dad on how to approach God. They had already tried to bring the fruit of the ground to cover themselves. After they sinned, they took fig leaves, sewed them together, you remember. And they covered themselves because they realized that they were naked (cf. [Genesis 3:7](#)). After their sin, they came to the realization, “I don’t have any clothes on. I’ve got to do something about it.” And so they sewed fig leaves together. But, we also read later on that God took the skins of animals and clothed them. And really that paves the highway to the cross that begins in [Genesis 3](#) when God says that the seed of the woman will come and bruise the serpent. And then we see the highway to the cross continue as the skins of animals were taken. An animal has to be killed to provide now for the sins of Adam. It is basically a foreshadowing of atonement.

Both of the Cain and Abel remembered the history of mom and dad. They remembered the sin. They knew the approach to God and yet Cain brings his own approach to God. He brings the fruit of the ground. God looks upon him. And it is not really that fruit versus the animal, it is that Abel came by faith and Cain did not. We read in [Hebrews 11:4](#), “By faith, Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice, whereby it was witnessed that he was righteous before God.”

The relationship that Cain had with God was a surface relationship. He brings service. But it is not from a background of obedience. For we read in [Genesis 4:7](#), “If you do well, will you not be accepted?” God says, “Cain, if you just lived right, if you were righteous, not perfect, you would be accepted, and this sacrifice would be accepted.” God never separates the worship from the worshipper or the sacrifice from the one giving the sacrifice. Cain comes and renders service to the Lord and yet, it is self-styled service. Something he made up along the way. It was hypocrisy. A man who does not practice what he preaches destroys what he builds.

You know, hypocrisy is a real danger for those in the ministry. I think it is easier to lose your first love in the ministry than any place else. You know, it is sort of like a guy who likes working with cars and he tinkers on the little Volkswagen as he grows up. And he thinks, “Man, this is so fun. I just love to take my carburetor apart after I get off work. I hate to put it together, but I love to take it apart. And I would like to do this for a living some day.” So he does it for a living and pretty soon he does not want to do it, he has to do it. He has to crank out those carburetors and rebuild those engines. And soon, he has lost the love and the passion that he once had for working on cars. It is gone.

It is easy to lose your love, that “first love” relationship with the Lord when you work in the ministry. We traffic so much in the truth that sometimes we become immune to it. It is easy to become numb to it. That is one of my constant prayers, “God, don’t just let me crank out a sermon. Don’t let me read the Bible and say, ‘Oh, this is perfect; they need to hear this.’” But let me pray, “Lord, I need that for my life. I want to become personally touched by Your truth so I’m not just cranking out a message because I’m in touch with the truth. I want to be changed by the truth.”

Remember E. M. Bounds? We quote him so often. He said that a man’s ministry is not the production of an hour but it is the outflow of an entire life.

Presently, the church is under attack all over. In New Mexico the big spiritual leader is the archbishop. It is a very Catholic state. The Archbishop has been there for many, many years. He is a respected figure in the community, and in the state. His first cousin is a member of my staff. And the archbishop has been respected, especially for his stands on the sexual issue and homosexuality. And he has come out and made several public acknowledgments of the evil of homosexuality and how men and women ought to keep themselves pure. But just this last month,

he has been indicted for five separate accounts of sexual infidelity—five of them. And now the whole Catholic Church in the state of New Mexico is up in arms because the man that they had looked to, who spoke so much against it, has been involved in this sin himself.

And one of the dangers, like Cain, is to become so close with all of the spiritual advantages and so close to the truth and the movement of God, but not let those truths touch our lives. We are just thinking, “I know that guy in my church will be here next week. I’m really going to get him next week with this message. This is a good one for him. I won’t mention his name but I’ll just sort of look his direction.” We can become immune to the truth instead of becoming shaped by it.

When the ministry becomes a performance rather than something that really comes from the life, we set ourselves up for the next phase that happened to Cain. He started with self-styled service and worship and the next phase was envy and jealousy. It does not say that in our text, but if you turn over to 1 John 3, it is written right there. This is one of the three times that he is mentioned in the New Testament. [1 John 3:10–11](#) says,

In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest; Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother. For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

Now, let’s just stop right there. Isn’t this the message we have heard from the beginning? The one we have heard ever since we have been involved in the Calvary Chapel movement. That has been the ongoing message, actually. Let us love one another. Did you know that it is said that the apostle John, when he was at a very old age, that they would bring him into the congregation and this was his only message? He would lift up his scrawny arm and say, “Little children, love one another.” And he would say that every Lord’s day. Until the people got a little tired of the same message, and one of them said, “John, you keep saying love one another, love one another. Don’t you have another message?” He said, “If this is done, that’s enough. Children, love one another.”

Now, after speaking about that he gives an example of one who does not love, named Cain.

That we should love one another, not as Cain, who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother’s were righteous. ([1 John 3:11–12](#))

It was envy and jealousy, something that Jon touched on yesterday, that motivated him toward anger. You see, Abel showed up Cain in his relationship with God. Cain was insecure in his own relationship with God, because of self-willed, self-righteous activity and posture before God. Now somebody comes into his life, his brother, who is more righteous, who is spiritual and who shows him up, and envy and jealousy begin.

Envy has been defined in the Bible dictionary as: “A discontent or uneasiness at the sight of another’s good fortune accompanied with a degree of hatred.

You know, Jesus gave a principle to Nicodemus when he was having a conversation. He said,

Nicodemus, everyone who is practicing evil hates the light. And he won't come to the light lest his deeds should be exposed. (cf. [John 3:20](#))

You know, there is a principle right there for ministry. When a minister or any person is insecure in his relationship with God, and somebody comes into his life who could be a rival and that other person is righteous and walks with God and loves the Word of the Lord and has leadership capabilities, he can become envious. We can start saying, "Gosh, they're looking up to him now. And they keep saying he's such a tremendous Bible teacher. Every time I leave town and he fills in for me, they like my assistant better than they like me. I'm not going to let him teach anymore. In fact, I think he needs to go out and start his own church. I'll send him out there. Really encourage him to get out there and start his own church." So he does. Across the street from you and that makes it worse.

But in self-styled worship you are not conformed to God's pattern in His Word. When somebody comes into your life who is living righteously and rightly before God, they start showing you up and you can become jealous and envious and discontent because he might be a better counselor or something. You know what I have found? When somebody on my staff is a better counselor than me, I rejoice, because I hate to counsel. And when somebody comes along who is much better than I am—and there are a lot of them who are when it comes to counseling—it is wonderful to say, "Here's a guy who loves doing it. He does it all day long. He happens to be great at it." And one of the secrets is, to cultivate greatness in others, you must push them up. And that stems from having a right relationship with God.

Cain did not have a right relationship with God. He became jealous and jealousy transforms into hatred.

That was Saul's problem. We talked about Saul throwing those spears over at David. And David ducked. But you know, David was put in charge of Saul's army. He was the commander of all of the fighting men. And he went out and behaved himself wisely before Saul and before the army, and the people of Israel respected David. And everything was okay until Saul and David came home from the battle and the women were out in the street singing. And it was the song that they were singing that really bugged Saul. It was the words. He liked the music. The beat was great. But it was the words that really got to him, "Saul has slain his thousands. But David has slain his tens of thousands." And Saul said, "What more can he have except the kingdom? (cf. [1 Samuel 18:6–8](#))

Now let's contrast Saul's attitude to Moses' attitude. Joshua comes into the camp and says, "Moses, Moses, there is a problem over here. Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp. Tell them to be quiet." Moses says, "Are you jealous for my sake? I would to God that all of His people could prophesy and He would put His Spirit on all of them. Don't get jealous for me." (cf. [Numbers 11:26–29](#)). See Moses wanted to lift people up. Saul wanted to push people down because David exposed Saul weaknesses. David showed him up and he wanted to get rid of David. Moses wanted to cultivate greatness in the ministry.

And I think that is really the secret to a successful ministry, the fact that you want to cultivate greatness in others. This is possible when you are not intimidated by their qualities. Hey, if they are a great teachers, great. They are only going to enhance your ministry and your staff and your community. They are great counselors? Great! Let the people at them. It is risky to do that; but when you are secure in your walk with God, it will enhance your ministry. And it will enhance that person's life and grow that person up into spiritual capabilities.

I heard of a pastor of a dwindling downtown church. And you know, downtown areas tend to become run down, and people start leaving them and fleeing to the suburbs. And this pastor once had a thriving church. It was the biggest church in town. But he started to notice that Sunday nights were getting a little thinner and thinner. Finally one night just a few people showed up and he said, “Hey, what’s the deal. I’m losing a lot of sheep here.” One of the elders stood up and said, “Well, there’s a guy in the suburbs, a young guy, really teaching the Bible and most of our flock has gone over there.”

“Well, is he a good Bible teacher?”

“Oh, he’s a great Bible teacher.”

“They teach the whole truth?”

“Yeah, nothing but the truth, so help me God.”

“Do they love the Lord?”

“They love the Lord.”

And so the pastor said, “Well, what are we waiting for?” He closed his Bible and said, “Let’s go.” He wasn’t threatened. He wasn’t intimidated. He just saw that God was doing a new work and he wanted to see and be involved in that as well.

Working on that level of being right with God, being close in your relationship with God, and your devotional life, and not just cranking out the messages, will keep you from becoming jealous. But here is the stage—a self-styled service leads to jealousy. You set yourself up for jealousy. You say, “God, I’m going to do Your ministry my way.” And then other people come into your life who have got the true capabilities, the true giftedness, and you become a little bit shaken by them. You see them as your rivals. You want to push them away. And you are doing nothing but hurting yourself, as we will see in a minute.

The next step was anger. We see that now in [Genesis 4:5](#). “He did not respect Cain and his offering and Cain was very angry and his countenance fell.”

You know people who fly into a rage always make a bad landing. And Cain did just that. He was angry with God because God respected his brother’s offering and not his own. And some of history’s greatest men have been ruined by anger and hatred. You know, Alexander the Great truly was great! At thirty years of age, he had conquered all of the known world. He wept in Babylon because there was nothing left to conquer. But he could not control his own spirit—twice he killed friends of his because in a drunken rage they had said something about their emperor. And Alexander angrily threw his spear at them and killed them. He could not control his own spirit. He was ruined by anger, though he could control the world.

Many of God’s men, through jealousy and anger, have also been ruined, as we see here. We all know about anger because we all get criticized. We know about our own anger, don’t we? It is because we have people in the church all the time, who take something that we said in a message the wrong way. They say, “You know, I disagree with that. And I have a word from the Lord for you.”

I had a guy come to me two weeks ago and he said, “I have a word from God just for you. God will not let me leave town until I tell you.” Now, anytime anybody says that I automatically have this defensive posture, because there are a lot of kooks out there.

So I said, “Interesting. All right, fine. What is it?”

So he sat down and said, “I do not want to say this but I am compelled by God to tell you. This is a message from God.”

“Okay, well, what is it?”

“Let My people go.”

“All right. Where are they going to go? What do you mean by that?”

And so he started talking about the church that he had come from and they had the freedom to dance in the Spirit and that I am putting a cap on what the Holy Spirit wants to do. “Let My people go.” I said, “Why didn’t you just come to me and tell me that’s your opinion? Because now you are pretending to be a prophet of God and you are a false prophet.” And you know, I found I had to restrain myself, because when there are kooks like that it makes me angry. It makes me really angry because they are going to feed off of God’s sheep and start ruining them. I can handle it but they are going to get out there to the sheep.

There are times, folks, when anger is justified. In fact, I think that there is something wrong with you if you do not get angry. There is something inhuman about a person who does not get angry. The Bible commands you, “Be angry, but don’t let it lead you to sin” (cf. [Ephesians 4:26](#)). There are certain things that make me angry. When I see what the devil is doing to God’s church, and to God’s ministers, I get angry.

A man walked into my church and said he was the Messiah. You know what made me angry was that he was telling a whole bunch of vulnerable little sheep that he was Jesus. So he comes into my office and he says, “I am the messiah.”

I said, “You’re Jesus?”

“Yep.”

I said, “I’m disappointed. Now can you prove that you’re Jesus?”

He said, “I can. I have the third testament.”

I said, “I have not read that one.”

He said, “Well it’s new. I wrote it.”

“Oh, you wrote it. You authenticated yourself?”

And I just put my arm around him and I said, “There’s the door. Walk through it and never come back. Not until there is really repentance in your heart.” But he was out there telling that lie to all of the sheep. That angers me when I see God’s flock being ripped off. Some anger is justified.

I read an article this week from a new church in Los Angeles. Did you hear of it? It is a feminist church and they worship the twin sister of Jesus, Jesse Mae Christ—because Jesus was a male chauvinist. Of course, she is getting a lot of press and all the women are saying, “Ooh, I like this one.”

When you see God’s flock being ripped off, get angry. Moses, when he saw the people around the golden calf—he got angry in [Exodus 32](#). Jesus, when he saw the money changers in the temple, He did not say, “That saddens Me.” He got a whip and He drove them out (cf. [Matthew 21:12](#)). And I like that passage of Scripture. Jesus had righteous indignation. You can’t read His text without knowing that Jesus became righteously indignant when He saw sheep being ripped off. He said, “You are white washed sepulchers. You are snakes. You are children of the devil.” That is radical.

A few weeks ago we were mentioning a bill that had come up in the state legislature concerning homosexuals. What happened in Colorado that had been overturned, they are now focusing their attention downward in New Mexico. And so they want equal rights as a minority status, like a black person. The bill said if you are an employer, you have to hire a certain amount of

homosexuals. And they were pushing it and pushing it. And so I mentioned something over the pulpit about that to try to give a biblical perspective. And you would not believe the notes I got from people in the church.

One of the notes disturbed me. You know, it is really disturbing, but I am sure that there are a lot of our brothers and sisters in the church who are homosexuals. I looked at that letter and I said, “There is not one in the true church of Jesus Christ that is a practicing homosexual. They might have a struggle with it or they might be a repentant one, but not one that is continually and habitually practicing it.” And my wife saw the things that were going on and she got a little bit angry as well. And you know, when she found out that the bill was in progress, she got on the phone. At my place it is telephone, telegraph, or tell my wife and the message will get out. She told all the representatives and she told all of the lawyers, and she got this whole group of people together in our state who presented it before the legislature and the judiciary committee, and they overturned the bill just this week, in the state of New Mexico. And the homosexuals are trying to pursue it.

So, righteous anger is healthy. It is healthy. And sometimes it is a good motivation, but then there is unrighteous anger. And Cain was one who was angry for the wrong reasons. His motivation was impure. And I just want to fire off three ways where your anger is unjustified.

First of all, when somebody else is blessed and you are not. And that is probably the most common. Either it is a staff member or it is somebody in your church who has had a need met, and your need, you think, is much greater but it has not been met. Or there is a pastor of another church whose church is growing and God is blessing them. They went to Chuck and Chuck gave them the loan. But Chuck turned you down when you asked him for the loan. So there is somebody else is being blessed.

The Scripture says, “Weep with those that weep. Rejoice with those that rejoice” (cf. [Romans 12:15](#)). It is a lot easier to weep with those who weep, isn’t it? If there is a tragedy in the ministry you say, “Oh brother, I’m so sorry. I’ll cry with you any time.” But if somebody says, “I’ve been blessed. God is just pouring out His Spirit. We have no financial need.” Then our reply becomes more muted, “Oh really? Well, praise God.” That reply is because somebody else is blessed.

We always talk about the prodigal son but we never talk about the other prodigal who stayed home ([Luke 15](#)). He was a prodigal son, you know. He was angry when he heard the music and he would not go in. And his father had to come out to him. He was angry that his brother was blessed.

Another form of unjustified anger is when you just do not get your way. You think something ought to be done by God and God does not give you your way and it makes you angry. And you have become not only angry with people, but angry with God. One example would be Jonah—a prophet and a bigot. He was convinced that Nineveh should fry—convinced that this arch enemy of the Jewish nation should be destroyed. And when God, in His grace and in His mercy, decided not to pour judgment on them, Jonah got ticked off. He did not get his way. He said, “You know that’s an unrighteous nation. God, they ought to pay for it.” But God saw that they turned and it says, “God relented from His anger” (cf. [Jonah 3:10](#)). And Jonah went to God and said, “I knew it! I knew that You were a righteous, graceful, loving God. And I’m angry because of it.” And God comes to Jonah and asks him, “Jonah, is this right for you to be angry?” Jonah doesn’t answer him. He sits outside the city, arms folded and looks over the city (cf. [Jonah 4](#)). Maybe God will just wipe these characters out.

In His grace and His love, once again God causes a plant, a gourd plant to grow up over Jonah, to give him protection in this angry state. In this sinful state God is blessing him. The next day, after it is grown up and Jonah is saying, “Oh this is a great place to live, under the shade of this gourd,” God creates a worm. The worm chews at the root. The gourd is withered. The East wind comes and blows and beats on Jonah and he becomes angry. And God says, “Jonah is it right for you to become angry?” Remember Jonah’s response? “It is right even unto death for me to become angry” (cf. [Jonah 4:9](#)). Jonah harbored animosity toward someone that God loved. He played God, wanting to judge those that God wanted to bless.

There was a pastor in Ireland who told this story to a group of Protestants, about a young two-year-old named Paul McGowen. This little boy loved to go to the park with his mommy every day and play in the park and see the birds. He would go to the park and see the birds flying around. He would say, “Birdie! Birdie!” One day on his way to the park—this was in Belfast—a terrorist bomb blew up and hurled little Paul across the street. He sustained head injuries. He was unconscious and taken to Belfast Children’s Hospital. They operated on him. For sixteen days he was in a coma. When he woke up, he could not see. The pastor is telling the Protestant congregation this story. After several weeks, when little Paul woke up blinded, the nurse was holding him by the window and all of a sudden little Paul says, “Birdies! Birdies!” He could see the little birdies. Finally he could see. Finally this miracle happened where he could see. They had been praying for him. Everybody in the audience rejoiced. But there was one woman who said, “But he was Roman Catholic, wasn’t he?”

You know, animosity toward other groups that are not of us or like us runs deep. God cannot bless them. They are not us! God is only allowed to pour out His grace upon us. I want my way. Why are You blessing them? They don’t even believe like we do.

A third way is when we react without responding. We react because we do not know all the facts. We have not researched all the facts. We react to a situation instead of gracefully responding. Moses is an example. Moses became angry when the Israelites wanted water to drink (cf. [Numbers 20](#)). And you know the story. Moses hit the rock, beat the rock, and he misrepresented God. He was not allowed to go into the Promised Land because of it. He misrepresented God as a God of anger rather than as a God of grace and love and forgiveness. He did not know all the facts. He reacted rather than responded.

In [Ecclesiastes 7:8–9](#), Solomon tells us these words of wisdom:

The end of a thing is better than its beginning;
The patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit. Do not hasten in your
spirit to be angry, For anger rests in the bosom of fools.

James says, “Be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath” (cf. [James 1:19](#).)” You should respond rather than react.

What happens when anger develops for any of these reasons, in the life of a minister? What often happens is that person begins to take it out on people like his wife, his children, his staff, and his church. And one of the worst things is when the pulpit becomes something to scold people and to chew them out rather than to feed them. This is a holy office to stand behind the pulpit and proclaim the Word of God. And there are pastors who, because they have been hurt and they have been burned, they react in anger towards somebody in the congregation. They use it to chew them out and rebuke them. There is a big difference between pouring out your heart and getting something off your chest—it needs to be done in love.

What happens when a person is caught up in this kind of activity is he becomes like Elijah—the Elijah complex. He becomes isolated. He isolates himself because of anger and pretty soon he thinks, “Well, you know, I’m the only one who is righteous anyway. I’m the only one giving the real truth. There is no one like me around.” And the problem with that, guys, is that it ruins us. Oh, it hurts them. It does. It hurts the flock of God, but it hurts the minister of God. It is like a rattle snake who, when he is really intimidated and he is really scared, he bites himself.

You know how an Eskimo kills a wolf? He takes a knife, coats it with a thin coat of blood and sticks it up in the snow with the blade sticking up. And the wolf comes by and he smells blood and he starts licking the blade. And as he licks the blade, because it is so cold, as he is cutting his tongue and sheering his tongue, he is numb to it because that blade is ice cold. And pretty soon, he kills himself as he swallows his own blood.

Anger does that. Anger destroys and debilitates the ministry of the person. They become totally ineffective. He does not see people as God sees them, through the loving, gracious eyes of a God who wants to love and forgive, but says, “I’m going to be right—dead right.” And it is debilitating.

Now notice what God does in [Genesis 4:10–12](#). After Cain kills his brother, God said,

What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood cries to Me from the ground. So now you are cursed from the earth which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. When you till the ground it shall no longer yield its strength to you. A fugitive and a vagabond you shall be on the earth.

It has been said that a person who thinks by the inch, talks by the yard, deserves to be dealt with by the foot. And God deals with them. He kicks them out of the garden. Notice what He said in [Genesis 4:13](#). Cain said to the Lord, “My punishment is greater than I can bear.” Isn’t that sad that he did not say, “My sin is greater than I can bear? I’m sorry. I confess it. I agree with You that it was wrong, Lord. I repent.” But he is concerned about the consequence. You see his heart had become so hard.

My punishment is greater than I can bear. Surely You have driven me out this day from the face of the ground; I shall be hidden from Your face; I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond on the earth, and it will happen that anyone who finds me will kill me. ([Genesis 4:13–14](#))

Now let’s look back at [verse 7](#) and we will close with this verse. Because I want to give you a few safeguards as we close this message. In [verse 7](#), God says, Cain, if you do well, if you live right, if you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well—notice this—sin lies at the door. Its desire is for you. But you should rule over it. In Hebrews it speaks of an animal crouching at the door, waiting so that as soon as you open the door it is going to come in and pounce on you.

Sin is crouching at the door, gang. It wants to master you. But you must master it. That is always the case, guys. Sin is crouching at the door, in terms of unbelief, sexual immorality, greed, anger, or whatever that door of vulnerability, whatever our Achilles’ heel happens to be. Sin is crouching

at the door. A person who refuses to be mastered by God and by the love of God, opens himself to be mastered by anything else. And ministries can be driven in those forces.

A couple safeguards: first, do not prolong the conflict if there is one. Do not prolong it. We all have them. There are people out there who love roast preacher for lunch every Sunday. And they will talk about you to everybody else in the congregation. And if you know there is a problem do not prolong it—resolve it. Sometimes the best way to resolve it is to go to a person. Sometimes it is just to leave it alone. But get it over quickly.

“Be angry and sin not. Do not let the sun go down on your wrath” (cf. [Ephesians 4:26](#)). Listen to the New English Bible, how it puts it:

If you are angry do not let your sin, or your anger lead you into
sin. Do not let the sunset find you still nursing it.

You sit in bed at night and it goes over and over and you are planning the course now of what exactly you are going to say in the sermon to the guy in the third row. Don't nurse it.

Secondly, overlook offenses. There is petty stuff. Don't worry about it. Those unsigned letters, throw them out. Don't even read them. Find out if it is signed—if it is not signed don't even read it. Throw it away. If somebody says something stupid, overlook it. Don't look at the black dot on the white sheet all the time. There are enough people who love you, who are grateful that you are their shepherd. All of the little conflicts do not really matter. It is just petty stuff.

And we have that beautiful proverb, [Proverbs 19:11](#), “The discretion of a man makes him slow to anger, And his glory is to overlook a transgression.”

Thirdly, watch your tongue. The tongue of a minister is sharpened because of exercise. We use it all the time and we become good at slicing people up. We can take the sword of the Spirit out and just level a person. Watch your tongue. “A soft answer turns away wrath” ([Proverbs 15:1](#)).

Somebody says, “Let My people go!” You know what I should have said? I should have said, “Well, would you pray for me?” And then I should have walked away. “Pray for me.” A soft answer turns away wrath. Harsh words stir up anger.

Fourthly and finally, be honest. If you feel something about a person don't butter them up with flattery. If there is something going on between you and a staff member or you and another pastor, be honest. Tell him what you think. The Scripture says in [Proverbs 27:5–6](#), “Open rebuke is better than secret love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend.”

It has helped my ministry a lot when somebody that I know and respect has come along side me and told me certain things that they see. Or when I have gone and just opened myself up to a person and then it is done. Be honest with a person. There are a lot of pastors, I think, that are afraid of honesty. We have this image of what we think people think of when they see us. We don't want to shatter that image. After all, we are the pastors. We do not get tempted, right? We do not have problems that the common people have. You know, I think it is important to let people see the cracks. Let them know that you are human. Be honest with them.

Paul Smith, several years ago, handed me a book by Juan Carlos Ortiz. He said I ought to read it. And I read it and it is really a great practical book on loving your neighbor as yourself. And Juan Carlos Ortiz is a pastor down in Argentina. He tells of a story of a pastor who hated his guts and

how he handled the situation. There was an animosity between he and another brother. Ortiz says, “There was a young man in my former denomination who became my enemy some time ago. He said that I was not being faithful to the church. Eventually he started to hate me. During one of the conventions I went to him and said,

‘Hello. How are you?’ and I gave him a big hug.

‘Don’t hug me’, he growled.

‘Well, I love you’, I replied.

‘You cannot love me because I am your enemy’. [He was almost shouting at this point].

‘Praise the Lord’, I said. ‘I didn’t know you were my enemy, but here is an opportunity for me to love my enemies. Thank You, Jesus, for my precious enemy.’”

He concluded by saying, “You know something. One year later I was preaching in his church.” Pastor Ortiz just would not let anger dominate him. He would not let jealousy dominate him. He had rumors going around about him all over the place in Argentina. He just said, “Forget it.” Forgive them. A soft answer turns away wrath.

Heavenly Father, we feel like we are being so fed by the practical exhortations of the men so far. We are privileged, Lord, to handle the word of truth. We do not take it lightly. And even though it would be great, Lord, like we do every year in June to speak about the common salvation, we felt it very necessary to exhort the brethren. Lord, You love Your church. You love Your ministry. And we remember right now that it is not our ministry to begin with. It is Yours. You just graciously let us be stewards, co-laborers with Christ. I pray, Lord, that we would never hold onto anything so tightly and possess something that does not belong to us anyway. That we would be faithful stewards, faithful men, and men filled with truth and that we would speak the truth in love. Help us, Lord, to never let our pulpit become platforms for getting even, or scolding the sheep, or yelling at people who have harmed us. Lord, help us to deal and to resolve issues of anger, sinful anger. Help us, Lord, to get angry at the right things. And to be very tender hearted toward Your sheep. Lord Jesus, You did not say, “If you love Me beat My sheep.” But You said, “If you love Me feed My sheep.” And that is what we want to do. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

BY

Calvary Chapel Outreach Fellowship

Lesson 12 **Abiding in Christ**

By

Chuck Smith

Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa

Brought to you by:

The Blue Letter Bible Institute

www.blbi.org

A ministry of:

The Blue Letter Bible

www.blueletterbible.org

The Apostle Paul, in 2 Corinthians, begins to share a little bit about his ministry. Paul had a plague. It followed him wherever he went. There were those who were so opposed to the message of grace that Paul was proclaiming that they felt it was their God-given duty to follow Paul wherever he established churches. And as soon as Paul left, they moved in like vultures to try to discredit his ministry in the hearts of the people. They would say, “Who is Paul?” They do not really recognize him in Jerusalem. They would challenge his apostleship and his authority. So Paul found it necessary, many times, to write these epistles to encourage the people not to listen to these smooth-talking deceivers who would follow him.

It is interesting to me that those who have heresy to proclaim never proclaim it to the world; they proclaim it to the church. Heretical doctrines are rarely evangelistic. Those who spread them are always coming to the church to feed off of the church. They will not go out in the front lines against the devil, but they will come to your churches. They will try to get a little group, a little listening audience, and then they will whisper, “I don’t know if you are spiritually ready for this or not, but God has been revealing some marvelous things in these days.” And they start trying to feed off of the body.

Paul was plagued by these individuals who would follow him and then try to disrupt the saints of God. They would not go to the cities where Paul had not gone. They were not willing to start their works in new areas or uncharted territory. They would go to those who had already come to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ and try to subvert the gospel that Paul had preached unto them.

So Paul is writing to the Corinthians. These undermining people would come with their letters of authority that stated, “So and so recognizes me, et cetera.” Paul says, “Hey, I do not need any letters of commendation, for you are really my letters of commendation. You are the living epistles. The very fact that you believe in Jesus Christ is my letter of commendation. You owe your faith to me. The fact that you are walking in the Lord is my letter of commendation. I do not need to come along and prove myself” (cf. [2 Corinthians 3:1–3](#)).

Now Paul, in considering the ministry, says, “And who is sufficient for these things? (cf. [2 Corinthians 2:16](#)). And then he answers the question, “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of Christ” (cf. [2 Corinthians 3:5](#)).

I look at the ministry and all that it entails—dealing with people, handling the Word of God, and being God’s representative. To me the heaviest part of the ministry is knowing that people are developing their concepts of God by what they see in me. They are drawing their ideas of what God is like, as they observe me. As a minister of Jesus Christ, I am a representative of Him and it is my duty to represent Him before people. And they are developing their concepts of God as they observe me. They are developing their concepts of God as they observe you. As has been pointed out, you are a role model for people. As you shepherd, they are going to be following you. They are going to follow the example that you have set.

I heard that Greg Laurie and one of his deacons decided to go hunting. They left in the pick-up with the guns in the rack in the back. They went to an area of Riverside County, but everything was posted “Closed. No hunting”. They had driven for hours and so finally the deacon said, “The only chance we are going to have to hunt is over there on Old Man Brown’s ranch but he is the meanest guy in the whole county. He has a reputation of being so mean that he will be out with his shotgun if you dare go anywhere near his yard.” Greg said, “We have come this far, I would like to do some shooting. I think I will just go up and ask him. Nothing ventured, nothing gained. It will not hurt to ask the fellow.”

Greg went up to the door and knocked. He said, “Sir, my deacon and I decided we would go hunting today. We have been driving for a long time and we found everything posted ‘closed’. I am Greg Laurie, the pastor of the Harvest Fellowship in Riverside. I was wondering, do you suppose it would be possible to do a little shooting on your property?” The fellow said, “So you are Greg Laurie? That is tremendous! I have been listening to your radio broadcast and man, do I ever appreciate your ministry. You do not know what you have done for my family and I.” He said, “We never miss your Bible study. Honey, do you know who is here? It is Greg Laurie!” He was just so excited. He said, “Hey, I would count it a real privilege for you to hunt on my property. But I do have one favor to ask you.” He said, “That horse out there in the corral... You see him out there? The vet just left and said that he is sick and we have to put him down. Would you mind shooting the horse before you go on out?” Greg said, “No, I will be glad to shoot the horse for you.”

So he headed back to the truck and Greg decided he would play a trick on his deacon. As he got back to the truck, he said to the deacon, “It is true. That guy has to be the meanest guy I have ever met in my life. You cannot believe what that man said to me. In fact, I am boiling. I am so mad.” He said, “I just have to do something. I cannot just drive off, I have to do something.” He grabbed the gun off the rack, leveled on the horse, and pulled the trigger. Pow! And the old horse falls over dead. And as Greg turned around to put the gun back, he hears, Pow! Pow! And the deacon says, “I got two of his cows. Let’s get out of here, Greg!”

So you are a role model. Your people are going to follow you. You have to be careful of the kind of an example you set for them as God’s representative.

When I think of these responsibilities, I cry out with Paul, “Who is sufficient for these things?” When I think of all that the ministry entails, the obligations, the responsibilities, and the accountability of the ministry that I must one day make before God, with Paul I often say, “Who is sufficient for these things?” And I recognize immediately that I am not. I am not sufficient for these things. I cannot handle it. It is more than what I can handle. It is important for us to recognize as Paul did, that we are not sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves (cf. [2 Corinthians 3:5](#)).

If God has started to bless your ministry, if God has started to use you in a special way, do not think that it is of yourself. Why is it that we always look for something in us as a reason why God finally chose us? He finally came around and realized what He had here. “Isn’t that wonderful? God finally knows just what a prize He snagged when He got hold of me. And now God is beginning to use me because God knew that He could trust me.” We begin to think that it is something of us when in reality, as Paul says, “God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise” (cf. [1 Corinthians 1:27](#)).

So God has chosen you and God has chosen me—the foolish things of the world, the simple things—that He might work through us in order that the wise might be confounded. Some may say, “Well, I do not understand how or why God does it for them.” The sufficiency is not of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of Christ.

There are a couple of Scriptures that I have really taken to heart which have become more or less models for my life. One is the statement of Jesus to His disciples in John 15, as He is talking about this relationship of the vine and the branches. Jesus said, “Apart from Me you can do nothing” (cf. [John 15:5](#)). I do not like to hear that. “Lord, surely there is something I can do.” I spent several years trying to disprove that Scripture. I felt that surely there has to be something I

can do that is worthwhile for God. But there came a day when I waved the white flag and I said, “I surrender, God. I agree. Apart from You, I can do nothing.”

I put that along with [Philippians 4:13](#), “For I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.” Apart from Him I can do nothing, but listen, there is nothing that I cannot do *with* His help. My sufficiency is not of myself; my sufficiency is of Christ. And when my sufficiency is of Christ, I have all sufficiency. I need nothing more than Him to accomplish my ministry, yet I have no ministry apart from Him.

I have no sufficiency of myself, my sufficiency is of Christ, who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament, not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life. (cf. [2 Corinthians 3:5–6](#))

This is a Scripture that has often been misinterpreted. I have heard people use this Scripture to prove that the Bible can kill people. “The letter killeth. If you just preach the Word of God, you are going to kill those people because the letter killeth.” I have heard it used to prove that you should not just teach the Word of God. Paul is talking about a new covenant and an old covenant. The new covenant is through Jesus Christ. The old covenant, the covenant of the letter of the law, killeth. You see, the law has actually condemned all of us to die. The law revealed to us God’s righteous standard. None of you have lived up to it. And having failed to live up to it, the law only has one thing for you—death. It has no power to justify you, no power to make you righteous, no power to forgive you. The law only has power to sentence you to death, and under the law you have been sentenced to death. The letter killeth. It has sentenced you to death, but the new covenant in Christ has brought us life.

Often our preaching would be corrected if we would just read the context. Paul goes on to talk about Moses and the law, the ministration of death. But even though it was a ministration of death, it was so glorious that when God gave the law it was necessary for Moses to veil his face when he met with the people. That which was fading was so glorious. That which was not to last, the law, which was only to be the schoolmaster to bring people to Christ, was so glorious that Moses’ face had to be veiled.

Paul goes on to say,

But we, with unveiled faces, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed from glory to glory even into the same image by the power of His Spirit working in us. (cf. [2 Corinthians 3:18](#))

Originally, man was created in the image of God. God said, “Let Us make man in Our image and after Our likeness” ([Genesis 1:26](#)). There is a Scripture in the New Testament that says we are of the genus of God, a remarkable Scripture indeed. In the beginning, man was God’s genus, His offspring, made in the image of God. Man fell from that image of God. Now the purpose of God is to restore man back into that image. That is the purpose of the coming of Jesus Christ. The purpose of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is to restore to man that which was lost by the fall. Even though man fell from the image of God because of sin and the fall, the purpose of God is to restore him into that image through Jesus Christ. “Now we with unveiled faces, beholding the glory of the Lord.”

Now here is where you come in. You see, it is your duty to so preach Christ to people so that they will see the glory of the Lord. Now if through your preaching people can see the glory of God and the glory of Jesus Christ, their lives will be changed.

So many times we are trying to change people by establishing rules for them. “The law could not do it but I will give you a set of rules. Follow these ten points. To really be righteous, you have to do this, this, this and this, and you cannot do this, this and this.” And then we are constantly riding them for their failures. What we need to do is preach Christ so that the people get a view of God and the glory of God. “As they, with open faces, behold the glory of the Lord, they will be changed from glory to glory into that same image” (cf. [2 Corinthians 3:18](#)).

Now that does not just go for other people; that goes for you too. Where do we, with unveiled faces, behold the glory of the Lord? It is right here in the Book. Too much of our Bible study is purely for the purpose of sermonizing. We do not read it for our own benefit, for our own devotional purposes. We think, “Man, I have to get a sermon. Where can I go?” And so I start reading with a sermon in mind rather than to discover Him, His glory, His beauty, and His wonder.

I have heard said—and it upsets me tremendously—“We are not interested in doctrine, we are interested in experience. We are not interested in studying the Word, we are interested in experiencing the Word.” I would like to say to you that I think that the greatest problem in the church today is the lack of good theology. People do not know the truth about God. Satan has been lying to people about God for a long time. There are more misconceptions concerning God, His nature, and His character than any person in the universe. What people need to know more than everything else is the truth about God, the nature of God, and the character of God. They need to know good sound theology, the doctrine of God, so that they, with open face, can behold the glory of the Lord and as they do, God’s Spirit will begin the changes in them.

It is a truth of life; it is a truth of the Scripture that man becomes like his god. David, in Psalm 115 said,

The gods of the heathen are vain, for they carve them out of
wood or silver. And eyes they have, but they cannot see. Feet
they have but they cannot walk. Ears they have but they cannot
hear. Mouths they have but they cannot speak. And they that
have made them have become like the gods that they have made.
(cf. [Psalm 115:3-8](#))

Why? It is because a man becomes like his god. That is just a truth of life.

We, with open faces beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed from glory to glory into the same image, because a man becomes like his god.

Beloved, now are we the sons of God. It doth not yet appear
what we are going to be. We know that when He appears we are
going to be like Him. ([1 John 3:2](#))

Why? It is because a man becomes like his god.

That is why it is so important that people have a true and proper concept of God. There are two places where they are going to develop their concepts of God. One is by the word that you preach.

And secondly, it is by the life that you live before them. And God help us, they need to be consistent with each other.

Paul said, “Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy we faint not” (cf. [2 Corinthians 4:1](#)). Man, if it were not for God’s mercy I would faint. I would check out. I would say, “Lord, You better get someone else. That is too much for me to try to handle. I do not want to try to handle that, Lord.”

But as we have received mercy, we faint not. But we have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness nor handling the Word of God deceitfully, but by the manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscious in the sight of God. ([2 Corinthians 4:1-2](#))

Now notice how we are not to handle the Word—in craftiness or deceitfully. You are aware of the fact that you can make the Scriptures say almost anything you want them to say. We see that all the time. Every cult tries to prove their point with the Scriptures. And so often we hear a person say, “But in the Greek it says...” There is a lot of deceitful handling of the Word of God. Honest exposition is hard to come by. Even some of the greatest Bible expositors today have those areas of scriptural prejudice where they become dishonest in their exposition of the Word. There are men whom I highly admire and respect as far as their teaching abilities, but when they get to certain areas where they have their blind spots, they are not honest in their exposition of the Word. They have certain things that they do not believe. They have certain things that they have relegated to the period of the apostolic age. They are certain that some things no longer exist and anything that happens that is close to what is in the Scripture, has to be of Satan. They are dishonestly and deceitfully handling the Word of God.

They have taken, “And that which is perfect has come” ([1 Corinthians 13:10](#)), and dishonestly and deceitfully tried to make that refer to the full revelation of the Scriptures. There is really no possible way you can come to that conclusion. That misinterpretation was not even used up until the present century when they tried to disprove the modern Pentecostal movement. Go back to *Thayer’s Lexicon*. Go back to the expositors before the modern out-pouring of the Holy Spirit and every single one of them, including Dean Alford, say that this has to refer in context to the coming again of Jesus Christ, “that which is perfect.” But because this understanding opposes their theology, they handle the Word of God deceitfully.

Now it is one thing to see what others are doing and point my finger at them, but I also have to look and say, “Do I have a blind spot? Am I approaching the Word of God with a presuppositional base that causes me to twist the Scriptures to support my theology the way I believe it to be?”

I was at a Bible conference one time and one of my favorite Bible teachers was ministering to the ministers in attendance. It was a pastors’ Bible conference. He got to that passage in Revelation 10:6 where it says, “And time shall be no more.”

And the angel which I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his hand to heaven, And swore by him that liveth for ever and ever, who created heaven, and the things that therein are, and the earth, and the things that therein are, and the sea, and the things which are therein, that there should be time no longer. ([Revelation 10:5-6](#), KJV)

He was of a Pentecostal background and like some Pentecostal ministers, he had a way of taking a phrase and repeating it and repeating it, to get people stirred up each time he said it with a little more verve. It gets a little more exciting and everybody gets a little more excited about it. He shouted, “And time shall be no more! Bless God, you pastors. You have been having so much trouble. You are always buried by your schedules. You never have enough time to do these things. And bless God, you are not going to have any schedules. Time shall be no more!” And he kept building the thing up until everybody was just really excited. “Oh bless God! Throw away our watches. Time shall be no more!”

At that time, I had a very close friend that used to travel with me and we would often go out together after the services. He was an older man and he liked me. I was a young fellow and he sort of took me under his wing and tutored me along. And so when we were out after this particular meeting getting a piece of pie at the coffee shop, I said to him, “It is my understanding that in the Greek it really is declaring there shall be no more *delay*. In other words, the rest of the things are going to move on in quick fashion. And the kingdom is now going to be set up without any more delay.” He smiled rather sheepishly and said, “I knew you were the only one that would catch that.” I had some problems with that because that is handling the Word of God deceitfully in order to get the people excited. It is not a true exposition of the Word.

We have to be careful how we handle the Word of God. We have to be honest in our exposition. I believe that we need to be as honest as we possibly can. I believe that sincerity plays a part in it. If we are sincere, though we may not be interpreting a Scripture correctly, if it is my understanding that that is the way it is, I believe that God is gracious and merciful to me.

My position has changed over the years on many Scriptures. There are a lot of sermons that I wish I could retract. Over the years I have matured in my understanding of the Word. There are some Scriptures that I have come to a fuller understanding of and it has changed from my earlier understanding of those Scriptures.

In seminary I had a professor who said, “Do not attempt to preach from the parables until you have been pastoring for at least twenty-five years.” I thought, “Oh come on, I understand those parables. I am ready to preach on them now.” And I started preaching from the parables. I now wish I had some of those sermons back.

How many sermons have you heard on the Prodigal Son where the whole sermon is predicated upon the father waiting to receive the prodigal home? “The father is watching daily, waiting for him in the distance. And oh, how God is waiting and watching to receive you.” And the whole sermon is based upon God’s receiving and the forgiveness of the prodigal. That is not the purpose of that parable at all. Jesus was eating with the sinners and the publicans, and the Pharisees were finding fault with Him. They said, “Look at Him, He is eating with sinners and publicans.” Jesus spoke a parable against them saying,

There was a little widow woman who lost a coin. She swept and searched her house until she found her coin and she said to her friends, “Rejoice! I have found the coin that I lost.” (cf. [Luke 15:8-9](#))

Then Jesus said,

There was a shepherd who had ninety-nine sheep, but one was lost. And he left the ninety-nine and went out to find the one that was lost. When he found it he said, “Come! Rejoice with me for the lost has been found.” (cf. [Luke 15:4-6](#))

Jesus was now getting to the purpose of His parable. You see, He was showing first of all that the natural result of finding something that is lost is to rejoice. They were unnatural in their reaction saying, “Oh He is eating with publicans and sinners.” They should have been rejoicing that the lost were being found but they were finding fault. They were the elder brother and the parable was spoken against them.

I had some tremendous evangelistic sermons out of that parable. God used it and people were saved, but I could never preach it that way again.

The kingdom of heaven is like unto a man going through a field discovering a treasure and who, for the joy thereof, immediately goes out and sells everything he has so that he can buy that field and obtain the treasure. (cf. [Matthew 13:44](#))

Many times I have preached on that parable saying, “How glorious it is to discover Jesus Christ. I tell you, you have such glorious riches in Christ. Are you willing to give up everything in order to have these glorious riches in Jesus Christ?” I had some really neat little illustrations on this. I would modernize it. Jesus was talking about things that were modern in His day. They understood them. So I would say, “You are going through a field and you trip. You pick yourself up, look down, and find that you tripped over a piece of metal. You start kicking the thing and it is like a bigger piece of metal than you thought. You scrape it with a stick and it looks like a lid. So you get a shovel and dig. You open the chest and there are all kinds of jewels. What do you do? Do you cover the thing over? No, you put the bushes back in place, go down to the hall of records and you find out who owns that field. You say, ‘Hey, how much do you want to sell your field for?’ You get him to give you a price and then you go out, sell your Chevy and hock your watch. You sell everything you have in order to buy that field so you can obtain the treasure. And then, once you have obtained the treasure, do you go back and buy your old Chevy back again? No way, man. You go down to the Mercedes dealer and get a new Mercedes. You are a rich man now.” My point was that we give up things to receive Christ and now that we have the glorious riches we do not go back and pick up the old things again. Our lives are so rich and so full in Christ that we do not moan and say, “Oh, I sold my old Chevy to have all of this.” No, you say, “Man, that thing was a wreck anyhow. Some sucker got it. Now I am enjoying my Mercedes.” And so I would modernize the story.

Years later I discovered that the field is the world, and Jesus is the One who sold everything to purchase the field. The treasure was me. A couple more good sermons went right out the window. I used to be able to really prove a good point and encourage a lot of people, but if I would use that Scripture like that again, it would be deceitful because I now have a proper understanding.

So we are not to handle the Word of God deceitfully. We have to be honest in our exposition of the Scriptures. We have to deal with the Word of God honestly, not walking in craftiness. I do not believe in the use of psychology or psychological little ploys in order to get people to make a commitment to Jesus Christ. There are a lot of gimmicks that have been introduced. We have learned how to manipulate people. We know how to get them excited. We know how to get them stirred up. I do not believe in it. I think it is wrong to use psychological ploys and craftiness. You may get them forward but you have only a shallow commitment.

I remember one time when I was still in seminary and I was holding a meeting up in Ventura. I heard of this clever little ploy that this evangelist used. When he was ready to give his invitation he said, “How many of you want to go to heaven when you die? Stand to your feet.” Naturally, everybody stood. Then he said, “How many of you know for sure, at this moment, if you would die right now you would go to heaven? Sit down.” And a bunch of people sat down and a bunch of liars sat down. The only one who remained standing was actually my uncle. I was embarrassed because he was honest enough to remain standing. And I could see by the look on his face that he thought, “I’ve been had!” That is the last time he has been to church and that haunts me. Yes, some can be very crafty.

God does not need our craftiness. God does not need psychological ploys. We know that people like recognition. We know that people are carnal and walk in the flesh. So why not appeal to their carnality? “We really are needing funds now. How many will commit to give a hundred dollars this next month, over and above your tithes? Stand up.” We know that people want recognition. We know that it is a good way of raising funds. Of course nowadays they start with \$10,000. Then when they get down to the hundreds you feel like a piker. As people stand signifying their pledge, everyone cheers. “Bless God. Isn’t that wonderful? Look friends, there is Brother Jones over there. Look at that. Bless God, he always comes through. Isn’t he marvelous? Oh, give him a hand, folks. He gave a million dollars for the work of God’s kingdom. Bless God!” Brother Jones is over there and he has been had by a clever evangelist, taken in by craftiness.

Oh yes, you can do it that way but it is going to be shallow and there is not going to be any real reward for it. The saddest thing of all is that Brother Jones is not going to get any reward for it either; he has already had it all.

Take heed to yourselves that you do not do your righteous deeds
before men to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward
from your Father in Heaven. (cf. [Matthew 6:1](#)).

Where, Lord? In the praise, the acknowledgement, the recognition by man, you have had your reward. For in that day the secret hidden things will be revealed and our works are going to be judged by fire of what sort they are. That is, our works will be judged by what motivated us to do them. And many of the works that people have done that have been motivated by the flesh, or motivated by their desire to receive glory and recognition by man will be consumed in the fire, and there will be nothing for them from God. Many of my works will be wood, hay, and stubble, and they will be burned because I have already received my reward (cf. [1 Corinthians 3:12-15](#)).

I desire glory in my flesh even in spiritual things. For years I sought glory for my flesh in the physical things such as athletic achievements. Then when I got over the hill I started looking for glory in my flesh in spiritual things. Do you know what my flesh enjoys almost more than anything else? I enjoy people saying, “Oh you are so deeply spiritual. You are so deep in the things of the Lord. My, you walk so close to God.” My flesh just loves it because I like people to think that I am more spiritual than I really am. I like people to think that I pray more than I really do. I like people to think that I read the Bible and I know the Bible better than I actually do. I have dirty little deceitful ways of dropping clever little statements or hints here and there so that you will know how deeply spiritual I really am. I want you to know how much I really pray, so you will know how close I really walk with God because my rotten, lousy flesh wants glory.

Now I am going to say some things that could possibly hurt some of you. I would like to preface it by saying if it was really done from a sincere heart in the Spirit then please accept what I am

saying in that spirit and it will not bother you. You will still love me and you will accept it in the Spirit. But if you were doing it in the flesh, then you are going to get very upset with me. You are going to be hurt; you are going to be offended. But if you were doing it in the flesh, you *should* be offended and hurt.

Do you know that I am almost fearful in opening up a meeting to the real moving of the Spirit? It is because whenever God's Spirit begins to move across a group of people and people start to really worship the Lord and get in the spirit of worship and praise, the flesh gets caught up in it. Everybody is worshipping and praising. There is this high. There is a movement. And you know that someone in the flesh is going to try to take glory from God and bring attention to himself by either a loud outburst, a scream, or a cry. Now when that person makes that loud outburst, what happens to me? My mind has been on the Lord. I have been worshipping God. I have been drawn by the Spirit. I am beholding God and the glory of God. Someone lets out an outburst, and now what happens to me mentally? My mind is immediately taken over to the person who is screaming, over to the person who is shaking and falling on the floor and flopping. My focus is drawn to the person who is suddenly standing up with hands raised and eyes closed, though the rest of us are still sitting. My attention is now diverted from the Lord and I wonder, "Oh, why is he standing?" It has a way of drawing attention to that person. It takes the attention off of the Lord and now attention is drawn to someone else.

He may say, "Well, that was not my intent." Well, that is what happens. God help us that no flesh should glory in His sight or no flesh should seek glory in His sight. When we are worshipping God and our hearts are being drawn and lifted by the Spirit into that conscious presence of God where we really are beginning to enter in, watch it! Observe it! It seems that there always is something that will come in to distract us from the Lord and get our attention upon some individual, some manifestation, or something that is going on.

And that is why I am almost fearful to see a moving of God's Spirit because someone is apt to do something that is untoward to take attention away from God and bring it on to themselves. Be careful. I would not want the responsibility of having taken attention away from God and placing it on me. I do not want to divert hearts from that devotion, praise, and worship of God and cause them to wonder what am I doing over there. I do not want that kind of a responsibility of having diverted anyone's attention from the Lord. You see, the purpose of my ministry is to focus people's attention on Him, not to divert attention from Him to myself.

For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and
ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. (cf. [2 Corinthians 4:5](#))

And there it is. What do I preach about me? I am your servant for Jesus' sake. I am preaching the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is Lord. You are to serve Him. You are to honor Him. You are to glorify Him, not His instrument. And as a pastor, people often come to you because God used your life to help them in a time of need or God used your life to touch them with His Word. They come to you and begin to pour out upon you their praise, their devotion, and their love.

I had a funeral service the other day and a lady came up afterwards and said, "Oh Chuck, you are just so wonderful. Oh Chuck, you are the greatest. Oh Chuck, you are marvelous. You are just one hell of a guy." My whole flesh was going until she got to that "hell of a guy" part. I knew then that she did not know what she was talking about.

Unfortunately, there is a mentality that goes often with the ministry. It is developed fully within the Catholic system, the Nicolaitans, the priesthood over the laity. It is the mentality that

ministers are just sort of one little notch closer to God or one little step higher, as though, “I am your instrument through which you can touch God.”

There is an interesting poem about this preacher who, every day was going up into the top of the steeple that he might be closer to God, get God’s message, and call it down upon the people. And one day, he was up there in the steeple seeking to hear the voice of God and he cried, “Oh God, where are You?” And God spoke to him and he heard the voice from down below saying, “I am down here among the people.”

Sometimes we put ourselves above the people, yet Jesus walked among the people. We preach ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake, not your lords, not this doctrine of shepherding. I am not the lord over you. Jesus Christ is the Lord. I am your servant for Jesus’ sake.

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels. ([2 Corinthians 4:7](#))

What treasure? The gospel that we are proclaiming is the glorious treasure. It is the greatest news that man every heard. It is the greatest treasure that anybody could ever have. It brings man to eternal riches.

This glorious treasure is actually the gospel of Christ in you, the hope of glory. This glorious treasure is the mystery of God revealed now through the church with all the richness of the kingdom of God and its glories for all eternity. Jesus Christ will come and dwell in your heart and life, transform you, and make you into the image of God. This is the glorious treasure. And where did God put it? He put it in earthen vessels, or in clay pots.

Now Jesus Christ is surely the greatest treasure in all the universe. The knowledge of Jesus Christ is the greatest treasure in all the universe. Paul said concerning the past, the law—“Those things which were gain to me I counted loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ” (cf. [Philippians 3:7](#)). This is indeed glorious treasure. Paul was willing to count everything loss for this glorious treasure. He said, “It is the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ, for whom I suffer the loss of all things, counting them but refuse that I might know Him and be found in Him” (cf. [Philippians 3:8](#)).

God takes the most valuable treasure and He puts it in the most common thing, a clay pot. We have this treasure in earthen vessels. Our problem is, too many times they are cracked pots. This treasure is in earthen vessels. Why? It is so that “the glory of the excellency or the power of the excellency may be of God and not of us” (cf. [2 Corinthians 4:7](#)). In other words, God has done something that is absolutely ludicrous. He has made you the instrument to contain the treasure. This glorious, valuable treasure, He has placed in you. He has done something that is totally ludicrous, for the purpose that the attention, the honor, the power, and the glory might be of God and not of us. Now if I try to reverse that, if I try to magnify the earthen vessel, if I try to bring glory and honor to the earthen vessel, God will put me on a shelf.

You see, I am to contain God. In his book, *The Deep Things of God*, Norman Grubb said, “The highest capacity of man is that of a container.” He meant that we could actually contain God. I heard him speak on this subject at Forest Home several years ago. I was deeply impressed. I bought all of his books, went home, read them and was not impressed. That is good because God removes our idols in a hurry. I began to see a flaw in what he was saying as he developed his message. When I went out of that service I was floating. “I am a container. I contain the God that created the universe. God who called the light to shine out of darkness is now shining in my heart. I am containing God. Hallelujah! I have come to the ultimate intention and purposes of God. I am

His container. I am containing the eternal God in this earthen vessel.” I was thrilled. But as I began to think about it and pray about it, I thought, “Hey wait a minute. No, that is not true. That is not what the Bible really teaches is the highest capacity of man, to contain God. The highest capacity is that God might flow forth from my life to others.” You see, God is not satisfied with me being a container. The contents must flow out in such a way that it will help and minister to those who are in need.

So we have this treasure in earthen vessels. I am just the container from which God is to flow forth into the lives of others. And as a container, I must be careful that as the contents flow out from me, they flow out in as pure a form as possible. I preach not myself but Christ. I do not want the contents to taste of me. You might have a container in your refrigerator in which you keep water and that container has a weird taste to it. Maybe you had cantaloupe in it at one time and the cantaloupe still is impregnated a bit into the plastic so that every time you go to get a drink of water you get a taste of stale cantaloupe. You are thirsty. You are wanting to get a drink. You go to the refrigerator and there is some water. You drink it and then yuck, you get the taste of the container, not the pureness of the water. You get now the taste of the container. You may say, “Get rid of that thing! I cannot stand that taste.”

The thirsty world is looking or dying for something to drink and they come to hear. Too often as the contents flow out, it has such a taste of me. People say, “Yuck! I do not like the aftertaste.” Let the contents flow out in as pure and unadulterated form as possible, not handling the Word craftily, deceitfully, but honestly. Let the contents flow out from you in a pure form. “For we have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us.”

Who is sufficient for these things? Not me. The responsibility is too great. I cannot handle it. My flesh is incorrigible. I really cannot control it. My only hope is to fasten my eyes upon Him and allow His Spirit to work in me, changing me from glory to glory into that same image. Because His sufficiency has been given unto me, I have to trust in Christ for every phase of my ministry. I have to trust in Christ for every message that I bring to people. I have to trust in Jesus Christ for my every action before the people. The moment I think I can do something in myself, I am going to stumble and misrepresent God before them. Yes, we do have a tremendous responsibility and yes, we must depend upon the Lord completely or we are going to blow it.

Bibliography:

Grubb, Norman, *The Deep Things of God*, Lutterworth Press, London, 1958.

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

BY

Calvary Chapel Outreach Fellowship

Lesson 13 Jesus, Part I

By

Gayle Erwin

Brought to you by:

The Blue Letter Bible Institute

www.blbi.org

A ministry of:

The Blue Letter Bible

www.blueletterbible.org

I have truly looked forward to studying the real core of the nature of Jesus which is something that has possessed my life. I cannot believe how much this has meant to me! When you see where it is in Scripture I hope that it means as much to you.

The real question in life is: What is God like? Everyone wants to know. Even atheists want to know. I have had some interesting conversations just lately with atheists—people that did not believe in God. And I asked them, “How did you come to that conclusion?” And they get a little bit put out because they did not think they would ever have to defend it. It is really an indefensible situation. Usually they say, “Well, I am a seeker.” And I say, “Okay, that is movement.” They just sort of say, “We know you are not there, God, so why don’t you go away and leave us alone, okay?”

The whole New Age thing seeks after something they know is out there. It is out there, they know, somewhere. The problem is getting in touch with “it.” So, they find places where there are vortexes or whatever “it” is and they chant: “Ooohmmm.” Then they tinkle bells in an attempt to get in touch with something that is out there.

Well, we have settled that. That sounds arrogant but it really is not. We know what God is like. He is like Jesus. That is exactly why God sent Him, so we would know precisely what He is like. The problem is that we have kind of messed up Jesus too, you know. Through the centuries we have had traditions!—And dare I say this loaded word “mythologies” have gathered around Him and we have painted pictures of Him that are not accurate.

For instance, Christmas is an interesting time. We sing songs. I really wish we would sing those songs all year long. I love them. But there is one particular song that I like but I cannot help but think, “Hmm, Silent Night.” Let’s talk about that. What silent night? Ha! You know that Bethlehem was jammed with people, don’t you? The foreign government that ruled the land said, “Go back to your birthplace. We are going to tax you!” Silent Night? Pubs were full and everyone was angry! For some reason or other we tend to think that there was a cosmic wave that went through and everyone said, “Did you feel that? It must be a holy night.” Folks, it was a profane night, and only a small handful of people had any idea what was going on.

And I do not know why it is that we tend to think that Mary had no birth pains. You see all of the pictures of her holding the new born baby Jesus. I wish my wife looked that good after our children were born—just kidding! We seem to think that she just said to Joseph, “It is time.” And “boop,” there is Jesus wrapped in swaddling clothes.

Oh folks, there is so much that we have done to this scene that places Jesus at an almost untouchable distance. May I begin to bring Him back very close to you? This is the One who wrapped love with skin so that He could be touched.

I think I have made a discovery. Now I know that sounds arrogant too, but what can I say? I think I have discovered some places where Jesus describes Himself. Now in order to know someone, they must reveal themselves to you; otherwise, you make less than

accurate observations. For instance, you can look at me and make certain observations: he likes to eat and he likes to talk. But to really know me I must reveal myself to you. And the same is true with God. The beautiful thing is that God does reveal Himself. That is the thing about Scripture, He reveals Himself to us. And that is the thing about Jesus, His revelation of Himself. Jesus reveals Himself as He describes Himself in response to a certain apostolic activity.

Another group of people we will talk about is the apostles. When I say the word “apostle” what pops into your mind? Do you see, as I do, these tall, handsome men with deep bass voices, who walk in unison with Jesus everywhere He goes? And when Jesus finishes speaking they form the apostolic touring choir that sings: “Just as I am without plea,” while every head was bowed.

That is not exactly the way these men were. You know what the apostles did more than anything else that is recorded in the Scripture? More than anything else, they argued! I love it. They argued. You never do that, do you? I do. I have never lost an argument. Often the other person had the better case, but that does not mean I lost. But the problem with arguing, especially if it is with your spouse or someone like a roommate or a coworker that you have to stay with, it is never really over. You know that we are going to talk about this again. And that is the way it was with the apostles. Do you know what they argued over? You would think it would be deep theological questions. Surely they resolved the tension between predestination and free moral agency. Surely they did! No. These great men of God argued over who is the greatest. “I am better than you.” “You are not.” And off they went. I love it because those men encourage me so much. You know, every once in a while when I have argued with someone, even I feel apostolic.

Well, they never would tell Jesus what they were arguing about. There are all kinds of interesting Scriptures. The first one I will read is from Mark 9 beginning with [verse 33](#). It says,

33 Then He [this is Jesus] came to Capernaum. And when He was in the house He asked them [this is the apostles He is asking], “What was it you disputed [or argued] among yourselves on the road?”

34 But they kept silent, for on the road they had disputed among themselves who would be the greatest.

It is hard to tell Jesus, isn't it, when you are arguing about something like that? You cannot go up to Jesus and say, “Well, we were trying decide which of us is the greatest in the kingdom” (cf. [Mark 9:35](#)).

I have noticed that about prayer. There are some things, when I approach the Lord in prayer that I might say to you, but I would not say them to Jesus. That is one good thing prayer does for you. It sort of straightens out some of your thinking because you realize that some things you begin to pray are ridiculous.

So they would not tell Jesus what they were arguing about and I understand. Here is where I believe there is beauty and humor in Scripture. I want to enlarge a little bit here. I do not want to change it but I want to put myself in it and think how this might have gone. Jesus is busy being the Messiah. The apostles are busy arguing with one another. “Who is the greatest?” Jesus says, “Hey, what were you guys arguing about back there?” They respond, “It’s okay. It is private. You do not need to know.” But Jesus knew. Oh, I love this. I can see the twinkle in His eye as He almost says, “That is okay, I do not need to know. But can I give you a teaching, fellas?” “Okay, go ahead. You’re the boss.” “Let Me tell you who the greatest in the kingdom is.” They might have looked at each other and said, “You must have told.” “I didn’t tell!” Can you see the shock on their faces? Personally, I think Peter started the argument. I can see him folding his arms and thinking, “Good. I would rather they hear it from Him than from me.”

But it is here, you see, where I believe I have had this discovery of seeing the nature of Jesus. When Jesus begins to teach about the greatest in the kingdom, He was teaching about Himself because He was greatest in the kingdom. So this set of teachings that He did in different places becomes an incredible revelation of His very nature. And He says, “He that is greatest”—And I can see the guys thinking, “Yeah, yeah. Is it me? Is it me?” But Jesus said, “He that is greatest must be servant of all.” Slave is a better word than servant. Isn’t that exciting? I know that it really is not.

I have often thought if I were to go on television like some hucksters I have seen and say: “Ladies and gentlemen, normally people travel thousands of miles and pay thousands of dollars to attend this seminar, but today I have a special deal just for you. If you will send me five hundred dollars, I will send you fifteen tapes and twelve books and in one week, you too can be a slave!” My mother might send in a few dollars, but if I were to go on TV and say: “If you will send me five hundred dollars, I will send you fifteen tapes and twelve books and in one week you too can be rich!” Oh man, the checkbooks would come out and somebody would get rich—me!

Well, Jesus continued teaching. Let me just read this to you and then we will go on and consider it here in [Mark 9:34-35](#).

But they kept silent, for on the road they had disputed
among themselves who would be the greatest.
And He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, “If
anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant
of all.”

We better deal with this. What is a servant’s job? Well, a servant’s job is to make life better for someone else. It is really as simple as that. A servant’s job is to live toward others in a way that frees them to become all that they were created to be. I am amazed as I read Galatians at how much Jesus is about freedom. Freedom!

Another operating description is that a slave or a servant is someone who is “others-centered.” That is especially different from being “self-centered.” Now this is rather

embarrassing to me because I have to make some confessions here. I do not always like to do that up in front of this many people. But I am afraid I have to confess to you that I am an incredibly self-centered man. I am sorry. I do not want to be, but I am. I think of myself most of the time. If there is a group photograph and I am in it—there I am. I find me first. I have never met a mirror I did not like.

Now the thing about being self-centered as opposed to others-centered is that it is miserable. It is really miserable. Jesus said it would be. You know, He told us this in the Bible, this Book that we could call the Manufacturer's Manual. You know, He created you and so He knows how you work. If you are going to fix your automobile, you go to the manufacturer's specs to be able to tune it up right. And if you want to tune yourself up right, go to the manufacturer's specs. And He who made you said, "If you want to find your life, lose it." Wow. Lose it? I know God said that because I would not have. I would have said, "You only go around once in life so grab it all! Get there before someone else does. That is the only way to do it!" Or I would have gone down to my local bookstore and found books like *Looking Out for Number One*; *How to Win by Intimidation*. It is only here in the Manufacturer's Manual that you hear Jesus say, "If you really want to find your life you have to lose it. In fact, if you really try to find it, you will lose it" (cf. [Matthew 16:25](#)).

Oh, I should have known that. He said it, but I learn slowly. In fact, I could have known it from just simple observation. You are familiar with this thing called "self-consciousness." It is misery, I know. I have a genetic problem here. I know it is genetic because my dad looked like this. But I have discovered in my old age that I have to lean over further when I eat because if I do not, I soil my clothes. I am embarrassed when I know I am going to be up in front of people and they are going to think, "He is a messy eater, isn't he?" And so I have learned how to walk around and cover things very well. And if I have to shake hands with somebody, I can do a quick switcheroo, you know. But I am spending time on myself and it is misery listening to me isn't it?

Have you ever awakened in the morning and you got up late and you are in a rush and you look in the mirror. That is a dangerous thing to do. But you look in the mirror and there is a hair that is being disobedient. Boing, boing. And you do everything you can because you are in a rush to get out. Boing, boing. And you are out now in public and you are walking around like this because you know people are staring at you thinking: "He must not own a comb." It is misery.

In fact, I should not talk about my wife, but when she gets a run in her stocking, the world has come to an end! All of Southern California stops and stares—she just knows it! It is amazing what this does to her.

Jesus knew that. So He said, "I do not want you to live miserable lives. I do not want you to live that way at all. That is not freedom. That is tormenting. I want you to give yourselves away. I want you to find out what it means to really tune yourselves up so that you work right." Wow.

In fact, one of the most interesting concepts in Scripture is that we are the body of Christ. Now that is very good to know because God has issued each of us a body, and so we know how bodies are supposed to operate. Are you aware that every single part of your body is a slave to the rest of your body? Not one part of your body exists for itself. Even if you take a part of it out at night and lay it on a shelf, you would not put a banana there so your dentures can eat during the night. In fact, it is this kind of thing that makes you healthy and happy and even able to be here and enjoy yourselves, because your body is serving itself. Every part is serving the rest.

What if it was different? Have you ever thought about that? Just certain simple things could not go on. For example: you took a deadly weapon in your hand and you rammed it into a morsel of food. And it came toward your face at breakneck speed. You could lose an eye. But at the last second with phenomenal precision, your mouth flew open and the fork deposited the food over and over and over. You never missed and there was no blood or anything, man. That is great precision. Now what if your hand decides, “I am tired of this routine because it is the same thing over and over. I want to do it my way.” No. Your body does not do that. It is delighted to cooperate with itself even with the simple act of clapping!

It is possible for one part of your body to begin to serve only itself. It does happen. It is a medical condition. Doctors have a name for it. They call it cancer. The very nature of cancer is when one part of the body begins to serve only itself. And we consider that a dreadful disease because it is life threatening. If only we understood what a dreadful disease and how life-threatening self-centeredness is in the body of Christ.

Well suddenly this takes on a different hue, doesn't it? We think, “Oh yes, of course, servanthood makes all the sense in the world.” And it really does when you see how God is and how He has revealed Himself through Jesus and what begins to happen in our lives when we follow Him. It is incredible!

Jesus compares Himself to a couple of other kingdoms in order to explain to us how He is. One of those would be the kingdom of the Gentiles. Now I will read it to you in a minute. But He says, “You know the rulers of the Gentiles.” In other words, “those who are the greatest in the world kingdom.” Gentiles would be what they would basically call the world out there, the pagan world. He said, “You know the rulers are the greatest in the Gentile kingdom and they lord it over others.” He says, “Not so with you” (cf. [Matthew 20:25-26](#)).

So “not lording over” becomes our second point here which makes sense if you understand number one. It would not make much sense for me to come to you and say, “Look, I am your slave and you will do what I tell you.” That does not compute. But isn't it amazing how many people get the wild idea of who they are by how many people they are over? Oh, I am constantly among groups of guys. We get together from time to time, pastors and the like, and we will kind of sidle up to each other and say, “How many do you have?” And in some way the world is constantly asking that question. But if you

understand number one: being a servant, then number two: being humble, makes all the sense in the world.

Jesus compared Himself to another kingdom and that is the kingdom of religion. Now you have lived long enough to know that religion and the kingdom of God are not necessarily the same thing. And Jesus knew it too. And so He said, “You know the teachers of the law—the scribes, the Pharisees, those who sit in the seat of Moses—or shall we say the seat of authority or the greatest in the religious kingdom—and how they love to lay heavy burdens on others. But they themselves will not lift a finger to carry the load.” He says, “Do what they say, but don’t do as they do!” (cf. [Matthew 23:2-4](#)).

So the only valid form of leadership in the kingdom of God is leadership by example. I am not free to say to you, “Do as I say, not as I do!” No. But I am free to say as Paul said, “Follow me as I follow Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1). I am so delighted that Jesus did not come to this earth and say: “I have come to lay down certain basic principles which I would expect you to learn very carefully and gather together with all the other great learning of history and come up with a thing called ‘Christianity.’” No, He says, “Follow Me. Follow Me and I will make you to become fishers of men” (cf. [Matthew 4:19](#)).

Now this is the thing that many who do not know the Lord really don’t understand. They think, “Oh yes, I believe in basic Christian principles and the ethics of the great religions of the world.” No, no. Jesus is not basic Christian principles. He is a person. And He did not say, “Follow My basic Christian principles.” He said, “Follow Me.” He is a person and we are to follow Him.

I realized once that just about everything I know I have learned by example, really. In fact, my wife and I have four children and they have taught us more than we ever taught them. I tried hard to teach them proper table manners but they eat like me. It is what they see. I have a crazy habit. I often will stand with my thumbs in my belt loops and my hands in my pockets like that. It is a worthless habit. It does not bake any bread, but I do it. And one day when my son was about four or five years old—I have forgotten—but he had his first pair of belt loop trousers. And I was standing like this and my wife said, “Psst. Look!” I looked over and there he was, looking at me. And I thought, “Would you look at that. Just by example I have taught him a totally useless habit.” That is what happens.

I have some dear friends who, when their cute little daughter was about six years old, she was playing on the patio of the church with some of her friends. And the mother was standing about ten feet away. At one point, this little girl did this with her friends. She went: “Ho—hmm. I am so tired.” I looked at the mother and smiled and she said, “Oh! I guess you know what goes on at my house.” I said, “Yeah.” If you have a five or six year old, just let me spend a few hours with them and I will know all about you. They just do what they see. We learn by example, don’t we.

I had a pastor friend who I think had caught the understanding of this. He called me one Monday actually and he said, “Hey Gayle, I have to tell you about this sermon I preached

yesterday.” I said, “Great. I like to hear things like that because if it is really good, I borrow it.” He said, “The title of it was ‘Some Things I am Sick and Tired of.’” I thought, “Oh man, you are not preaching sermons like that, are you?” He knew what I was thinking so he said, “Now don’t jump to conclusions until I tell you.” He said, “The first point was this: I am sick and tired of expecting you to pray, when I have not been praying.” He also said, “I am sick and tired of expecting you to read the Bible when I have not been reading the Bible.” He said, “I am sick and tired of expecting you to give when I have not been giving.” I thought, “All right! You have caught on.”

Jesus said, “Follow Me. I will make you to become fishers of men” (cf. [Matthew 4:19](#)). He never expects us to do anything that He has not done first and shown us how. I love it!

Paul says to the church at Thessalonica, “You have been imitators of me and now you are a model for the rest of the churches in Asia” ([1 Thessalonians 2:14](#)). This is exemplifying going on. To the church at Philippi he says, “The things you have heard from me, and learned from me, and seen in me, these do” (cf. [Philippians 4:9](#)). Wow! But it is so comfortable following when this kind of thing is going on. It is so comfortable following when there is modeling, where there is a biblical example. Then you know you will be able to do it.

Some years ago, I was teaching in Nashville. My wife and family were on the coast of Mississippi where my mother lives and they were going to drive up to join me. Well, to get to Nashville from there you have to go through a town called Mobile, Alabama. It is a beautiful old town. It just was not designed to drive through, that’s all. The freeway bypass was not complete. It went out into the middle of a swamp and stopped and didn’t tell you it was going to stop. For two hours my wife tried to get through that town. She would stop policemen and ask directions. She would stop at service stations and ask directions—directions were not her strongest area. And finally at the point of despair—now I do not know if you have ever been at a point of despair in your life—she stopped at one more service station and said, “Sir, will you please help me get through this town?”

Now if you have ever been at a point of despair and asked for help, you have probably heard what this man said. “It’s easy.” Don’t you hate that, when you have been breaking your neck and they say, “It is easy.” He said, “All you have to do is go this direction.” And he described it. Now if you have ever given advice, you have heard what my wife answered. “I tried that and it did not work.” He said, “Well, there is another way you can go.” And he described it and she said, “I tried that and it did not work.” So he looked at her for a second and he said, “Then you are not going to make it through this town.” And he turned away. Fortunately, there was a man overhearing the conversation who said, “Lady, if you don’t mind following me, I know this is a tough town to get through, so I will show you.” My wife said, “All right!” So she got behind and they went down Government Street onto the Bankhead Tunnel, up the east side of the Mobile River and they drove miles beyond until the freeway began again. He stopped said, “Now you get on there. It takes you straight to Nashville. You cannot get lost.” Now I do not know this man and I do not know if he was a Christian, but he certainly understood how Jesus led. “Follow me.” Oh, I like that.

Then Jesus says, “He that is greatest must be humble.” I never have liked that word. And it is mostly because I have misunderstood it. You see, for so much of my life I thought humility was basically an inferiority complex. It worked its way out in my life this way: “I am really nothing. I can’t sing, can’t play a piano, can’t pick a guitar, and I can barely pick my nose.” And people would respond to me the way I wanted them to. They would say, “Oh Gayle. You are so humble.” I would say, “Thank you. It is not me, it’s the Lord.” Until I heard the Lord say, “It is not Me either. I want to have nothing to do with that!”

See that is not humility; that is sickness. Humility really is an accurate assessment of ourself. It is being absolutely honest with ourself. It is an honesty principle, actually, being honest about myself. Now that can be devastating. An accurate view of yourself will drive you to the Lord. We could describe this principle as: being up-front; plain vanilla; what you see is what you get; transparent; willing to be read like a book; living without pretense, without hypocrisy.

Now, a falsely humble person is a pain to be around. They really are. A falsely humble person says, “I’m just your humble servant that is all. I am just coming over here just to serve you and I just want you to know that I am just going to hang around here and be your humble servant. Please understand. I am just going to be your humble servant.” And then you begin to think, “Get him out of my face, man!”

A truly humble person is a delight to be around because you never have to figure them out. If they say, “Good morning” you do not have to think, “I wonder what he meant by that?”

One of my favorite stories in the Old Testament is in [Exodus 3](#). I like Moses. He had a PhD in Egyptology. He had messed his life up something terrible. And now the best job he can get is way out on the back of the desert, herding sheep. They are not even his sheep. Moses did this for forty years, think of that—forty years! What have you ever done for forty years that is so boring? And finally God says, “I think I can talk to this man now.”

I have often prayed, “God, don’t let me get so hard headed that it takes You forty years to get in touch with me.” God says, “I think I can talk to Moses now.” So God sets a bush on fire. Have you ever wondered which bush? Oh they have billions of thorn bushes in that desert. How did He pick a bush? Did He have a Mr. Thorn Bush of Israel contest or what? I think He looked for one that was nearby, available, and would burn. And He sets this bush on fire. And Moses (bored to tears in the desert) sees it. He probably thought, “All right, something different in the desert. Let’s check this one out.” He was eighty, you know. He gets over here and discovers that it was not your average bush. It didn’t burn up. In fact it was even more special, it spoke! And it knew his name, “Moses, Moses!” “What?” “Take off your shoes. You are on holy ground.” He took off his shoes. And promptly entered into an argument with the bush! I love it. That takes nerve. Jewish

people have a stronger word for that. They called it “*chutzpah*.” That is like murdering your parents and then throwing yourself on the mercy of the courts as an orphan.

The bush won and Moses says, “Okay I’ll go. I will talk to Pharaoh. I will talk to the children of Israel. But what is Your name? When they ask me who sent me, what will I say?” And God said, “You tell them I AM—that I AM has sent you.” I AM. I get goose bumps when I say that. I AM. You see if I were to send you I would have to say, “Tell them I AINT has sent you or THE GREAT MAYBE.” But God is the great I AM. The thing is He says, “This is the name I have chosen to be known by from generation to generation, or from now on” (cf. [Exodus 3:14-15](#)). It is His name. Wow!

And Paul tells us in [Ephesians 3:14-15](#) that He is the Father after whom His whole family on earth is named. So that means that is our last name, I AM. How about that—Gayle Erwin, I AM. Now that means our very name calls us to “I Amness.” Our very name calls us to honesty. It calls us to being the ones who are unhidden, who say, “Here is the truth about me.”

The problem is that I am afraid that so much of the time I even lie with my face. Do you ever do that? No, you would not do that. But there are times when I desperately need prayer and I find myself coming to the gathering of the saints knowing they are going to greet me at the door. So what do I do when they ask, “How you doing?” I say, “Fine. Praise the Lord, I am a Christian. I do not have any problems.” And I think to myself, “I would not confess it anyway.”

What if one part of your body deceived another part of your body that way? Have you ever thought about it? You see, this is the thing that makes humility so powerful because it means that we give up deception. We give up any lying to others about ourselves. I believe you get to humility by confession. You see, confession is simply telling the truth about yourself. It is saying, “I know this is what you think, but here is the truth. And so here is where you can pray for me.” Confession is not necessarily going back and seeing how much you can dig up way back there and pull it up and say, “I bet I have bigger sins than you.” No, that is not confession. Confession is just living honestly and saying, “Here is the truth about me and here is where you can pray for me.”

The Bible does say, “Confess your faults one to another” ([James 5:16](#)). The way I handle that is: “Sure, I will be glad to confess your faults.” No. Humility says, “Yes, here is the truth about me. I do not have to be hidden anymore because I am forgiven.” What a difference to live openly and freely and unhidden. How much energy it takes to have to hide and cover things up. In fact, what was the first thing Adam and Eve did when they sinned in the Garden? They hid! They began the cover-up process.

By the way, I have a fig tree in my yard and I love figs. But when I pick figs I have to put on a long-sleeved shirt because fig leaves really make me itch. Adam and Eve sewed fig leaves to cover themselves! I imagine them walking around itching—Whoa! They knew they should suffer. And then God comes along and says, “Oh that is not what I had in mind. Let me fix you some lambskin seat covers.”

And I have discovered that when I try to cover myself it is painful. Only God knows how to do it. In fact, if you want to create some chaos where you work, especially if you work among people that have not come to know the Lord and do not understand His forgiveness, you can just go up to them and say, “What you have kept hidden for years is going to be revealed today.” It is chaos then.

You see, the beautiful thing about humility is when you recognize the truth about yourself, you understand that you are hopeless, and you are a sinner. You cannot quit sinning. You cannot get control of your life. What can you do? That is where God says, “Do I have a plan for you.” He says, “All you have to do is come to Me with that hopelessness, that humility, that reality. And I will forgive you and change you.” Oh man! He will turn you into an “I AM.” And only He can do it.

Your body would not survive without humility and without this honesty to itself. And yet, everywhere I go, I have discovered that every culture including my own, says, “Don’t let them know the truth about yourself. Play your cards close to your chest. Keep a poker face.” My British ancestry taught me to keep a stiff upper lip. I do not know quite how you do that, but you are supposed to keep a stiff upper lip. If one part of your body tries to deceive another part of your body, you are in desperate condition. It is desperate because the simple act of walking could not occur. You see, I take a step and I am expecting this leg to follow through, right? Well, what if this leg says, “He only thinks I am coming too.” I would be on my face, you see.

Look at it this way: Suppose I am standing next to a stove and a burner is on that is red hot. And I do a very unintelligent thing—I lay my hand on the burner. Now if my hand acted the way I have sometimes seen the body of Christ react to certain situations, it would say, “Oh, you have done a stupid thing. Oh, this is embarrassing. Do not let the rest of the body know that you have done this thing. Just be cool.” My body would never do that. If I lay my hand on a hot burner, immediately it responds, “Get me off of this! I have done an awful thing!” See, that is the way my body operates because each part is honest with the other part about itself.

We are about half way through with this first part of what Jesus is like and I am going to have to stop here and finish this in our next session. But you have got to think about this because this is so incredibly important. If this is the way Jesus is, He is better than anybody I have ever seen before. I mean, this is incredible. No person that I have ever met, other than Jesus, fulfills this principle. And if you think about who He is and the fact that He has come to be this for us, boy, my overwhelming immediate response is, “Oh Father, I want to be like Him. I want to receive Him. He is the only one that can handle my sins and I want Him to do it.”

So, if you don’t know Him, the saddest thing in the world would be to walk out of here without the greatest opportunity you have ever had presented to you. Do you want to know the only One who can forgive you and give you that incredible freedom in your heart, that says, “I am forgiven! I am free!” The King of the universe has come, not to get

us to serve Him but He came to serve us. And then we cannot help but serve Him. What an incredible opportunity to meet the God who came to show this to us. He walked it out and proved Himself this way. And He is here now to take care of this. What a golden opportunity. May the God of grace and glory overwhelm you with His presence and draw you to Him. Amen.

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

BY

Calvary Chapel Outreach Fellowship

Lesson 14 Jesus, Part II

By

Gayle Erwin

Brought to you by:

The Blue Letter Bible Institute

www.blbi.org

A ministry of:

The Blue Letter Bible

www.blueletterbible.org

I guess you could call these lessons on servanthood, “The Nature of Jesus.” And in the last lesson we looked at four of those parts to the nature of Jesus. But let me just march with you through some specific Scriptures that I think will help us sort of get it together before we look at the final parts of the first half.

[Matthew 18:1](#) says,

- 1 At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”
- 2 Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them,
- 3 and said, “Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.
- 4 Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.
- 5 Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me.”

And in [Matthew 20:16](#), it seems that it is almost thrown in, it says: “So the last will be first; and the first last, for many are called but few chosen.”

[Matthew 20:25-28](#) says,

- 25 But Jesus called them to Himself and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them.
- 26 Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant.
- 27 And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—
- 28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

Then in [Matthew 23](#), beginning with verse 1 it says,

- 1 Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples,
- 2 saying: “The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat.
- 3 Therefore whatever they tell you to observe that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do.

Look down to [verses 11 and 12](#):

- 11 “But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant.

12 And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Now go with me to [Mark 9:33](#),

33 Then He came to Capernaum. And when He was in the house He asked them [He is asking the apostles] “What was it you disputed among yourselves on the road?”

34 But they kept silent, for on the road they had disputed among themselves who would be the greatest.

35 And He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, “If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all.”

36 Then He took a little child and set him in the midst of them. And when He had taken him in His arms, He said to them,

37 “Whoever receives one of these little children in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me, receives not Me but Him who sent Me.”

In [Mark 10:42](#) it says,

42 But Jesus called them to Himself and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them.

43 Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant.

44 And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all.

45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

Now go with me to [Luke 22:24](#). If this sounds repetitious it is because it is.

24 Now there was also a dispute among them [I love these apostles], as to which of them should be considered the greatest.

25 And He said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called 'benefactors.'

26 But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves.

27 For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves.”

Now there are other Scriptures to bear this out, but now we have basically all the words that we are going to need in order to complete our list. In the last lesson we began looking at what Jesus said about Himself in His “greatest in the kingdom teachings,” which I believe very well describes who He is because He is greatest in the kingdom. Jesus said, “He that is greatest must be servant of all.” Well, we talked about that last time. And then we looked at how He compared Himself with the kingdom of the world or the Gentiles. And He said, “You must not lord it over others.”

And then He compared Himself with the religious kingdom or that of the scribes, the Pharisees, those who sit in the seat of Moses or the seat of authority, or corollary—those who were considered the greatest in the religious kingdom. And He said, “They love to lay heavy burdens on others but they themselves will not lift a finger to carry the load” (cf. [Matthew 23:4](#)). He says, “Do as they say, but do not do as they do.” So the only way we can lead in the kingdom of God is by example.

By the way, in [John chapter 13](#), which we will look at later, Jesus uses this very word—example.

And then the fourth thing—He that is greatest must be humble. Now that is where we got to last time. Humility, of course, we discovered to be not putting ourselves down, or having some hang-dog attitude. But it is being honest about oneself. It is being “what you see is what you get”—transparent. It is living without pretense, without hypocrisy.

Now, you will notice that as we were reading the Scriptures, one of the additional phrases that we heard was “as a child.” So let’s write that down as point number five: He that is greatest must be as a child.

One of the things I noticed about children is that they are rather humble. A small one at least is humble. Have you noticed that a small child is, if they are happy they cannot pretend they are sad. Have you noticed that? And if they are sad they cannot pretend that they are happy. Wasted words to a crying child is, “Don’t cry.” My children were never able to pretend that they liked spinach. “Poison! I am going to report you.” So children tend to be who they are.

I always enjoy watching parents trying to get their children to do certain things, especially small babies. They like to say, “Wave to the people.” And the child refuses. I tell them, “I would not wave at me if I were you either. Don’t worry about it.” But a child tends to be who he is.

Another thing about a child—and it is the same thing as humility, actually. But I want to pull it out separately here. A child is unable to deceive. Have you ever seen a two-year-old trying to learn how to play hide and go seek? They do not quite have the concept.

Whoever is “it” counts to fifty and says, “Here I come, ready or not!” When he turns around the two-year-old is right there, covering his face and thinking: “I do not see you. You do not see me.”

My own children would sometimes say to me, “Daddy, I am going to go hide in the kitchen. You come find me, okay?” I love it. They did not know how to hide, in fact when my son was about five, he saw a magician somewhere and decided he wanted to be that. But it never worked for him because, you see, magic is totally dependent on deception. And he did not understand deception. He tried and said, “Daddy, I am going to play a trick on you, okay?” “Okay, son.” “I’ve got a rock in my hand, Daddy, and I want you to tell me which hand it is in. Okay, ready?” “I am ready, son.” He makes an effort with his hand and of course nothing happened because he just did not know how to deceive.

My children were never able to understand how I always knew when they had done something they should not do. It is because guilt came out of every pore in their body, you know. If they came home innocent, they just came home. But if they came home guilty, they came home whistling. And I would say, “What have you done?” “How did you know?”

I wonder what would happen if we adults did not know how to deceive? Have you ever thought about that? What would happen if we really did not know how to deceive each other? It would change things, wouldn’t it? You recall, of course, when Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden that they began to hide. They became children of darkness and here began all the deception that we have suffered under for centuries.

But we are children of light! It is hard to hide things in the light. Have you noticed that? If you are going to hide something, you just tend to hide it in the dark. A child is unable to deceive.

I think when Jesus calls us to be His children one of the things He is calling us to be is a non-deceiving sort of person, the kind of person that has no hidden agendas. Well, it is similar to humility, isn’t it? What you see is what you get is how we are to be.

Jesus was a very open person. I am amazed at Him. He said He was the light of the world, which also He said of us, by the way. And He said of us that we were a city set on a hill. The Scripture says of Him that this was not done in a corner. This was right out in the open, you see. In Him was no darkness at all. That is amazing!

So a child is unable to deceive. And I think God calls us not to be deceptive sort of people—the kind of people when the world says, “Oh, you are a Christian. You are one of the honest ones, the undeceiving ones, the open ones.” “Well, if we are not deceptive, how are we going to protect ourselves?” That is God’s job, see. “Well, can we trust Him?” Of course we can! We should try it some time to see His faithfulness.

Another thing about a child that I really like is that a child is very unthreatening. Just looking you over, I do not see any of you men that I would want to meet in a dark alley at midnight. But meeting a little child in a dark alley is no threat. Isn't that amazing? They do not scare us. Has it ever occurred to you that no one was afraid of Jesus? I am amazed at that because He had all the power of the universe coursing through His veins, you know. He had this incredible power that is in billions of galaxies out in space, man. The power that created this earth! But nobody was afraid of Him—amazing!

The Sanhedrin did not arrest Him, not because they were afraid of Him but because they were afraid of the crowd. And Jesus even sends the apostles out and says, "I send you out as lambs among wolves" ([Matthew 10:16](#)). Boy that sounds exciting! Can you hear the wolves going, "Oh no, here come the sheep. What are we going to do?" Now if you are going to go out as a lamb among wolves, you learn quickly not to go on your own power.

One of the things that troubles me as I journey around is that it seems we have been training some attack sheep. Rambo-type sheep I guess you would call them—We can get them, don't we? Baaah!

Throughout Scripture this has been God's approach to the world, He takes something that was naught and speaks a universe into existence. He takes a people who were not a people and He makes them His people. God has always done that. Throughout the Old Testament He takes the children of Israel when they are weakest and wins the greatest battles. He takes them when they are trapped and destroys an Egyptian enemy—a whole army.

Even Joseph, said the most interesting thing to his brothers as the whole family was moving down to Egypt to eat. Joseph had become the number "one and a half" man in all of Egypt, you know. And he says to his brothers, "Now when you come to the border, they are going to ask you who you are and why you are coming here." He said, "Don't tell them that you are my brother. Just tell them the truth. Tell them you are a bunch of cattle herders because we despise cattle herders." Now that does not make any sense, does it? Look, if the president was my brother you would probably know by now. But Joseph is saying not to do that, "When you come to the border, just tell them the truth. Tell them that you are cattle herders because we despise cattle herders." So they get there and they say, "Who are you?" "Well, we are nobody. We are just a bunch of cattle herders coming down to eat." The Egyptians say, "Oh, cattle herders. You are no threat to us. We despise cattle herders. Come on in. In fact, we will give you our best land, the land of Goshen." And the rest is history.

You come to the New Testament and you hear of Paul saying, "Not many mighty, not many noble are chosen. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise and the weak things to confound the mighty" (cf. [1 Corinthians 1:26-27](#)). That is us! We are the weak and the foolish. And the world cannot figure us out. I like that. It is the way God has always operated. Paul, the apostle says something else that seems un-American to me. He says, "When I am weak, then am I strong" (cf. [2 Corinthians 12:10](#)). See, I would have put a question mark there. But it is a declaration. He says, "His

strength is made perfect in my weakness” ([2 Corinthians 12:9](#)). How strange—but that is the way God operates.

It really is a lot of fun when you stop and think about it. It is the thing that makes life such an adventure for us because the world cannot figure it out. Frankly, we cannot understand it either, but boy, is it ever an adventure!

In fact you come into modern time and you find it so. In 1978 I met a Christian leader from the country of Nepal. Now at that particular point Nepal was perhaps the most closed country in the world to the gospel. Some things have changed just recently and it is better, but it was very, very difficult back then. And he said to me, “Please pray for us. The birthright of every Christian in our country is seven years in jail.” He said, “If you get baptized they throw you in jail for seven years. If you do the baptizing, then they throw you in jail for fourteen years.” So he said, “Pray for us.”

I’ll be honest with you, I thought: “Why pray for you?” But I discovered later that the church in Nepal for years doubled in size every year. How did they do that? “It is elementary, my dear Watson.” When someone gets baptized, they throw him in jail. The other prisoners ask him, “Why are you here?” “Well, I became a Christian.” “What is that?” “You really want to know?” So other prisoners become Christians and when they are released and go home, their family asks them, “What kind of rehabilitation program did they have in that prison?” The ex-prisoner says, “They did not have one.” “Well, why are you so different?” “Well, I became a Christian.” “What’s that?” “You really want to know?” For years the country of Nepal built prisons as fast they could just to house the church!

In 1948 when Mao Tse-tung took over China, they could only find about 250,000 Christians in the country at that point. They were not welcome. At first they thought they would kill them all. They decided that might be a bit messy. One of the police bureau members, I am told said, “I know something about these Christians and I know they have to meet with each other all the time. So if we can separate them from each other, they will die out.” So they started looking for places where there were no Christians and they would send one there.

At that point Mao Tse-tung became the director of the world’s largest missions’ agency. And I understand that in some parts when they would get Christians into these villages, they did not want to give them an important job because after all, they are Christians. So, they would give the Chinese Christians what amounted to the lowest job on their particular ladder—the postman. They paid them to go house to house. Way to go, Mao! And now when the door to China opened up again—at least it did for a while where we could do some surveying—we discovered that there are millions and millions of Christians there.

How can they do that in Nepal and in China? They were so weak. All they had was God. This is not a bad thing. Just as a child is unthreatening, when we approach life in that way

and we lean on God what begins to happen then is beyond anyone's understanding, isn't it?

Let me tell you a story. I was serving a church once where on Thursday mornings the ladies would come for a prayer meeting and they would put their preschool age children in the church nursery and have their prayer meeting—to which I was not invited even though my name is Gayle. I loved those children and I would take about thirty minutes on those Thursday mornings just to go and play with them. I will never forget the first time I did it. You know how church nurseries are, this double door prison that we build. I opened the top half, leaned over with proper pastoral pose, “Hi, kids! Pastor Erwin here. Let's play.” One of them ran in the other room terrified. The rest of them just went about their business. Well, they did not seem to understand who I was. So I opened the bottom half, walked in and stood among them with proper pastoral pose. “Hi kids! Pastor Erwin here. Let's play.” Another one ran in the other room terrified. The rest of them just walked around like: “Did you hear a noise?” By now my ego was involved because the nursery attendant who was watching all of this was beginning to giggle. I wanted to grab one of kids and shake him and say, “You are going to play with me, kid, and you are going to enjoy it!”

Then the Holy Spirit helped me to remember what life was like for me when I was that size and what adults looked like to me. They seemed like giants, man! My world was kneecaps. And immediately I knew what to do. Without saying another word, I just got down on the floor. And in thirty seconds every one of them was right on top of me. “All right! We are going to play!” My hair went one direction and my dignity went another, and neither have returned.

At that point, I learned something about what we call the incarnation, God becoming man in Jesus. And in a sense getting down on our floor where we can look Him in the eyes and say, “All right. It is party time in the kingdom!”

Well, let's go to number six. He that is greatest must be as the younger, according to [Luke 22:26](#). Now that meant far more in that day than it seems to mean to us in our day. To be elder or younger in a household now is of really little significance. But it was very significant back then. The elder brother got the birthright and with it the majority of the family's inheritance. In fact, in some of those Middle Eastern countries, the elder brother would inherit everything. The younger brother then lived at the benevolence of the elder brother. And the elder brothers were not known for benevolence. So the younger brother was the disadvantaged one. He was the one for whom the system was not a friend. The status quo was never on his side. The way things were structured was his enemy. Indeed, the elder brother came to be known, stereotypically, as the establishment man and the younger brother as the rebel, if you please.

It is interesting that Jesus says, “I want you to live as the younger.” Now what that means first is: I want you to know that the system will never be on your side. In this world the way things are will always be your enemy. So don't expect your government or the system of the world to ever become the vehicle by which the world will be won. No, do

not count on it. In fact, those great pilgrims of faith declared themselves to be pilgrims in [Hebrews 11:10-13](#) didn't they? They said, "Here we have no enduring city." Interesting. No system, no place here that will last where we can say, "This is ours." But instead they said that they "look for a city which has foundations whose builder and maker is God" (cf. [Hebrews 11:10](#)). So we will never have our permanent place, our restful system here. That is one of the things He was saying.

But another thing He said regarding being the younger is: "I want you to realize that you are a pilgrim. You are just passing through, so travel light."

I travel a lot and one of the things that I have learned about traveling is the joy of the journey is inversely proportional to the amount of luggage that I take. The more luggage I take, the less joy I have; the less luggage I take, the more joy. Heaven is carry-on luggage!

I think Jesus is talking about something like that. He is saying, "We are to be pilgrims, passing through." I used to hear a song. I do not hear it much anymore. I have not heard it in a long time. Some of you might remember it. It says,

This world is not my home. I am just a passing through.
My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue.
The angels beckon me from heaven's open door.
And I can't feel at home in this world anymore.

I think I have not heard it much lately because I don't think I can honestly sing it much lately. I would now have to sing: "This world is now my home. I am not passing through. My treasures are laid up on Moonlight Drive in Cathedral City, California. The angels beckon me from heaven's open door and I can't go right now. I am polishing my Rolls Royce." No, I don't have a Rolls Royce.

I am amazed at what happens the more things we get. I once thought I was pretty free from all of that, until about four years ago. My wife and I moved twice in one summer. Everyone ought to do that once. They say that two moves is as good as a fire. I could not believe how much stuff we had. I thought we would pack the night before we moved. My wife was wiser than that. And hour after hour during those weeks, the boxes began to crowd us out of our rooms. I could not believe it. Where was it all coming from? When the day arrived and I had hired this big truck, I was carrying box after box up that ramp. And my back was going out. And finally I picked up this heavy box and I said, "Honey, what is in this box?" She says, "Well, that is garage sale stuff. We will sell it for fifty cents when we get over there." And I am killing myself carrying it up the truck ramp. And I realized we are into stuff. I am into things.

In fact when we were packing up we discovered boxes that had not been opened in nine years. We really needed it badly, didn't we? But we found one box that was just labeled "Stuff." just like that. And I thought, "Man, I do not remember this." And we opened it to find garbage from the house we had down here. We had kept it for nine years! I am a

collector. I am a packrat. I have dodads, thingamajigs. I have had them for thirty years. I do not know what they are but they look very interesting. And I know that when I throw them away, the next day I am going to need them. I cannot believe how I accumulate things.

Jesus dealt with a man about that in one of the most interesting stories in Scriptures. It was coming together so well and this man really seemed to have his act together. You begin reading this story and you think, “This is going to be an awesome story of the kingdom.” The man was intelligent because he knew who to come to. He came to Jesus. That is intelligent. And he knew the question to ask. You see some people come to God and ask really stupid questions. “Whose wife will she be in the resurrection?” is a stupid question. “Should we pay taxes to Caesar?” is a stupid question. “Can God make an object so big that He cannot move it?” is a stupid question.

This young man in Luke’s gospel knew the question to ask. He said, “Good Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” (cf. [Luke 18:18](#)). This is the right question. He was a smart guy. Intelligent. And Jesus listed off a few rules and He said, “You know these.” And then the man said, “Yes, and I have kept them since my youth.” Wow! This man was not only intelligent but he was holy. And he had one more thing going for him—he was rich. We call him the rich, young ruler. He was my kind of man—intelligent, holy, and rich. I would love to have him on my board. And the Bible records that Jesus loved him. It is a beautiful story. See, everything is coming together. And Jesus said to him—and I shall paraphrase slightly here—“You are doing great, man. In fact, you only lack one thing.” Hey, that is called good news. You see, I would expect Jesus to say to me, “Well let me see, Erwin. You lack 743 things.” But I can hear this man, “Just one thing? What is it? I am a can-do man and I will do it!” And Jesus says—and I continue to paraphrase slightly here. “Boy, you are doing so good there is only one thing I can see that has you in bondage still. Why don’t you go sell everything you have and give it to the poor? Then come follow Me.” “Oh.” And the Bible says that he went away sad because he had a lot of stuff.

This is so sad. If the man would have had just one bicycle he would have said, “Big deal, take it.” But he said, “You don’t understand, Sir, I have 100,000 bicycles.” How many bicycles can you ride at once? “That’s beside the point. I have 100,000.” The rich young ruler was sad. Jesus was sad. The apostles were sad. They were probably thinking, “Why didn’t we tell him to sell it and give the money to the Apostolic Evangelistic Association?”

And then Jesus said, “Boy, it’s tough for a guy like this. In fact it is harder for a rich man to enter the kingdom than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle” (cf. [Luke 18:25](#)). I once taught that the eye of the needle was a gate in the Jerusalem Wall, so small that a camel could only go through on his knees with nothing on his back. It is really a great illustration. So one day I decided to check it out to see if it was true. It is not. There was never any such gate in the Jerusalem Wall. So when Jesus said a camel through the eye of a needle, He meant a camel through the eye of a needle. Now I do not know if you have

ever tried to push a camel through the eye of a needle. It can be done, but you have to grind him up real fine first.

One of the things that I discovered is that as I accumulate things, it does not put me at rest. It is a funny thing. I saw the best illustration of that I think I have ever seen once when I was taking an all-night bus ride in India. Everyone ought to do that once in their lives. And somewhere in the trip this man got on the bus. It was a crowded bus and he had about ten boxes that he wanted to bring on. Well, they do not go inside the bus, they go on top. And so with great output of energy (because he did not seem to get anyone who could help him and I wasn't sure he wanted my help) he finally got all ten of them on top. And he got into the bus and he was exhausted. But not too exhausted to nearly start a fight so he could get a window seat. I thought, "At last this man can get some rest." But you know what he did? For the rest of the trip he had his head out the window counting boxes. "One, two, three, four, five, six. One, two, three, four, five, six." And when people would get off he would watch them very closely. I realized that is what happens, when I get stuff now I have to count it!

Jesus says in essence, "I want you to travel light." Oh by the way, I do personally believe that you can have things and make it to heaven. I believe that; but I also believe you need to see these things the same way Paul the apostle saw things. I will let paraphrase him slightly, He says: "I consider all these things to be dung" ([Philippians 3:8](#)). You are not offended by that word, are you? He means manure. Now if you consider your material possessions that way, you are not going to get too attached to them. If Jesus were to say, "Hey Gayle, come over here and work for Me." And if I were to say to Him, "I can't do it right now, Jesus. I am guarding a hundred tons of manure and I am expecting another load any minute." See how absurd that begins to sound. Now if you can see your "things" that way, then they will not corrupt you and you can live life as the "younger," you see.

Is this clear now? To live as the "younger," means that you understand you cannot count on the system of this world. You will always be the disadvantaged one. But that means you have to lean on His power, of course. It means to travel light.

Well, then Jesus says, "He that is greatest must be as the least and or the last" ([Matthew 20:26](#)). Which doesn't mean I want to be least and last to show you how least and last I am. If I ever come to you and say, "You be first and I will be last since I am the greatest," remember this is an others-centered thing. You recall when we were discussing the servant and one of the working definitions for it is to be others-centered. If I see you the way Jesus sees you, and I love you the way He loves you, then I am going to want to put you first and I really won't be noticing that I was last. I will not be saying, "Did you see that Jesus? I was last. Do I get points?" No, this is an others-centered thing.

The eighth thing Jesus says about Himself is also found in the Gospels. In the next session, we will look at six more points that we find in the Epistles, but that will be in our next lesson.

When I first saw this though, I had two reactions. My first reaction was, “Boy Jesus, I love You now more than I ever have before. I am glad to follow You.” Then I had another reaction. Have you noticed that the old carnal nature had habit patterns. These are thought patterns that every once in a while will zing through. You know what I found myself thinking? “Oh come on, Erwin. You cannot do that. You are having a rough enough time being a Christian now. You will never be able to do this.”

Ah, but I have some good news. The first bit of good news is that Jesus is “others-centered” toward us. That is good news. There have been times, for instance, in my sharing the gospel with individuals that I would offer them the opportunity to follow the Lord and they would say “no.” And a few times I had the presence of mind to ask them, “Well, would you mind describing God as you understand Him?” Boy, when they got through describing Him I would not have followed Him either. They did not know that Jesus is others-centered. How can you say no to Him? This is good news. This is the way He is toward us.

The other item of good news comes from [Philippians 2:13](#) which says, “For it is God who is at work in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure.” It is God who is at work in you to make you want to do His will and to enable you to do His will. In other words, you are God’s fault. [Ephesians 2:10](#) tells us that we are His workmanship, His *poema*—His work of art—which is awesome.

I best understood this some years ago where I used to work. On Tuesdays and Thursdays the men of the department would go across the street to a gymnasium and during lunch hour they would play basketball. Now basketball is not my best game. Sometimes they would confuse me with the ball. And sometimes when we would choose up sides they would get down to me and say, “Look, we had Erwin last time. It is your turn this time.” So I was playing basketball for the fellowship and the exercise.

There was one guy whose name was Dave. He was about six feet thirty inches tall and He could play basketball. I loved to get chosen on his team because we would always win. By the way, I saw this guy just a year or so ago for the first time in many, many years. And he tells me, “I am most famous because of this story you tell, Gayle. When they find out that I am the Dave—‘Oh yeah, we know you.’” And he says, “I tell people that I am not as good as Erwin said I was. But Erwin is as bad as he said he was.” But I loved to get chosen on his team because we would always win.

Now on his team I only had one job: get the ball to Dave. So I would bring the ball inbounds and I would lob it over to Dave. And he would turn around and score. The other team would be amazed and then they would miss half of their shots. And it would be my turn again. I would bring the ball back in bounds. And by now I am feeling my Cheerios so I do a few Globe Trotter stunts to make them think that I know what I am doing. And if the ball got stolen it would be when I was showing off, you know. Then I would lob it over to Dave and he would turn around and score again. And the other team would go, “Whoa!” And then I would say, “Aren’t we good?” We? There was no “we” to it. It was

all Dave. I only had one job: getting the ball to Dave! Now this is the way it is with us because we are on God's team.

Let me tell you another story in the middle of this story. When I was in high school the big-name sportsmen first started becoming Christians. And they would come by my secular high school. And we would have an assembly and they would give their testimony and kids would come to Christ. It was awesome! Now these guys' hearts were right, but their heads did not always have their theology figured out. I remember this one big football bruiser that came by and said, "In football we have a first team and we have a second team. And then we have scrubs. Nobody wants to be the scrub so we get out there and we run 500 miles a day. And we eat fifteen beefsteaks an hour. And we lift 150 tons of weight a day. And we put on our pads and we run headlong into brick walls to make ourselves tough, so we can be on the first team because nobody wants to be a scrub."

And then he applied that spiritually and that is where he got off just bit. He said, "That is the way it is with God. God's got a first team. He's got a second team. And then He has scrubs." That's me. I'm a scrub. But he said, "Nobody wants to be that so we go to church 500 times an hour. And we read 15,000 Scriptures a minute. And we witness to 6,000 times a second. And we give 150% of our income, so we can be on God's first team because nobody wants to be a scrub."

But folks, that is not the way it is with God at all. He has only one team and He calls it a body. See, I would never come to you and say, "Is that your first team, nose?" "Well, of course it is. It is the only one I have." Well, that is the point, you see. So we are all in His body. We are on His team and we have got one job. Get the ball to Jesus! Jesus said, "Without Me you can nothing!" How much is nothing? All right. We got that solved, okay?

So I bring the ball in bounds and I lob it over to Jesus and He turns around and scores. And Satan goes, "Whoa!" And he misses half of his shots. And I bring the ball back in bounds and by now I am feeling my spiritual Cheerios so I do a few spiritual Globe Trotter stunts to make you think I know what I am doing. And if the ball gets stolen it will be when I am showing off. And I lob it over to Jesus and He scores again. And Satan goes, "Whoa!" And then I say, "Aren't we good?" But there is no "we" to it. It was all Him. I only had one job—get the ball to Jesus. "Without Me you can do nothing" ([John 15:5](#)).

[Hebrews 12:2](#) reveals to us, "Looking unto Jesus the author and the finisher of our faith." Incredible. Not the author and abandoner of our faith. What He starts He has the power to finish. Isn't that great? He is the Finisher. I am the author of the unfinished job. My wife gets a little upset about it. I have these unfinished jobs around the house. There are little piles of tools and parts and I am say, "I am just waiting on a part, honey, and then I will finish this." "He who has begun this work in you will be faithful to complete it" (cf. [Philippians 1:6](#)). It is not, "He who has begun this work in you will really get tired of you after a while and say, 'Okay, you are on your own.'" No, He will complete it.

Now unto Him who is able to keep you from falling. Who is the “Him” that it is unto? You? No. Jesus.

So I have learned in my old age, as I have experienced and watched all kinds of different theologies, to hold onto them very lightly. But I hang on to Jesus for dear life, man. I am looking unto Jesus. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus.

I have a brother three years younger than I who is an expert sailor. And every time I go and visit him, we go sailing. Now this has brought about a certain tradition—a legend almost at our house. My mother goes into immediate intense prayer. And she calls the coastguard and says, “Gentlemen, start your engines. The Erwin boys are on the ocean.” Now the reason for that is we always go aground and have to be rescued. This happens because my brother turns the helm over to me. And he says, “It is real easy, Gayle, just go toward that red light that flashes red once every two seconds and we will be okay. No problem.” But there is a problem. It is not the only light out there. And the top of the ocean looks pretty much the same everywhere. Have you noticed that? I see another light. “Oh now, that is red and it is flashing twice a second. That is easier to follow. I will follow that one.” And then I see another light and it is moving too. Now I think that we will really get somewhere. And sure enough, after a while my brother comes running back, “Gayle, what happened? What happened?” “I don’t know, Jay. I am just following this light.” “What light?” “It is there.” “That is the wrong light!”

And that is what happens to us spiritually sometimes. We see the light of the world and we begin to follow. You discover that there are some other lights out there. Look at that one, it is flashing a lot faster. Boy, there you go. We can go that way. Yeah! And then we see another one that has pizzazz to it. And it is really moving. Now we will get somewhere. But sure enough, after a while what happens? We have our eyes off of Jesus. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus.

Now I am telling you and I wanted you to see this too. Not so it can put you under some burden of “Oh boy, look at what I have to do now.” No, I want you to see what He is doing in you. This is like the pattern He writes on you. And says, “Now I want you to see what I am going to make you become.” Oh, what a goal! It beats any goal I have ever seen. And my heart cries out, “Yes, Lord Jesus!”

Let’s pray.

Lord, You are so good to us. And our hearts do go up to You in worship. We thank You, Lord. Work on us. We open ourselves to You and ask You to make us like You. Work out Your will in us. Draw us to You and to Your likeness. Fill us with the knowledge of You and Your will. I ask in the name of Jesus. Amen.

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

BY

Calvary Chapel Outreach Fellowship

Lesson 15 Jesus, Part III

By

Gayle Erwin

Brought to you by:

The Blue Letter Bible Institute

www.blbi.org

A ministry of:

The Blue Letter Bible

www.blueletterbible.org

We have been looking together at the nature of Jesus as revealed in His “Greatest in the Kingdom” teachings. First, is that He was servant of all or slave was a better word, if you recall. Second, as we interpolated from His expression about contrasting Himself with the greatest in the gentile or world kingdom, we discovered that He did not lord it over others. So number two is not lord it over others.

As He compared Himself to the greatest in the religious kingdom He said in essence, “He that is greatest must lead by example” (cf. [Matthew 23:11](#)). He says that specifically in a certain passage which we will cover later in our series.

Then He said that he who is greatest must be humble (cf. [Matthew 23:12](#)). We discovered that that specifically means that he was absolutely honest about himself. Humility is a very accurate assessment of who you are, which can be devastating, but it is true.

Then he that is greatest must be as a child (cf. [Matthew 18:4](#)). We saw that a child was very humble. A small child is not very pretentious, we know that. A child is unable to be very deceptive. These are the kinds of principles that make our body work and they make the body of Christ work. Relationships cannot survive deception, you see.

Then another thing that we discovered is a child is very unthreatening. We are seldom afraid of a child. And no one was ever afraid of Jesus.

And then he that is greatest must be as the younger. We looked at this in terms of being always the disadvantaged people in this world. We are pilgrims passing through, having no enduring city here but looking for one whose foundation and builder and maker is God. “Being as the younger” also means traveling light or carrying very little luggage through this life so that wherever God calls us we can go. If you recall, we are not to be guarding a lot of dung.

And he that is greatest must be as the least and as the last. And that completed what He had to say in the Gospels.

Now go with me to [Philippians 2](#). You will discover that the first four verses of Philippians tie into these eight points perfectly and this is an awesome, awesome section. Listen to this:

- 1 Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy,
- 2 fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.
- 3 Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit.

See, if you recall—If I may stop here for just a moment. As we were looking at the nature of Jesus, one of the key descriptions was being “others centered” which is opposite to my natural self-centered tendencies. So it says—

3 Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.

Now, I just need to comment on one thing about that statement because often I will see people who get that backward and they esteem themselves worse than others. Now do you see what is going on there? That turns it into a self-centered mode when I am just looking at myself as being worse than others. That is not what it says. Others-centeredness says, “I esteem you better.” Do you see the difference? “So in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.”

4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

And then we come to this awesome passage. Maybe it was a song they sang in the early church. I do not know. If it was, we really ought to put it back to music. We should figure out every way we can to sing this next passage. It is a great song. Maybe it was a creed they said. If so, it was an excellent creed. A creed does not have to express everything you believe as long as it gives you the key so that everything else that you believe is obvious. And this does. Or maybe just at that particular moment the Holy Spirit said, “Write this down, Paul.” And he wrote:

5 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.

Wow! Does your mind ever fail you and you cannot remember something? If you ever have the opportunity to trade minds with anyone, do not trade with me. You would be in trouble. But here is the opportunity to trade with Jesus. This is awesome! We can literally permit His mind to be in us. Not a bad deal. The question is: What was His mind? What was this central core of motivating being? What was the set of attitudes that were in Christ Jesus?

Fortunately He does not leave us alone but He tells us. The next verses reveal specifically what this means. And he says,

6 Who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God.

I read that and I thought, “Huh? What does this mean?” It is rather obscure, isn’t it? Well the NIV says, “Who though He was in the form of God did not consider equality with God something to be grasped” ([Philippians 2:6](#), NIV). Well, that helps a little bit. But what does it mean? Well, let’s dig in. I discovered that there were two meanings to this and we are going to let this be points nine and ten here. There are two meanings to this particular verse.

First, it means that He used no force on us, no physical force. And that He was not driven by blind ambitions. So point number ten would be “no blind ambition.”

No force. Let’s talk about that. He could have used force on us, you know. He could have because He had power! You know that He had all the power of the universe coursing through His veins. This was incredible power that formed billions of galaxies out in space. This incredible power that created this earth! And yet with all of this power He did not use force on us. It is amazing because He could have grabbed us by the throat and put a sword there and said, “Wouldn’t you like to be a Christian?” We would have said, “Oh yes. I have been thinking about it for a long time.” But He did not do that. I am amazed. He has the power to force us and He does not.

In fact what amazes me is how much the Scripture speaks of His gentleness. Now, there is a good reason for this. You see when we feel that we have been forced into something, we are going to do everything we can to sabotage the situation.

This year my wife and I celebrate our thirty-fifth anniversary together. But I can remember thirty-six years ago when I was a scared boy. I remember it. I held a ring in my hand and I said to Aida Brown, “Wiiilll yooooou maarrrry me?” She said, “Eh, might as well.” Not quite. Now I could have held a ring in one hand and a pistol in the other. And I could have said, “You are going to marry me for your own good?” And if she had married me under those circumstances, I would have fed some of every meal she fixed for me to the dog first in order to make sure he stayed alive.

When we feel that we have been forced, we are going to do everything we can to sabotage the situation. Have you ever heard anyone make this statement or ask this question? “Can I do this and still be a Christian?” Have you ever heard that question? Now that is coming from a heart that feels forced, you see, and so it is trying to press against the edges. That would be as foolish as if my wife were to say to me, “Honey, you are going to be gone for about a week. Is it okay if I go out with some other men in the neighborhood and still be called your wife?” Of course it is not okay!

Now when you love someone you want to enhance the relationship. You want to improve it, you see. But the only way you can make a genuine decision is if you are not forced. So Jesus comes in a way that frees us to make a genuine decision about Him. All the evidence in the world is there.

[Revelation 3:20](#) you may know by heart. “Behold I stand at the door and knock.” He is a gentleman and He knocks. If it were me, I would have said, “Behold I stand at the door and I am going to huff and puff and blow your house down.” But Jesus is a gentleman. He knocks. “And if any man hears His voice and then opens the door, then He will come in and sup with them” (cf. [Revelation 3:20](#)). Jesus is a gentleman.

There are places in His ministry that I am fascinated by. One was in the third year of His ministry which is often called “the year of opposition.” The first year is referred to as the year of obscurity; the second is “the year of popularity;” and the third year is

“opposition.” This was when everyone had abandoned Him. It appears that the only people still hanging around were the apostles and they must have been a little bit discomfited. There must have been some looking around on their part. See, they had been so busy arguing over who was the greatest that they had not noticed the crowds were gone. And they may have said, “Oh-oh. I bet we are going to have some apostolic lay-offs now.” And so Jesus must have seen their discomfort and He said something to them that amazes me. I would not have said it. I would have looked at them in their discomfort and said, “All right, you fellas. Three steps in the wrong direction and you are vapor!” See that is what I would have said. But do you know what Jesus said to them? He said, “Will you leave Me also?” Isn’t that amazing? He never violated their ability to choose. This is awesome.

And then [Matthew 12:20](#) quotes from [Isaiah 42:3](#) these words: “A bruised reed He would not break and smoking flax He would not quench.” What does that mean? We do not use those words today either. Well, for a bruised reed He would not break, that is sort of like saying, “He would not kick a man when he was down.” That is when we like to kick them because they cannot kick back! And some of you, when Jesus found you, you were down. And the world was kicking you like crazy. And Jesus did not come along and say, “You have never been kicked until you have had a divine kick!” No, He picks you up and He begins to put you together.

I was just thinking about this yesterday looking at the people who were here and realizing how much of an incredible set of stories there are. What would happen if we began to share all the ways Jesus has put you back together and healed and restored you. How long would it take? We do not have that much time, do we? That is one reason I look forward to heaven. We will get to hear the whole story.

A bruised reed He would not break and smoking flax He would not quench. Wow. What does that mean? Well, in modern terms that means He would take the slightest spark of hope in someone and try to fan it into a flame.

I was a Boy Scout once until I got old enough to be Girl Scout. But that is beside the point. Sometimes we would have competition of skills among other troops of scouts. One of the competitions was starting fires without matches. And I can remember thirty or forty Boy Scouts lined up with a handful of what they called tinder, which was something that would burn readily like cotton or something of that nature. And when they would blow the whistle, the flints would begin to strike against it. And the sparks would fly and soon there would be a little wisp of smoke come up. Never once did I see any one of those fellas look at that and say, “Just one wisp of smoke? Is that the best you can do with all the sparks I have made? Just one little wisp of smoke?” Oh no. That is all they wanted. They would pick it up and blow on it saying, “Hang in there! We are going to make it.” And it would burst into flame.

When Jesus found some of you, you were one stinky little wisp of smoke. And the world was looking at you saying, “Is that the best you can do with all the opportunity you have had? All the potential you have got? Just one little wisp of smoke.” But Jesus did not do

that. He picked you up and began to blow the great breath of God on you saying, “Hang in there, we are going to make it.” And here you are, you see.

“A bruised reed He would not break, and smoking flax He would not quench.” He used no force on us because He wanted us to make a genuine decision about Him.

And He was not driven by blind ambition. You have heard the old philosophical question: Does the end justify the means? You have heard that. Blind ambition says, “Yes, it does. If the end is good enough, then lie, cheat, steal, whatever you have to do to achieve your goal.” But Jesus was not driven by blind ambition.

In fact, Satan tempted Him on that very point. He took Him up on a high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world with their splendor. Oh, can you see it in your mind? Can you hear Satan tempting:

“Ha, ha, ha. Looks good, doesn’t it, Jesus?”

“Yes, it does.”

“Ha, ha, ha. I thought so. You really want it, don’t You?”

“Yes, I do.”

“I thought so. You came for this, didn’t You?”

“Yes, I did.”

“I thought so. Well, I can get it for You wholesale. All You have to do is bow down and worship me. Come on, You can do it. You can have it real cheap!”

But at that point Jesus made an eternal decision. “No, it is written: ‘Thou shalt worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve’” (cf. [Matthew 4:10](#)). Jesus decided at that point that a heavenly goal can only be achieved by heavenly means.

Now we may think this does not really apply to us. I do not have that kind of problem. But you know it happens so often. It does. Maybe you work in a place where your employer has asked you to do something that you know is unethical. And you feel, “I cannot do this.” Then you realize your job is on the line and good jobs are hard to come by. You have a mortgage to payoff, a car to pay for, a family to feed, and you end up caving in so often. It is really quite common. God help us, it even happens in the church.

Have you ever gotten a letter from some “ministry” that said, “Dear brother or sister so-and-so, God woke me up at 3:00 in the morning and your name was on my mind. God gave me a word for you and if you will send me an offering to help keep me on the air, I will be glad to tell you what God said.” And you think, “Great day! They do not know me. This is a computer letter, why would they do this?” Well, it may have started well. And it may have been an act of faith that caused them to enlarge things and then there came a cash crunch. Have you ever heard of that?

And then they discuss: “What are we going to do? We are going to lose some of our ministry!” Someone says, “Well, I know how to raise money.”

“Well, I am not sure that is the right way to”—

“Well, you want to lose your ministry?”

“No.”

“Well then give me a chance.”

“Okay.” And then you start getting letters like that. This is blind ambition.

Jesus was not driven by blind ambition. There never seemed to be a panic in His life.

Let's move on to the next verse, which is a rather scary one for me. It is not my favorite verse in the Scripture. It says, “He made Himself of no reputation”—or no image, or He emptied Himself and made Himself nothing. This is not my favorite verse because I am kind of into reputation. I like it. I want people to know who I am, to know my name, to know how to spell it, to know that I am a guy. But [Philippians 2:7](#) says that Jesus made Himself of no reputation, no image. Why would He do that?

The thing about reputation and image is that it separates you from people. It really does. I live over in the desert and there is a town right near me where there seems to be more Rolls Royces per square foot than any place I have ever seen. Now why do you drive a Rolls Royce? It is not because you are desperate for transportation but image, you know. But it really separates you from people.

You have probably heard of Johnny Cash. I interviewed him once when I was editing a youth magazine. He had made a public profession of faith. His pastor was a friend of mine—and said that he would get me an interview. I said, “Wonderful!” I will never forget that day. I was sitting in his plush office, waiting for Mr. Cash to arrive. I had memorized my questions and for days I had practiced being cool. And then he walked in and said, “Hi, I'm Johnny Cash.” I did not realize he was that big! I lost it. I said, “Hi, Johnny. Can I have your autograph? It is for my son.” When that was over, I thought, “I don't believe this. He puts his shoes on one foot at a time just like I do. Why was I so intimidated?”
Fame. Fortune.

Jesus makes Himself of no reputation so everyone in the world—“whosoever will”—can come boldly before Him and be comfortable. Wow! In fact He did such a good job of it. I want to show you some ways that He made Himself of no reputation here. This is an awesome thing to me. Imagine for a moment that you are God. Just give me one day, huh? And there is this ball of mud out in the middle of space called earth and little critters running around on it called people and you loved them. And you want to tell them that but they do not even speak your language. And then you think: “I know what I will do. I will send my Son. I will make Him just like them and just like Me.” Now you have a problem—a premier, an introduction.

Now if God would have checked with me, since I have had some experience in public relations, I could have helped Him. I would have said, “I know how premiers go. I live near Hollywood so turn it over to me. Every searchlight in the world will be there. Everybody who is somebody will be there.” And then God says, “Well, no Erwin. I don't think I will do it that way. I think I will have My Son born like other people.”

And then I offer my advice: “Oh, okay. Not a bad idea actually. What you need to do, God, is you need to snap your fingers and create a five thousand story hospital, gleaming and bright on the outside with a giant diamond on the top that would catch the rays of the sun and cast them over the countryside. And only have one person ever born there—Your Son. We can organize tours to go see it.”

God says, “No thanks, Erwin. I have got a different idea. I am going to have Him born in a barn.” I respond, “Born in a barn? Do you realize how funny this is? That is no place for a baby to be born. I was born on a farm. I am an old farm boy. I know what barns are like. Not places for babies to be born, lest they go ‘Moo’ afterwards.” We have sanitized this manger, folks. We really have. We think that the angels were just waiting and thinking, “Oh no, they are going to have to sleep out here. Oh my. Quick! Sweep and shovel! Do whatever we have to do to get it clean.” It is hard for us to realize because of our traditions that they probably had to watch their step in there.

I love Christmas and I especially love nativity scenes. But they are not quite accurate most of the time. They do not smell right. It looks like somebody has said, “Everybody get over here. We are going to take a picture.” I have pondered this because I am fascinated by this particular moment. You realize, of course, that Bethlehem was sort of the old hometown. So, why didn’t Joseph and Mary have a place to stay? Have you ever thought about this? Why didn’t they have a place to stay in their old hometown?

When I go back to the farm area where I was born, there are plenty of places to sleep. We have family and friends that come to stay with us. Why didn’t Mary and Joseph have a place to stay? Well, I have a couple of ideas. Mary was pregnant, you know. And this kind of happened before they were married, you know and the baby was not Joseph’s, you know. And it was a lot worse in that day than it tends to be in ours. And I have just an idea that maybe their family said, “Look, we don’t know what is going on here, but we do not approve of it. And if you stay with us people will think we do. So maybe you should stay somewhere else.”

So if you have ever found yourself on the wrong side of family approval, Jesus has been there. He knows where you are at.

But there is another thing. Have you ever heard the statement: “Money talks”? Have you heard that? It talks to me. It says, “Goodbye!” You know that if Joseph had had enough of the coins, the innkeeper would have said, “Why don’t you stay in my apartment? I will sleep in the barn.” So obviously they did not have money.

So if you have ever found yourself at the wrong end of the financial ladder, Jesus has been there too. He knows where you are at.

But if this was not enough, He could never brag about this. You understand this. He could never say, “I was born in a barn. Where were you born?” My mother used to say that to me. “Erwin, Gayle Erwin, were you born in a barn?” And it was not a compliment ever.

But if this was not enough, He had, as I have indicated, questionable parents. You see we believe in the virgin birth today. They did not necessarily believe in it as we do back then, any more than if the sweetest young lady of your youth group suddenly showed up pregnant and everyone is going, “Oh no, where did we go wrong?” And finally someone gets the courage to ask her, “Who did it?” And she smiles sweetly and says, “The Holy Spirit.” “Sure.” Do you understand the stigma under which Jesus grew up? What they might have called Him?

So far, this is not helping His reputation, is it? But if this was not enough, He had a very common name. By now you are aware that His name was not actually Jesus. That is the way we sort of push it through the Greek to our language today. More accurately His name was actually Joshua or Yeshua, which was a good name. It means “God is salvation.” But it was a very common name. There were Yeshuas running all over the place. If God would have just checked with me, I would have recommended that He give His Son a name that stands out from all other names, so that everyone would know when they heard it—that must be God. But Yeshua?

And if that was not enough, He had what kind of birth announcement? Well, I am going to make a judgment about it and I am going to call it a weak announcement. Now you may be saying, “Wait a minute, Erwin. They did not have angels singing when I was born; so, how can you call the heralding angels a weak announcement?” Well, think with me for a second. First of all, if He had checked with me—since I have had some experience in public relations—I would have recommended that He get up on the moon with about a five thousand dollar microphone and hang two billion-watt speakers out in space. And He walks up to the microphone to say, “Hello world. This is God!” And then everyone says, “Yes—what?” But He says, “No thanks, Erwin, I have another idea. I think I am going to use a choir.” “Okay, okay. Choirs are all right. But don’t you think you should follow somebody’s chain of command and have them sing for the Sanhedrin first? Well, at least have them sing in the marketplace that way we get our best coverage per singing angel. You want them to sing where?”

Have you ever thought about this? Imagine that you are one of these angels and for two hundred years you have been practicing. “Mi, mi, mi. Everything is in order.” For a hundred years they have been building risers in the sky for the gig of the centuries. And the moment arises and whoever is in charge says, “Okay fellas. He has been born! Hit it!” And they pull the curtains and you get ready to sing. And then you see the crowd. Six shepherds? “All right. Who was in charge of posters?”

Folks, shepherds were the wrong bunch to bring the message to. We have also sanitized the shepherd. We tend to believe that every Jewish boy just grew up dreaming of being a shepherd. Really in that day shepherds were sort of bad news. They were kind of like your friendly local burglars. When they went through town things tended to disappear. The shepherds’ attitude would have been, “All of this commotion, for what?”

But if that was not enough, have you noticed that the Lord always seems to be bringing the message to the wrong people? Like us. I hate to tell you this but I think you are mature enough to handle it. He was not handsome. Now you may be saying, “That is it, Erwin. I was with you till now. But I have got His picture on my wall. And He is the most beautiful red-headed Irishman I have ever seen.” No [Isaiah 53:2](#) tells us the truth about Him. And I cannot believe how we missed this. “He had no form or comeliness.” Now we do not use that word “comeliness” very much. But it means handsomeness, good looks—“that we should desire Him.” Amazing! But I like that because I know how I feel around ridiculously handsome men. Jealous. But Jesus does not even throw this into the equation. I have pondered this, you know. I know there are some reasons why it might not be true. But you realize the gospels are His biography. Have you ever wondered why they did not actually describe Him physically? Usually they do describe the person in a biography. And it is possible that maybe they thought of it and then said, “Nah. Give Him a break.”

But if that wasn't enough, He grew up in a very bad neighborhood. If you ever go to London be sure to go to the Tower of London. It is history condensed. They have the crown jewels of England at the Tower of London. I know of no place else in the world where anything of this nature is on display. You go deep beneath the earth in this totally secure room. And as you walk around the outside, you look in the middle and you have never seen jewelry like that. You do not need one of those eye pieces to see any of the gems. After you visit this display, whenever you walk by a jewelry store you will not be impressed. They have jewels in the Tower of London as big as your fist. And I looked at that and I thought, “What would I do with one of those if I owned it? I don't have a place to keep it. Would I carry it in my pocket? And say to my friends, ‘Look what I have.’” They would say, “Look what you had.”

Now I tell you this because I want you to think for a moment. Imagine that you are Mary or Joseph and born to you is the greatest jewel ever to grace this earth. What are you going to do with Him? Have you ever thought of that? Where are you going to go live? What neighborhood do you want to raise the Son of God in? They took Him to Nazareth.

Now if you ever go to Israel, the chances are good that you will go to Nazareth. And if you react to Nazareth like I did, I could not wait to get out of that town! What are we doing in this dirty, no good town? They say it always has been dirty. I said, “What are we doing here?”

“Well, Jesus grew up here.”

“Okay, fine. Let's go.”

Even Nathaniel said, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”

But I like this, because it tells me that you do not have to grow up in Beverly Hills to be somebody.

But if this was not enough, He owned nothing. He said, “Birds have nests; foxes have holes; I don't even have a place to lay My head” (cf. [Matthew 8:20](#)). Now that is not very impressive in our day. Not impressive at all.

There are a couple of problems with owning things. First, when you purchase something you have to maintain it. It takes time and energy. You have to protect it. It takes time and energy. You can own just enough things that all your time and energy goes into maintaining and protecting your things. And Jesus, who came to redeem people, was not going to be fooled by things.

There is another problem. If you are rich, do not tell me because if I think you are rich, I get real friendly. Isn't that amazing how wealth messes with our minds? And Jesus comes in a way that says, "If you follow Me, it will be for the right reasons, not for greedy ones." I am amazed of the various theologies that arise and feed off of greed. What can you get? Jesus did not found that principle.

But if that was not enough, He had what I can only describe as a rather strange advance man. See, if I were forming the Gayle Erwin Evangelistic Crusade today, I would want to send someone ahead of me who had some dignity. I would choose somebody who could just really put things together and organize them. John the Baptist was the original hippie. He lived out in the desert wearing funny clothes, eating organic foods and yelling at people, "Repent!" And when they do, he dunked them in water.

But if that was not enough, He also had what I can only describe as a motley crew. I could have helped God so much if He would have let me advise Him. I would have recommended that He first go to the theological seminaries and get three or four professors who understand the ramifications of the theological questions that arise. Then I would recommend that He go to Hollywood and get someone with charisma who can command the attention of the crowd and explain to them what it was you meant when you said "such and such." Then I would recommend that He go to Wall Street and get three or four millionaires. They are nice to have on the team. Then I would recommend that He go to Muscle Beach and get about six bodyguards, because they will crucify you around here if you do not watch out. That is the way I would have put it together.

But Jesus did not do that. He went to the streets and got the strangest bunch. If you had been walking fifty feet behind Him you would have said "I smell fish." He had a zealot and a tax collector with Him. What can I say? It is kind of like having Saddam Hussein and George Bush on the same ticket. And some of those fellas had the worst accents you have ever heard in your whole life. And with that crew He proposed to turn the world upside down. Amazing!

But I like it because if He can work with them He can work with me and you.

But if that wasn't enough, He died a very bad death. Now we believe that but we do not really believe it.

I was reading in 1 Corinthians where Paul says, "The preaching of the cross is to them that perish, foolishness" (cf. [1 Corinthians 1:18](#)). And I thought, "No, no! It is not foolishness. The cross, I see it everywhere. It is on lapels. It is on necklaces. It is on

bracelets. It is behind altars, beautifully polished wood or burnished silver. It is on the top of steeples everywhere. Sometimes it is even neon-lighted and revolving.” And the Lord spoke to my heart and said, “Erwin, you do not understand the cross because people do not die on crosses today.” “Oh yeah,” I thought. And I realized that if we were to bring it into modern terminology, if Jesus were to have come today for the first time—now I know the Bible has prophecies about this—let’s just think about it for a moment. If He were to have come today for the first time, we would treat Him a lot better. We would electrocute Him, or gas Him, or hang Him.

Now that would change some things. It would change our evangelism. Can you see me saying, “Friend, have I got good news for you. My best friend just died in the electric chair for you. And if you will believe that and take up your electric chair and follow Him, you will be saved.” You would be saying, “Take him away. Take him away.”

Our songs would change to: “At the electric chair, at the electric chair, where I first saw the light. There’s room in the gas chamber for you.”

Now you see as we laugh at this, we who are from a Greek mental descent, see why it says, “To the Greek it is foolishness and to the Jew a stumbling block, but it is the power of God unto salvation” ([1 Corinthians 1:23-24](#)). Well, you look at this and can you decide that Jesus did a pretty good job of making Himself of no reputation.

But I have a problem because Jesus said something that disturbs me. Really He said a lot of things that disturb me. One thing He said is: “As the Father has sent Me, even so send I you” (cf. [John 20:21](#)). Oh-oh! We have a problem, don’t we? See, I cannot go back and be born in a barn. I was born on a farm, but it was a nice farmhouse. I cannot go back and have questionable parents. They had been married for two years before I was born—so there. What about a common name? How many guys do you know named Gayle? Weak announcement? I probably made my own announcement and with my voice it would not have been weak. You can count on that. I happen to have grown up in a bad neighborhood but that does not make any difference to you. There was a time I owned nothing, but the bank and I are cooperating on a house. If I had an advance man he would have to be a little strange to accept the job. I am a one man motley crew. If I died a bad death you would just say, “He deserved it.” So I cannot necessarily repeat this and it would not, if I did, be of much value to you. But I do believe that I will have my own list of those ways that God moves on me to make me approachable by those He has chosen for me to serve. I have no reputation.

Let me for just a second talk about us preacher types. We are into reputation, you know. I can introduce myself and say, “Hello. I am the Reverend Mr. Gayle D. Erwin.” And I have got you. I want to impress you. Dust the furniture, the preacher is here. Well, if I do not get to do that, I can wear a black suit and white shirt and a black tie and immediately you know I am an umpire, an undertaker, or a preacher. But if I don’t do that I have another method. I can speak with the sanctuary tone. “Dearly beloved, it is so good to see you today. It is the end of your search for a friendly church.” And immediately you know that I must be a preacher because people do not talk that way.

The truth of what this means came screaming home to me one day. I was flying to Dallas and the plane was full. I had to sit in the middle seat. The man seated by the window was a well-dressed, distinguished looking young man, just outstanding. And he was reading a Bible. Now you do not often see people reading Bibles on airplanes and when you do, your first thought is: “He knows something about the plane that I don’t know.” But after a few moments I cleared my throat and said, “Is that a Bible you are reading, sir?”

And he said, “Uh-huh.”

I said, “Well, I do that too. Why are you reading it?”

And he said, “Well, to be honest with you, sir, I am a wealthy man. I own a manufacturing company. I have a big house in an exclusive neighborhood, a beautiful wife, and lovely children. And I have everything that I ever dreamed of in life. I have achieved it all. And I am only thirty-two years old. To be honest with you, I am miserable. There are some other people in my neighborhood just as miserable as me. But there are some others in my neighborhood who are, well, happy.” He said, “So I decided to see if I could find out why. And I have done some investigating and I do not know all the reasons, but I found out that they all read the Bible. So I bought one to see if I can figure out what is going on.”

There he was, right next to me. I could see his scalp already hanging from my belt. I nearly had the man on his knees in this plane. And at one point he looked at me and said, “By the way, what do you do?” I wanted to say, “I represent the Big Three.” But I told him, “I am a preacher.” Now you can finish this story, can’t you? I was the first preacher he had ever talked to in his life. The wheels began to spin in his mind. “What have I said to this man of the cloth?” And the conversation became very proper. Someone who was seated on the other side of me who had been overhearing the whole conversation said, “Oh, you’re a preacher, huh? Well, I have been wanting to talk to a preacher for a long time. I have some questions I want to ask.”

They were great questions like: How many angels can stand on the head of a pin? The answer is five, in case you want to know. And the Lord just spoke to my heart and said, “Gayle, you loved your reputation, didn’t you? You squeezed everything out of it you could, didn’t you, Gayle? You loved it.” “Yes, yes.” “Now do you see all of the stereotypes that you have helped build and how it separates?” “Yes.”

And Jesus made Himself of no reputation so anyone could come.

And if you have not come to Him, there is nothing that should hold you back. He has come to you. And you know, we have three more principles to go but we will have to finish those in the next lesson. As I look at the ones we have covered, I am so overwhelmed with this man Jesus, that again my heart says, “I will follow You the rest of my days. Blessed be the name of the Lord.” Amen.

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

BY

Calvary Chapel Outreach Fellowship

Lesson 16 Jesus, Part IV

By

Gayle Erwin

Brought to you by:

The Blue Letter Bible Institute

www.blbi.org

A ministry of:

The Blue Letter Bible

www.blueletterbible.org

In our prior sessions, we looked at the nature of Jesus as found in His “Greatest in the Kingdom” teachings, and also in the passage in [Philippians 2](#) where Paul speaks of the “mind of Christ”

Let’s go through the points as a review. The first point was: servant. He that is greatest must be servant of all. And Jesus begins to teach about Himself as He says this. The second thing was: not lord it over others. And the third thing was: example. You have to live and lead by example. And the fourth item was: humble. Being humble is living honestly, being honest about ourselves, living without pretense, or without hypocrisy. And the fifth item was: as a child. As a child is humble, a child is unable to deceive, and a child is unthreatening. And the sixth item was: as the younger. This means understanding that we will always be the disadvantaged ones and also it means traveling light. Number seven and eight were: last and least, which of course are quite similar. And that completed the eight parts of His “Greatest in the Kingdom” teaching.

And then that brought us to the passage in [Philippians 2:5](#) where Paul says to us, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.” In other words, the same set of attitudes should be in you that were in Jesus. We must let the same simple core of motivating being be in us that was also in Christ Jesus.

And we have looked at three items so far. Number nine was: no force. Jesus used no force on us. He left us free to make a genuine choice. Number ten was: no blind ambition. Jesus was not driven by blind ambition. His heavenly goal He achieved only by heavenly means. And then number eleven, which we ended on last week: He made Himself of no reputation.

Now that brings us back to the passage that we were discussing in [Philippians 2](#). “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who though He was in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped” ([Philippians 2:5-6](#), NIV). Jesus thought it not robbery to be equal with God. “But made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man” ([Philippians 2:7-8](#)).

Now Paul is not trying to tell us here that Jesus was a facsimile of God or that He was a hologram of God. Nor is Paul saying that Jesus favored God, or was as much like Him as you are going to find here. No, he is telling us that He was exactly like God and exactly like man. He was not a facsimile of man, but He was exactly like us.

So number twelve is: human. Now for some reason or other that is a very difficult thing for a lot of people to consider—that Jesus was fully human. In fact, centuries ago, back in the Council of Chalcedon, the church struggled with that very question. Who was He? Was He God acting like a man? Was He man acting like a god? Was He half God, half man? Who was He? They came to what I think was the proper conclusion—that He was fully God and fully man. How can that be? I do not know! But I like it.

Now the “fully God” side we seem to be able to handle that fairly well, but the “fully man” side we still struggle with that. I am amazed at how often people want to say, “Now wait a minute.” But the fact is, folks, the Bible tells us right in the very opening chapter of John, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us” ([John 1:14](#)). Flesh! What does that mean to you, flesh? Well, I know what it means to me. I am amazed at this thing called flesh. I have an ample supply of it.

Some years ago I was in Bhubaneswar, India, a state of Orissa, which is the poorest state of India. And I happened to be walking around part of the city early in the morning. I like to do that when I am in a foreign country. And I came upon a dead cow hidden in a ditch along the dusty road. It was bloated and maggots were crawling on it. Isn't this wonderful? I do not know why, but I walked over to see it. Now I do not have much of a need to see a dead cow. But I did it anyway. It did not take long before I had seen all of it I needed to see. The odor overwhelmed me and as I walked away from it, I thought, “Oh, man.” And then the Lord spoke to my heart and said, “Gayle that is a picture of your flesh.”

Flesh! And the Word was made flesh?—and dwelt among us. This is amazing. In fact it goes so far as to say that “God made Him in the likeness of sinful flesh” (cf. [Romans 8:3](#)). You can read it. He was like us! Can that be so? I think so. How? I do not know, but I like it. In fact, just to prove it the Bible tells us in [Hebrews 4:15](#) that He “was tempted in all points like we are.” Oooh! Have you ever thought you had an original temptation? Have you ever thought, “Oh no, Jesus, You would not be tempted this way. Not You.” But He was—in all points.

Now think of that, folks. Jesus was tempted in all points, not most points, not a good number of points, but in all points. “Yet [He was] without sin.” Isn't that marvelous? That just overwhelms me.

Now here is where you have to fasten your seatbelts. James tells us that we are tempted when we are drawn away of our own lusts. What? You mean Jesus was built like us? That is exactly what I mean. That is why He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities. That is why we can come boldly before the throne of grace. That is why we can come within the veil because of what He did. Amazing! Now that means He had a pretty well developed desire structure, didn't He?

I don't know why I do not like peanut butter, because I love peanuts. So you could place a peanut butter sandwich by my bed tonight and it would be there tomorrow. I just do not have a desire for it. But there are certain other things that would tempt me.

Jesus was tempted in all points like we are, yet without sin. Awesome! How can God take sinful flesh—how can He take that likeness and the purity of Himself and weld them together? It is impossible. I know it cannot be done humanly, but He did it. How? I don't know, but I like it. I like it.

That is why He can plead our case before the Father. Do you realize that? He understands us!

Oh, now that brings up one of the marvelous benefits of His being truly human. When you are truly in touch with your humanity, you are in touch with the rest of the world. Did you know that? The Bible also tells us “There is no temptation overtaken us but such as is common to man” (cf. [1 Corinthians 10:13](#)). So if you know yourself, if you are in touch with your humanity, you are in touch with the entire world! That is why Jesus, I believe, knew the heart of man.

Long before I ever went to India, I knew what Indians were like. They are greedy and lustful, just like me. Long before I ever went to Africa, I knew what Africans were like—greedy and lustful, just like me. Long before I came to this church—I know what is going through your minds—we are all alike that way.

In fact, some years ago I was teaching a couple thousand pastors and their wives in Zimbabwe, an African country with a different culture entirely. And I got off onto family relationships, which is a dangerous thing to do in another culture. But fools rush in where angels fear to tread, so there I was. And at one point I said to this group, “It could be that you men woke up this morning and the first thing you said to your wives was—and I quoted something. And then your wives answered you back—and I quoted something else. And then you husbands answered them back—and I quoted something. And then your wives answered—and I quoted something.” And I noticed that these men and women were looking at each other and punching one another, and pointing at me. When I finished teaching, they rushed down to the front and said, “You were listening at our bedroom window this morning, weren’t you?” I said, “No, I wouldn’t do that!” They said, “Then you are a prophet!” I had to get honest with them and admit, “Well, actually, I was just sharing some words that my wife and I have used with each other in the past.”

We are all the same. We are just alike. If you are really in touch with your humanity, you know what everybody else is like.

There is another distinct advantage of being in touch with your humanity, being truly human. If you understand that we are in the flesh, you are not very impressed with yourself. You really are not. You understand that we are each just a ball of mud.

I am amazed, though, at how much attention we give this mud. Have you noticed that? All over this state there are mud houses, designed to help you redesign your mud! It is amazing! It costs lots of money, of course, and they make certain promises as to what you can look like when they get through with your mud. And we do it. We go there. We spend money on it. So we can say, “Do you like my mud?”

I was watching one of these body building programs on television. I had never seen anything like that before. I could not believe it. These guys, as they walked out on stage—They didn’t really walk out, they just sort of slunk out, you know. Rats and mice, it seemed were running up and down under their skin. And they went through their paces.

I could not believe what I was seeing. And then something dawned on me as I watched. I realized there is not a single person on that program my age—not a one! I wanted to shout at them, “Hey fellas, guess what is going to happen to you? There is a very powerful force in this world called gravity. It is going to win, believe me! All these muscles—know where they are going to end up on your bodies!”

You get up in the morning and you make a serious mistake when you go look in a mirror. I look and I think, “I have met the enemy.” And I realize I immediately set about changing everything I see. Oh boy, my nose doesn’t belong up there. Let me bring it back down. And we powder here and we spray there. Now, why in the world do we do that? Why do we do that?

It is because we know that flesh rots! The flesh is dying. Remember the cow? I want you to understand, as you look in the mirror and as you spray, the job you have ahead of you. If we truly understand that we are flesh, we are not going to be very impressed with ourselves. We will understand. You will not get proud. It is hard to get proud when you understand that it is just mud.

Now you may say, “But I am anointed!” Okay, you are a greasy ball of mud—big deal! I am convinced that some of the major failures we have seen on the public religious scene have come because individuals lost sight of their muddiness. They began to think that maybe they were a step or two above mere humanity. But folks, I have learned that if I am in touch with the reality of my muddiness, I know how to protect myself a lot more. I am more likely to pray, “Oh, and lead me not into temptation, but deliver me from evil” ([Matthew 6:13](#)). And I will understand what I am praying about when I do that because I am truly human.

And then it tells us that Jesus humbled Himself and was obedient—that will be number thirteen in our list. He was obedient even unto death. The death on the cross is point number fourteen which will complete our list, by the way.

But let’s talk about being obedient. These fourteen points that we have gone over, are not only the nature of Jesus, but they have to also be the nature of the Father because Jesus said, “When you have seen Me you have seen the Father” (cf. [John 14:9](#)). And Jesus, who came and walked in the flesh, also lived out this nature of His Father. He was obedient to this.

After some interesting statements in Scripture relative to Jesus—some He made Himself—He says, “I only do what I see the Father do.” I am paraphrasing this slightly. “I only do what I see the Father do. I only say what I hear the Father say. My meat, My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me” (cf. [John 4:34](#)). In other words “I delight to do His will. In fact, I have come, in the volume of the book it is said of Me—this is why I came, to do Your will, Lord” (cf. [Hebrews 10:7](#)). Marvelous!

As He faced what probably was His final and greatest struggling moment in that garden, do you know what His ultimate statement was? He said, “Nevertheless, not as I will, but

as Thou wilt” (cf. [Matthew 26:39](#)). He was completely obedient to the nature of the Father. I am in awe of this because it was even to the point of death, the death on the cross ([Philippians 2:8](#)).

Now, I personally think His greatest temptation was to escape death. They say there is no one single drive within us quite as strong as the drive to stay alive. So the opportunities that He had to stay alive were probably some of His greatest temptations. That is why when Peter recognized who Jesus was when asked, “Who do you say I am?” Peter said, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” Jesus says, “Way to go, Peter.” I am paraphrasing here too. “Flesh and blood did not reveal this to you. [Your brain bone had nothing to do with this.] The Father has revealed this to you” (cf. [Matthew 16:13-17](#)). And then Peter was basking in the glory of his revelation.

But now that the disciples know who He is, Jesus begins to teach about the difficult things that He is going to have to go through and ultimately suffer death. And Peter becomes an advisor to God. Remember that? He rebukes Jesus! Can you see it? “Come here, God. You quit talking like that. You aren’t going to have go through that. You are God, remember? I told You. And anyway, I am on Your side, remember? And I get revelations, remember?” (cf. [Matthew 16:22](#)). And it was then that Jesus said, “Get behind Me, Satan. You don’t know the things of God, just the things of men” (cf. [Matthew 16:23](#)). Peter was good at attempting to rescue Jesus. He did it again, remember? Peter had a sword in his hand in the garden and attempted to rescue Jesus when he cut off the ear of the high priest’s servant. I believe that was a great temptation on the part of Jesus. If I were Him I would think, “Now let Me see. I will just empower his arm and there will be heads all over the place.” I can understand that temptation. But Jesus resisted it once again.

I think when Jesus stood before all of the courts, opportunity was given to Him to escape and He resisted. He would not let anything keep Him from fulfilling His call to come and rescue us and die for us.

Death is sort of the ultimate test of our servanthood, isn’t it? For what am I willing to die? That is a scary question but it is a very real one. I guess in some way we all have to face this. Now we live rather easy lives, as far as that’s concerned. We don’t tend to be in constant threat of death right now.

Death. Is there anything for which I am willing to die? A person? A people? A place? Things? A belief? A set of beliefs? Is there any place where I can say, “Here I stand and here I stake my life?” That is a good question. It is a scary question. For what am I willing to die?

Well, Jesus was obedient even unto death, death on the cross.

When I saw this, folks, I had two reactions. My first one was that I was absolutely overwhelmed with this man Jesus, absolutely overwhelmed! I loved Him more than I had ever loved Him before. I said, “Jesus, there is no one I have ever met that comes

anywhere near this. I gladly, I gladly give myself to You. I will follow You. I will gladly follow You.”

Then I had another reaction. Do you remember the past that you once had in the carnal nature that used to guide your life? Remember the habitual thought patterns that sort of zinged through your mind every once in while and now it doesn't happen. Well, a thought sort of zinged through to me. And I began to think, “Now, come on. You expect us to win the world by being servants? Come on. You expect us to win the world by being humble and as children and the last and the least? Come on. You expect us to win the world by being of no reputation? You expect us to win the world using no force? Come one, God! Give us guns! We can do it with guns, you know. Give us money and we will buy the world. We know we can do that! Give us influence. We will vote the sinners out. That is what we will do.”

Then the Lord let me see that it is not over when it stops with death. It is not over because the next words in that passage in Philippians, the next words in Scripture say: “Therefore God has raised Him up and given Him the name that is above every name, at whose name every knee shall bow in heaven and earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God, the Father” (cf. [Philippians 2:9-11](#)).

Do you see what is going on here? When you walk the Jesus pathway, you get God's results. When you do it God's way then you hear, “Therefore God.” Oh man, I am excited by that!

Now you know that you do not have to do it this way in order to succeed in life. You do not have to do it God's way to succeed. God help us, sometimes you do not even have to do it this way to succeed in church. When I see someone who really tries to live this out, usually I observe them saying, “Wow, God! How did You do that, God? Wow! This is beautiful God. Way to go, God!” And I ask them, “What is the secret of your success?” And they will say, “I do not know. Wow, God! Way to go, God!” I found out that when I figure things out, my success is usually over. Indeed I can do it my way and usually I do.

But I found this out that if I do it my way, first of all, I succeed only to the limit of my ability. Secondly, I damage people and thirdly, my fruit does not remain. But if I walk the Jesus pathway, first of all, I succeed only to the limit of God's ability. I do not damage people and my fruit remains. Now I would much rather hear, “Therefore God,” than “Therefore Gayle” any day of the week.

In fact I am convinced that the only way we will succeed, because God is rather jealous about Himself and about His glory, and the only way we will truly succeed with the promises that He has laid out for us, is when we do it His way. It is when we lean so totally on Him that we discover, “When I am weak then I am I strong. His strength is made perfect in my weakness.” (cf. [2 Corinthians 12:10](#)).

But now I need to confess something else to you. I am convinced that I am so corrupt from my nature and my culture that I really do not have a clue as to what true success

actually is. I tend to think that success is a body count. How many did we have? Or success is cash flow. How much did we get? Or success is media attention. How many cameras are there? But I do not think God is quite as impressed with that as I am. In fact, He seems to give honor, as Paul said, to the most unseemly part of the body. That makes no sense to me. But God does it that way. In fact He does not call the mighty or the noble, at least He rarely does. In fact He takes “the weak and the foolish to confound the strong and the wise” (cf. [1 Corinthians 1:27](#)). I do not understand why He does that. But He does and it just does not fit my logic. I do not have a clue as to what true success is.

Have you ever try to imagine what heaven is like? Do you ever think that the biggest mansion up there is going to go to the most successful Christian that ever lived? And when we get there we go rushing up to number one Glory Road to see whose name is on the mailbox. And we discover that it is Mr. Spiffleboofer Woostiwowow. You will probably say, “I have never heard of him.” I have an idea it will probably be that way.

Some years ago in a magazine I saw an ad by a Christian organization. It showed this fella who had just forded a jungle stream. He had what appeared to be everything he owned on his back. He was heading off into what appeared to be obscurity. I thought, “You will never see him again. That’s it. It is over.” And the caption beneath the picture said, “But Bob was voted most likely to succeed.” And that is the way with God. The world does not understand that. They view the Christian and they say, “Oh, how sad. He could have made a name for himself. He could have put his mark on this world. And here he is with a Ph.D. traipsing off into the jungle to translate for some God-forsaken tribe. How sad.” The world does not understand.

Let me tell you another very personal story, and if you will forgive me, I am going to brag just a little bit. When I was in high school and college I cut a rather wide path. This was not for physical reasons, but I was president of every student body that I was part of, you know. What can I say other than I was big man on campus. I planned to be a medical doctor, a surgeon actually. But there was no way I could do that. My parents invented poverty and it was hopeless. The Lord blessed me and I managed to win a scholarship that was so good it paid for every dime of my undergraduate work. It even gave me spending money. It was an awesome scholarship.

I was the boy from across the tracks who had made good and I had become kind of the town favorite—the fair-haired boy of town. And one of the banks in town did a most uncharacteristic thing. Their board informed me that they had decided when I reached medical school they would pay for my medical school expenses. I had it made. I went off to college and during those days, God began to deal with me and He said, “Gayle, I like doctors. But I have something else I want you to do.” I said, “Really? What?” “I want you to preach.” “Okay.” I wish you could have been there when I made the announcement. “You are going to what?” The city father came the hundred miles to that university to try to talk me out of this dumb decision. The bank president sent word to me that I was no longer their friend, which is kind of the way banks deal with me anyway.

Some years later I went back to that town for a reunion with my graduating high school class. In high school I had a teacher who was the best academic teacher I have ever had. He was really awesome. They ought to make a movie of his life because he was such a good teacher. He was at that reunion and I will never forget when he saw me that disappointment clouded his face. He looked at me and he said, “Gayle, I just don’t understand. I had such hopes for you. I looked into your eyes and saw the answer to cancer. But ministry? This seems like such a waste. I just don’t understand, Gayle. You could have been something.” Oh, I tried to get him to understand, but I could not. I tried to get him to understand that I had seen more cancer disappear or be prevented this way than ever had I wielded the knife. But he was in a different ballpark. He just could not understand.

Most of the world is in another ballpark, aren’t they? They are not going to understand your relationship with Jesus Christ, so don’t expect them to. But oh, please do not be fooled by the world’s view of success. We do not have enough time left for us to be fooled by the world’s view of success.

Now some of your friends and relatives will put you under great pressure about this. They will not understand your relationship with Jesus. I know that some of your parents or your friends wish that you would go back on drugs so they could understand you. And you wish that they would understand this Jesus thing. Well, that is okay actually. Just don’t be fooled by it. Don’t be fooled by it.

God may call you to work in some ministry that is so obscure that we never hear from you again. Your name virtually may disappear because of the obscurity of your ministry. But if you are doing it obediently and faithfully and joyfully, you are the most successful Christian on the face of this earth. If God chooses you to work in some ministry where your name is up in lights and you are famous—and that is very dangerous—but you do it faithfully and joyfully and obediently, then you are the most successful Christian on the face of this earth. But you are not one drop more successful than the person who works in obscurity.

You look in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, that great chapter of faith, and you discover individuals who, by their faith, wrought such mighty deeds that they would end on the front page of today’s newspapers because of their faith. But in that same chapter you discover individuals who, by their faith, lived in caves, were fugitives, starved, were tormented, and gave themselves up to die. In the world’s eyes all of them were failures because of their faith. But what did God think of them? He said, “The world was not even worthy of them” (cf. [Hebrews 11:37-38](#)).

Oh, folks, I would much rather hear, “Therefore God” than anything else—than anything else. Please do not be fooled by the world. I guess what I am really ultimately trying to say is this: If God has chosen you to be a slave—and I suspect He has—don’t lower yourself and try to be president.

Let us now go forward and follow Him and watch while we hear, “Therefore God” in our lives.

Oh, thank You, Father, for Your kindness to us. Thank You, Lord, for these people who have come because their hearts are turned toward You. Fill them with Yourself. Overwhelm them with Your goodness, Lord. Walk with them each step so that they sense that You are there. Lord, give them opportunity after opportunity to see Your hand working in their lives. May joy overtake them and surprise them. May Your power be evident in their lives. May Your Word be so present that their lives will be filled with fruit, and never return void. I pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen. Amen.

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

BY

Calvary Chapel Outreach Fellowship

Lesson 17

The Suffering Servant

By

Clark Van Wick

Calvary Chapel Bible Fellowship

Brought to you by:

The Blue Letter Bible Institute

www.blbi.org

A ministry of:

The Blue Letter Bible

www.blueletterbible.org

Let's pray,

Lord, how thankful we are for the Word which is the bread of life for us; to nourish us, to sustain us, to strengthen us. Lord, today we simply come worshipping You in spirit and in truth, setting aside all of the cares and concerns of the day, for there are many. And we simply, with one heart and one mind, turn toward You to learn of You in order that we would become more like You. That is the prayer of our hearts, to simply become more like You. We so desperately need You and how thankful we are that we can come as the *Ohana*, the family, with one heart and one mind, in Jesus' name we pray. And all of God's people said, "Amen."

Let's open our Bibles to [Isaiah 53](#). You will recall that chapters 49-57 in Isaiah deal with the Lord's servant, which of course speaks of Messiah. It is pointing to Jesus Christ as the Lord's Servant, the Lord's Deliverer, or the Lord's Redeemer. And in [chapter 52](#), Isaiah had encouraged the southern kingdom of Judah to be strong, knowing that eventually they would be released from Babylonian captivity; though that was more than one hundred years into the future from the time of this prophecy.

Well, the end of their captivity is spoken of in [Isaiah 52:13-15](#), which really belongs to chapter 53 because in verses 13-15 Isaiah points to the Suffering Servant. And when Messiah would come, He would come in humility; it says that He would suffer horribly and be rejected by many. Of course, the nation of Israel did not believe anything about that as it pertains to Messiah. They were not looking for a Suffering Servant to come on to the scene; they were looking for a conquering king. They were not looking for a Messiah that was to be humble and lowly, but one that was to be mighty and powerful. They were not looking for a Messiah to deliver them from the bondage of sin, but from the bondage of captivity.

And therefore, Isaiah begins chapter 53 with this question: "Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" That is a good question, Isaiah. Who has believed our report, who has believed the prophets who had prophesied of the Messiah that He would come lowly, that He would come humbly, that He would suffer horribly? Who has believed these reports? Well, the answer is: very few! In fact, the nation of Israel as a whole did not believe that Messiah would suffer. They did not believe that He would come lowly, riding on a donkey like [Zechariah 9:9](#) declares. They could not believe that He would be born in a little town called Bethlehem there in [Micah 5:2](#). And what an incredible picture that must have been for the children of Israel—the picture that Messiah was to come, not on a white horse, but on a little grey donkey.

Turn with me if you would to [John 12](#). It is interesting even to this very day that there are those who do not believe this very report which Isaiah is proclaiming. In fact, if you go to synagogues today (either here in the States or in Israel) when they read the law and they read from the prophets, they always skip through [Isaiah 53](#). They do not read that chapter because to this day they still do not believe that Messiah was to suffer. They do not believe He was to be bruised and pierced and die a horribly tragic death.

It is interesting that next month we will be in Israel and we always stop at a place called the Shrine of the Book. It is a very beautiful structure; it is shaped like a clay jar. Now, this building that is shaped like a clay jar houses what is called the “Dead Sea Scrolls.” And I remember asking Ronnie, our tour guide on one tour, “Ronnie, you know as well as I do that when the Jews get together and have synagogue, they read from the law and the prophets. What do they do when they come to [Isaiah 53](#)?” He said, “Well, you know as well as I do, Clark, they do not read it because they believe that it was actually inserted by the Christians.”

And the Jews have believed that for a long, long time—right up until 1947. You see, in 1947 this little shepherd boy had lost his sheep down near the caves of Qumran—where we will be next month. And there in one of the caves, as he was throwing a rock into the cave to see if his little sheep had fallen down the shaft, he heard a “clink.” So, he threw another rock and he heard another “clink.” Well, the clinking was off of a clay pot. Suffice it to say, the scrolls that were found in these clay pots contained virtually all of the Old Testament written in them, including—you guessed it—[Isaiah 53](#). This substantiated that this was part of the Jewish *Tanakh*, the Old Testament, validating, confirming that Messiah was to suffer; that Messiah was to be bruised, rejected, pierced, and that He was to be cut off from the land of the living.

Even though [Isaiah 53:1](#) says, “the arm of the Lord was revealed,” it speaks of His power and His might. We are going to look at [John 12](#) in a moment. The arm of the Lord has been revealed. It speaks of His power and His strength. It speaks of His glory, as even the Psalmist declares in [Psalm 19:1](#), that: “The heavens declare His glory and the firmaments shows forth His handiwork day unto day, utters speech night unto night.” By the way, Paul made that declaration in [Romans 1:20](#). He said that all of the invisible attributes of God are clearly seen in creation. Even His Godhead and His power—everything about God—is displayed in you and me as His creation and in the creation itself. “Know that the arm of the Lord has been revealed,” but there are those who would not believe.

Who has believed this report? Well, take a look at [John 12:37-41](#).

37 But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him,

38 that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke:
“Lord, who has believed our report?

And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?” [There is our verse again.]

39 Therefore they could not believe, because Isaiah said again:

40 *“He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts,
Lest they should see with their eyes,
Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn,
So that I should heal them.”*

41 These things Isaiah said when he saw His glory and spoke of Him.

Jesus Christ came on to the scene and He did mighty works and signs. The arm of the Lord was revealed through Christ and all that He did. And yet, they did not believe. Why? It is because Isaiah had made the prophecy that they would reject the ministry of Messiah, which is His suffering and death on the cross for you and for me. And like the children of Israel, there are many people today who will not believe. Even though the signs and wonders abound, even though some three hundred plus prophecies of Messiah were fulfilled in Jesus, they still will not believe. They have hardened their hearts against the Lord.

I do believe that there comes a time when our hearts are so hardened against God that He finally says: “Okay, fine. If that is how you want it that is how you’ve got it.” [Genesis 6:3](#) says, “God’s Spirit will not always strive with man.” There will come a point when “God will turn us over to a reprobate mind”—[Romans 1:28](#) is very clear. And this should be a wake up call for any and all who have rejected the Messiah as Christ.

Back to Isaiah 53. This is an incredible portion of Scripture. It is only twelve verses, but here we have the gospel message laid out beautifully. And what Isaiah does in [verses 2-12](#), is deal with many areas and many aspects of the Messiah. I have listed nine of them found in these 12 verses. There are nine things that we want to look at that pertain to the Suffering Servant—that is to Messiah Himself—Jesus, the Christ.

The first thing that Isaiah mentions is His humility. Take a look at the beginning of [verse 2](#) which says: “For He shall grow up before Him [speaking of God] as a tender plant, And as a root out of dry ground.” So the first thing he mentions regarding Messiah is His humility. Now this is something the Jews could hardly stand. “Are you kidding me, Messiah is going to come in humility? He is going to come lowly?” Well, that is what this speaks of; it says that He is going to grow up as a tender plant. This is a plant that is fragile, a plant that is delicate and not a hardy tree like a cypress or the cedar of Lebanon. This is not referring to a strong oak tree, but a tender little plant, one that is pliable or bendable. And he says that He is going to be a root out of dry ground.

Now, the dry ground speaks of that which is parched, that which is arid. And plants do not grow up big and healthy in dry ground. They grow small and weak and sad and pathetic we might say. And all of that points to His humility. That is what Paul said in [Philippians 2:6](#). He is talking about Christ:

6 Who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God,
7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.
8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of* death, even the death of the cross.

This would have amazed the Jews. The Messiah was going to come humbly as we have already seen in [Zechariah 9:9](#). He was to come lowly, riding on the donkey, the foal of a donkey. They were expecting the Messiah to come with a sword in one hand, riding on a

white horse to liberate them from the bondage of the Babylonian and Assyrian onslaught. Make no mistake about it; Jesus Christ will come back with a sword and on a white horse one day. But that was not at His first coming; that will be His second coming. He came first in humility.

Number two, the second thing he mentions about Messiah is not only His humility, but His appearance. Look at [verse 2](#) again, in the middle of the verse we read:

He [Messiah, Yeshua, Jesus] has no form [or stately form] or comeliness;
[which we would translate splendor]
And when we see Him, there is no beauty [or the word literally is
appearance, there is no beautiful appearance] that we should desire Him.

So, the second thing he mentions about Messiah is His appearance. When Messiah comes, Isaiah is proclaiming that He is not going to be wearing kingly robes; He is not going to be wearing beautiful garments. He is not going to have a royal appearance, as a stately prince or a stately king would come onto the scene with glamour and the hype and hoopla. In fact, look back at [Isaiah 52:14](#),

Just as many were astonished at you,
So His visage [His appearance] was marred more than any man,
And His form more than the sons of men;

So, His appearance is going to be grotesque; it is going to be ugly we might say. It is not going to have any beauty or any stateliness or anything wonderful about it. And as we read the gospel accounts, as we read about our Lord, Jesus Christ, they of course beat Him, and scourged Him repeatedly. They smote Him in the face; they plucked out the hair of His beard. I would image the site was too horrific to look at.

I always find this interesting because I have seen pictures that have been painted of Jesus Christ and so have you, and He always looks very handsome, kind of rugged and tan, but with a gentle calmness about His demeanor. I always find that interesting because that is not what the Bible says about Jesus. His visage was marred more than any man. “He had no comeliness that we should behold Him.” His appearance was that of repulsion; in fact, I think it is very interesting (in light of all eternity) that He will remain the same.

You see, when John the revelator was there on Patmos in [Revelation 5:6](#), he said that he saw “Jesus Christ, the Lamb as though He was slain.” And I find that interesting because when we get to heaven, I personally believe (this is my own personal belief) that Jesus is still going to bear the scars, bear the marks that He bore for you and He bore for me. Why? Because you will remember after the resurrection in [John 20](#), Thomas would not believe that Jesus rose from the dead. He said, “Unless I put my hands in the nail prints of His hand and my hand into the side where He was pierced, I will not believe.” In [John 20](#) Jesus appeared to them in that upper room. He said, “Thomas, touch; put your hand in my hand; put your hand in my side so that you may believe.” I believe His scars are going to

be for all of eternity as a memorial, a testimony to you and to me of His great love for each and every one of us. And so, Isaiah deals with His appearance.

Number three, Isaiah deals with His sorrow and His grief. Take a look at [verse 3](#),

He [Messiah, Jesus Christ] is despised and rejected by men,
A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.
And we hid, as it were, *our* faces from Him;
He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

Because He was despised, because he was not esteemed because they hid their faces from Him, He was a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief. You see, He was full of sorrow and full of grief because the people He came to save despised Him and did not esteem Him and hid their faces from Him. That brought great sorrow and great grief to the heart of our Lord.

In [Luke 19](#), we have the account of the triumphal entry as Jesus of course mounted that little donkey; and as the people were waving palm branches and crying out, “Hosanna, Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” As Jesus was nearing the city, speaking of Jerusalem in [John 11:35](#), it says: “He saw the city and wept.” He wept over their spiritual condition because He came—in [Luke 19:10](#) which is the key verse to the book—“to seek and to save that which was lost.” And since they despised Him, and since they did not esteem Him, and since they hid their faces from Him, He was full of sorrow and full of grief.

In Mark 14, we are told when He was in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus Himself said in verse [34](#): “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful.” Why? He was sorrowful for the lost. For those who did not esteem Him, for those who rejected Him, and those who turned their faces from Him. I hope and I pray that each and every one of us has the heart of our Lord. That when we see the lost, we too would be filled with sorrow and filled with grief because often times when we see those who do not esteem our Lord Jesus Christ, or those who despise Him and those who turn their face from Him, sometimes we are filled with anger and rage. We are frustrated because we think: “Man, don’t you get it? Don’t you see that Christ is the only way, the only truth, and the only life?” And we get a little frustrated and sometimes a little agitated. But I hope and pray that we have the heart of the Lord that was moved with compassion when He saw the multitudes, because He saw them as sheep without a shepherd. That is what Paul understood.

Remember in [Romans 9:2](#), Paul said: “I am filled with sorrow and exceedingly filled with grief.” This was because the Jewish people would not come to Messiah. He goes on in [Romans 9:3](#) and says that “he was willing to become accursed for his countrymen.” This literally means that Paul was willing to give up his salvation, so that others may be saved; that is the heart of our Lord for each and every one of us.

Number four, [Isaiah 53:4-6](#) mentions His affliction. Now I simply want to mention two things about His affliction from these verses. First, quite simply, it was for us. Why was

Jesus Christ afflicted? Why did He suffer? Why did He die on the cross? It was for us. It was for our benefit. It was for our eternal life. Look at verses 4-6,

4 Surely He has borne our griefs
And carried our sorrows.
5 He *was* wounded for our transgressions,
He was bruised for our iniquities;
6 All we like sheep have gone astray;
We have turned, every one, to his own way;
And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

Why did Jesus Christ allow Himself to be afflicted, to suffer the beatings, the scourgings, the mockings, the ridicules, and to be nailed to the cross? It was for us; it was for you and for me.

Isaiah deals with four things, four areas of our lives that personally pertain to the affliction of Christ. Note them carefully, family. Number one, it was for our grief and sorrow. [Isaiah 53:4](#) says, “He [Jesus] has born our grief [we might say sicknesses] and carried our sorrows [or our pains].” It carries the same idea; grief and sorrow speak of sickness and pain. And Jesus Christ was afflicted for our sickness, for our pain, for our grief, and for our sorrows. You see, sin brings separation between us and God.

[Psalm 51](#) declares that we were born into sin; and thus, there is a separation between us and God and that will always bring grief and sorrow. It is a grievous thing to be separated from God, but Jesus Christ, in His willingness to be afflicted for us, took care of that grief and that sorrow.

Number two, it was for our transgressions and our iniquities. Take a look at [verse 5](#), it says: “He was wounded.” It can literally be translated “crushed.” He was wounded for our transgressions and bruised or crushed for our iniquities.” Look at [verse 6](#). “All we like sheep have gone astray and we have turned, every one, to his own way.” We are like sheep wandering, lost. And by the way, sheep wander off easily. But notice that “the Lord, Yahweh, has laid on Him, Messiah, the iniquity, sin and transgressions of us all.”

Why did Jesus Christ allow Himself to be afflicted? Why did He allow Himself to go to the cross? It was for our transgressions; it was for our iniquities, and it was for our sins. Yes, sin separates us from God and there needed to be a remedy. The remedy was the cross. Jesus Christ took your sins, He took my sins, and the Bible says in [1 Peter 2:24](#), “He bore our sins in His own body.”

Jesus Christ took the sins of the world and they were heaped upon His shoulders. Paul says in [2 Corinthians 5:21](#) that “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us.” Jesus Christ became sin. Why? He took our sins, past, present, and future and He nailed them to the cross in His own body; thus, there was a separation between Him and God. He cried out on the cross, “My God, My God, why hath Thou forsaken me?”

Why did God forsake Messiah? He accomplished His plan and did His will because of the sin He took from you and me. Sin brings separation; that is what [Isaiah 59:2](#) declares. It is our sin that separates us from God. And Messiah, Jesus Christ, experienced something that He had never experienced ever before—momentary separation between Himself and the Father. Why? Because He took our transgressions; He took our iniquities.

Number three, He was not only afflicted for our grief, sorrows, transgressions, and iniquities, but for our peace. Take a look at the middle of [Isaiah 53:5](#), it says: “The chastisement [punishment] for our peace *was* upon Him.” Jesus Christ took our punishment, our chastisement, the judgment that we should receive. He took it upon Himself so that you and I might have peace. This is a peace, [Philippians 4:7](#) says, “that passes all understanding.” He has made peace between us and God. You see, there is no way we could possibly make peace with God based upon our performance. There is nothing we can do to eliminate or alleviate the chastisement that we deserve because of our sin nature. Jesus Christ was afflicted for our peace. He took our chastisement to make peace between us and God.

Paul said in [2 Thessalonians 3:16](#) that “the Lord of peace will give you peace in every way.” In [John 14:27](#), Jesus said, “My peace I give unto thee.” And you can never have peace from God until you first make peace with God. And that peace comes through Jesus Christ and Him alone.

Number four and finally, it is for our healing. We said that there were four reasons why Jesus was afflicted for us. One, for our grief and sorrow; two, for our transgressions and iniquities; three, for our peace; and number four is for our healing. Look at the end of [verse 5](#); do not miss this. It says, “By His stripes.” The word “stripes” literally means blows or thrashings that cut into the flesh. It speaks of the scourgings that Jesus Christ received which cut into His flesh. But notice that it was “by His stripes;” it is by these blows, which cut to the bone, that you and I are healed. Peter quotes that in [1 Peter 2:24](#), when he said: “By His stripes we are healed.”

I am afraid there is a little bit of confusion about what healing Isaiah and Peter are referring to. I have heard pastors on the radio and television say that God heals us physically because of His stripes. And I understand that God does heal physically, there is no question about it. Our God is a God that does heal; but unfortunately, they have taken this out of context. The whole context deals with the spiritual man, not the physical man. And “by His stripes you and I are healed,” spiritually, for all of eternity. Does He heal physically? Oh, yes! All of the time? No, sometimes He does not heal. Unfortunately, there are those today who think that the reason we are not healed is because we lack faith.

Well, apparently Paul lacked faith because in [2 Corinthians 12](#), he prayed three times that God would remove this thorn from his flesh. This physical infirmity may have been an eye problem, we do not know. And God said “No” in [2 Corinthians 12:9](#), “My grace is sufficient for you.” God does not always heal, physically; but He always will heal

spiritually, as we simply ask Him to forgive us of our sins, to cleanse us of our unrighteousness. [1 John 1:9](#) tells us that “He forgives and He cleanses us.” He heals the separation between us and God.

Back to [Isaiah 53](#). We said that there were two reasons why He was afflicted. Number one, it was for us; and we looked at four reasons. But number two, it was by God. His affliction was not only *for* us, it was *by* God. Drop back to [verse 4](#), in the middle of the verse we read: “Yet we esteemed [reckoned] Him stricken, [literally struck down] by God and afflicted.” Isn’t that interesting? Jesus Christ was afflicted not only for us, but He was afflicted by God Himself.

Recently a movie came out that stirred a lot of controversy regarding the afflictions of Christ, the crucifixion of Christ. It was called, *The Passion of Christ*. There were uproars in a variety of communities blaming and pointing fingers.

“You killed Messiah!”

“No, you killed Messiah!”

“You afflicted Him!”

“No, you afflicted Him!”

How foolish and ignorant this arguing was. The [Isaiah 53:4](#) says, “He was smitten by God.” That is what Paul said in [Acts 2:23](#). He said that Jesus Christ was delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God. That is what Jesus said too when He was standing before Pontius Pilate in [John 19](#). Pilate said, “Do you not know that I have power to crucify you and power to save you?” And Jesus said, “You’ve got to be kidding me [my translation].” Jesus said, “You have nothing but that which was given to you from above.” It was God’s plan right from the beginning. In fact, it was not a new plan. When I say it was God’s plan from the beginning, I am talking about from the beginning of the world. We read in [Revelation 13:8](#), “Jesus Christ was the Lamb that was slain before the foundation of the world.” It was not an afterthought. God did not say, “Oops!” It was something that God planned from eternity past. Messiah was afflicted for us by God, so that we might have eternal life in Him.

Number five. The fifth thing that He brings us about Messiah, he talked about His humility, His appearance, His sorrow and grief, His affliction, and now number five talks about His silence. Look at [Isaiah 53:7](#). It says,

He was oppressed [the Suffering Servant] and He was afflicted,
Yet He opened not His mouth;
He was led as a lamb to the slaughter,
And as a sheep before its shearers is silent,
So He opened not His mouth.

Jesus Christ suffered, He was afflicted; and yet, He did not open His mouth. In [John 19:9](#) when Jesus was standing before Pilate, he was asking questions of Jesus. He said, “Where are you from?” The Bible says, “And Jesus answered him not.” This was fulfilling Isaiah.

And when Jesus stood before Herod, in [Luke 23](#), Herod was thrilled to see Jesus. He thought He might have been John the Baptist raised from the dead, and he was hoping to see a miracle or a sign or some kind of show. And Herod was asking Jesus questions over and over. And “Jesus answered him not.”

Peter tells us in [1 Peter 2:23](#) that “When Jesus was reviled, He did not revile in return, but committed Himself to God who judges righteously.” Why was Jesus silent? Why did He not open His mouth? Well, it was because there was nothing to confess. There was no admission of guilt because He was not guilty, He was perfect and sinless; He had nothing to confess. So, “He opened not His mouth and as a Lamb before its shearers is silent, He opened not His mouth.” Why? [1 Peter 2:23](#) says that it is because “He committed Himself to God.”

Now get the picture here. Jesus was being accused, He was suffering violently, He was going to die horribly, and all He had to do was speak up and confess personally; but there was nothing to confess, because He was innocent. And this is as it should be with us also. You see, Christ sets forth a wonderful example for each and every one of us. We ought to be innocent, above reproach—men and women of integrity. And when people revile you, the natural tendency is to revile in return. But Christ set that example of not reviling in return, but committing Himself to Him who judges righteously. When people come against you, when they bring railing accusations toward you, let God handle it. Commit your ways to the Lord.

Paul said in [Romans 12:19](#), “My dear brothers, do not vindicate yourselves one to another, but give place to wrath; for vengeance is Mine, I will repay, thus says the Lord.” Allow God to vindicate you. You do not have to say anything.

I remember many years ago when my wife and I were experiencing great persecution through personal attacks against us. Our natural tendency was of course to vindicate ourselves and tell everybody how wonderful and innocent we were. Of course we know that is not true, but that is our natural tendency. But the Lord had spoken to our hearts about [Romans 12:19](#). We said, “We are not going to say anything; we are not going to do anything because it says in [1 Peter 2:23](#) that ‘we are to commit our ways to the Lord.’” And you know God is a better vindicator than us. Just so you know, He will vindicate you “above and beyond what you can even ask or imagine” (cf. [Ephesians 2:20](#)).

Back to [Isaiah 53:8](#). Let’s come to the sixth thing he talks about regarding the Messiah, the Suffering Servant: His death.

He [Jesus Christ] was taken from prison [confinement] and from judgment,
And who will declare His generation?

In other words, He is taken out of prison from judgment, He is going to suffer, He is going to die and who is going to declare Him to His generation? He will not have any

offspring; He is going to be dead. Do you follow me? So, there is nobody to carry on His line because of the Suffering Servant aspect of His life. “For He was cut off from the land of the living;” that of course speaks of His death. [Daniel 9:26](#) talks about the fact that “Messiah would be cut off; not for Himself, He was to die.” In the Old Testament, as in [Zechariah 12:10](#), it prophesies “that we would look on Him whom we have pierced.”

[Psalm 22](#) talks about the crucifixion of Messiah; [Isaiah 53](#) talks about this fact as well, and [Daniel 9](#) talks about the death of Messiah. It is difficult to escape the fact that the Lord’s servant would suffer and die. He would be cut off from the land of the living. [Isaiah 53:8](#) says, “For the transgressions of My people He was stricken.” We have seen that as recorded in the New Testament. Why was He smitten, why was He stricken? It was for our sins and for our transgressions. And [Isaiah 53:9](#) says, “They made His grave with the wicked,” pointing to [Luke 22:33](#) when Jesus died between the two thieves on the cross. [Matthew 27:57](#) says, “But with the rich at His death;” this of course points to Joseph of Arimathea, the rich man who put Jesus in his own newly carved tomb. Why? It was because “He had done no violence nor was any deceit found in His mouth,” as we have already looked at in [1 Peter 2:22-23](#).

Now, we have looked at His death and we already understand that. Let’s come to the seventh thing that Isaiah discusses and that is His righteousness. In [Isaiah 53:10-11](#), Isaiah talks about His righteousness.

Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise [crush] Him;
He has put *Him* to grief.
When You make His soul an offering for sin,
He shall see *His* seed,
[Which speaks of us, the byproduct of His death, His offspring]
He shall prolong *His* days,
[Which is an interesting concept because we just read that He would be cut off, He would die, and yet His days will be prolonged. This is a beautiful picture of the resurrection of the Messiah. Do not let anyone tell you that the resurrection is not found in the Old Testament. It truly is sprinkled throughout and you can see it clearly.]
And the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand.

In other words, Messiah is going to accomplish the will of God. “The pleasure of the Lord, God Almighty shall prosper.” It shall go forth in Messiah’s hand because He will do the will of God. We looked at that in [John 4:34](#) when Jesus said, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent me.” [John 6:38](#) says, “I came down from heaven not to do my will but the will of Him who sent me.” In [Luke 22:42](#) Jesus said, “Not My will, but Thy will be done.” So constantly, Messiah will be accomplishing the will of God.

[Isaiah 53:11](#) says,

He shall see the travail [or the stress] of His soul,

[God is going to see the travail and the distress of Messiah's soul] *and* be satisfied.

So, God will be satisfied as it pertains to the affliction and the distress, and ultimately the crucifixion of Messiah. What is going to be satisfied? It is the righteousness of the law, [Romans 8:4](#) declares.

Notice as [verse 11](#) continues, it is:

By His knowledge, My righteous Servant [by the knowledge of Messiah, knowing that God's plan for His suffering is the plan of redemption for all of mankind. My righteous Servant] shall justify many,
For He shall bear their iniquities [sins].

Because Jesus Christ satisfied the righteous requirement of the law, which is righteousness or perfection by His vicarious death on the cross, He shall justify many. Jesus Christ justifies many. Who are the many? Well, those who receive His justification. Those who bow the knee to Jesus Christ, He gives them a right standing before God. He justifies them before God. He imputes His righteousness as He is the righteous Servant to you and to me, so that now we can be just. We can stand before God in righteousness. Now, it is not our righteousness because justification cannot be earned. Nobody can work at being just or righteous. No one can earn a right standing before God. It certainly is not based on our performance. It is based on the finished work of the cross. It is based on what Jesus Christ did for you and for me.

Number eight, the next thing he mentions about the Messiah is His victory. Look at [verse 12](#). It says,

Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great,
And He shall divide the spoil with the strong, [Why?]
Because He poured out His soul unto death,
And He was numbered with the transgressors,
And He bore the sin of many, [We have already talked about that]
And made intercession for the transgressors.

At the beginning of [verse 12](#), he talks about His victory. In “dividing the portion” or the “spoils” speaks of something one does after a military victory. Once you enter into battle, once you conquer the enemy, you then divide your portions among the men. You divide the spoils, the plunder, and it speaks of victory. And this, of course, points to the cross.

We are told in [1 Corinthians 15:54](#),

When this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: “*Death is swallowed up in victory.*
O Death, where is your sting?”

O grave, where is your victory?"

Well, because of the cross, Jesus Christ is victorious over death and sin, [Romans 8:2](#) declares. What a beautiful picture that is for us. You see, because He was victorious, so too it is with us. We have victory over spiritual death, we have victory over sin that separates us from God because of the cross, because of what Christ has done.

And finally number nine, and we will close with this; He talks about His intercession. Isaiah talks about the Messiah's intercession. Take a look at the end of [Isaiah 53:12](#)—you are going to like this—“And made intercession for the transgressors.” So, [verse 12](#) declares that one aspect of the Messiah, the Suffering Servant, is that He intercedes for the transgressors. Boy, what a picture of that we saw on the cross!

In [Luke 23:34](#), as Jesus was hanging on the cross, he prayed. That is what intercession means—praying to God. And His prayer was: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” He interceded for the transgressors. He prayed on their behalf, like the Holy Spirit does for us in [Romans 8](#): “When we know not what we ought to pray for as we ought, the Holy Spirit intercedes for us with groans that cannot be uttered.” [1 Timothy 2:5](#) tells us that Jesus Christ is interceding for you and me. Paul says, “There is one Mediator between God and man; it is the Man, Christ Jesus,” who is mediating or making intercession on your behalf and my behalf.

Why is that so significant? Why is that so important that Jesus Christ is praying for you and praying for me? It is because the Bible says in [Revelation 12:10](#) that “Satan is accusing us before God.” He is the accuser of the brethren day and night, accusing you and accusing me before God. So, Satan is accusing us, but Jesus Christ is interceding for us. In fact, the Bible says in [Hebrews 7:25](#) that “Jesus Christ lives forevermore to make intercession for you and for me.”

What a glorious Messiah we have. What a wonderful Lord, Jesus is. He came as a Suffering Servant. The children of Israel did not esteem Him. They did not receive Him and they turned their back on Him. And that is why we read in [Romans 11:25](#) that “Hardening in part has happened to the nation of Israel because they rejected God.” And God turned His back temporarily on them. Friends, we need to be very careful to understand all that Christ has done for us and to esteem Him highly and to receive Him practically.

Father, how thankful we are that you sent Your Son to accomplish Your plan and Your purpose in bringing eternal life to all who believe. Lord, we are so thankful that You in fact are interceding on our behalf. We praise and bless You that You humbly came as that Suffering Servant, willing to be afflicted for us that we might have eternal life in You. We thank You for that in Jesus name, amen.

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

BY

Calvary Chapel Outreach Fellowship

Lesson 18

Following Good Examples

By

David Guzik

Director, Calvary Chapel Bible College, Seigen, Germany

Brought to you by:

The Blue Letter Bible Institute

www.blbi.org

A ministry of:

The Blue Letter Bible

www.blueletterbible.org

I will give you just a few minutes to find [3 John](#) in your Bibles. I suppose many believers, including myself, have never been taught this passage. I honestly do not ever recall hearing a message on [3 John](#) at any church I ever went to, from any preacher I ever listened to. I have to be straight with you, according to the polling data and all the stuff I have read about how people think and how they feel today, you should not even want to study this. Because according to the statistics, you are supposed to think that the Bible is kind of boring. You are supposed to think that going verse by verse through the Bible has nothing to teach you. That is what a lot of people are telling preachers about how people feel today, but I do not buy it. I think we need to let the word of God speak for itself because “it is living, it is active, it is sharper than a two edged sword” (cf. [Hebrews 4:12](#)).

The Bible speaks to our hearts and it has something to say to us right now today. Let’s jump right into [3 John](#). I do not have to say chapter one—there is only one chapter. You are going to go through a whole book of the Bible in this lesson.

Starting at [verse 1](#), John says,

- 1 The elder,
To the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth:
- 2 Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.
- 3 For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth *that is* in you, just as you walk in the truth.
- 4 I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.

John begins this letter and he is writing to a friend named Gaius. You might say that you don’t see where it says that it is the apostle John writing at all. Well, we know from comparing Scripture with Scripture, and from church history, and just from the whole nature and character of the letter that the person who identifies himself as the elder in [verse 1](#), is the apostle John. And he is writing to a guy named Gaius. We do not know who exactly this guy named Gaius is. There are three or four people mentioned other places in the New Testament by this name. But the name “Gaius” was very common in the ancient Roman Empire. So we do not know who is was exactly; but it does not really matter because whoever it was, God has something to say to us through this very letter here today.

So John is writing to a man named Gaius and notice what he says there in [verse 2](#), “Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.” Now when we write a letter today, we usually have a certain format that we go by. You put the date at the top and then you put who you are writing the letter to and at the very end you put who you are. You sign it “sincerely, so-and-so.” And in the ancient world they had a protocol or format for writing letters as well. In some ways their format made a lot more sense. They would always start out a letter with who was writing it. I mean that a lot of times I don’t know who is writing the letter until the very end, which is where you put your name. But in the ancient world they put their name first.

So John starts off “The elder [himself].” And then he says who it is to—this fellow Gaius—and then he goes on and he gives an expression of greeting and well wishing. In [verse 2](#) he says, “Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.” Now some people have interpreted this statement from the apostle John as if he was making a very specific prayer for Gaius in wanting him to be rich and wanting him to be in perfect health all of his life—all of his days—as if that was sort of his birth right as a Christian.

Well, it is kind of interesting because when you go through and study the Bible as it would have been understood by ancient readers, you find that this kind of greeting that John gives was very customary. It was a very commonplace greeting. As a matter of fact, it was so commonplace that sometimes they would abbreviate it just with the first letter of each word and put it all together. Often at the end of a letter one might put a “p.s.” and then say something as an afterthought. Well, “p.s.” stands for “post script” and you do not write that out, you just put “p.s.” and the recipient gets the idea. Or sometimes when people are writing a mushy love letter at the very end they will put “S.W.A.K.” which stands for “sealed with a kiss.” And they do not write out those words, they just put the letters and everyone is supposed to know what it means. Well, they would abbreviate this phrase in the same way because it was such a commonplace expression for a greeting or well wishing.

What I am trying to get at here is not so much about the customs of ancient letter writing, but just to let you know that what John was saying here was not anything special or unique. It is not some broad promise that God wants every Christian to be always wealthy and to be always in perfect health. Why do I bring this up? Basically, I bring it up because there are people out there teaching the wrong things about this passage. There are people causing difficulty and stirring up a faulty understanding in the church today and their basic teaching is that God intends for every Christian to be rich and in perfect health every day of their life. And if you are not rich and if you are not in perfect health, there is a reason why—you do not have enough faith! These false teachers say that if you only had enough faith then you would be rich! If you only had enough faith, you would be in perfect health. Some people call this the “health and wealth” gospel and that is really what it is. It is all about being healthy and wealthy. I can understand why this philosophy resonates among the people today in our American culture. We want to be rich and we do not want any problems with our health. And then somebody comes along and says, “God has given you a free ticket on both of these items.” Who wouldn’t say, “Yea, I’ll take that!”? The problem is that it is not true and it is not biblical.

Now, we should always remember that God only wants what is best for His children. I can assure you of the fact that God is a good God and He only wants what is best for you and what is best for me. I wish we would latch on to that truth more in our lives. Sometimes we forget it.

Psalm 34 says, “Taste and see that the Lord is good” ([Psalm 34:8](#)). And God is good. He only wants good for you, but what we think is good for us and what God thinks is good

for us can sometimes be two different things. Sometimes we think it would be good if only we were rich. And sometimes we think it would be good if we never had a physical problem in all of our days. A lot of times that is the way a child thinks. He thinks it would be good if he could have ice cream at every meal! Children think it would be good if they could stay up all night every night because that is what they want. That is not good. And a child may say, “My mom and dad don’t love me because they won’t give me what is good.” We need God to decide what is good for us all the time. And I know that there have been powerful times in my life where God has spoken to my heart, and I am sure you have experienced the same thing, when because of some financial difficulty or because of some problem with our bodies, God speaks to us in a way that we could not hear otherwise. And He speaks to us and ministers to us in the midst of all of this.

Now let me say something else here that I think is very important. I do believe that there are some Christians who could be healed by God or could be blessed by God financially in a way that they have not already been blessed; yet they haven’t been blessed in this way because they lack faith. I think that there are some things that God wants to give us and some things that God wants to do in our lives that we just don’t receive, simply because we *won’t* believe that He *will* bless us in this way. I think that every Christian should be encouraged to have a greater faith and to have a greater trust in God. God wants to do so many great things in our lives but that is a different thing entirely from saying, “If you are not rich, if you are not perfectly healthy, it is because you do not have enough faith.”

You have seen it on the television set, haven’t you? The big fancy healing evangelist, who is at a big crusade and he has just finished pumping the audience full of this kind of doctrine and letting them know that the only obstacle is your faith. He says: “And if you believe, you can have it. You can write your own ticket with God. If you will only believe, He will do anything you want Him to, if you will only believe.” And he goes through the healing line with the people in wheel chairs and he doesn’t spend very much time with them. He just kind of makes a matter-of-fact gesture coming down the line; and when people don’t come up out of the wheelchair, what can that evangelist say to them except, “You don’t have enough faith.”? So he says, “Well, if you only had enough faith you would be up out of the wheel chair.”

Friends, that man is teaching a damnable doctrine. It is heaping condemnation upon people who God wants to comfort and encourage. It is a short-cited view of what God does and how He works in our lives. Friends, I stand before you completely convinced that God blesses people financially; that God does heal people, but He does it in His own way and in His own time and according to His own purposes. And those things are just beyond our finding out. I rejoice that one day God has promised perfect health and perfect prosperity for each and every believer. We call it “resurrection.” And you know anything He does with our bodies up until that time is just taxing the tent. You can tax the tent all day long, but there is no doubt about it, these tents are going down hill. None of us is getting any younger.

Almost a year ago I injured my knee playing basketball. Boy, did I start hearing the criticism! “Well, you know Pastor David, you are not getting any younger. Maybe it is time to start cutting back on that kind of thing.” And I did not want to hear that at all. I know I am not getting any younger, I am only getting older, and so are all of you might I add! And as we go on we realize the years are passing and these bodies are just getting older and older and more in decay and going down hill. That is all there is to it. But God has a perfect plan to address that problem. He calls it “resurrection.” One day we are going to be perfectly restored and our bodies are going to be made whole before the Lord. He will not be just patching up the tent, friends. He is going to move us into a mansion. and that is what we are waiting for as Christians. God promised resurrection for our bodies just as much as He has promised it for our souls.

I have a bigger question for you. Take a look at [verse 2](#) where he says, “Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.” He makes a correlation there between the health of your soul and the health of your body. Let me ask you a question. If the health of your body right now could immediately reflect the health of your soul, how would you look? Some of you come to church and will admit that you are a little flabby, a little weak, a little out of shape. But if your body could reflect the health of your soul, man you would look so pumped up and buffed out! People would look at you and say, “Wow he looks like Samson! Look at that person. That is amazing! Look at the strength—that is wild!” Others of us might look pretty good physically, but if your body could instantly reflect the health of your soul, you would be in bed in a coma for heaven’s sake. You would be very close to death, based on the condition of your soul. So ask yourself what you would look like right now. That is a scary thought, isn’t it? How healthy would your body be right now if it reflected the state of your soul? We need to have a healthy soul and God wants us to have one.

He goes on and talks about what will make your soul healthy and that is: *the truth*. Look at [verse 3](#), he said: “For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth *that is* in you, just as you walk in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.” What got John pumped up about his disciples, his followers, his “sheep” so to speak, as a pastor? What got him pumped up was to know that they were walking in the truth. They were staying in the truth, and abiding in the truth.

You could tell that Gaius was walking in the truth. Look at [verse 3](#), “I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth *that is* in you.” People could look at the life of Gaius and say, “There is a man full of the truth. Look at the truth of God that is in him. It is all over his life.” That is what God was doing in the life of Gaius. The truth of God was in him.

Going on here, John is going to begin a section in [verse 5](#) that I think is very interesting to consider. He is going to speak to us about three examples. We can learn a lot from examples in our life, can’t we? We can learn a lot from good examples and we can also learn a lot from bad examples. And the first example he is going to give us is a good one. The second example is a bad one, and then he is going to wrap up with a third example which is a good one.

Let us look at the first example of this fellow named Gaius in [3 John 5-8](#).

Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers,
who have borne witness of your love before the church. *If* you send them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God, you will do well, because they went forth for His name's sake, taking nothing from the Gentiles.
We therefore ought to receive such, that we may become fellow workers for the truth.

Now I want you to consider just for a moment here what it is you are holding in your hand. You are holding a Book in your hand that has ink on its pages. The words on those pages are represented in ink, but those words themselves are the eternal word of God. The word is just that—eternal. The Bible tells us that “The grass withers and the flowers fade, but the word of our God stands forever” (cf. [Isaiah 40:7](#)). And in the eternal word, this one man named Gaius receives great praise from the apostle John. By the way, wouldn't you like that? Wouldn't you like to be complemented like that in God's eternal word? This is going to be with us in heaven forever! And Gaius is praised—for what?—for hospitality. It was for the fact that he opened up his home and he fed and took care of, in this case, visiting Christian missionaries and teachers and evangelists. He opened up his home and that is a lot of praise and a pretty high honor for something rather basic. It is almost routine, but God did not see it as routine.

Now why is Gaius's hospitality so important to God? I can tell you a few reasons. First of all it was because he did it so well. Look at [verse 5](#) where he says, “Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers.” Whatever God calls you to do, do it faithfully. You may say, “Well wait a minute. You know I am just serving the Lord in my home. I am taking care of my children. I am trying to raise up godly children unto the Lord.” Then you need to do it faithfully and God will bless you. Another person may say that here at the church they just hand out bulletins or that they are just an usher, or they help out a little bit with the kids in the children's ministry. Then you need to do it faithfully.

Listen, all Gaius did was provide a clean bed, good food for people to eat, and some warm hospitality in his home, and he is commended in God's eternal word forever! Why? It is because he did it faithfully. The Bible tells us that when we get to heaven, some of us are going to hear the words from Jesus Christ: “Well done good and faithful servant” ([Matthew 25:21](#)). And far beyond the success of your work, far beyond the size of your work, far beyond what the human view of the importance of your work is, God looks at the faithfulness of your work. That is what God is concerned about—how faithful you have been.

It is very important for people to be faithful in the area of hospitality back in the ancient world. You know in that day, generally Christian travelers and itinerant ministers in

particular were dependent upon the hospitality of other Christians. They could not just go into a town and stay at the Ramada Inn or the Clarion or whatever. They did not have places like that. Hotels were few and far between in the ancient world and when you found one, it was usually notorious for the immorality. They were usually known to be hot beds for prostitution.

So what is a visiting Christian minister going to do? Is he going to go stay in a place that has a reputation for being a brothel? No, he is not going to do that. Then what must he do? Well, he has to trust that when he gets into town there will be Christians who have the gift of hospitality that will take him into their home. If he does not do that he is going to literally be sleeping on the streets. Plus the missionary is not going to have much money; so he is going to need to have someone say, “Here eat my food. I will help you and support you.” They were dependent upon this hospitality and I want you to know that this is so important to God.

What Gaius was doing in supporting these Christian ministers is that he was actually doing their ministry too! Do you want to see this? Look at [verse 8](#), “We therefore ought to receive such that we may become fellow workers for the truth.” In other words, when you support somebody who is in a position of ministry serving God you become a fellow worker with them. You might be saying, “I don’t feel called to be a missionary. I don’t feel called to be a preacher. I don’t feel called to be in some place of prominence or in front of people.” Perhaps not, but you can share in other people’s ministry by being a fellow worker with them by helping them. You help them and you are then a fellow worker.

I want you to think about this. Take a man like Billy Graham and think of the hundreds of thousands of people that he has preached to and the hundreds of thousands of people that he has led to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. He has had an amazing ministry. I want you to know that the rewards of a man like Billy Graham are not just going to him, but literally to the thousands of people who have helped him and supported him all through the years, they are going to share in his reward. And you can do that too!

This whole example that we find in the Old Testament is exciting. In [1 Samuel 30](#), David fought a battle and some of the people went out and fought as frontline soldiers and some of the people stayed back and were the support staff. And when the battle was over the frontline soldiers got paid for the battle from all the spoils of war that they received. And when they came back from battle these soldiers said that they were not sharing it with the support people. And David said “No, the support people get to share in the same rewards as the people on the frontlines.” And that became a law in Israel and it is a spiritual law before the Lord right now. You can share in the same rewards as people who are out front doing the work of the Lord by sharing with them and helping support them in whatever God leads you to do.

Friends, I think that is an exciting principle. I think that everyone of us needs to be busy with the work of serving the Lord and getting out the gospel in this way. You many say, “Well I am not called to be a missionary.” Well find a way to help a missionary and

support them and you are doing their work too. You are helping them and you are a fellow worker with them. Whether it is a missionary, a church, a preacher or some person out there doing the work of God, find someone you can help and God will bless you.

I will tell you another way to do that—take a look at [verse 6](#). He says, “*If you send them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God, you will do well.*” That is how John tells Gaius to do this ministry of helping out these people. He says to do it “in a manner worthy of God.” In other words, when these people came and visited Gaius, he was to minister to them as if he was ministering to the Lord Himself. When you set out that table for dinner, think of it as if the Lord is going to come eat at the table. You will want to put out the clean dishes and you will make sure that the bent fork isn’t put out there. You may say, “Wait a minute, then if the Lord is going to be staying in that bedroom, I need to clean it in a manner as if I am doing it unto the Lord. I need to change the sheets on that bed because I am going to do it in a manner worthy of God.”

What I am just trying to say, friends, is that whatever the Lord puts in front of you to do, do it with all of your heart. Do it as unto the Lord and do it faithfully and God will bless you and he will give you a great reward in heaven for what you are doing. You can look forward to that. You can know that you are working hard and doing whatever you can as unto the Lord and trust that there is going to be a great reward. This man Gaius was a great example of this process.

Now we have a bad example, look at [verses 9-11](#).

I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us.

Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting *them* out of the church.

Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God.

We think of Gaius there in heaven and when we meet Gaius he might say to us, “Hey, did you read about me in 3 John? That is me he is talking about.” Now I don’t know if we are going to meet Diotrephes in heaven. Maybe the guy repented and got right with God. I do not know, but if you see Diotrephes in heaven he is going to be the guy covering up his name tag. Right here John has to call him out and say that this man was stirring up all kinds of trouble in the church.

Now what was Diotrephes doing that was so bad if Gaius was so good? Take a look first of all at his heart, which was bad. Look at [verse 9](#), “I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us.” What was the biggest problem with Diotrephes? Plain and simple, it was pride. He loved to have the preeminence among the brethren. Can’t you just imagine a man like Diotrephes, a leader in the church, in some city looking at a man like the apostle John and saying to himself:

“Why should the big shot apostles get all of the honor and all the attention? Look at my ministry, isn’t it just as good?” And pride would lead him just like it has led many other people into destruction.

Why is it so bad to have a heart that loves the preeminence? I am going to say this strongly and I can say it biblically. When you have a heart that loves the preeminence you have the devil’s heart because that is what he loves. That is what Satan said when he fell. When Satan rebelled against God he said, “I will be like the most High.” In his heart he wanted to have the preeminence. He wanted to have top billing or at least equal billing with God and it was his own pride that led to his fall. Please watch out for the sin of pride. Watch out as it infects us and corrupts us. The Bible does say that “God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble” (cf. [James 4:6](#)). You don’t want God to resist you, do you? You want God to give you His grace. Ask God to search your heart about pride and lay it aside.

Maybe God has given you a place of preeminence in some area of your life. Maybe you are a boss or foreman at work. Maybe you are a teacher in a class so you have preeminence some place. If you have a place of preeminence somewhere, then don’t love it. That was Diotrephes’s problem—not that he had a place of preeminence—it was that he loved to have that place. And that is when our heart becomes corrupted, when we love to have it. You might be doing fine in the place of preeminence, but how do you do in a place of humble service? The greatest way to tell if you are a servant is to see how your heart reacts when people treat you like a servant, and then you will see if you really are one. This pride is what comes from Satan.

“Jesus Christ who was in the very nature of God did not consider equality with God something to hold on to, but He made Himself nothing taking the very nature of a servant” (cf. [Philippians 2:6](#)). That is the attitude that God wants us to have and Diotrephes’s first problem was that his heart was filled with pride. He loved to have the preeminence.

Secondly, I want you notice that Diotrephes was a gossip. We see this in [verse 10](#). “Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words.” What does that mean? It means that he was a gossip! It means he went around spreading false statements, lies, and innuendos about John and the other apostles. And John just simply says that he is going to have a talk with this man when he sees him face to face, because he is a malicious gossip. Friends, just because you hear something does not mean it is true. I wish gossips had died out in the church with Diotrephes, but they have not and you have to be on guard against this. We should not only avoid gossip ourselves, but we should not buy into it either.

Finally, I want you to notice that Diotrephes’s other problem. In some measure or another he was a control freak. [Verse 10](#) says, “And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting *them* out of the church.” In other words, Diotrephes would look over the church congregation and say, “Hey you let the apostle John stay at your house last month. I heard about that. You are out of here. I

do not like the apostle John, so if you let him stay at your house you are not any part of this church.” Diotrephes had some place of leadership in this church and he was using it to coerce people, to brow-beat them, and trouble them—supposedly in the name of the Lord.

Friends, Diotrephes was forbidding people to show hospitality to John or to the other apostles, even to the point of putting them out. I think it is amazing that even though this man is putting people out of the church, John does not put Diotrephes out of the church. John does not say, “I excommunicate this man”—although I think he had every right to kick him out. You know what he does? John exposes Diotrephes before these Christians and then he trusts that as believers they will use proper discernment to know what to do next.

[Verse 11](#) concludes the thought where John says, “Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, [like Diotrephes] but what is good [like Gaius]. He who does good [like Gaius] is of God, but he who does evil [like Diotrephes] has not seen God.”

Now I told you that we had a third “good example” and that is found in [verse 12](#). Take a look at it. He says, “Demetrius has a *good* testimony from all, and from the truth itself. And we also bear witness, and you know that our testimony is true.” I love it. Demetrius has three testimonies here, three people vouching for him, three letters of reference. The first is from everybody. He has a good testimony from all. Everybody who knows Demetrius says that he is a great guy. He is a godly man.

Secondly, Demetrius has a testimony from *the truth* itself. Isn’t that great! *The truth* itself is a testimony to him. Wouldn’t you love it to be said of you that this Book is a testimony of you? That is what John says about Demetrius. And then the third thing is that even the apostle John and the people with him testify of what a great man Demetrius is. John doesn’t say much about Demetrius. I think he brings him up here (and I hope I am not reading too much into the text) but I think that John is speaking to Gaius and maybe there were two leaders in this church. There was Diotrephes and there was Demetrius, and basically John was saying: “Hey, don’t respect the leadership of this Diotrephes guy, but Demetrius is a man that you can respect.” You see, in the midst of this kind of conflict, John is saying that Demetrius is the kind of man you should be following. He is the type of man you should respect.

Sometimes I think we have an overly romantic view of what the early church was like. We walk around thinking, “Oh it was so close to the time of Jesus and the church was so close to the apostles and there was just love and joy and peace. It must have been so great then and I wish we could get back to the days of the early church.” Well, sometimes when you see conflict and you feel like this, just think about it—you are back to the days of the early church! They had conflict then too! And John is telling Gaius, “Listen, this Diotrephes is not the kind of leader you should follow. Demetrius is the kind of leader you should follow;” which I think leads us right into the last two verses perfectly.

Take a look here at [verses 13-14](#), “I had many things to write, but I do not wish to write to you with pen and ink; but I hope to see you shortly, and we shall speak face to face.” I can appreciate John’s heart there. It is great to write to people, it is great to talk to them on the phone, but there is nothing like talking with people face to face. That is what John is saying that he has a lot more to share and he just cannot wait until he sees them face to face.

But I want you to see how John concludes [verse 14](#) and the end of the letter. He says, “Peace to you. Our friends greet you. Greet the friends by name.” Now the first thing he does is talk about friends. In other words, “In the midst of all this conflict, don’t forget that you have friends in the gospel.” Isn’t it true that sometimes conflict in a church family can make us really suspicious of everybody? I don’t think John wants Gaius to be like that and he reminds Gaius that he has friends—people who are following the Lord. He does not want him to be suspicious of everybody.

I really like what John says before that. It is very simple, it is just three words. He says, “Peace to you.” What a great way to conclude the letter. Friends do you realize that there was a lot of conflict going on in this church where Diotrephes and Demetrius and Gaius were And Diotrephes was kicking people out of the church because they were faithful to the apostle John. There was a lot of conflict and trouble; but in the midst of all of that John says to Gaius, “Peace to you.”

Now can you have peace in the midst of a time of conflict in your life? Are you one of those people who cannot have peace unless everything is easy and good? God speaks to us in His word about a “peace that passes understanding” (cf. [Philippians 4:7](#)). I am pretty good at the peace that is according to understanding. When everything is fine in my life, I have a lot of peace. Well, of course, who doesn’t? But how about: “the peace that passes understanding?” That is a peace which comes from God alone. And what John is saying to Gaius is that even in the midst of all this conflict he is having, he can have the peace of God.

I don’t know what areas of conflict might be in your life right now or what conflict there might be in the future, but you can have the peace of God in the midst of it. This is not a peace that just comes automatically. You have to seek God for it and you take His heart and receive His heart in the midst of it. It is just the same as when Jesus brought calm to the disciples in the midst of the storm. God can bring you peace even in the midst of conflict. When you have that peace then you can faithfully minister to the Lord in a way that you have never known before.

I think God has put a lot on our plate. He has given us a lot to think about from this passage and He wants us to be able to have peace no matter what kind of conflict might be ahead.

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

BY

Calvary Chapel Outreach Fellowship

Lesson 19 **Mary and Martha**

By

Joe Focht

Calvary Chapel Philadelphia

Brought to you by:

The Blue Letter Bible Institute

www.blbi.org

A ministry of:

The Blue Letter Bible

www.blueletterbible.org

Servant Leadership – Lesson 19
Mary and Martha by Joe Focht

1

[Luke 10:38-42](#) is a familiar passage, but it is only recorded in Luke.

38 Now it came to pass, as they went [Jesus and the guys, the disciples] that he entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house.

39 And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word.

40 But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me.

41 And Jesus answered and said unto her, [you can put the emphasis wherever you want here] 'Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things:

42 But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.'

Before we begin I would like to read that also from a translation by Kenneth Weist, an expanded translation, a Greek scholar from Moody Institute in this century who translates it this way—and you will like some of this:

Now as they were going on their way, he himself entered a certain village and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him as a guest into her home. And she had a sister called Mary, who also having seated herself beside the Lord's feet, was listening to his word. But Martha was going around in circles, over occupied with preparing the meal. And bursting in upon Jesus, she assumed a stance over him [I can just see her] and said, 'Lord is it not a concern to you that my sister has let me down to be preparing a meal alone? Speak to her therefore at once that she take hold and do her part with me.' And answering the Lord said to her, 'Martha, Martha, you are worried and excited about many things, but of few things there is need, for Mary chose out for herself the good portion which is of such a nature that it shall not hastily be snatched away from her.'

So that gives us a little bit more light onto the scene, with the women here, as we look at it. You may be familiar with the passage. As I studied this week and just looked over it, of course, it is always convicting for me because I find in my own life I can very easily become a "Martha." And we will talk about that further, but I find that my service for Christ definitely gets in the way of my communion with Jesus Christ. I find that I need help because I get so wrapped up in what I am doing that I start to run on my own energy. I get burned out and the next thing I know, I am barking at people and my wife is saying: "Why are you so crabby?" And I say [barking back at her], "I'm not crabby!"

It is at this point that I just have to ask: "If the fruit of the Spirit is love, where am I at Lord? I am just kind of running out of gas here. I am running on my own energy. Forgive me. I need to come back to You. When I first got saved, Jesus, it was just You and me. There wasn't all this other stuff and I was happy. And so, Lord, settle me down."

I think the things that we want to do for Jesus, whether it is going to Bible studies, or being part of a particular kind of ministry, or driving our kids to Christian school—there are many Christian things we do that are so tangible. We do not have to look for them, they are waiting for us when we wake up. They are on the phone, in the mail, standing in our face or chasing us down the hallway, and we are even facing them in traffic. You know our involvement in Christian things and Christian service is very tangible, and it is very easy to involve ourselves in it because it is right there every day. Whereas, the presence of Christ is often not as tangible as I wish that it was.

There are times when I am on my knees before the Lord and I am just wishing, “I wish Lord, that You were here so that I could lean on Your breast like John did. I just wish I could hear Your voice. Lord I just wish you were right here because I just feel like I need to cry on Your shoulder. I just wish You were present.” And I find, with that part of my relationship with Christ, I have to really settle myself there and quiet myself.

My life is neither quiet nor settled and I really have to seek that time to be alone with Him. But those are the times when I am renewed. It is there that the tears begin to flow; it is there that my batteries begin to get charged; it is there that life comes to me; it is there that I am reminded what my relationship with Jesus is really all about. And I can understand both Mary and Martha. I pray in my own life that I can serve like Martha, but that I can worship like Mary. And so we have the picture of these two women in Luke 10.

Now I also want to say that if you do not know Christ personally, we will address the whole issue of what God wants from us. And maybe it will help you understand a little bit about what we believe. But for the Christian, this passage is a great exhortation because in this picture of Mary and Martha, we are not choosing between good and evil, we know that. But we are making choices all day. The Christian life, the Christian experience is a series of choices and we must choose to do what the word says. It is choosing to be led by the Holy Spirit and yet within that we can choose sometimes between what is better and what is best.

Albert Benjamin Simpson, who began the Christian and Missionary Alliance, said that “Often the enemy of making the best choice is making the better choice.” In other words, as Christians the choices we are making in general are just better than many of the choices we made before we came to Christ; and they are better than many of the choices that are being made in the world. We are choosing good and noble things, but there are times in choosing something that actually is good that gets in the way of choosing what is best. Sometimes the best thing we can do is choose to sit at His feet and just be alone with Him, rather than choosing to do a good thing for Him. We have that exhortation here in [Luke 10](#) and I believe it is from the Lord’s heart. The message is that He would rather have “us” than what we can do for Him. I think that is clearly contained in this passage.

I want to look at Martha though because what happens so often is that I think somebody will say, “Well that person is a real Martha!” And that means look out for them because they will give you a heart attack if you hang around with them. And you know that is in a

real negative context. When you hear “look out for that person, that person is a real Martha,” I think that is because we have not looked closely enough at her character. She is actually quite a remarkable woman.

We are not sure where the friendship between Jesus, Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, who was their brother, began. We know that Jesus went to their home there in Bethany. Evidently it was a place that He loves to go to and He finds time to relax and be with people that He cared about. It was a haven for Him, but we do not have a previous record of where this relationship really got off the ground. As we look at it, I think it is amazing.

Turn to John 11, which will throw some light on this relationship. And you know the story but there are some things that we are going to take note of in [John 11:1](#). “Now a certain man was sick, named Lazarus, of Bethany, the town of Mary.” Now that is interesting because back in our study in [Luke 10:38](#) it says that “Martha received Him into her house.” It looks like the town was Mary’s and the house was Martha’s. They were different personalities. Martha probably liked to cook and Mary liked to cook, but Mary didn’t like to clean up afterward. Martha just liked to be there the whole time. Mary seems to be very in-tune with other folks.

We all have our different characteristics, we all have different traits. God uses us that way because we are all individuals. Some people are very contemplative, they like to sit, to think, to read; and other people like to play sports. Some people love to work and Martha just has that industrious hospitality. She is just very mature and she likes to do what she is doing. But she can be a person who is driven. Mary, I imagine, could space out and could sit around and do just certain things. We are all different, some people love to go door-to-door witnessing and other people go up and knock on the door and pray that nobody is home. And these people are only going door to door witnessing because somebody has condemned them into doing it. They should be home praying for people that like to door-to-door witness—their gifts are different.

Here in [John 11:1](#), evidently it takes note that this was the town or the village of Mary and her sister Martha. “It was that Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.” Now look at [John 11:3](#). “Therefore his sisters sent unto him, saying, ‘Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick.’” Now that is *phileo*, the word “love” there, it means: “brotherly love, fondness, or friendship.” That is interesting because the women say, “Lord, Your buddy is sick, Lazarus—Laz, the guy you love to hang out with.” It was an interesting relationship there.

[John 11:4](#) says, “When Jesus heard that, he said, ‘This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby.’” Look at [verse 5](#), this word “loved” is *agape*: “Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus.” This is before the miracle of raising Lazarus. It was quite a relationship they have.

Look down at [John 11:11](#). Jesus is speaking to the disciples. “These things said he: and after that he saith unto them, ‘Our friend [isn’t that interesting, our friend] Lazarus is

Servant Leadership – Lesson 19
Mary and Martha by Joe Focht

sleeping.” Thomas of course said, “Well that’s good, he is sick and he needs his rest. And then it says that Jesus has to say plainly, “He is dead.” Jesus had trouble getting through to the guys sometimes.

Look over in [verses 20-21](#), it says:

Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met him: but Mary sat still in the house. Then said Martha unto Jesus, ‘Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.’

Now listen to this woman who we think is just a workaholic. Listen to what she says:

But I know that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee.

So Jesus tries her out of course. He says,

Okay, your brother’s going to rise. You know whatever I ask I am going to get. This is what we will do, he is going to rise from the dead”

Martha says,

Oh, I know Lord, he is going to rise again in the last day in the resurrection.

Jesus said unto her, ‘I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. So you believe this Martha?’

Now listen to this answer. This is a remarkable answer.

She said unto him, ‘Yes, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.’ (cf. [John 11:21-27](#))

Now that is an amazing answer for a woman who we accuse of just being a workaholic. She went back to the house. And it is interesting in [verse 28](#), it says she told Mary: “The Master is calling for you.” And you want to take note, interestingly down in [verse 45](#) after the resurrection of Lazarus, it says: “Many of the Jews came to Mary.” She was evangelizing, evidently. “Many of the Jews which came to Mary [it doesn’t mention Martha there] had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on Him.”

So we have this household with these amazing women. I would say that we need to take note of this.

In [John 9](#), the Pharisees and Sadducees who were the religious leaders of the day, said: “Anybody who says that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah is excommunicated. We are

cutting them off from the temple, we are cutting them off from Judaism” (cf. [John 9:22](#)). Now here is Martha in Bethany two miles from the temple precincts and she says, “I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God that has come into the world” (cf. [John 11:27](#)). That is a remarkable statement! She is standing up in the face of everything and she is willing to be cut off from her own religion because of her commitment to Christ. That is quite a woman. Are you willing to be cut off from everything, even your own family because of your commitment to Jesus Christ?

Not only that, but for Jesus Christ from the time of His birth, there was no room for Him in the inn. That kind of set the whole stage for His life. He had seen a certain amount of popularity. His popularity is plummeting at this point. [John 6:66](#) tells us that many of His disciples are leaving Him now. He had the twelve but He had a bigger group, He had sent out seventy at one point, but here they are leaving Him. He is talking about going to Jerusalem and being crucified and they would have to eat His flesh and drink His blood, and they are freaked out. Everybody is just saying: “the heck with Him now.” And His disciples are leaving Him. It tells us in [John 5:18](#) that in Judea the religious leaders are planning how they can kill him.

It tells us when He was in the area of Gadera that the Gadarenes begged Him to leave the area (cf. [Luke 8:37](#)). They did not want Him there. It says on another trip when He was heading south through Samaria that the Samaritans would not receive Him. There is no place for Jesus at this time either. His popularity is dwindling; people are rejecting Him, and refusing Him.

A young man comes to Him in [Luke 9:57-58](#) and says, “Lord I will follow you anywhere.” Jesus says to him, “The foxes have their dens and the birds of the air have their nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.” In other words, “You want to follow Me? Let me tell you something. The foxes are in their environment, they are at home here. They have their dens here, this is where they live. The birds of the air are at home. They settle down, they have their nests. This is not My environment, I am not from this world. You want to follow Me? I am passing through; My only purpose for being here is to do the Father’s work and complete it. You may follow Me if you want to, but this is not My world and there is no place for Me in this world to rest.”

Now that is pretty remarkable because it says that “Martha received Him and welcomed Him into her home.” She was quite a woman as far as I am concerned. And she stood in the face of all kinds of criticism in order to welcome Jesus and His disciples into her house. She opened the doors, made a meal, and welcomed them. But it is interesting that she did all of that so she could accuse Him and neglect Him!

We may think that Jesus is welcome in our homes. I pray that He is. We have things hanging on our walls. We have the Bible by the toilet, a Bible in the glove compartment, a Bible in the living room and Christian posters and stuff on the walls, and Christian videos. But sometimes I think Jesus is waiting around in the living room for somebody to talk to Him. My house is like a beehive most of the time. Sometimes I am thinking:

“Well, He is welcome here, but nobody talks to Him. He must be sitting in the living room just feeling neglected like He was here in the Scriptures.”

So, I want us to take note of this because here, Martha invites Jesus in and gets so wrapped up in cooking that she comes out to accuse Him. Now Mary is different. The three times we heard about her in the Bible she is at the feet of Jesus. Here in [John 11](#) she is at the feet of Jesus listening. When Lazarus dies, she falls at the feet of Jesus weeping and in [John 12](#), [Matthew 26](#), and [Mark 14](#) she is there at the house of Simon and she is at the feet of Jesus pouring out the alabaster box of ointment, probably her life’s savings. And she is very perceptive; she did this for Jesus’ burial. She is the only woman in the Bible that Jesus establishes a memorial to. “Wherever this gospel is preached in all of the world, that which she has done shall be mentioned in memorial of her” (cf. [Matthew 26:13](#)).

And Mary knows that there is something better cooking in the living room than what is cooking in the kitchen. Something eternal is cooking in the living room. What is cooking in the kitchen is going to be gone tomorrow. So, evidently she helped, look what it says here in [verse 39](#), “And she had a sister called Mary, which also [see that word “also” here is important] she *also* sat at Jesus’ feet, and heard his word” (cf. [Luke 10:39](#)). What it does not mean is that Martha also sat there. That is not the context of the story. It means that Mary was working in the kitchen, but what she also did was leave the kitchen and sat at Jesus feet to hear his word. She also did that. So she is not a bum, Mary the space-case! She worked and she served, but she also knew it was important to sit at the feet of Christ.

Martha on the other hand, when we look at her, she is courageous, she is standing, she is willing to lose friends, and her reputation for her relationship with Jesus. There is not compromise, Jesus Christ is welcome in her home and he is not welcome anywhere at this particular point in his ministry. Martha is hospitable, she is industrious, she is diligent as she is bent on serving, and that is a good thing. She is mature but she is a work junky, she is driven and she is a work warrior. She is the kind of woman who, when she is in the flesh, could drive you out of your mind—and a man who is like this could do the same thing.

There are some indicators that you want to take note of in your own life, when you get to that point, and we can all get there. First of all, if you are accusing Jesus of slowing down the ministry, you need to go back and think about what you are saying. She goes out and says to Jesus, “Don’t you care?” And it says that she put her hands on her hips first and stood over him, the Lord of the universe, the Creator is in her living room. “Don’t you care?” And basically when we do that to God what we are saying is: “You do not realize that my plans are more important than yours. Don’t you understand what I am involved in and how badly I need your help? Why aren’t you...there you are sitting in the living room, talking about eternity, salvation, crucifixion, resurrection...I am cooking lamb, don’t you know what’s important here?”

And that is usually what we are doing—accusing God—when we are complaining that is what we are doing. We are saying: “I’ve got something going on here that does not seem

to be very important to you.” Usually when we are doing that, there is sometimes tremendous pain and then I understand that none of us respond well. But most of the time we need to slow down and ask: “What in the world am I thinking?”

Once you accuse God, it is easy to accuse other people. Notice then it is no longer “Mary,” it is “that sister of mine.” That is what she says to Jesus. She doesn’t bother to call her “Mary.” Martha says, “Lord, don’t you care that sister who left me?” Or it could be: “that husband of mine!” You know when I come home from work and my wife is saying “your son,” you know things are changing. I own him, she doesn’t own him anymore. He did something. Martha says, “That sister of mine...” Let me tell you something, if Jesus tells you to do something, you should do it. And you should do it as unto the Lord. And you should look to Jesus Christ for the reward for that service.

If you start grumbling and complaining—and let me tell you I have been in ministry for a long time—ministry is full of people, including me sometimes, that point their finger at other people who are complaining about those who are supposed to be ministering. Because when you are overwhelmed with ministering and serving, you are grouchy because you are overwhelmed. And you have already accused God, so you might as well accuse people too! But Martha is saying, “It is Mary’s fault. Here I am alone, I am doing...” Let me tell you something, Jesus did not come to Martha’s house because he heard that she made the best blintzes in Judea. Do you understand? Jesus is there because it is the one place where he can sit in the living room with people he loves that have some hold on who he is. They would welcome him into their home and the feast that he has there is with Lazarus and with Mary and with Martha, with the family. That is the feast that he is enjoying.

If Jesus was coming to your house in two days at five o’clock for dinner, what would you be doing today? Ladies, what would you be doing? Frantically cleaning and planning a gourmet meal? I bet that Jesus would just love to jump in the van with all the kids and drive through McDonalds. I bet the feast for Him would be just sitting and spending time with us. From my observation he would be holding the kids on his lap, laughing, talking, saying: “So many times I tried to tell you how much I loved you and you just....So I had to come on Tuesday afternoon to tell you.”

And lastly then Martha begins to try to manipulate the whole thing. Look, she is throwing a guilt trip on Jesus. It is bad enough that Satan condemns us, but here is Martha throwing the guilt trip on Jesus. “Don’t you care that my sister...what kind of a Lord are you? You are supposed to care about equity and justice and all things. You are supposed to be the Lord and there is my sister, she is sitting there loafing and you don’t even care!”

You have got to have guts to throw a guilt trip on the Master! You know what I mean? He came to deliver grace and forgiveness and life. She is throwing a guilt trip on him. Now I will tell you that this brings the story to the point where I appreciated it so much because I am so much like Martha in so many ways. I can get that way so many times. I appreciate the fact that Jesus responds with reproof. He does not rebuke her, He is not angry. There is a *pathos*, there is a real emotion to this, which is why it is written the way

it is—doubled up—“Martha, Martha.” Jesus does not say, “Did you read chapter 1 of Luke? Did you hear what happened to Zachariah when he shot his mouth off with an angel? He could not talk for nine months after that. And he was just talking to an angel.”

Jesus could have gotten one of the donkeys to stick his head in the window and say, “Martha do you know who you are talking to?” This would have been like Balaam’s ass saying, “He is the Creator of the universe!”

You know when Miriam criticized Moses, God smote her with leprosy. Here this woman, Martha, was standing with her hands on her hips bossing the Lord! And He just looks up and says, “Martha, Martha.” It is like saying, “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that stonest the prophets and kills those that are sent unto thee. How many times would I have gathered thee under my wings like a hen gathers her chicks and you would not. And now your house is left unto you desolate and henceforth you shall see me no more until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord’” (cf. [Luke 13:34-35](#)).

Or when Peter says, “Lord, although all the rest of these betray you...” Jesus said, “This night the prophecy is going to be fulfilled, I will strike down the shepherd, the sheep shall be scattered. You are all going to forsake me.” And Peter says, “Except me Lord, you can count on me. I know these guys are all going to run away, but I will be there.” And Jesus’ response is: “Simon, Simon. Satan has desired to sift you as wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith doesn’t fail. And in the hour you are restored, strengthen your brethren” (cf. [Luke 22:31-32](#)).

It was on the road to Damascus, as Saul is breathing out threatenings and slaughterings against the church that he is knocked to the ground by this light that appears. And the voice that comes from the light says, “Saul, Saul. Why persecutest thou me? It is hard for thee to kick against the goads” ([Acts 26:14](#)). It is amazing that Jesus did not just smoke them with a laser beam or something, you know? Instead he knocked him down and talked sense to him. And the thing that I appreciate about this is that there is so much here for us to learn.

You know, I am the pastor, I preach this stuff and I am supposed to live by it. But I get so caught up in the ministry sometimes that I find myself running out of gas. I realize that I am not spending the time with Jesus that I should. I get so caught up in things and Satan is just there to lay a guilt trip on me. The thing I love about the Lord is that the Lord doesn’t say, “Joey, Joey.” He doesn’t do that but I kind of hear this, “My son” thing. You know when one of my boys need to get in line, I call him “son.” And I hear that kind of a thing from the Lord: “Son come sit with me for a while, I want to talk to you.” It is never in anger. It is a reproof. And Martha will get there, we will see her in [John 12](#) at Simon’s house. Tradition, by the way, tells us back to the second century that Simon the leper was the father of Mary and Martha. And perhaps, if that is true, it was his cleansing of leprosy that started Jesus’ relationship with this family.

But it is in [John 12](#) in Simon’s house that we see Martha. It says she was serving and she is waiting on the tables, just working, whistling, singing and listening; and she is not

stressed out any more. There is no mention of her saying, “You know what to do Lord. Get Mary up off the floor with that ointment. She is making a whole lot of stink and I have to clean up the floor, I have to make dinner, and I have to do everything.” Now none of that is going on. And I love the fact that Jesus is so gentle to continually bring me along in my life, as I get off track and I get caught up with things. But he is faithful, as it says in the Song of Songs, to “Draw me in, we will run after thee” (cf. [Sgs 1:4](#)). He is always faithful to draw us back and to bring us back to focus, to bring us back on target again.

It is with great expression—Jesus says, “Martha, Martha, you are so careful and troubled.” “Careful” is our word from the Parable of the Sower. Remember we said that one of the things that chokes out the word of God in our lives is the cares of this life. That is the same word “careful” the *merimnao*. You feel like you are being pulled in a thousand directions. That is what the word means—to be pulled in different directions. People say, “I feel like I am being pulled in a thousand different directions.” Jesus says, “Martha, Martha. You are so careful and troubled [which is agitated].” We say, “crabby.” Martha you are all distracted and grouchy.

And you do find yourself getting like this, pulled in a thousand different directions, you are grouchy and then the Lord is saying: “Look there is one thing that is necessary.” One thing is needful and that one thing cannot be taken away and that is to be with Jesus. The thing that Mary did is she was with him. And the thing that will never be taken from us is being with him. Our homes can be taken, our careers can be taken, and our kids can be taken. Anything in life can be taken, our service can be taken, all of these things; but one thing that will never be taken away from a believer is to be with him. It is the reason he died.

God sat with man (Adam) in the cool of the day in the book of Genesis before the fall and fellowshiped with him. That was the heart of God. Ever since the fall, the purpose of God in redemption is to bring man back into fellowship with Himself. And the highest expression of love is devotion and fellowship, it is not service. The highest expression of love is not service. This is important because I think before we came to Christ—and if you do not know Christ, then maybe this is your perception of him—but we can perceive God as the great “Thou shalt not” who lives in the sky. And maybe you thought that God was this big guy up there who says, “Thou shalt not do this; thou shalt not do that; and I want you to do this and I want you to do that.” He is like the great, “you do, you don’t do” up there to us. That is all he was, the guy with all the rules. And we thought, “If I become a Christian I have to...what a drag!”

That is not at all what Christianity is about. The shame of this type of thinking is that Jesus died so that we could come back into fellowship with God, under his righteousness. And I think the shame of it is that when we come into the church—and most churches are not growing—and they get somebody new who walks in, they look at the new person and if he is under one hundred and ten years old they think: “Fresh blood! Sign him up— fifty years in Sunday school, seventy years as an usher. Quick, sign him up!” And I think that

the church gives us the impression that God is only interested in what you can give to him. He is financially in trouble. He wants you to give this much, or you need to get involved in this ministry. And the truth as seen through Scripture is that God wants you! He does not want what you can do for him. He is not up in heaven saying, “Thank God you got here and now we can organize the Kingdom!” Do you understand?

In the last two weeks in my house I painted two of our bedrooms and our dining room. And of course nothing can be the same color because you have molding and trim and so you have to cut everything in and be careful and paint from the top down so you don’t splatter. And of course my seven year old—the kids are off from school now for summer—the whole time he is just standing there days on end, standing there with a brush. “Can I help Dad? Hey Dad, can I help you? Can I help? Can I use this brush? Can I help you paint, Dad?” And I am thinking: “by myself I am going to knock this job out in four hours and with my son—two days!” When I am painting the fence in the yard they never want to help. So I finally say, “Okay you can help me.” And in ten minutes they are tired of it and they go somewhere else. But there in the house my son just repeatedly asked to help me. And we let our kids help to bless *them*. I did not have my son so he could help paint. I did not say to my wife, “We have five kids, we can paint the whole house in no time.” It makes me nervous when my seven-year-old helps, you understand? My joy is simply to be with him.

And I think sometimes when God looks down from heaven and sees me in the pulpit, he is nervous! I think he lets me help because it blesses me. Do you understand? And I forget that on His end the purpose of trading away His own Son was so that I could be with Him again in fellowship. What God really desires is me.

It tells us this in the book of [Revelation 21:2-3](#),

And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.
And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God [that is Jesus Christ] is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them.

I mean, as the eternal state is described, the first three things he is saying is that “they are going to be with me. I am going to be their God, I am going to be with them. My dwelling place is going to be with them.” His name is Emmanuel, “God with us.” The heart of God is that we would be with him and that he would be with us. And there is some joy that he places in just being with us.

My daughter Hannah is five years old. She is so crazy, she is just in perpetual motion. I look at her and think: “If we could only put a wire on that and run the electricity in the house with it and harness all that energy!” She makes me tired watching her, but there are times when she just settles down and for two sentences she will communicate in her version of English with us. She is five years old and I enjoy just listening to her and looking into her face as she tries to communicate. We had company the other night and

she came out with a jump rope. She said, “Do you want to see me jump? I have been *prataxsing*. I been *prataxsing*.” I just looked at her—*prataxsing*—who could say that but her? *Prataxsing*. But it is rare for her to stop and talk because she is so busy and I want to bless her with all the things I let her do. But I like to look at my kids, they have freckles. Josh is seven and I have found freckles in the last year that I had not taken note of before. Sometimes when they are sick they are still enough to look at or realize this or that; but most of the time when I try to get them to be still they are all over the place and I just want to see them.

Now don't you feel like we are that way with God sometimes? We want to be in the kitchen, we want to be doing this or that and God just wants to grab us. And we wrestle around like our kids do. Isn't it hard to believe that the greatest joy of His heart is to be with us? It is not what we do for Him, but it is that He wants to be with us. Sometimes I don't even want to be with me and I cannot get away from me. I know people who move to another state and they don't know that they are trying to get away from themselves and when they get there it is a bummer because they are still there!

We know how we are and we know the wrestling within us and all the busyness. And we know the tendency we have to just do things instead of bringing ourselves into God's presence. We know the hypocrisy, we know the lust, the anger, the different things we go through; and it is hard for us as we struggle with those things to really believe with all of our hearts that the Lord of the universe desires to sit with us. And you always have to remember that it is us in Christ. It is because of Jesus that we can sit with God. God sees us, not as we see ourselves, but in the righteousness of Christ. And He can see us right now as holy, though we see ourselves with all these things we wrestle with every day.

It tells us in 1 Corinthians that “He is the God who calls things that are naught as though they were” (cf. [1 Corinthians 1:28](#)). It just is a gentle reproof for me to read through these things and remind myself. And I hope He is not sitting at my home waiting to talk to somebody. He is certainly welcome at our house. I hope I remember to slow myself down enough to find Him and spend time with Him.

I hope, if you do not know Christ, that you will realize He does not want you to join a denomination; He does not want you to be a part of a religious system. I have children at home and I don't want them to be part of a religion, a “Daddy” religion. They are my children and we have a relationship. If you don't know this, what God wants is *you*. He has paid for you in the blood of His own Son and He loves you so much. He is more concerned about your life than you are concerned about it. Pray and ask Christ to forgive your sins and to give you new life and to bring you into the family of God. That is what He wants.

SERVANT LEADERSHIP
BY
Calvary Chapel Outreach Fellowship

Lesson 20
Exhortation to Maturity, Part I

By
Pancho Juarez
Calvary Chapel Montebello

Brought to you by:
The Blue Letter Bible Institute
www.blbi.org

A ministry of:
The Blue Letter Bible
www.blueletterbible.org

I want to do a two-part study on “Exhortation to Maturity.” Now, nobody likes to be criticized. I sure do not like to be criticized, but as a Christian man I have learned the value of being criticized. You have to allow someone in your life to tell you honestly, “Hey, your breath smells.” Someone has to tell you honestly, “Hey, that cologne stinks, man.” Or “Hey man, you have lettuce on your teeth.” Someone has to be honest with you.

The Bible says this: “Faithful are the wounds of a friend” ([Proverbs 27:6](#)). A friend will hurt you at times, but a true friend is someone who loves you and tells you the truth. It also says: “But the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.”

David gets more poetic when he said this:

Let the righteous strike me;
It shall be kindness.
And let him rebuke me;
It shall be an excellent oil;
Let my head not refuse it. ([Psalm 141:5](#))

What is David saying? “I am not above correction, but if someone is going to correct me, I want a righteous person to correct me.” He says, “And he can even strike me in the head and it will be excellent oil.” Oil was used as a medication. So David says that the criticism—whatever is going to admonish or exhort me—if it is from a righteous man, it will be good for me.

The Bible says in the book of Proverbs:

Reprove a wise man and he will love you; reprove a scornful man and he will jump on you [or he will hit you]. (cf. [Proverbs 9:8](#))

And there are people who do not like to be corrected. When you want to correct those types of people you must be very cautious; you know when you correct them, they are basically going to pounce on you. So they go along in life without correction, thinking that their own deviation is okay with everybody around them; and in reality, everybody around them says they are off the wall.

Nobody likes to be corrected. You see, there are different kinds of correction or criticism. There is corrective criticism and there is malicious criticism and there is constructive criticism and there is destructive criticism. So you need to figure out which type of criticism it is.

In [Job 5:17](#) he says:

Behold, happy *is* the man whom God corrects;
Therefore do not despise the chastening of the Almighty.
For He bruises, but He binds up;

He wounds, but His hands make whole.

This means when God corrects you it is not going to feel very good, but there are people who do not have the same good intentions for you that God does. There are people who like to correct others and that type of correction becomes destructive correction. It comes from malicious people who are not only there to tell you your faults and blemishes, but they want to put you down. They want to put you away and castigate you and marginalize you. They want to belittle you and do these evil things against you and those people are not there to build you up.

I have nothing to gain by teaching this and I am not trying to exploit you or marginalize you. I am not trying to belittle you and that is not why I am giving this message. In John 21 Jesus speaks to Peter saying: “Love my sheep; tend my lambs; feed my sheep” (cf. [John 21:15-17](#)). God never told anyone to beat His sheep and I am not about to beat the sheep. I love you as a shepherd and I want you to grow and be mature.

I have noticed that there are a lot of people who Paul calls “carnal Christians” in 1 Corinthians 3. He says,

I wish I could speak to you as mature Christians, but you are not. You are still infants, babies in Christ. I fed you milk and I cannot give you solid food. And still today you are infants, you are carnal people in the way you behave and the way you conduct yourself by having strife and hatred and envy and bitterness. Aren't you behaving like mere men? (cf. [1 Corinthians 3:1-4](#)).

And Paul said they were carnal Christians.

I want to share with you from Romans 8 and also from 1 Corinthians 3. This will be part one in the “Exhortation to Maturity” study. Please turn to Romans 8.

Paul the apostle says in [Romans 8:1](#)

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

Verse 1 anticipates what is coming and gives you a description of what Paul is about to say. First of all, the word “walk” or “walking” basically means our conduct or our behavior. It is how we conduct the every day affairs of our life—that is what he means by “walk.” He says that “there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.” The word “condemnation” comes from the same root word, “to be condemned”—perhaps condemned to a life sentence. You are condemned because you are a prisoner. You were found guilty after the evidence was presented. The judge sent down a sentence saying you were condemned to life; therefore, you are guilty.

The Bible says for Christians, “there is no condemnation.” We do not feel that same guilty feeling that we felt before we became Christians. I was always feeling guilty like I did something wrong because I had. And this was the feeling of culpability; in fact, today when you go to a medical facility and you tell the doctor that you always feel guilty, it is a very common emotional malady. It is very common and some medical specialists refer to that as “the culpability factor.” Everybody has it they say. But the Bible says that before we became Christians, the Holy Spirit would convict us of sin through our conscience. There is conviction and condemnation. First you have been convicted and then you are condemned. The word “convicted” is where you realize that the evidence is stacked against you. Everything is against you and you realize when you hear the word of God, that you need God.

In John 1 we see two disciples of John the Baptist. And when John said, “Behold the Son, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world,” the Bible says that these two disciples of John the Baptist disengaged from under him and they began to follow Jesus. And Jesus turns around and asks them, “What are you looking for.” And they say, “Rabbi,” [which means master or teacher] “where are You staying, where are you dwelling, we want to speak to you” (cf. [John 1:38](#)). And Jesus gives them the invitation, “Come and see.” The Bible says that they spent the whole night with Jesus and the next day these two disciples were so transformed that they left to find their loved ones immediately. Something happened to them when the spent time with the Lord. And I made an observation from this passage that Jesus understands the inclinations of man’s heart.

What do I mean by the inclinations of the heart? I mean that we have certain bents in our hearts. Other people cannot see them, but we feel them. There is a certain bent toward a certain way. I noticed when there is sincerity in people’s lives, and God sees that sincerity. He sees when we have an inclination and we come to a place in our life where we say that we need God. It is not a feeling caused by medicine, it is not a relationship, it is not money or position, it is not education, or anything social; we just have an empty feeling because we need God in our life. And then we come to church searching and God sees the inclination in our heart and He will also ask, “What are you seeking?” And in our heart of hearts we respond, “I am seeking You, Lord.” And God will tell us, “Come and see.”

But some people go to church for the wrong reasons—because everybody is doing it. Or perhaps you are a Christian, but you are not walking near the Lord. It is just the same old thing, business as usual and there is no dynamic, no pizzazz, and no open doors of development. This is a condition of arrested development. But notice that Paul says, “There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ.” He talks about conducting ourselves either in the spiritual realm or conducting ourselves in the flesh. When we read Romans, we find the consequences of having the mind of the flesh, having the conduct of the flesh, being motivated by the flesh, and the consequences of living in the flesh.

Whereas, when you adhere to and submit to the spiritual elements, you will see the results of what happens. And I want you to read it. I am not going to read it to you. You

cannot blame me and say, “Well, Pancho, that is your philosophy, that is what you are saying.” I am just going to read the Scriptures and let the Holy Spirit speak to you for what it is. I believe, as a pastor, there are too many Christians who do not have a propeller. There are too many Christians who do not have a mast in their ship. There are too many Christians who have no helm on the ship. There are too many Christians driving without realizing that there is no gasoline in their tank. There are so many people spinning their wheels and there is no dynamic in their Christianity. There is no development and they are standing in a condition of arrested development.

Many years ago I worked at the local Women’s Hospital. Over a period of time I worked in all four units and unit four was the psych hospital. I was put into a unit that I never even knew existed at the women’s hospital. It was a clinic called “Failure to Thrive.” This is a medical problem that occurs when a baby is not developing right. A baby could be eighteen months or two years old and the baby looks like he is only five months old. It is a grave, grave, disturbing and alarming situation. This baby is already supposed to be walking and growing and it is a serious matter.

This same illustration can be applied to many Christians who have been walking with the Lord for fifteen years, but they are in a state of arrested development. They are not growing spiritually because they are carnal Christians, and their behavior at this point is that they are powerless and impotent. They do not know how to behave. They resort to the flesh and to their own attitudes and there is no divine intervention or illumination. They have no personal revelation and there is none because the carnal Christian does not read his Bible. The carnal Christian goes to church and listens to a man. I pray that the Holy Spirit will see you because this church is a Bible-believing church. The Bible gives us instructions, not the philosophy of a knucklehead. It is the way of life. It is the Spirit that gives life and anoints the believer. It is the Spirit that enlightens us and tells us what to do.

You see, when something is going wrong in our life, we like to quote a certain Scripture. If someone says, “Oh, I just lost my job,” another person will say, “All things work for good—[Romans 8:28](#).” “NO, NO! You see I got fired because I was stealing.” “Oh, it does not work for you then.” You see we like to quote that Scripture, but we can take it out of context and when used for a pretext, then it is out of context. When you read [Romans 8:28](#) in context, we are told in order for the Scripture to work—“when all things work together for good”—we must be walking in the Spirit.

Notice [Romans 8:26](#) says,

The Spirit also helps us in our weaknesses for we do not know what we should to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

You come to a situation in your life and you see that life is not static. Life is not predictable, but life is unpredictable and life changes. You think I lost my hair over a period of time? No, one day, man—one day! I did a film with Viet Nam veterans and I

think I got contaminated with Agent Orange from them. I did a movie called *Quiet Hope* and I had hair. It was good and I can show you that I had hair like Sal Mineo. I had hair and after that one day, I woke up and I looked at the pillow and there was enough hair to make two wigs from all the hair I lost. And I said, “What happened? I am losing my hair!” And it freaked me out! It was like boom, instantly gone! So that is not a normal day for me. For you it would not be a normal day. Every day is a factor in our lives. You may become a mother, a parent, you open up a business, you go through a malady, an infection, you have a disease, you have children who now have children of their own, you have to buy a house, and every day the circumstances change. Some circumstances become overwhelming for us at times.

Sometimes we do not even know what to pray and how to pray for situations. You see, in different cultures we have ways to express pain. I can say, “Aye, Aye, Aye.” And I did not say a word to you, but you know what that means by the way it sounds. Someone else may say, “Ehm, Ehm, Ehm.” And I know what that means. Other people say, “Whooo wheeeee!” These things express something that we cannot articulate. And we make a sound that accentuates the pain in a groaning manner. When we cannot articulate how we feel, the Bible says that the Holy Spirit speaks for us with groanings that cannot be uttered.

[Romans 8:27](#) says,

Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit *is*,
because He makes intercession for the saints according to *the will of God*.

It is not our will; it is God’s will. Our minds and our hearts are governed and controlled by the Holy Spirit. You see, we are out of the equation. Why the mind and why the heart? They are important and the Bible says that: “the peace of God passes understanding and the peace of God guards your mind and your heart” (cf. [Philippians 4:7](#)). When we are going through a difficult situation, our heart and our mind have to be hygienically stabilized because if they are not, we will go crazy and make the wrong decisions. When we go by the feelings in our heart, we are going to make the wrong assessments and we are going to anticipate that something is wrong. When the peace of God overwhelms us, we do not even know what to do or what to say. But the Holy Spirit comforts us and Jesus makes intercession for us and our mind and our hearts are conquered by the governor of peace Himself.

Now we can read [Romans 8:28](#),

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love
God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose.

People who have no purpose in life wake up each day and they say, “Life stinks and there is no purpose.” It is just another stinking blue day.” They have no hope. Every day the Bible says, “We have graces from God and His mercies are new every morning” (cf. [Lamentations 3:22-23](#)). I thank God that I have learned the value of getting up in the

morning and praising the Lord for another day. If you are under fifty, you do not understand that. I wake up each day and say, “Thank the Lord.” And I am learning and being disciplined by the Master Himself and that is His purpose for me.

So, Paul the apostle said,

There is no condemnation to those who are in Jesus Christ who do not walk [behave or conduct themselves] according to the flesh but according to the spirit. (cf. [Romans 8:1](#))

Notice the word “flesh” and the word “spirit.” These are two motivating forces. Paul gave it a nickname because we have two characters. We have the new man which is a Christian, and we have the old man with the old nature. Paul says that the old man will never leave us. He will not depart from us until we depart from these bodies. He calls it “this body of death,” and the old man is full of passion and lust and guilt and shame. The kind of life that we used to live before coming to Christ, now needs to be mortified. Kill the old man and you need to see how to bury the old man.

We are not killing the old man by singing the song, “Wishing and hoping and dreaming...” We will not be able to do it that way. Many people say, “Lord, please help me with my flesh.” What do you mean, “help you with your flesh?” That is like the little lady who was yelling at the church, “Pastor, pray for me. There are too many cobwebs in my house.” Now this is not literally, but in a figurative sense there were problems in her home and the house was in chaos. And every Sunday she would say, “Pastor, pray for me there are a lot of cobwebs in my house!” And one day the pastor got so upset after hearing this twenty times, he prayed: “Lord we ask you to kill the spider!”

Why are we asking the Lord to help us with our flesh? We are being like the lady with the cobwebs. The apostle Paul uses the words, “walk according to the flesh,” which means that one is “working toward” or “having an appetite for” the things of the flesh or the world. As Christians, we need to walk according to the Spirit. Apart from the Spirit, we naturally have no interest in the things of God, but our interest is only in the world.

There are women who come in for counseling and they have boyfriends who are not Christians. And there are guys in our church who are seeing girls that are from Egypt, in other words they are worldly; they are Egyptians—they dress, walk, act and dance like an Egyptian. Both will come in and say to me, “Pastor, pray for us.” No the Bible clearly says to separate from that worldly person because you have nothing in common. The girl thinks she is going to get married and once they are married they are going to travel around the world partying. And the Christian man thinks when they get married they are going to go to church on Sunday and Wednesday nights. And his girlfriend thinks: “He is crazy—what is church?” But they both say that they love each other and I can see that there will be problems ahead for them.

How are we to be walking and dealing with the flesh ourselves? We will read it now in [Romans 8:2](#)—

2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.

3 For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God *did* by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh,

4 that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

5 For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those *who live* according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.

6 For to be carnally minded *is* death, but to be spiritually minded *is* life and peace.

So, this is a very graphic contrast. Those people have the mind (that means their appetite) where their time, their energy, their planning, their forethought, and everything is surrounding the flesh. And what is the flesh? Well the word *sarkikos* is the Greek word for flesh. It means meat, body meat. But when you translate *sarkikos* into the Latin language it becomes *carnes*. That is where we get the word meat, plain meat like *chili con carne*. However, when we speak about a carnal man, it means the fleshly desires. It is characterized by physical rather than intellectual or spiritual orientation. It is giving too much heed to the carnal aspects of day to day life. They are more concerned about themselves and they have the mentality of the world.

And that is why Paul says, “You are a carnal man because I cannot speak to you as a mature Christian; you are still drinking milk” (cf. [1 Corinthians 3:2](#)). Now, there is nothing wrong with drinking milk. Babies that were just dedicated cannot eat *menudo* because they will die. Their little digestive tract can only digest mother’s breast milk or formula—that is all. But in time, babies need to be given vegetables and then when they get their little deciduous teeth, we can start giving them food. And later on they get so big that you have to take them to Tommy Burgers to get two burgers and fries and two malts and root beer and then they want a pastrami! And you ask yourself what happened? He is growing and he is maturing. It is normal when you see a baby drinking milk. They are sucking and getting nourishment and it is wonderful. But can you imagine seeing a sixteen-year-old boy or girl with a bottle? It is not funny. You instantly think that something is wrong.

When Christians are being carnal, we cannot see their baby bottles, but we can see their childish behavior. Now, God wants us to be childlike, in other words, there is a good and a bad side to it. When you are a child you believe everything and you are so simple. You are not complicated.

Years ago we used to have a beat up old BMW 2002, which was a high precision car. It was beat up but the motor was right on. And sometimes my daughters would be in the back seat strapped in with the seat belts. And they would complain because the windows did not work, and sometimes the engine did not start. And I wanted to make them

appreciate my car because they were embarrassed by it when they were about four years old. They complained that the heater did not work and the windows would not go up and they would be freezing, and so I had to dress them up warmly. But I would tell them that we had turbo power! They would ask what that was—turbo power? And I would push this button and then we would go flying fast. It was the turbo button that I pressed, which was a lighter that did not work, and I would step on the gas and we would speed forward. Duo-turbo! And they would tell all of their friends, “Our car is not good, but we have a turbo and we go fast.” They would tell everyone their daddy just pushes the turbo button and we go so fast.

And for a long time I kept them believing that until they found out later on that I had no turbo. But they believed it because they were *childlike*. But being *childish* is basically behaving like a brat. Someone who says, “Don’t tell me what to do.” But wait a minute, when you tell somebody the meaning and you want to correct something—“Honey, let me tell you something, your breath smells like a dragon.” Or you could say something like, “Honey, can I share something with you? You know that I love you and I married you, but you know what? Your breath smells.” This is corrective, not vindictive or malicious. “You eat too much.” “What are you trying to tell me?” “You just eat a lot.” “Well, what does that mean?” And our natural response is to defend ourselves and we come back and we defend ourselves by saying, “Don’t tell me what to do.” And that is the reaction that we all have. We are not to get upset with others because we all have that in us.

We must give correction the way God wants us to do it, with gentleness. When someone has a broken bone, we do not come to that person and hastily grab the limb and say, “Let me fix it. It is going to hurt you but I am going to put it back in place and then we will put it in a cast.” Rather, we must explain that it will hurt but we are going to gently put it back in place and then we will cast it. We warn that it is going to hurt, but that we are there to help them and medically treat them.

The Bible says that the Son of God produces life in [verse six](#).

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 when someone is walking in the flesh, he is conducting himself in the flesh, governed by the flesh, monitored by the flesh, thinking of the flesh, his heart is of the flesh; then the Bible says that person is not ready to be governed by God. Because there is hate in his mind, there is enmity toward God. And Paul is speaking to people who always have a chip on their shoulders against the things of God.

Some people who have not wanted to work will complain to God, “You said that you would take care of me and I am going through changes. Why am I going through changes?” And God, as a loving Father, will tell you: “It ain’t me, babe! It ain’t about me, it is about you. You do not want Me to be a part of your life. You profess Me, but

you do not possess Me. You call out for Me, but only when you are in trouble. You do not want Me to speak to you. You do not pick up My Word. You do not even pray. And all of a sudden You think I am a magic genie for you.” They complain, “I got problems, Jesus, Jesus, come.” And they think that He will appear at their service. It does not work that way. That is not reality!

Think about this correlation. Do you have children? If you have a child who never speaks to you and does not want to call you up, does not even email or send a postcard, not even a call on Thanksgiving; but when he is in trouble he calls you from Idaho and says, “Daddy, I am in a drug rehab.” You may say, “Oh, it is Daddy now? Where have you been, your mother has been worried to death.” And so parents understand this type of relationship. There are a child who never speaks, governed by the flesh, propelled by the flesh, and yet they want to have a relationship with God.

The Bible says when your mind is controlled by the flesh and your mind and heart are governed by the flesh, it is enmity against God. The flesh can never please God because God is not in the physical realm. Now do you understand that [Romans 8:28](#) does not work for everybody? And people use that verse very liberally. Whatever you are going through they will quote that verse to you. A woman’s husband left her. [Romans 8:28](#) does not work because she tried to kill her husband. That Scripture does not belong to that person. It is applicable when you are walking in the Spirit of God. This does not mean that you are going to be exempted from problems, you understand that? Just because you are walking in the Spirit, it does not give you some kind of inoculation to not go through pain without feeling it.

When we are walking in the Spirit, we cannot think that there will be no problems. Oh, the electric bill gets paid, my A/C is working, my heater is working, I have cable and the big screen, and this is all great because I am walking in the Spirit. No, that is not how it works. Realize that when we are walking in the Spirit sometimes there is even more battle because the enemy realizes that we are girding up to fight him. We are saying, “Enough is enough. I am going to dedicate my life to Jesus. I am going to be committed to the things of God. I have been walking in the flesh too long.” Do we think we are the only ones who know that? The enemy will not let it rest.

When someone is walking in the flesh the enemy has him in a state of amnesia until he wakes up spiritually. Now the devil is concerned. There will be about twenty of his cohorts waiting outside and they are going to try to get this person to change his mind about walking in the Spirit. They will try to tell this person that the pastor was talking trash. They want him to be their buddy and go party. They will say that the pastor does not know anything and he is talking about Someone (Jesus) who means nothing to him.

But God may be rousing you and He is awakening you spiritually. Some of you who are walking in the flesh as Christians, you know that it is not right. You know it is not proper. You know that you are not developing or growing and you know why. You are still dealing under the table. Maybe you are married and you are still goo-goo eyes at that guy or that girl at the office, and you are wondering if you a “still have it.” I know these

things because sometimes I walk around or I ride around in my car and I want to see if people are looking at me. Nobody looks at me!

My children and I saw a guy driving by himself in an SUV and he had a television monitor in the front, television monitors in the second-row seats, and two more monitors in the back. The windows were all open, all the television monitors were on and he was by himself. He might as well have worn a sign: “Look at me!” And of course I looked at him and my son said, “Don’t look at him dad, that’s what he wants us to do. Don’t look at him.” I said, “I have to look at him, I want to see what kind of fool he is. I just want to see what he is doing.” He stopped and he was watching the television like it was some program that he needed to watch. It was so sad. “Look at me,” he was saying to the world.

Nobody looks at you and yet you are wondering if you still have it and you are trying to play the field. Listen, if you are married, you cannot play the field. You do not even have a catcher’s mitt, you have nothing! You cannot play the field! And so, when you are wheeling and dealing in the things of the flesh, listen to some agricultural insight: if you are planting corn, do not expect watermelon. As you go to the harvest at harvest time, do not be amazed that it is corn that you have produced. It is corn because you planted corn.

The Bible says, “Do not be deceived, whatever you sow, that you will reap” ([Galatians 6:7](#)). So if you are planting seeds of deceit, seeds of the flesh, seeds of the yahoo stuff, and then you come for the harvest and then you will realize that it is a bad harvest! And you wonder why? So now that you realize this, you understand your mistake. And then you begin to plant seeds of the Spirit and in time, when the harvest comes, you will reap the rewards of planting seeds of the Spirit.

You may think I am making this up, but in [Romans 8:8-9](#) it says,

So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.
But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.

So, if you are not a Christian and you have not received Christ, the Holy Spirit is not in you.

Remember that God sees the inclination of your heart. If you are searching for God, He will meet you (cf. [James 4:8](#)). But even if you are just doing it because everybody else is doing it and you were brought in and forced to church, know that God divinely brings people to a place by His sovereignty and in His providence. He often uses a friend, a neighbor, a co-worker to bring people to the place where they can hear Jesus say, as He did to His disciples, “Come and see.” And now you are hearing. Not only are you coming and seeing, but now you are listening to the Word of God. There is a condemnation, a guilt, and a shame without Christ. The moment we receive the Lord Jesus Christ, we do not see it, but supernaturally the Holy Spirit, the presence of God comes upon us.

Jesus spoke about the Comforter. Before He went to the cross, Jesus was in the upper room and there is a whole discourse in the Gospel of John 13 through 16 of the dialogue that went on there. Jesus dropped the bomb on His disciples. He said, “I am leaving, I have been telling you that I am leaving. I must go but I will not leave you as orphans” (cf. [John 14:18](#)). Now when we think of orphans, we think of a child without parents. The Greek word is *orphanos*, but that is not what it means. The word *orphanos* literally means “comfortless.”

Now, how would you describe someone who is comfortless? Well the epitome of someone who is comfortless is a child without the love of a mother and a father. So, Jesus said,

Listen, I have to go away, but I will not leave you comfortless. But I will send you another Comforter. And when He comes He will come in you and upon you and He will guide you, He will lead you into all things. He will tell you about the things of the future and He will bring to mind the things that I have shared with you. He will bring you to remembrance. He will lead you in all things and testify of Me and when He comes He will guide you. (cf. [John 14](#))

And that is what Paul is talking about— the Holy Spirit coming “upon” us.

If you do not have Jesus Christ in your heart, the Spirit is not in you. Now, you need to think about this. In [Romans 8](#), Paul is speaking to Christians who are carnally minded. They have salvation in Christ, but they have not completely surrendered their old life to Him. Regarding this, one commentator said:

Many carnal Christians are found in the church. These are Christians in whom Christianity is not dominating their lives. The world still has much power over them and much attraction for them and they allow the enemy to hinder them. They love Christ, but not enough to lead them to live very near to Him. They are chiefly living for fault and failure.

Let’s continue in [Romans 8:9-11](#).

9 But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.

10 And if Christ *is* in you, the body *is* dead because of sin, but the Spirit *is* life because of righteousness.

11 But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to [quicken] your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

Now he says that the kind of power that the Spirit works upon us is a similar explosive power to that which raised Jesus from the dead. He said if that Spirit also dwells in you (and He does) he said that He will give life to your mortal bodies. What does mortal mean? It means that eventually we are going to die. But before we die, as we are living—like the King James terminology says—“The Holy Spirit will quicken us.” It means He will revitalize you. It means spiritual pizzazz!

My wife used to work at a clinic before we got married and I would go pick her up. And at this facility they would give vitamin B12 injections to people who were lethargic. I was not lethargic, I was a wired coffee bean. I was naturally wired up. But one time she said “Pancho, you need to feel better. We nurses always give shots to each other, especially on Monday we shoot each other up and we go at it.” So I agreed to take the B12 and they gave me a shot and boom! I do not know if you have ever had a vitamin B12 shot or how you responded, and maybe it was psychosomatic, but I tell you what, it was like I worked double-time and it was legal. It just gave me an edge and it was something that metabolically happened to me.

I know that is a sad illustration for what Paul is saying and I apologize, but understand that the Holy Spirit will quicken us and will revitalize us. It has nothing to do with man’s efforts. We cannot just wish or hope for it. No, it is none of our doing. All God wants from us is a yielding and a submission. And when we surrender to the Lord, the criticism becomes instructive and that changes us. And that is just the beginning when we acknowledge Christ in our heart.

The second step after we acknowledge in our heart, and we yield to Him in our heart and what He wants us to do—then we are to do it. That is the second step. And the third step is to submit to Jesus Christ. Let Him change us from the inside out.

Now notice what he says in [verses 12-13](#),

Therefore, brethren, we are debtors--not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh.

For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

Wait a minute, [Romans 8:13](#) says, “But if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of our flesh, you will live.” So it has nothing to do with us saying, “I am going to take care of it. I am going to do it.” We cannot. We had been trying to do that on our own for years. We have to allow God to do it. Sure there are things that we need to do ourselves. If you are in an illegal relationship, it is your responsibility to end it. Do not wait for God to give you a revelation that you are living in fornication. Do not ask God what you should do if you are seeing a married woman. That is adultery!

“Lord I am about to rob a Seven-Eleven, what should I do?” That is robbery! That is a 211! Sometimes you do not have to pray because it is simple logic. You do not have to pray for that. You have to do what is logical and legal! But the illogical, the

impractical—which is the inability to do it on your own—is a God thing. That is when we say, “God this is for You. I cannot do it. I do not love my husband. He is a creep.” God will put that love in your heart supernaturally.

You might say, “God I am tired of hearing my wife yap, yap, yap. God help me.” And then when you hear that “yap, yap, yap” you say, “I love you.” So, what happened? Well, there was a transformation that took place, and that is what you needed. But when you are responding and reacting in the flesh, then you are part of the problem and not part of the solution.

The Bible says in [Romans 8:13](#), “by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body”—kill it.

Romans [8:15-17](#) says,

15 For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father.”

16 The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,

17 and if children, then heirs--heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him*, that we may also be glorified together.

You see, when we receive Jesus Christ, “the Spirit of God is not a Spirit of timidity but He is a Spirit of power and of sound mind” ([2 Timothy 1:7](#)). And God says that we become adopted, we become children and by the Spirit we begin to cry out *Abba*, Father. Now what does *Abba* mean? It is a term of endearment that is very personal. None of you call me “Poppy”—my daughters call me “Poppy.” My children call me “Poppy.” You see there is a certain way that they call me Poppy. But when my girls want to seek a quality decision, they have learned as adults to seek the God of their father, but at times they want that human touch and they ask, “Poppy, can I have a word with you? I am going through a decision making process and I was wondering...” And that is when I give all of my attention to them. Why?—because of my love for them. We raised them, they are our children, our flesh and blood; and because they are our children, we listen to them.

In the same way when you and I become children of God and when we need His assistance to work in our lives by the Spirit, the Spirit causes and induces us involuntarily to seek after the things of God because the Spirit causes you to yield. And in humility you cry out, “Abba Father.”

And then when we read [Romans 8:28](#), “All things work for good to those who love God and are called of God according to His purpose.” Why? It is because the Spirit of God is prompting and protecting us, leading us, guiding us, opening doors, protecting our minds and our hearts. God is interceding for us up in heaven. And although it had been a closed door, a closed door, a closed door, God now miraculously opens the door. And we ask how a particular thing happened? All things work for good for those who love God and

are called of God. He has a purpose for our life. When we allow God's purpose to be done in our life, we no longer have to trust in the flesh.

It is no longer, "I am doing this, I want to do this I want to open this door. Abba Cadabba, Ali Babba, open this door!" When you open all the doors, you will realize that behind every door it is empty and there is nothing. There is nothing but a dark room with broken toys or maybe it is a thrift shop instead of the palace where God wants you to go. God has doors open for you and all you have to do is trust Him and say, "Lord, the world is crashing against me. I don't trust anybody, Abba Father." And with groaning you submit to His Lordship because "all things work for good for those who love God and are called of God" (cf. [Romans 8:28](#)).

May the Lord bless you.

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

BY

Calvary Chapel Outreach Fellowship

Lesson 21

Exhortation to Maturity, Part II

By

Pancho Juarez

Calvary Chapel Montebello

Brought to you by:

The Blue Letter Bible Institute

www.blbi.org

A ministry of:

The Blue Letter Bible

www.blueletterbible.org

Let's turn to [Galatians 5:16](#). This is part two of "Exhortation to Maturity."

Now, may I once again reiterate by explaining to you that I am not here with a motive to belittle you, to exploit you, to take advantage of you or to beat you up with the Word of God. That is not my intent. The intent of this pastor's heart is for the body of Christ to rise up, to wake up. And so, I shared with you part one last week from [Romans 8](#) and this is part two of the series. And we are in [Galatians 5](#) this week.

Those who walk in the flesh, conduct themselves in the flesh and their carnal mind does not subject itself to God. The mind of the fleshly person, or the carnal mind, does not have any respect for the things of God and there is enmity between the mind of the flesh and God. They cannot communicate because the flesh overpowers them.

There was a man who kept a pair of fighting dogs and people would bet on which dog would win the fight between these dogs. There was a brown dog and there was a white dog and the owner of the dogs would always bet and he would always win. They looked the same—the dogs both looked ferocious. The owner would always say, "The odds are for you, man." People would ask the owner, "How do you know which dog is going to win?" He would answer, "I will tell you a secret, it is the one that I feed the most. That one is stronger."

And so, this is the way it is with our spiritual entity and our physical entity. When we feed the flesh, we read from [Romans 8](#), we sow seeds to the flesh and the harvest is going to be fleshy and therefore it brings forth death. Here we see this clash again in [Galatians 5:16](#).

Paul says,

16 Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

17 For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.

18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

19 Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, [this does not mean hygienically, it means morally filthy] lewdness,

20 idolatry, sorcery, [which is witchcraft or drugs] hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies,

21 envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told *you* in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

There is the key—those who practice these things. It is not referring to those times on occasion when you and I as Christians slip and call it "getting all fleshed-out." Have you ever heard that term? "I just fleshed-out for just fifteen seconds." That is a different kind

of desire that we sometimes have. “Oh, Lord, can I just have one minute to flesh-out because they are cussing at me and I just want to let them know that I can do the same thing. Let me flesh-out.” It is called a flesh flash!

But as Christians, we do not practice these things regularly. You see, when you practice something it means that you are practicing to get better at the craft. These carnal people are habitual, chronic, always engaging in the deeds of the flesh. Now the apostle Paul is not talking about non-believers that are governed by ignorance and blindness and Satan. Paul is speaking to Christians and he calls them “carnal Christians.” We read from 1 Corinthians where Paul says, “I wish I could speak to you as mature people, but you cannot handle that. You are still babies. You are carnal. Where there are divisions, jealousies, envy, and where there is arguing, you are acting like mere non-Christian people” (cf. [1 Corinthians 3:1-4](#)). Paul said, “You are carnal Christians.”

Now the carnal Christian and the character of the carnal Christian is that he is born again. He is regenerated and he has received the new nature and the Spirit of God has been quickened in his newness of life. He has been endowed with the gifts of the Holy Spirit; but somewhere along the line this Christian begins to dabble into the things of the world again. Carnal Christians begin to trust more in the arm of the flesh. They begin to “put their trust in horses and chariots and also Egypt” (cf. [Jeremiah 17:5-6](#)). Egypt is symbolic of the former life and there is a tendency to operate in that mode as they did before they became a Christian. And they begin to trust in their own endeavors and trust in their own experience. They put their trust in their own age or tenor or devices or their own calculations, and they begin to live their life accordingly. Now God is no longer their Master. God is no longer Lord; He is not leading or guiding them. They are now prompted, guided, and governed by the flesh.

And the Bible teaches us when we walk by the flesh and conduct ourselves in the flesh, it brings forth death—separation from God. Therefore it brings a conclusion of chaos, sadness, and grief. And it brings a bankruptcy to our spiritual state because we want to do our own thing. Paul says that the dynamics and the mechanics of the spirit and the flesh are diametrically opposed. And when they make contact they cannot handle it, they are contrary to one another. And the Bible says in [Galatians 5:17](#) that “You do not do the things that you wish.”

How much control the flesh has over people who say, “I have no control, man. I want to do it; but I cannot, I am dominated by it. I am forced by this compulsion that I have inside of me to do what is wrong, even though I know that it is wrong. Even though I intellectually and morally know that it is wrong, I still do it.” They sing the song, “Me and Mrs. Jones, we got a thing going on. I know it’s wrong—we both know it’s wrong.” You see even Mrs. Jones messed up. The song says that they both know it is wrong but they can’t stop! The song continues, “We meet at the same café at the same time. We both know it’s wrong.” Then why are they doing it? Well, Mrs. Jones, it is because you are in the flesh. Mrs. Jones, you are not thinking biblically and whoever this “Sancho” is—we do not know who he is, but he said Mrs. Jones’ name and he does not give his

own name—so he is very smart. He will drop her name but not his own name or even a fictitious name.

Now, what does “carnal” mean? I shared with you that it basically means the meat, the body, or the flesh. But biblically here it implies: an earthiness, weakness, sensuality, and the absence of sensitivity. It involves the dominance of the lower nature, and it is diametrically opposed to spiritual maturity. Being carnal is characterized by the physical rather than by intellectual or spiritual orientation. It is giving too much heed to the material aspects of day to day life. It implies a person who is no longer walking in the spirit. We are told that these are the works of the flesh—works. You have to really work at being lewd. You have to work at being a fornicator. You have to work at becoming an adulterer. You have to work at becoming a sorcerer and to have hatred—you have to work at these things.

Now the contrast is the fruit of the spirit, which is found in [Galatians 5:22](#).

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness,
goodness, faithfulness,
23 gentleness, self-control. Against such [wonderful emotions] there is no
law.

Jesus said, “The world will know that you are my disciples by the love that you have for one another” (cf. [John 13:35](#)). You see, love should be the supreme manifestation of your Christian walk, genuine love. It does not mean that you should be like Tiny Tim and with a little violin say, “I love you, I love you!” It does not mean that. It does not mean at your workplace in the morning you have a little skip in your jump and you walk around with your coffee saying, “Hello, good morning, I love you.” That is not reality.

What I am talking about is your composure, your assurance, and confidence in the hope of life in Christ. It does not mean that you have your act together. It means that God has the act together for you! It is not that you have your whole act together and that you are more religious than others because you went to the third service. It does not mean that. But it does mean that you have the hope of God and the joy of the Lord, the strength of God and His goodness, gentleness, kindness, and the long suffering that it takes. This is especially needed in a job that is always precarious when dealing with weird people. You have to have patience and long suffering with joy.

Now, there are people who are always bitter and it is seen in their character, even though the carnal Christian has been born again. If you know anything about the Corinthians, you know that they were morally reprehensible people. They were Christians but they were still acting like Greeks, practicing the philosophy of the Greeks; and they were quite confused. They had the philosophy that the spirit and the body are two different entities; the spirit belongs to God, but the body is separate. So if my body wants to sleep, I am going to heed to my body and I am going to sleep. If my body is hungry, I will eat and engorge myself. If my body wants to have some kind of passion, I am going to yield to it

because my body needs it. That was the philosophy of the Greeks. They believed that the body and spirit are two different things.

Jesus said, “Oh, no. The body and the spirit are one. When you become a Christian, the Spirit dominates the body. Before you become a Christian, it is the body that controls the spirit. But as Christians, the body and the flesh let go and the Spirit takes over. And now the Spirit of God controls our passions. He controls us. Notice what it says in [Galatians 5:22](#), “But the fruit of the Spirit.”

[Galatians 5:24](#) says,

And those *who are* Christ's have crucified the [what?] flesh with its [what?] passions and [what?] desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

So you see that the Christian life is active; it is walking in the spirit. It has nothing to do with your philosophy. It has nothing to do with your resolve to be a good Christian and doing the mechanics, generated by your desires of the flesh. No, it is the Spirit that causes you to act in such a way that denies the flesh. It is the Spirit of God and it is not a religion. God just gives you that inducement to be kind, to be gentle, and to be patient. But if you walk in the flesh and someone steps on your tail and your eyes bug out and claws come out and garbage comes out of your mouth, someone will say, “Hey, don’t you go to Calvary Chapel Montebello?”—then you must embarrassedly answer, “Yes, yes I am sorry. I got a little fleshed-out.” This type of thing happens. But Paul is talking about people who are carnal Christians in Romans 8 and they have a deliberate agenda to sojourn in the world and to act like worldly people.

Once I backslid for a only a day and a half or two days; it was back in 1978. My wife went to a choir retreat and while she was away I got a call from a friend who I used to go with to another church. You see, at the time I was not tired of Christianity, I was tired of “churchianity.” I was going to a church that was very traditional. I went from one tradition to another tradition. I had received the Lord in Costa Mesa, but because that was so far from home, I had to go to a church right around where I lived. That other church was so cold and just okay because it was so traditional and I was tired of it.

Some of the people there were not speaking to me and I got mad. The conflict arose when we were giving baskets away for Thanksgiving. Across the street from our church there were apartments where poor people lived. And it does not take a social scientist to know that these people were our neighbors on the street and they needed some assistance. So we had all of these baskets that we were going to deliver, and we ended up going to a ritzy area up in the hills.

So I asked the pastor, “Why are we giving these baskets to affluent people?” He made a lame excuse. I asked, “Do you know where these people live? I mean, right across the street from the church there are people in need...” And right away the radar took over in

this rebellious maverick. Pretty soon I was marked for doing something that I thought was right. I still stand correct in my heart because I think that we should have given the baskets to the poor people across from the church. They needed it most. So I began to get tired of the way they were running things; I had confused it with Christianity, but that was not Christianity—it was “churchianity.”

So, at this particular time I was bummed out and I said, “My wife’s gone to a retreat and I am not going to church tomorrow morning.” The phone rings and it was a guy who used to go to church with me and we started talking trash. “Yeah man, I am tired of it too, man. Listen, let’s go party!” We put on our war gear. And it was like Cheech and Chong, and we went to the Icehouse. There was a comedy show that night and I realized that everybody was laughing, but I was not laughing. I started to think: “Why is the place dark and why do we have to drink?”

I could not smoke cigarettes like I used to, but when I was in the car I was trying to act cool like I used to do. I did not even know how to hold a cigarette anymore. And when I walked into the club, a guy said to me, “Hey what’s up, what’s going on, what’s happening!” And I go, “Hi.” I did not even know how to act because I was married and I was a Christian now. And after a while I just got freaked out and I told my friend, “I want to go home.”
“What?”
I said, “I want to go home. I don’t like this and I want to go home.”

So I went home and we had a bottle of wine and so I said, “Give me the bottle.” And I drank some of it and I had a horrible headache. I had not drunk in three or four years, whatever it was. And I just felt so sick and I was vomiting. Here I am a Christian and I was acting like I used to act in the old days.

And then my wife comes back from the mountain top and she comes down like Moses, “Hello, Panch! I had a wonderful time. Ohhhh!”
And I said, “I fell.”
“From where?”
“I fell, man!”
“From where?”
“I went to the...crying...telling the story...and I want to go home, man.”
“What?”
“Yeah, man.”
“So what happened?”
“Well, I am a Christian and I had no fun. I freaked out. I felt that I let you down and I let God down and I feel guilty inside.”
And she said, “You feel guilty about it?”
“Yeah, I feel terrible.”
“God loves you because if you were not feeling anything, you would be lost.”
And I said, “Hey! You have been to the mountain top, Amen! Thank you, Solomona. I appreciate that.”

That revelation was so wonderful. And that was my last time of going backwards. I know what is out there in the world, it is like Egypt. I have been there and I have done that. And there are tendencies for us to go and pursue the world. As in the book of Jeremiah, we want chariots and horses and Egypt to rescue us. We always look here and there and we never look up and say, “God help me!” If you are walking in the flesh today, and you are not walking in the Spirit, do not get disillusioned. Listen, if the shoe fits, put it on, wear it, and confess it to God.

Now let me ask you something. I assume that there are people who are walking in the flesh, and entertaining the flesh, energized by the flesh, and they have a little bit of knowledge about Jesus in their heart and they have been dominated by the flesh. If you are hearing or reading this and that is where you are and you told God in your heart, “God, this dude is talking to me. Lord, I am walking in the flesh,” then you have one of two options: either you say, “Yes and I like it.” That is your prerogative and the consequences are traumatic. Or you can say in your heart, “I am tired. Father, forgive me. Father restore me and give me back the joy that I had and let me walk in the Spirit again, I ask You.”

Will God listen to you, yes or no? Will He restore you? Will God forgive you? Absolutely! The question is: do you want to be restored? And I am putting that on the table before you. I am putting that decision on your side of the net. See, you do not have to do it right now, but you can wait until you get to your car or when you are alone. If you have someone in the car with you, wait until you get to your house. If you are alone, you can go into your room. If you have no room of your own, go into the bathroom and there you are alone. And in the quietness of your own heart and the privacy of your own relationship with God, you need to say: “Lord, I know why I am going through what I am going through.”

You do not need counseling or a lightning bolt from God. You need an instant of quickened emotion. It is just that you are experiencing the consequences from wheeling and dealing with people who do not love Jesus and who are not walking with the Lord and with those who do not care about the Word of God. And you are no longer part of them and their lifestyle. You cannot even act like those people. You cannot even talk like them, but you sure are being influenced by them. Now you have a little bit of knowledge about Jesus, but you have more of the world in your heart and you are convicted. And when it comes to decision making, you are unable to process your quality decisions because they are clouded and darkened and you are not able to discern good from evil.

Turn with me to [Hebrews 5:11-12](#). Let me give you the background so that you can understand it. The writer of Hebrews wants to speak about this priest from the Old Testament in relation to Jesus Christ. The priest’s name is Melchizedek and right in the middle of when he is about to tell them about him, the writer says, “Oh, forget it. I wanted to tell you some deep stuff about Melchizedek, but you know that I cannot tell you because you have become dull of hearing. And I want to talk to you about deep things. I want to talk to you about biblical truth, but you are still into Bible stories. The writer says that he wants to speak to them about eating meat, but they were still holding

on to their bottles. He said, “I want to talk to you as men, but I have no respect for you because I see that you still have diapers on and I cannot talk to you as a mature man.”

Notice what is said in [Hebrews 5](#) and the context,

9 And having been perfected, He [Jesus] became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him,
10 called by God as High Priest "according to the order of Melchizedek,"
11 of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.

What does “dull” mean? Well, it just means when we hear something it does not excite us any more. How are we excited? It is done through our senses, when we see something or hear something or we feel something. Those are our senses and that is what tells our mind what the eye sees and what the audio acknowledges. And it conveys to our brain what we see and hear. So basically, what these carnal people are seeing and experiencing they have no more joy or excitement about. Everything spiritual is dull. They say that they hate to go to church because it is dull. They hate to read the Bible because they say that it is dull. They do not want to pray because it is dull. Everything spiritual is dull. The ushers are dull. So what will get them excited? At this point it is the world and the mentality of the world that gets carnal Christians excited and not the things of God. So, these believers have become dull of hearing.

In [verse 12](#) Paul says,

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need *someone* to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food.

He said, “By now you ought to be a teacher teaching others and yet I see you with your bottle and you are drinking milk instead of eating solid food.” This relates to the Christian faith. Some of these carnal Christians and their relationship to the Christian faith, number one: have no practical use in the church because they have a critical spirit. People in the flesh always have a critical spirit. Secondly, there is no source of joy. They are always chronically downcast, gloomy, or bummed-out. I am not saying that you cannot have one day or two or even a week of being bummed-out. But when you have it every day of the week—twenty-four seven—you are always gloomy, you are always bummed-out, and you always have the face of a bulldog, then something is wrong.

When asked, “How you doing?”

“Growl.”

“Everything alright?”

“Growl.”

“Good morning!”

“What’s so good about it?”

And all you hear from them is sarcasm and cynicism and criticism.

Thirdly, carnal Christians are often fretful and peevish. That means that they complain a lot. When you say, “hello,” they are so cold. Fourth: they are often not very open to reasonable appeal. Like a child they want to do everything their own way. Like Frank Sinatra sings that old song, “I did it my way.” Fifth: they are no credit to Christianity, but they make it questionable to the eyes of those in the world because they have become poor witnesses. And people say of them, “If that is a Christian, I don’t want to be a Christian.”

Now if you know anything about the Corinthian church, they were very immoral men who had deviated from the truth, right? And yet when Paul writes to them there are six things that I see that tells me they are Christians. He says to them in [1 Corinthians 1:4-8](#),

4 I thank my God always concerning you [Corinthians] for the grace of
God which was given to you by Christ Jesus,
5 that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all
knowledge,
6 even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you,
7 so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of
our Lord Jesus Christ,
8 who will also confirm you to the end, *that you may be* blameless in the
day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Although they were carnal Christians, Paul acknowledged that they had been born again and that God is going to present them faultless. They had been entrusted with the Holy Spirit and there are six elements mentioned, so these people are Christians. But Paul says, “You are dominated” and that is the problem. It is a life being ruled and governed and dominated by the flesh. It is a life that is dependant upon human effort and resources. It is a selfish, self-centered life. It is a lifestyle that is opposed to one that is directed by God’s Spirit.

Now these are some conspicuous signs of the carnal Christian in the body of Christ. Just so you can see. They are jealous and envious. Basically they are mal-content. They are dissatisfied, they are disgruntled, and I share with you that they are grumpy.

Secondly: they clash with dissention, they are argumentative, disagreeable, quarrelsome and non-conformists. They always like to argue. They always like to confront. They always like to question. They ask, “Why, why, why?” And when you try to explain, they continue to ask, “But why?” And I tell them that there is a problem here and they say, “Yes, there is a problem. We do not have anybody doing this or that.”

I say, “Would you like to volunteer and help the church with this?”

“No, I just wanted to bring it to your attention.”

I say, “Well you are part of the problem. If you see something that other people do not see, God is giving you a preview of what you need to do.”

“Well, I just want to bring it to your attention. That is all.”

And they walk away and they are not part of the solution, but part of the problem.

They are men followers. They follow a personality rather than Christ. There are people who come to this church and they say, “I go to such and such’s church” or “I go to so and so’s church in Downey.” And I ask what they want from us and they say that they have just come to “check us out.” The point is that there are people who like to visit other churches and they are men followers. And then finally, of course, carnal Christians have arrested or suspended growth. In other words, they have a failure to thrive and they become simpletons in their Christian faith. They are still into Bible stories, as opposed to Bible truths.

Paul says in [Hebrews 5:13](#),

13 For everyone who partakes *only* of milk *is* unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe.

14 But solid food belongs to those who are of full age [mature], *that is*, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

A child who is two years old cannot walk down Washington Boulevard by himself because he does not have the maturity to understand that he cannot make it across the street without getting hit. I have good news for you. A child of our friend’s family was found floating in the pool. He was only eighteen months old. The dad found him and immediately they rushed the child in to the hospital and I have good news. They took him to Kaiser downtown and he woke up and he recognized his dad and the last report that I heard, he was doing well. In the name of Jesus, we pray that he continues to be well.

But do you think that this eighteen-month-old child said, “Oh, I want to see my mom and dad care for me.” Do you think he did that? No, he does not have that reasoning ability. He cannot acknowledge anything. He was not able to discern that he could not swim and that he was going to die. He could not figure that out, and yet there are Christians who are immature and are not able to discern what is evil and what is not. And they make quality decisions and choices based on their carnal posture. And then they ask, “Why am I going through chaos? Why am I going through confusion?” It is because they are allowing themselves to be dictated, monitored, and governed by the flesh. They have an attitude of “my way or the highway.”

Jesus said, “I am the way, I am the truth I am the life.” The carnal Christian says, “Yes, I will follow You, but from a distance.” And if Jesus makes a left turn, the carnal Christian says: “He’s going to get lost. I know the city much better than He does.” And he goes another way and he makes a major mistake.

I have had men who come in and say, “Pastor, I want to talk to you, do you have time?” They say, “Check this out. I walk around here and you know I love Jesus, you know what I mean? I walk on the street and people say, ‘Where you from?’ What should I say? What is up? What do you think?”

And I say, “Well, first of all lower your pants from your chest. When you walk, make sure you do not walk like a duck. Put your feet straight. Now, put on pants that fit you, and you know what, if you really do not want violence or anyone to challenge you, put on a Hawaiian shirt.

And the dude says, “No that ain’t right!”

I say, “Who is going to ask you where you are from when you are wearing a Hawaiian shirt? If they do, just say ‘Aloha.’”

And yet these people are not able to see that they are still wearing the gangster regalia. They have the gangster walk and they walk with their Bible under their arm. They are born again, but they still have the look. They stop at a crosswalk and push the button with an attitude. They are not able to discern the difference. There are many people who make foul choices, wrong choices, wrong decisions; and it is not because God is not with them, but because they insist on doing things their own way. Their hearing has become dull.

Now, Paul says in Hebrews that they have their senses exercised. It is the same thing as those who practice to get better. So, when we are growing, we begin to exercise our faith. You see, when the doctor tells us something that is drastic, we will not get shaken up. Why? Well, we have been exercising at the spiritual clinic for a long time. The doctor says that he sees something in the CAT scan. And it does not jolt us anymore. We do not panic at what he sees like we did during our first experience. When we heard: “Millie we see something on your brain and we do not know what it is,” we broke down. But we do not break any more. Why?—because we are spiritual giants? No, it is because we have been down that road before and if God wants to do something, we know that nothing happens to us without his authority. Nothing!

Paul says, “I will give thanks in all things.” Remember in Philippians he says, “Even if I have to die, it will be honorable” ([Philippians 1:21](#)). He says that he would rather be with Jesus and there is a confidence that Paul has. But here the carnal people, by reason of their senses not being exercised, they are unable to discern good from evil. Your senses include your eyes. When you are walking in the Spirit, you need to understand the mechanics of the process. If you are a man and were blind and a skimpy-dressed girl passes by, will it affect you? No, because you cannot see. You have to depend on someone whistling at her.

“Wow! Did you see that?”

“No, I cannot.”

Well, we have to see and we have to hear. And if a person is deaf and blind, then he is missing two senses. If we are able to see and we see something evil and if we are governed by the flesh, our eyes see it and we want it and our heart tells us it is good. And then the heart has failed us because our heart has departed from God. Our heart is not a neutral organ of emotions that tells us only what is right, because the heart is deceitful. And our heart says, “Go for it,” and then we make mistakes.

When we have our senses exercised and we see and hear something evil, in our spirit we hear whistles and bells warning us: “Get away, get away! She is no good, get away!” Or

“Girls, get away from him, he is a player! And players play only when they are playing. He is a player. Get away!” And that is how we are warned by the Spirit of God; that is discernment. The word “discern” means that one has the ability to see something beyond the obvious. And we see something else behind the situation. Some people have discernment of the spirits; they have that gift. We can be talking to someone who we think is cool, but someone with a discerning spirit comes along and says, “That guy is weird.” Why?—because he spiritually discerns something about that person.

My wife will simply say, “I do not like that person.” I ask why and she says that she does not know but the person gives her the creeps. If you know my wife, she is not easily creeped out. She is a wonderful lady. But she sees the creeps and that is heavy. And we find out a month later that this guy had been playing on his wife for the last twelve years. My wife says, “I told you.” It is not like he wore a sign, but she discerns the evil in her spirit. Discernment is a wonderful gift to have to be able to discern evil, to discern good from evil.

When we were going to lease the building on Greenwood and I told the congregation that we were going to go get it, we had a big signing of the contract ceremony in front of the whole church. This building was going to be ours and we were going to lease it. And then when we got to the real estate office, before we signed the papers out of nowhere, literally out of nowhere, I said: “Can I look at the building again?”

We were here on Telegraph and we had to go all the way to Greenwood. There were two owners who were brothers. One was a Hollywood guy and the other was a property management kingpin.

The guy says, “Why do you want to see it again?”

And when he reacted like that, I knew I really wanted to see the building. I said, “I just want to see it.”

And the innocent brother said, “Well, what’s the matter? Let’s let him go check it out.”

He asked again, “Why?”

And I insisted on going to check it out.

When I first saw the building, what attracted me was that it used to be an indoor supermarket, and it had a full-on kitchen with all the kitchen supplies. It had ovens, fryers, grills, and I thought: “We are Calvary Chapel Montebello and we are going to be eating every day!” And I thought that this could be a wonderful thing with a full-on kitchen with refrigerators and everything. I said, “We can open this up immediately.” With eight hundred people I knew that we could open it up and maintain it right here. And we had the whole open space where we could have fellowship and food and we thought it would be like an indoor swap meet, but it was going to be a Christian swap meet.

When we got to the building, all of the windows were gone and the air conditioner units were gone. All the kitchen supplies were gone and the honest man was just so embarrassed and he was looking at his brother like, “Wow, what a sneak you are, man!” And so I said, “I am walking away from this place.” And I just felt embarrassed and I got

in my little Volkswagen and I started to cry. I said, “Lord, I do not even know what you want me to do.” And I was sobbing.

And as I was passing through this area, I saw this place and it was empty—this was the same day. And in those days I had an LA Cellular phone, the type that looked like a big coffin. I looked at the building and I jumped the fence and I called the realtor. “Hey, I am from Calvary Chapel Montebello and we meet at the high school and I am interested in this building.” And he asked if I would like to make an appointment. And I asked if he could come over right then. He said that he was with another client and I asked if the client was giving him any money because I had a hundred and sixty thousand dollars in my pocket—which I did not, it was a check. I said I had cash in the bank and the guy said he would be right over and he hung up.

When he got to this building, he jumped the fence too because he did not have the key. We were looking around and we looked at the building and I said, “Let’s put in an offer for it.” We found out that the owner was the son of the original owner who had died. This son is a Presbyterian pastor and he wanted to get rid of the building. The realtor said that he could not believe it, the son wants to give it to Calvary Chapel! He knew we make churches out of bowling alleys, garages, skating rinks, and everywhere. He said, “I know that Calvary Chapel pastors are known for making churches out of warehouses, so go for it!”

At five o’clock in the morning when I was in Japan, I got the call that said: “We are in!” And I started yelling and the Japanese folks were looking at me. They would not understand what I was going through, but I did not care. I said, “So sorry, so sorry, but we got a church building!”

Now you see how the Lord opens doors and God gives us the discernment. It is not because I am smart or because I went to East LA College. It is not because of those reasons. God gives the simple man and simple woman the ability to have sagacity and the ability or discretion or prudence, and His wisdom. It is God who gives it to us so we can make the right decision, the right choices, at the right time, for the right reasons, and for the right purposes. And it is God who will bless us. Amen?

Turn with me to the last verse in [Jeremiah 17](#). The carnal Christian, as we see in [verse 5](#), is already cursed. The carnal Christian lives in a precarious or unstable lifestyle. Before I read this, we need to understand that carnal Christians are unstable in doctrine. Hebrews says, “They lack basic understanding and they are dull of hearing; they are unskilled in the word of righteousness. They experience an arrested or stunted growth. They have a life of inner discord and strife. They are destitute and derelict to fight spiritual warfare and they have become undiscerning and blinded by Satan” (cf. [Hebrews 5:13-14](#)).

Now let me give you some additional background. Jeremiah the prophet was warning the people of Israel that the Babylonians were coming. It was not a matter of “when or if,” it was happening. They were coming. And in Jeremiah 17, God told Jeremiah, “Tell my people to capitulate or give up. Do not fight the Babylonians. They are under My hand.

They are instruments in My hand. Tell My people to give themselves up. Go to Babylon. Let them take you in exile to Babylon. Buy homes in Babylon and built orchards and gardens, have children, and in seventy years, I, God, will bring you back.”

So Jeremiah, in the midst of the Babylonian attacks that were coming, goes to tell the people: “Thus says the Lord, ‘Give yourselves up.’ God said that He will take you to the foreign land, but He will bring you and your children’s children back to the homeland. This is punishment, but in seventy years He will bring us back.” (cf. Jeremiah 17).

Well, the priests, the civic leaders, the monarchy, and the princes and the prophets were all carnal. They were saying that they were not going to give themselves up. At this time the prophet was selling his visions; the priest was selling his counseling; and the royalty were getting bribes and exploiting the people of God. They were all doing even worse things than these. And so, Jeremiah warns them. But the people want to go back to Egypt. They want to ask Egypt if they can combine their forces to go against Babylon. And Jeremiah says, “Don’t go to Egypt. They have horses and chariots, but blessed is the man that trusts in God more than flesh.”

You see the Israelites wanted to go back to the world. They wanted to go back to Egypt and that is something that God always looks upon as a former way of life. Do you remember the movie the *Ten Commandments*? It was Edward G. Robinson who said, “Yeah, let’s go back. We need to go back. We had cilantro, we had melons and leeks. We can go back over there.”

And Moses said, “No, we will not go back to Egypt.”

And the two actors argued back and forth. Then Moses reminds Edward G. Robinson’s character: “Why would we go back to Egypt? Remember we were prisoners, we were oppressed, and we were slaves. To go back to Egypt just so we can eat some vegetables is not the right reasons to go back.”

And many people in the Christian Church come to service on Sunday but on Monday morning they put on their Egyptian garments, their Egyptian headdress, and their Egyptian sandals and here they go back there. And they live the week in the world, but maybe on Wednesday they take off the Egyptian headdress and they put on their halo when they come to church. But then the rest of the week it is party time like the Egyptians, dancing and walking and talking like the Egyptians. Then they come to church on Sunday and say, “Woe is me. I do not understand what is wrong with my life. I am a Christian, but I have all these problems.” Be realistic, you cannot expect God to bless you when you are living in Egypt and thinking about it and worshipping Egypt.

Look what happens in [Jeremiah 17:5-6](#),

Thus says the Lord,
“Cursed *is* the man who trusts in man
And makes flesh his strength,
Whose heart [what?] departs from the LORD.
For he shall be like a shrub in the desert,

And shall not see when good comes,
But shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness,
In a salt land which is not inhabited.”

This particular brush or shrub does not produce succulence, which is moisture or water in case people need some water in the desert. It does not give flowers or fragrance or shade for the insects; this shrub is good for nothing. God says, “You will be like a shrub, you will be cursed.”

Now look at the contrast in [verses 7-8](#),

Blessed *is* the man who trusts in the LORD,
And whose hope is the LORD.
For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters,
Which spreads out its roots by the river,
And will not fear when heat comes;
But its leaf will be green,
And will not be anxious in the year of drought,
Nor will cease from yielding fruit.
The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*,
And desperately wicked;
Who can know it?
I, the LORD, search the heart,
I test the mind,
Even to give every man according to his ways,
According to the fruit of his doings.

Hey, what goes around comes around; in other words, you reap what you sow. You want to be treated the way you feel like being treated, then treat others the way you want to be treated. When you go back to work do not be mad dogging everyone. Ask the Lord to help you so that you can have joy and you can have His love. Love is not something that we merely say. We are not going to go into our offices or place of work and act like Tiny Tim and walk in there, “Hello, I’m walking through the tulips.” That is not realistic or reality.

But love is expressed in kindness, generosity, and substitution, all of those things. Just put a smile on, just a smile, a smile! Walk in with a smile. It does not mean that you are dingy and that you have no problems. No, what Christian does not have problems? I have problems right now, but they are not prohibiting me from rejoicing in the things of God. They push me further into the worship of God. Where else can I go? Go back to the Icehouse? Oh, no way! Go back to the laughing people in the dark? Oh, no way! I am not going to do that. I am going to look up and ask the Lord to help me. “I need Your help, Lord.”

And I hope that you will find that prescription for your life. If God has impressed your heart today, praise the Lord! Don’t walk out and complain that you came to church and

now you are all convicted. That is good and that is wonderful! Isn't it wonderful when God rebukes and God exhorts? It is better to be found out by God, than to be found out by man. Man does not know how to forgive, but God does. Man does not know how to nurture us and give us mental hygiene, but God does. "He restores my soul. He leads me to fresh waters. He leads me to green grass and He is my shield and my buckler. His staff and His rod comfort me because He is with me every day of my life. Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil because He is with me. Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever and ever. The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want" (cf. [Psalm 23](#)).

Let's pray,

Father, in the name of Jesus, we thank You for your kindness and generosity. I pray that you will go before Your sheep whom You love very much. Lord, You tell us that if even one is lost that You will leave the ninety-nine to go get that one. That shows how kind and good You are. Father, we pray that Your Holy Spirit will touch each and every one of us right now. I ask that You would begin to do a work in us. Amen.

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

BY

Calvary Chapel Outreach Fellowship

Lesson 22

Equipping, Edifying, Protecting

By

Damian Kyle

Calvary Chapel Modesto

Brought to you by:

The Blue Letter Bible Institute

www.blbi.org

A ministry of:

The Blue Letter Bible

www.blueletterbible.org

Let's turn to the [Ephesians 4:7-16](#).

7 But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.

8 Therefore He says:

“When He ascended on high,
He led captivity captive,
And gave gifts to men.”

9 (Now this, “He ascended” [speaking of Jesus]—what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth?

10 He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)

11 And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers,

12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,

13 till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;

14 that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting,

15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head--Christ--

16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

Let's pray.

We love Your word, Lord, and we are very happy to be in the truth and very glad that by Your Holy Spirit You are interested in taking every jot, every tittle, every line, and every precept of this word and building it into our hearts and into our minds. May it produce in us exactly what it was written for and we pray that it would produce this individually in our human lives. Then Lord, that it might be there in us and that You would be able to bring it to remembrance for Your purposes for the rest of the days of our pilgrimage. So, we ask for that work of Your Holy Spirit through Your word in this place today and we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

In Ephesians chapters 4–6, we have a description by God of the Christian life that is a worthy response to all that God has done for us—all of the blessings that are ours in Christ Jesus that Paul has been detailing all through the first three chapters.

The first mark of our proper response that Paul lays out, a response that is worthy of all that we are and all that we have in Christ, is that our lives would be influenced for unity in the body of Christ. The second response for all that God has done for us is that every one of us would do our share (as is written in [verse 16](#)) that every part of the body of Christ, every single Christian, would do his share according to his gifting and God's call upon his life. Every single one of us, as a Christian, has the privilege of being gifted in at least one spiritual gift from God. And then there is, with that privilege, the responsibility of taking our place in the body of Christ and allowing God to use that gift through our life for His purposes in the world, in the generation that He has allowed us to live.

In [Ephesians 4:8-10](#), the Giver of these gifts is described and it is none other than Jesus Himself. It speaks of Him leaving the glory of heaven, coming to this earth. He was not merely willing to come to this fallen earth, but He was willing to die here for our sins. He went into the heart of the earth, into Hades itself, and was resurrected three days later. And then following all of that, being resurrected, He then ascended into heaven where He rules over all things.

Now I look at something like this and I think: “If we are all gifted (and we are) and if each of us has a share to do in God's work (and we do), then how does that happen?” And that is what Paul talks about here in [Ephesians 4:11-15](#). It happens as the leadership in a church makes the things that are listed in those verses the goals of the church, the priorities and the emphases of the local church. Because in these verses, God describes what He wants the church to be. And I think that passages like this are becoming increasingly important because there is increasingly more confusion in the church. In my estimation it has hit warp speed (for you Trekkies), but I mean it is moving fast—especially in the last five years. There are many different ideas about what the church is supposed to be and what its function is in the world. There are different ideas regarding what the church's function is in the community and what it is supposed to be doing to accomplish all of this within human lives. And the idea regarding what the church is supposed to be is changing so dramatically.

What does the church exist for and why do people come here on Sunday mornings and Sunday nights? Why do they come every other day and night of the week and sit in the different studies and get involved beyond Sunday mornings and Sunday nights? Why do we even come together? What is God aiming at? If we do not know what He is aiming at, then we hardly know how to cooperate with Him. Does He bring you to church for me to amuse you? That may happen as a by-product, but does God bring you to church for me to entertain you? Does He bring people into the body to do anything and everything under the sun for the sake of growing larger as a church? Is that the most important thing in the world to God—that every church would be a big church at any expense?

Passages like this are valuable because they not only define to leaders what the local church is supposed to be and what the goals are, but it defines how God wants us to get there. And Scripture defines the ways that really honor God and it defines God-honoring ways that the church becomes what it is supposed to be. But I think that it is important not only for leaders in a church to understand this, but also every single Christian should

know what it is that we can expect biblically from a local church—no more, no less. What is that organism supposed to be to me? There is a lot of confusion about that today.

I really feel bad for pastors today. I do not necessarily feel bad for myself because I have a little bit of a heritage. One of the great blessings in my life, in the beginning of my Christian walk, was to come into contact with the teaching of Pastor Chuck Smith. God had already taken him through all kinds of things to get these issues squared away and he saved us the seventeen years of misery that he had to endure while all of that was happening.

There is so much pressure to make the church this thing or that thing—or people are going to bolt—they will not come to church. All of this kind of pressure is on the pastor; and thus, I think it is important for everyone to understand (leaders and non-leaders alike) that none of us are free to define the church. None of us, no matter who we are, I do not care how gifted or how talented or how large numerically any group of people might be in the body of Christ, world-wide or in a local church; we do not have the right to define what the priorities and the emphases of the local church are to be.

The church belongs to God and He has defined that. Ephesians 4 is one of those passages where He does that. And notice the first word of [verse 12](#). Paul lists all of these leaders in verse 11 and here is the purpose, it is found in that first word “for.” Jesus has appointed leaders in His church and then He gives them, and us, their job description. The church leaders are not free to define it; neither is anyone else. And notice in [verse 12](#) that it is “for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.” And so, the church is to be a place where saints (that is Christians) are equipped for the work of the ministry. The church is to be an equipping center.

How would you like to run an ad in the paper, in the Modesto Bee, that says: “Calvary Chapel in Modesto, the Equipping Center” and then wait for the collective yawn? And how exciting does equipping sound to anyone? You are hardly going to be able to go on the road and do a church growth seminar on the basis of that. Equipping sounds like work! It sounds like kind of the gritty work that has to be done before something can be successful, and that is exactly what it is! But as tedious or as boring as the word “equipping” may sound, to the Christian who understands that he is gifted by God Almighty and God has a call upon his life—when one is eager to step out into that call and to be used by God—then the word “equipping” is a very, very exciting word.

The church is to be a place where people not only get saved, but then they are disciplined and equipped to now do whatever it is that God has called them to do in the world for His glory. The word “equipping” means *equipping*, but also it means “training” and “preparing.” As much as the physician, as much as the police officer, or the fireman or fire persons, as much as the electrician or the pharmacist or the educator has to be trained and prepared to be successful in those areas of life, the Christian has to be trained and prepared also.

It is interesting that in all of these other fields there is an expectation that equipping is required and that the equipping is not always going to be the most fun thing in the world. It is going to require diligence, it is going to require a sobriety, and it is going to require that those people bring their own motivation into that equipping process. For example, when they have an opening here to work in the fire department with the city of Modesto, they may have two openings and they get seven hundred applications. And if you do not bring the “want to” there, you have no chance at all of getting the job. Only two of the applicants have a chance, but they will not make it without the “want to” and without a sense that this is going to involve some work. Equipping is going to involve some diligence, it is going to involve some discipline in my life, it is going to involve some sacrifice and study, as a part of my preparation; and that is how it is in all of life.

Sometimes as Christians we can have the idea that when these things—diligence, sacrifice, study, hard work—are required of us for Christian maturity. We think that some great thing is being demanded of us. Nothing is being demanded of us; it just means that we do not understand how precious a gift this equipping from God is. This means anyone who would have that attitude, does not understand how valuable it is to have the privilege of being able to be used by God in any way on planet Earth. And it is an honor to have my name associated with His work.

Sometimes Christians very readily make sacrifices, tighten their belts, do this and that, arrange schedules and priorities and so forth, in order to further their career. But when it comes to hard work or sacrifice that relates to God’s calling or God’s giftedness, the attitude is: “that is just the church.” It is degraded to this thing that is a priority five steps down from what I do in the natural. That is wrong and that is a wrong attitude in the body of Christ toward these things.

And so equipping means a “complete furnishing.” God has called each of us to a particular place of service in this world, as His representative, and for every single one of us it is going to require equipping. We need to be furnished for that calling. Now this occurs primarily through the teaching of the word of God.

Jesus declared in [Matthew 28:18-20](#), in the great commission:

“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.
Go therefore and make disciples [not just converts but disciples] of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age.”

And the emphasis of the early church is seen in [Acts 2](#).

And they continued steadfastly [in entertainment—no] in the apostles' doctrine [teaching] prayer and fellowship with one another, and the Lord's Supper. (cf. [Acts 2:42](#))

And then down in [Acts 2:47](#), when the church became what God wanted the church to be and it had the emphases and the priorities that God wanted it to have—“then God added to the church daily such as should be saved.”

Remember in [John 21](#), Jesus was talking with Peter and he denied the Lord three times. Then Jesus restores him back into ministry and does it publicly.

Jesus said:

“Peter do you love Me?”

Peter said, “Lord, you know I have a fond affection for You.”

Jesus said, “Feed My sheep.”

He asked him again, “Peter do you love Me?”

Peter said, “Lord, You know I love You.”

Jesus said, “Feed My sheep.”

A third time, “Peter do you love Me?”

Peter said, “Lord, You know everything. You know I love You.”

Jesus said, “Feed My sheep.” (cf. [John 21:15-17](#))

Feeding the flock of God out of a shepherd’s heart is an expression of love.

Paul declared that:

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 complete, thoroughly furnished [or equipped] for every good work. ([2 Timothy 3:16-17](#))

Paul wrote again to Timothy and he said:

And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. ([2 Timothy 2:2](#))

Paul testified to the elders at Ephesus when he thought that he would never see them again. This is the church he had spent years with, and Paul had close relationships with the leaders there. And he said to them:

Therefore I testify to you this day that I *am* innocent of the blood of all *men*. For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God. ([Acts 20:26-27](#))

And all the way through the Old Testament and all the way through the New Testament a tremendous emphasis is put upon the teaching of the word of God to equip believers—His people—for what He has called them to do.

Frequently I am asked by Christians about God's calling, specifically in this body, and it is a good thing. Someone will say: "You know I believe God has a calling on my life. I just sense that." And of course that is true of all believers. This person may say, "I don't know what it is yet; and so, what can I do to prepare?" I typically say very much the same thing in a situation like that. The first thing I let people know, regarding God's gifting in their life and His calling in their life, is that He is going to reveal it to them. He wants us to be in His will more than we want to be there. And it is apparent that this person wanted to be in God's will or he would not have had the concerns that he had. I tell these individuals that God is going to get them there, and to relax.

But in the meantime, the one thing that all of us can do, no matter if the gift is—as an evangelist, a missionary, a pastor, a teacher, or having the gift of helps, the gift of mercy, or whatever it might be—the one thing we can always profitably spend our time on is learning the word of God. So I tell people that every time the church is open, they need to get in under the teaching of the word of God. They need to check out Bible study tapes and listen and use the library here at the church, in order that they might grow in the word. They need to do everything they can to learn the word of God.

When I first got saved back in 1980, I was working for the phone company and at that time I was a cable splicer. For months at a time I would be put on these jobs working on underground cable, which would involve 800 pairs to 2400 pairs of cable that I would splice together. It was good, hard, and wonderful work. I did not listen to tapes when I was dealing with live cables because a worker cannot have his mind divided on the work; but with dead cables, I just would throw in these Bible study tapes and I would sometimes listen to seven tapes a day while doing those cables. In the course of two or three years, I had listened to the Bible from Genesis to Revelation on tape by Chuck Smith over three times. I developed a systematic theology of the word of God before I knew what a systematic theology was.

Even today when we drive around, I am still a tape-a-holic. It is a wonderful addiction listening to study tapes while going here and there all through the course of the week. I am still listening to two, three, four or five tapes, depending on what is happening and what I am involved in each week. And so, it offers a chance to really be built up in the word of God.

Also in [Ephesians 4:12](#), I think it is important to recognize that the calling of God upon the lives of these leaders is not a call to do all of the work themselves; that is physically impossible. But they are to equip others to do what it is that God has called them to do. The sheer scope of so much of the ministry that happens in this church and through this church in a given week is gigantic, and it is way beyond the very severe physical limitations of this staff. Why does the ministry go on? Why is it able to go on? It is because so many have been equipped and so many have taken their place of serving.

I hear about things all of the time where something has happened and I did not even know that a particular person was in the hospital. Or I never knew that someone else had

been laid off from his job and this thing and another thing. And then I find out that somebody else with the gift of helps came in and then through the home fellowships, they supplied meals for a time or they made sure that the need was covered. So much happens that nobody else knows about and it is the Spirit of God directing His people all through the week in their gifting. It is a beautiful thing and the result is seen in [verse 12](#), which is that the body of Christ is edified. It is built up it is made strong and it is made healthy.

Another thing found in [verse 13](#) is that the church is to be a place where we all “come to the unity of the faith.” Notice it is not “until” we all come to the unity of faith; it is “till” we all come to the unity of the faith. It is not talking about faith for salvation. It is not talking about a personal faith. It is talking about the faith in terms of doctrine, in terms of what the Bible teaches and what we know to be true from the Bible.

As we grow in our knowledge of the Scriptures, the net affect upon our lives and upon the body of Christ as a whole is *unity*. Because when the Bible becomes the standard for doctrine—that is what we believe and practice, that is how we live—when the Bible becomes the standard for those two things in my life or in the lives of a group of Christians, then the effect is going to be unity because we know what the Bible has to say about these things. So, we are not defining them for ourselves; and thus, we unify with one another as a result of being clear on what the Bible has to say about things.

Imagine putting a hundred people in a room who have no respect for God’s word. They do not believe that the Bible is inspired by God, and they do not make it the standard for what they believe or how they live. And now you begin to ask them some questions. You ask these hundred people in a room what they think God is like. How many answers are you going to get? You will get a hundred different answers. You ask how people get to heaven, if they believe in heaven, and you are going to get a lot of different answers. How can a person be saved? What is heaven like? What happens after death? You ask them what the right thing is to believe about divorce; about fornication, heterosexual sin outside of the confines of marriage; ask those hundred people about homosexuality, and what are you going to end up with for answers? You will probably get a hundred different answers from a hundred different people. And it will all be prefaced this way: “Well, you know I think...” And you are going to have utter division within that room.

But when we know the word of God well, when we know what God has to say about something, then it settles the issue for the child of God. That settles it. That is the position that is right. That is what is perfect and loving, that is what is wise. And then what happens? We can unify with all of these issues. This is one of the reasons why churches that are founded on teaching the Word of God tend to be more stable. They experience far less division than other kinds of churches which are built on things like entertainment, amusement, or on whatever it takes to get people into the building for that kind of thing.

For a church to grow under the teaching of the word of God, it is a slower growth. It is a much slower growth, but it is a much more solid growth. It is a stable church. And because it is stable, it does not get shaken by every idea of man that comes down the pike and every wind of doctrine that goes through the body of Christ. I was thinking since we

moved here in 1985 about all the different kinds of odd doctrines that ran through the body of Christ. Back in 1985 the deliverance ministry was huge! The demon possession of Christians and casting demons out of Christians was just unbiblical, but it was huge and running through the whole body as a way to produce holiness and victory in the lives of Christians.

Then the positive confession doctrine came into the church and it is still around today. Then there was the school of the prophets; we were told that these guys are the ones we need to listen to, and the office of the prophet was elevated way beyond its biblical position. And then the health and wealth doctrine; and then there was the laughing in the spirit. Then there was the drunk in the spirit, and the barking in the spirit, and the roaring in the spirit, and all of these kinds of things that were going through the church. And then the church growth program which required this skit thing that we were told to do. And after you do that one, then the church growth thing was tied to the home fellowships. None of these things can ever take the place of the Word of God.

I know of a man that I watched first-hand take a very healthy church and wipe the whole thing out. Every Sunday he would come into the pulpit and what he preached about on Sunday or for the next six Sundays was based on the latest Christian book that he had read. So he would say, “We have to do this now.” And six weeks later it was, “No we have to do this now.” And soon after people listen to that, they get fried. They are wiped out under the weight of it. Soon they are starving for the word of God and the church just begins to disintegrate because God gives us a hunger by His Spirit for the Word in our lives.

And so, all of these odd practices have gone through the body of Christ and it is so gracious of God, because of His word, that these false doctrines have hardly ever even created a ripple in this body. They just made their way through and all of us here have just continued moving on. Why? Because the word of God is being taught and that is the expectation that you bring into the study, and that is the expectation that you bring into the other Bible studies throughout the week. And when that is the expectation, not for all of these other things but for the Word of God, then it is going to out-live all these fads. It is going to out-live the heavens and the earth, and so it produces a unity within the body of Christ. The unity of faith.

Now in [verse 13](#), it says that the church is to be a place where we all “come to the knowledge of the Son of God.” The word “knowledge” there is an interesting one. There are several words used for “knowledge” in the original language. This one is *epignosco*. The word *gnosco* in the Greek language is not talking about a head-knowledge. It is a knowledge that comes by experience. And *epi* means a more intense form of *gnosco*. So it is not just talking about a mental or a doctrinal knowledge of Jesus as the Son of God—though that is very important—but this is talking about an experiential knowledge of the Son of God.

The church is to be a place where we come, not only to grow in our knowledge of the word of God, but in growing in the word of God we are to grow in our knowledge of the

Lord Jesus. We are to grow in our personal relationship with Him. The church is a place that encourages not just learning about what the Bible has to say, but it translates into a personal daily walk with Him. And that is to be the emphasis of the local church—the emphasis of that personal relationship.

Sometimes there is confusion concerning the worship portion of our service here at Calvary Chapel. Some people want more hymns and some people want more choruses; and we listen to those things and we pray about those things. One of the strengths of the hymns is that they are weighty in content—just the sheer doctrine that is in many of the hymns. And that is the strength of the hymns. One of the weaknesses of the hymns is that they are typically *about* God. We don't sing them *to* Him. Now one of the strengths of the choruses that have been so popular in the last twenty-five years is that they are more personal. Most of them are sung personally *to* God. Sometimes their weakness can be that they lack a little weight. And so we mix the two together to really get something that is fabulous.

But the worship portion of the service, as the team is leading us in worship, is not just singing songs; it is a time for us to close our eyes and just sing those songs in worship to the Lord. What is happening? This is nurturing my personal relationship with the Lord. I am communicating with Him. He is communicating back to me by His Holy Spirit. And that is what this part of the service is all about.

If you are new to church, you have been coming for a few months and you get the song sheet and you stare at the worship team all the way through the service and I know they are very attractive people, but the idea is that they would disappear and that you would focus on the Lord and then just begin to sing those songs to Him. Why? Because the Lord desires for us to come to a knowledge of Jesus, an experiential knowledge of Him. So that is what worship is about.

One thing about the worship at this church (and there are different ideas that people have about what happens through music within a church) is that it is set up completely for worship; it is not performance oriented. It is not designed to entertain us, and it is not designed to do something emotionally to us. It is designed to point us to God and then to lead us. As the team prays during the week, they ask what songs the Lord wants to hear from His people on Sunday because those are the ones we want to sing to Him. They ask God what songs His people have a need to sing to Him, so that their perspective about life and God and crisis and trials in the light of God can all be shifted around in their lives. And then that is what they lead us in; but all of it is designed so that we come into a deeper knowledge of the Lord—deeper in our personal relationship with the Lord.

And then there in [Ephesians 4:13](#), the church is to be a place where we all come to a “perfect man.” So I would just like all of the perfect people of this church to stand right now. When we look at that and read “the perfect man,” the word “perfect” means: “to be fully aged, or to be mature.” It is a place where we can come to maturity. And the goal is not to “produce,” as I was reading about producing in a mission's magazine regarding Christianity and the continent of Africa. And it said, “Christianity in Africa is two inches

deep and a hundred miles wide.” And it is increasingly getting like that in the United States of America. So what is the idea here? Is the idea to just fill rooms like this and then say that we are able to fill rooms this size on the basis of “luring people in” and “Give a-buck Sunday” and “Invite-a-friend Sunday” or whatever the deal is? No the idea of gathering together is to produce mature Christians.

What is a mature Christian? I am kind of embarrassed by this statement, but maturity on a purely physical level is when one is able to reproduce. And the same thing is true on a spiritual level. It is the ability to lead someone else to Christ and then to disciple them into maturing in their walk with the Lord—just like someone did for you and me. And that is Christian maturity.

The church is there in order to keep us moving, to push, to prod (not in a carnal way), but by the Spirit of God so none of us falls asleep at the wheel, but we keep on moving toward maturity. Nobody takes sabbaticals from growing in the Lord and then says, “Yeah, boy, I took those six months off or six years off.” That is all very valuable time, too valuable to lose. And so, the church is that place where people are exhorted and encouraged toward maturity.

And then there is a fifth point in [Ephesians 4:13](#). The church is to be a place where we all: “come to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” It is a place to grow in Christ-likeness. That is what we are aiming at, all of us in the body of Christ. What is the aim for an individual human life? Maturity. But here it is defined. It is Christ-likeness. We are Christians and we measure our life off of His, not off of the person who is sitting to the left of us or to the right of us. We are not to watch certain movies or engage in various activities because we have seen other Christians do that. Other Christians are not the standard.

But we are to produce mature Christians who measure their lives off of His life and desire “His stature.” The verse says, “His spiritual stature” which is where we are to look. We should be able to say, “That’s what I want to be like. I want to be like Him. I want to be as much like Him this side of glory as possible. I know that one day I am going to see Him face to face and I am going to be as He is. But before that happens, I want to be as much like Him in how I act and how I think and what I do and what I don’t do, on a daily basis, as I possibly can.” And then we become Christians who are filled to the full with Him—full of His power, full of His love, full of His wisdom, and full of His strength. And if that is the standard (and it is) then there is always going to be room for growth in our lives.

If you are a Christian and you have stopped growing, wake up! I can jump up here, and I can pull out a handkerchief, and yell at you, or whatever it takes to get your attention. If you are wasting your life and you have wrong definitions on what it means to be a Christian and what God is aiming for, and what you are supposed to be aiming for, then get going with all of your strength toward spiritual maturity.

And then a sixth point in [verse 14](#), the church is to be a place where we learn what is necessary to protect us from the spiritual dangers that surround us. The word of God protects us from immaturity. Notice that: “we should no longer be children”—that is we should no longer be immature spiritually. I remember a while back, I was driving through Modesto and there was this little kid, a very young toddler-aged kid, walking down the street with nobody in sight. And when you see a kid like that, you think: “that kid is vulnerable to anyone and anything that comes along.” Kids that age have no capacity to protect themselves. So I went up a little ways, pulled over, and watched the situation until an adult showed up on the scene. And eventually one did, good thing!

But we face the same danger, spiritually. That is how God looks at His people when there is no maturity in the word of God. He sees them just like that little kid walking down the street. Without a firm foundation in the word of God, we are vulnerable to every kind of wrong doing that could come our way. That is how God sees things. And the word of God keeps us from being children, so that we will no longer be vulnerable children.

The word of God protects us from false doctrine. Without a firm foundation in the word of God, how in the world am I going to know what is right or wrong, what to accept and what to reject? There are a million voices in the world that are speaking for God. Everybody is an authority on God. “This is what He says.” “No, this is what He says.” And the Mormons say one thing and the Jehovah Witnesses say another thing, and the Christian is saying another thing, and all the way through everybody has a voice and everybody is an expert on God.

So how in the world am I supposed to understand what the truth is, and how can I be protected from false doctrine? The word of God and a firm foundation in the word of God is the only way. Otherwise, I am going to be as it says, “like a boat that is tossed back and forth by the waves” (cf. [Ephesians 4:14](#)). In other words a boat that has no maps, no helmsman or captain to get it to a destination. And there is no hope of getting to that destination. What is the destination for us? Christ-likeness.

This is like having Fall arrive and the leaves drop down to the ground and the wind comes and then the leaf is blown over here. And then five minutes later it is blown over there and then it is blown again and every time you come outside that leaf is in a different place. There are a lot of Christians like that every time you see them. One day they believe this thing, and the next time you see them over in this group, and a week later they are over involved in this other thing. And there are long days, weeks, months, and years when put together, and they are still being blown wherever the latest thing is that they are being told about. This is because there is no foundation in the world for them to base things upon. What is the next phase, what is the next fad, and the next charismatic teacher—that kind of living. Obedience to the word of God protects us from that kind of lifestyle.

Knowing the word of God also protects us from false teachers and “the trickery of men and cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting” (cf. [Ephesians 4:14](#)). Literally it is referring to the dice playing of men. It is talking about loaded dice. When a person does not know

the word of God, as a child of God, it is like sending a child to Las Vegas and hoping that they will come out with their diaper. If you send a child into sophisticated environments like that, where people are preying to separate you from everything you own and everything you hold dear, you have no hope. And spiritually there are people who exist in this world that have been trained to run into Christians that do not know the word of God and when they are done with that kind of person, the Christian will be separated from everything he once held spiritually dear.

Do you know where the biggest group of converts to Mormonism come from? By far, something like eighty percent of the people that convert were raised in Christian churches, but they never learned the Bible. They were not taught the Bible. As a shepherd, I personally never want to stand before God and give an account for doing that. I am not talking about the people who are deceived. I know that people have to bring the “want to” whether they go to the junior high group or the high school group or they come into the main service. But I never want anyone who desires to know the word of God to ever get into a place of being taken off by a cult or a non-Christian religion because they did not know the word of God. That is what happens and these deceiving people are out there and they are trained. They can see your scalp on their belt when they perceive that you are a Christian who does not know the word of God and they know just where to take you. They know just how to load the dice to take you where they want to take you on things. So the danger of it and the “cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting” is that they have schemes and they have devices and they are just waiting for Christians who are in that category.

Remember how Jesus handled the temptations against Him? When the devil tempted Jesus the third time, he decided to quote some verses himself which were out of context and completely misapplied. But the devil does love to misquote the Bible. And Jesus corrected the him, but the Lord corrected with the accurate word of God. And every single time Jesus answered him by saying: “It is written.” “It is written.” “It is written.” And He quoted from the book of Deuteronomy each one of those times. Jesus was meeting that kind of temptation through the word of God.

Paul warned that there would be this kind of person lying in wait to deceive. Even in the local churches he spoke in Ephesus and as he spoke to the Ephesian elders he said that he was leaving, but he said the deceivers are not just going to come from outside the church. He said they will come from among their own group and that people are going to rise up with heresies and they are going to deny the Lord and they are going to draw people off to themselves. So Paul warned them regarding this deception.

So the same warning is needed today. Peter warned of this, John warned of it; all the way through the Scriptures we are warned. And so the church is to be a place where we are equipped to be ready for this kind of deception when it comes. And I do not care who any of us are, as Christians, there will be those who come to try and deceive you into false teachings. And so there is a necessity for the local church to build the word of God into all of our lives as a protection.

And then finally in [verse 15](#), the church is a place where the truth is to be spoken from a motive of love. The false teachers were speaking in order to gain a place of power in people's lives or to get money from them by telling the people what they wanted to hear. Paul comes along and exhorts the leaders saying, "You speak the truth, but do it in love." Those two things need to come together. It is not enough just to speak the truth. You cannot be like Christ and just speak the truth. You have to have love coupled with the truth to be like Christ. You cannot be loving with no truth. That is not like Christ at all. It has to be both things.

Remember when Jesus was with the woman who was caught in the very act of adultery and the accusers brought her to Him in [John 8](#). And they said, "We caught her in the very act." And they threw her down in front of Jesus and interrupted His teaching. And Jesus did not deal with her sin immediately; He dealt with it, but He dealt with her accusers sin first and then soon all of those guys were gone. All of those religious leaders left and then Jesus said to the woman, "Where are all your accusers? Is there no one to accuse you?" She did not know what in the world this was all about, because Jesus had the power to drive these guys off. She must have wondered what He was going to do to her. She said, "No one, there is no man left to accuse me here." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn thee. Go and sin no more" (cf. [John 8:10](#)). This is an example of the truth and love beautifully combined in the life of Jesus. And the Bible teaches us and conforms us into His image, so that it will be a part of our lives too.

And what will be the result? In [verses 15 and 16](#), the body will then be coordinated with the head. This is the image of the body as we spoke about last week. And when these things become the marks of the body of Christ, individual Christians all putting our lives together with these things built in, then our thinking, our actions and our movements are going to be in line with the Head. Now when the Head says, "Go do this" or "go left here" or "go do this over here," we are already aligned with Him. Otherwise, we are going to have this separation between what the Head is like, Jesus, and what the body is like, us. And if separated, we are going to have this very spastic thing that is not going to be effective at all. And I do not use that in a derogatory means.

And so when these things mark our lives, then we are working in perfect coordination with the Head. And that is when we are working in coordination with one another because we are all on the same page.

Let's pray.

Thank you, Lord, for this passage and the truth that is found there. How we need it. And I pray, Lord, that You would use it to encourage all who lead in Your body. Concerning Your emphases and Your priorities, Lord, there are so many pressures to become so many other things today. And we pray, Lord, for the grace to just settle on these things that You have chosen to honor and bless. These things alone produce maturity in Your people and something that is in good coordination with You and Your headship in our lives.

Servant Leadership – Lesson 22
Equipping, Edifying, Protecting by Damian Kyle

14

Lord, I pray for all of us as individual members of Your body. May these things shape our expectations concerning what the local church is to be. And we pray for what is to be happening within the local church and just what it is that You are wanting to produce within each and everyone of our lives also. We commit it to You and the continued work of Your Holy Spirit. And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

BY

Calvary Chapel Outreach Fellowship

Lesson 23

The Joy of Servanthood

By

Damian Kyle

Calvary Chapel Modesto

Brought to you by:

The Blue Letter Bible Institute

www.blbi.org

A ministry of:

The Blue Letter Bible

www.blueletterbible.org

We are in the book of Philippians. In order to understand this letter, I think perhaps as much as with any letter in the New Testament that Paul writes, we do need to know a little bit about the history of this church and the relationship that he has with the people. The birthing of the church in Philippi is recorded in [Acts 16](#), as the apostle Paul is on his second missionary journey and he is making his way across what is known today as Turkey. As he makes his way, Paul attempts to go into the area known as Asia (not the Orient that we think of as Asia today) but Asia as defined in the Mediterranean—which would be southwestern Turkey. He tries to go down into that region, and it would appear that he tried to cross the Aegean Sea to make his way to Corinth, and then on to Athens. Paul wanted to go into that southern portion of Greece, but the Holy Spirit stopped him from being able to do it. So they (Paul, Silas, and Timothy) go up into the northwestern section of Turkey and as they are waiting there, they receive a vision of a man from Macedonia—which is in northern Greece. This man calls out to them: “Come over and help us” (cf. [Acts 16:9](#)). And Paul realizes that they now have the instruction from the Holy Spirit by this vision that they are to go into the area of Macedonia. And so they make their way there; and then ultimately, they go into a city called Philippi.

When they arrive in Philippi, they find that there is no synagogue. Although it was in Greece, Philippi was a colony and it was a Roman city. For a city to be called a “colony” in the Roman Empire, it means that this was a place where the great generals, the military leaders, and the great officials retired. And basically, these cities that were colonies were just a little bit of Rome, but they were far away from Rome. So, it was a city heavily influenced by gentiles in terms of its tone. And when Paul comes into that city as a Christian Jew, he finds that there is no synagogue. This is interesting even for a gentile part of the world because it was a requirement for the Jews, in any city where there were at least 10 adult Jewish males, to build a synagogue. So here you have a city in which there was virtually no Jewish presence; it was almost purely a gentile city.

So, having no synagogue, Paul went with those who were traveling with him (Silas and Timothy) down to the riverside. I do not know if the worship song has anything to do with this, but they go down by the river. When the Jews did not have a synagogue, very often they would go to a beautiful place in nature that spoke of God, a place that spoke of His creation. Water was a favorite place because of the imagery, in terms of God giving the Jews water from the rock and supplying their need. And down by the river there is a group of Jewish women meeting and there is a woman by the name of Lydia who is a seller of purple. This would have meant that she was dealing with something comparable to diamonds, in the ancient world, because it was something very precious and very valuable to wear purple at that time. The cloth was a royal purple color because of an insect, a worm that had to be squished in order to produce that color. It was very, very rare. So, Lydia had dealt in this kind of dye and the shell fish that it came from and all. And the Lord opened up her heart to the things of the gospel. And thus began the first reported convert in establishing the first church in the history of Europe. This was the beginning of the church in Philippi and it is spoken of in [Acts 16](#).

Paul then comes in and begins to preach the word of God in Philippi and a very strong church is established there, as the Holy Spirit works through them confirming the gospel. But it was not without its difficulties. As Paul was preaching the gospel, there was a demon-possessed girl who brought tremendous wealth to her owners by fortune telling and this kind of thing. She was following Paul around for a few days and she said, “Listen to these men. They are servants of the Most High God and they tell us the way of salvation” (cf. [Acts 16:17](#)).

After a few days, we are told in the words of [Acts 16:18](#), the apostle Paul was greatly displeased. He did not need, nor did God need, the advertising of the devil for the fact that they were carrying the truth. This was simply muddying the waters and so he turns to the girl and he casts the demon out of her. Well, that represented a tremendous loss of income for her owners. And they got upset and raised a big riot in the city saying, “These men, being Jews, come into this gentile city and they are teaching things that ought not to be taught here” (cf. [Acts 16:20-21](#)). And there was a riot and Paul and Silas were arrested. Then they were beaten with many stripes and thrown into the heart of the prison in Philippi. As they are in the heart of that prison in stocks, badly beaten, what did Paul and Silas do at night? They began to sing songs to the Lord, which got the attention of all of the prisoners. Paul and Silas were just praising the Lord and He produced an earthquake. Then all of the cells were opened up, and ultimately, the owner or overseer of the prison and his whole family ended up being saved.

Then the Roman governors over the city sent a message the next day and said: “Paul you are free to go now.” In essence, Paul said: “I am not leaving. I am a Roman citizen, who you publically beat.” No Roman citizen was ever to be beaten without a trial. He said, “You have publically humiliated me and my witness before the whole city. I will not leave this jail until you officials come here and ask me to leave” (cf. [Acts 16:37](#)). Which the officials did, and then Paul left. He went to the church and made sure that they were established and strong, and then he moved on in that second missionary journey to the next city.

So this is the history that Paul had with the church at Corinth. They were very close in their relationship with one another because of the history they had together.

Now the theme of the book of Philippians is a theme of joy. That word “joy” is used nineteen times in the book. The reason for the joy in our life and in Paul’s life is recorded forty times in Philippians and that is the name of “the Lord Jesus.” It is used forty times in the book and He is the source of our joy. And joy is superior to happiness because happiness—I am not putting happiness down, I am all for it—but it is inferior in its quality, when compared to joy. Happiness has its basis in our physical circumstances. We are happy when everything is happening very nicely in our physical circumstances. But when things kind of become messy, then our happiness goes. Joy is something deeper because it has its basis in Christ. It has its basis in what God has done for us and what God thinks of us and the promises God has made to us. And it is because those things never change, that the source of our joy never changes.

Let's say that you are doing your taxes and you have done the quick thing and you are going to get a return of eight hundred dollars coming back. Wow! What you could do with eight hundred dollars! And here you are, happy as can be; and then, as you are driving home from picking up your tax return, you start to hear a knock in the engine of your car. And all of a sudden you have this sneaking suspicion that it is going to cost about twelve hundred dollars to fix that knocking. You were so happy five minutes before and now the happiness is gone. This is tied to circumstances and it happens all day every day in our lives. But joy is founded in Christ and He does not change. The source of our joy is always there. That is the reason for the theme of Philippians and it is one of Paul's prison epistles. He writes this epistle from a prison in Rome. He writes this letter that is full of joy, even though he is unjustly accused and he has been sitting in a Roman prison. He can do this because his source is joy and what he lives for is joy and not happiness. He is able to have joy even in circumstances that are so unfair.

Now, Paul writes this letter for a couple of reasons. One of them is to just say, "thank you" to the Philippians for a gift that they had sent to him. Paul has probably been in this Roman prison for as long as two years. At sometime during that two-year period, the believers at the church in Corinth (which Paul founded) discovered that Paul was in prison and that he must have been miserable. In the ancient prisons, they did not necessarily feed the prisoner three square meals a day. Often times in those prisons they incarcerated you, and it was up to your families to keep you fed and keep you clothed. So this church sent an offering to Paul to make sure that his needs would be met. And that meant a lot to Paul. So what he is doing in this letter is writing them a thank-you note.

The Bible says in [1 Corinthians 13](#) that agape love is "well mannered;" and so, Paul has good manners and he is writing a thank-you note to the believers at Philippi. Another reason for writing this letter is that false teachers had crept into the church and they were trying to draw people into legalism, and Paul is going to head those guys off at the pass. And a third reason is that there was a division that started to develop in the church at Corinth. There are two women who are having a fight over something—I am sure quite noble—and they have a position of significance there within the church in terms of their ministry. This disagreement is threatening to spill over to others within that church, who are going to start taking sides—which is dangerous for the church. So Paul wants to address these things in his writing.

In these ancient letters there were four characteristics of the opening. Number one, the letter writer would always identify himself at the beginning of the letter. When we write letters today we sign, "sincerely yours," and we identify ourselves at the end of the letter. They were more practical in the early days because they wrote everything on scrolls; and so, if they had a lengthy letter they had to unroll the scroll all the way to the end, in order to find out who in the world had sent the letter. Then they would have to roll it all the way back, in order to begin reading the thing. So, they identified themselves at the beginning of the letter. Then they would identify who they were writing the letter to, and they would greet who they were writing the letter to and then they would typically begin their letters with some kind of thanksgiving. So Paul, by the Spirit of God, follows that same model.

Notice he begins here in [Philippians 1:1](#), as the writer of the letter—“Paul and Timothy.” Now Timothy is with Paul and they would have known Timothy in Philippi because, by the time Paul goes to Philippi, he had already had a split with Barnabus. Barnabus has gone his way with John Mark, and Paul is now continuing his missionary journey with Silas. And on the way to Philippi, Timothy joins them. So, they would have been familiar with Timothy, but Paul is the writer of the letter. Later on in the book we are going to see where Paul repeats over and over again: “I, I, I.” In other words, this is not the result of some combined effort that both he and Timothy have put together. Timothy just happens to be with him. Paul introduces Timothy, who was saved under the ministry of Paul, and he was with Paul quite a bit in his service to the Lord. But Paul is the writer of the epistle.

Now you can buy commentaries that will make you crazy on different things. There are different commentaries who dispute whether Paul is the author of this letter. Nobody else could be the author of this letter! I mean, the Holy Spirit inspired it, but the very first word in the entire letter is “Paul.” This kind of reminds me of the person who said, “You know when you ain’t got an education you gots to use your brains!” Paul has written this letter and Timothy is with him. And they describe themselves as, “bondservants of Jesus Christ” ([Philippians 1:1](#)).

Now this is interesting because there are only four letters in the New Testament where Paul does not introduce himself as an apostle, at the beginning. When he writes to everybody else it is: “Paul, an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ.” This is because Paul would typically be writing to a church and he would be correcting something that was being done incorrectly in that church. And so, he would identify himself as an apostle in order to establish his authority for correcting the problem in the church. But to First and Second Thessalonians, the letter to Philemon, and then in this letter to the Philippians, Paul does not identify himself as an apostle. This is because he knows he has a relationship with these people, and he just comes to them as “Paul.” The established relationship means something to both of them, and Paul knows that they will take what he has to say seriously.

So, Paul writes to them describing himself and Timothy as bondservants of Jesus Christ. Now the word “bondservant” has its Old Testament origin in [Exodus 21](#). Here is how that would work. Let’s say both you and I are Jews and let’s say that I owed you a fair amount of money that I had no hope of being able to repay. What I could do is sell myself to become your slave. But a Jew could only be your personal slave or your servant for a maximum of six years, and on the seventh year that person was required, by the law of Moses, to free the slave. And those six years of service would cover the debt.

But let’s say that I have been your servant for six years and we are coming up on the release date, and you have been the greatest master that a servant could ever know. I have come to love you and appreciate you and I think to myself: “I do not want to stop serving this family or serving this man. I know that if I go out into the world I will never find a circumstance superior to the one that I have here. I love this family, I love this man and I want to be a servant on my own free will.” And I make the decision that I want to be their

personal servant for life. If I went to my master and I communicated that to him, then he would take me down to the gate of the city. The gate would have a wooden frame where all of the leading men in the city would gather as witnesses. And then, they would take my earlobe and put it up against the wood and take an awl and drive it through my earlobe into the wood, piercing my ear. That would now be a sign that I am a *doulos*—that is the word in the Greek here. I am now a bondservant.

As a bondservant I have first of all, out of a motivation of love for my master, made a commitment of my own free will to become his servant for life. There are three characteristics of a bondservant and Paul carries that imagery over into his relationship with the Lord. I love my Master, and of my own free will I chose to become His servant for the rest of my life. That is what a bondservant was and Paul proudly wore that Old Testament title for defining his position, in terms of his service to the Lord. There were no business cards handed out identifying him as, “the Grand Poobah of missionary journeys,” or that kind of thing. He just identified himself as, “a bondservant of Jesus Christ.”

Now notice what he writes: “To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi.” This word “saints” is a very important one to understand. What Roman Catholicism has done to the term “saint,” by and large in the Americas including the United States, is nothing less than criminal—by biblical standards. To be a saint, the word comes from the Greek word *hagios* and it means “to be holy.” To be a saint is to be holy, and to be holy is to be something that was set apart from the world specifically for God’s use. That is what made something holy, and by virtue of the fact that it was set aside for God’s use, made it different from everything else in the world. And that is what a saint is. Our lives were once used for every kind of ungodly thing by our own choosing, prior to coming to know the Lord. But when we came to know the Lord, we said, “God, what is left of my life, I am giving to you to be used for your purposes.” And when we gave ourselves to the Lord we became saints.

Now in Roman Catholicism, in order to become a saint, you have to die physically. And sainthood is a very specialized segment of people. We tend to think that if someone one were to come up to us and say, “Are you a saint?” I would laugh and say that “I am doing my best, but I would not call myself a saint.” But every Christian could make a card to hand out with his name and title. My card would read: “Saint Damian,” and it would be biblically accurate because every one of us, who knows the Lord Jesus, is a saint. However, in Roman Catholicism, to become a saint they have a procedure when a person dies. They have the devil’s advocate and then they have an advocate that tries to lay the case for the fact that this person ought to be deemed a saint. They have this great debate that goes on once a person dies. Aren’t you glad as Christians that God made it easier for us to become saints?

The Catholics would lay a case that a certain person ought to be named a saint. And as part of that process, there had to be at least one miracle that had been done in the name of the deceased. That miracle had to be verified as being true; and then you would have another person called the devil’s advocate, who would come on the scene and he would

try to lay the case for why this person should not be named a saint. If the advocate for sainthood won the case, then the person would be deemed a saint. Obviously, that turns sainthood into this very small and select group of people.

But notice the definition of a saint in the next three words of [Philippians 1:1](#), “in Christ Jesus.” When we give our lives to the Lord and we trust in Him for the forgiveness of our sins, there is nothing else in all of life that we can do to please the heart of the Father more than to trust in His Son. And when we do trust in Christ, God’s Holy Spirit comes into our lives and our life becomes different now from every other life in the world. Whether anybody recognizes us from a religious institution or not, in God’s eyes, what our life is about now is entirely different from what it once was about and what the world is about today. So, every single one of us who knows the Lord is a saint.

And then Paul says, “for the saints who are in Philippi with the bishops and the deacons.” The church at Philippi is prospering. They have bishops and they have deacons. This is a church that is not only growing, but it has a need for some sanctified organization. The deacons were leaders in the early church who took care of the physical things. They were very spiritual in what they did to vacuum and get the church ready and make sure the lights were changed and make sure the temperature was right. This was a very spiritual calling of God on a person’s life. And so, that is what the deacons did and the elders or the bishops took care of other spiritual needs in the church. They were giving themselves to study of the Word and prayer. So Paul greets them also there. And here is his greeting: “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Some of you are old veterans of studying this passage and you may think: “Oh no, is he going to do that old grace and peace thing?” Yes, I am. Look at Paul as he writes all of these letters and he begins them with “grace and peace,” “grace and peace,” “grace and peace.” And you may be thinking: “Can’t the Holy Spirit come up with some kind of a new greeting other than this?” And He does not and it is by design. I am convinced that He wants us to hear this thing over and over again, until it is not only driven deep into our lives, but each time that it has been driven into our lives, we would be reminded of the importance of this.

When the Greeks (the gentiles) would greet one another, it was with the word *karis* which means, “grace.” It means “undeserved favor.” So, if I were to see you in a city like Philippi and you are a gentile and I am a gentile, I would say to you “*karis*” and I would be saying: “Grace to you” or “May you have a better day than you deserve” or “May you have a gracious day.” And that is how they would greet one another and how they would say goodbye to one another.

Now the Jews had another word to greet one another with, and they still use it to this day. When you greet someone in Israel or any Jewish person, you would say the word “*shalom*,”—peace. And then when you go to say goodbye, you would say, “*shalom*” again. You may think: “This is a hello and a goodbye with them? Yes, it is. And *shalom* just means “peace.” So Paul takes the great greeting of the gentiles and he takes the great single greeting of the Jews and he unites them in his greeting, but the order is significant.

Never ever does Paul, by the Holy Spirit, reverse the order of grace and peace. It is always grace first and then peace. Never is it reversed because it is only as a person knows the grace of God, that they can then know the peace of God.

If I have a relationship with God that is based on my works, then I have forgotten about the fact that He deals with me every single day on the basis of grace. Every single day He gives me a day that is better than I deserve. This is to say nothing of eternity. So, when Paul speaks concerning the recognition that this is God's heart towards me, and when I recognize it is not based upon works, what happens? Jack LeLaine gets to crank up the mighty Wurlitzer, we get to inhale deeply, exhale, and relax—peace! There is no peace apart from grace because then I would have to work my way to heaven. And so, Paul and the Holy Spirit are just driving it home over and over again. This is all about grace and that is why you can have peace in your relationship with God.

For those of you who think you know all about this and you have heard this grace and peace wrap before, just stop and think about how we go along in our Christian life and then we sin. We miss the mark and fall short in a particular situation, and we are conscious of it. We think: “Boy did I fail! That conversation or that evening would be completely different if I had a chance to do it over again.” And sometimes we begin to think: “Oh no, I cannot go to God in prayer. I have to whip myself for the next three days and then maybe I can go to prayer; and then maybe the peace can be restored. I hope I can get back to God the way that I had before I sinned.” We often put ourselves through this routine and that is when we have a “works mentality.” That is when the relationship is based upon works rather than upon grace, and then our peace is completely gone.

So, God knows how often we need to be reminded about His grace. God knew he was getting a project when He got us, and He knew that we were going to need grace every single day. That is what this relationship is based on, the grace of God. And because of His grace, we can have peace.

Notice in [Philippians 1:2](#) where this grace and peace comes from—“from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Translation—in other words God is saying—“This is the way I want it to be.” So when you are “strong in the grace,” as Peter wrote, then you are strong in the fact that God deals with you in this relationship on the basis of grace. You are not reading something into it that God does not want you to understand about Him. He is the one who greets us in this way: “grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

It is a beautiful thing too, when the Lord Jesus Christ is coupled with God our Father, as a beautiful evidence of His deity and the grace that comes equally from them. If you put anybody else's name in there: “Grace and peace from God our Father and Damian Kyle,” you would say: “Wow, did we fall off the cliff at the end of that verse or what?” Was that a drop! Did you feel that drop? When the verse says, “from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” it speaks of equality.

Then Paul heads into his thanksgiving. He said, “I thank my God upon every remembrance of you.” That is the relationship that he has with this church. It was beautiful, but it was not as if no one had ever failed in this relationship that they had with each other. When Paul stopped to think about them, which is later in life and he is sitting in this prison, he said: “I just want you to know I thank my God upon every remembrance of you.” Isn’t that great? This relationship and this church gave the apostle Paul good memories. We look at the apostle Paul and think of him as a great strong apostle and that he probably did not need the encouragement of other people. He could probably just run through brick walls for God and all of this stuff and it did not matter what anybody thought about him. But it did matter to Paul, and this church had a special place in his heart. “I thank my God upon every remembrance of you,” he said.

There are people of whom I have had the privilege of officiating at their coronation service. They had gone on to be with the Lord and it would come to my remembrance how I missed them. I missed them terribly, and with that loss, part of my heart was being cut off from this world and I was being further planted, day by day, into the world to come. But some of those people meant so much to me and I never got the chance to say anything to them before they departed. Some of them never knew how much I cared in my heart concerning them and now they are gone. It is a beautiful thing to be able to say that about a group of God’s people. Paul says, “I thank my God upon every remembrance of you” ([Philippians 1:3](#)).

I feel that way concerning the people of this church. I love the staff here and I hope they know it. It is a great staff and we love being here and serving the Lord together. And I walk through this big empty room during the week and I cannot wait until the people of our congregation are back here again. All through the week we are able to say, “Thank You, Lord. Thank You for their lives and for what You are doing.” The Lord works together in all of us this way in the body of Christ.

Now notice that Paul is very strict in his theology and I think he is very careful. He does not want anyone lifted up in pride, so he does not say: “I want to thank you for all the good things you have done and for the memories you have given me.” Notice who he thanks; He thanks God. The apostle Paul knew what was true of the people in Philippi, even in that church among Christians, would be true of him. The only reason we can ever say thanks for any contacts any of us has had with our life is because God has done something to change us and to make us have good memories. And the Lord has done that. Aren’t you thankful for what He has changed us from and what He is changing us into every day, and how faithful He is to that work in us? To God be the glory, great things He has done in our lives—to think that this could be possible even of us!

Paul says, “always in every prayer of mine making requests for you all with joy.” He said, “I am so thankful for you that I talk to God about you all of the time in prayer. And I am thankful for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now” (cf. [Philippians 1:3-5](#)). And of course they had been involved with Paul’s ministry financially, but they were also being faithful to the gospel, to preach the true gospel. And

Paul appreciated that about the church at Philippi. They had stayed faithful all the way through from the first day until now.

And then [verse six](#) is one of these great mountain top verses in the New Testament: “being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete *it* until the day of Jesus Christ.” You know when God saved you and me, He saved a project. He calls us a “work.” But He calls us a good work that He is doing in our lives. And God declares, “what He has begun”—we think that we began something—what He has begun in our lives, He said: “I want you to be confident of this, I am going to bring it to completion.” And what is the good work that He is going to bring to completion? Christ-likeness. Day by day, He makes us a bit more like the Lord Jesus in how we think and how we speak and act. Paul comes in and says, “God is going to be faithful to stay with us until the day that the Lord returns and takes us home to be with Him. And then we will be in our perfect body and we will be just like Him, in terms of our nature; we will be divine like He is. But then we will be like Christ for eternity.

And so Paul declares here that this is something we are to be confident in—He will complete it. I think we need to know that. Do you ever get impatient with yourself? “Man, when am I going to learn that? Why am I still stumbling over that silly thing in my life that is so unlike Christ? I take two steps forward and one step back. Can’t it be forty steps forward and no steps back?” And we can just think we will never be like Him because growing in Christ-likeness is going so slowly. And then the Lord comes in and says, “No, you need to be confident that what God begins He finishes.” He works every single day in our lives to help us to be more like the Lord and He will be faithful to do that all the way till the Lord returns.

God never starts something and then stops it. Aren’t you glad about that? It drives me crazy not to finish something. Now that may be a characteristic of your life and it doesn’t mean that you are worse than me, it just means that we are probably not going to work well together. It drives me crazy. I am not saying that it drives the Lord crazy, but there is that certain kind of person who begins something, gets it eighty percent done, and then stops—loses interest. And then you look back on a year’s worth of their work and there are all of these things that still have remaining items for closure on them. That kind of thing drives me crazy! I have a proof text to reassure myself that I am on firm ground here with God. What He begins He finishes. That is the way He is. God does not begin something and then forget about it or say, “No, that’s far enough.” He brings it to completion.

In [Philippians 1:7](#) Paul said, “Just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace.” And Paul is so thankful that they have stood with him in this ministry and it meant a lot to Paul that they had given financially toward him. It was not so much the money, as it was just that he sensed he was not in this ministry alone—somebody else gets it. Others were supportive of what he was doing.

Then Paul said in verse eight, “For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ.” (cf. [Philippians 1:8](#)). Paul was just saying that God is his witness of how much he loved them and how much he longed to be with them. We think of Paul as this great theologian and this great mind and this great valiant force of the faith, but he also had such a heart of love.

And then he begins to speak to them regarding what he prayed for them. “And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more.” Well, here is a church that is tremendous in terms of love and Paul said: “I pray all of the time that your love will abound more and more.” As long as Christ is the standard for love (and He is the standard for love) there is always going to be room for growing in that area in our Christian life. Then he defines this love a little bit. “This I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and discernment.” Sometimes what we think that love means never saying ‘no’ to another person or you are unloving.

I remember when we were at the other church location there was a woman who came to the church and she was a little odd, to be sure. One Sunday morning she sat right up in the front row and she took out an electric razor and began to shave herself there in the front row. But God blinded me to it. It would have been a fair distraction to me, as I am easily distracted. So she was an odd kind of a character, but what she did then, following the services, is wait until someone left their purse in the fellowship hall in order to go into the restroom—we were smaller then and a little more trusting. And when the owner of the purse was out of sight, this odd lady would go over and she would steal the wallet from it. Well, we caught her doing that and I went over and I said, “Listen, if I do not get to steal from these people, nobody gets to steal from them.” It was something to that effect because I realized I had to have a sense of humor.

But I told this lady that these people in the church did not come here to become victims of what she was doing. I said, “You cannot come here and do this. We are shepherds here and we are going to protect this flock.” She said, “Well, you call yourself a loving church. I am going to go find a church that is loving.” And she threw this whole guilt trip back in my face and I thought that she ought to be on television. Anyway, we never saw her again. But she had the idea that love is always saying “yes” to any whim or anything that anybody asks of them. But Paul says that “love has an element of knowledge and an element of discernment” (cf. [Philippians 1:9](#)). With that knowledge, true *agape* love always does what is best for the other person. That is true love. Sometimes that means saying “no.” Sometimes that is not the easiest way; it can be the hardest way.

So, love can be hard. Paul wrote to the church at Thessalonica: “If a man will not work [not cannot work] then he shall not eat” (cf. [2 Thessalonians 3:10](#)). In other words, we are not going to reinforce idleness and laziness in the body of Christ. Well, that was very loving but it was very strong and firm.

So what is the definition of what love looks like in another person’s life? We go to the word of God and the knowledge of the word of God. What does the word say that we ought to do in this situation? That is how I can know what true love is. And so it is to

involve more knowledge and then also discernment. It looks below the surface of the situation to examine what is really happening. It looks at what is really at the core of what is happening in a situation and not just what is visible on the surface. We are to examine how the word of God applies to it; and as I do what God says, then I know that I can be a really loving person.

I have a loved-one in my family, who for years was quite entrenched in the drug culture, and he has since come to know the Lord and loves the Lord; but all through those years he worked at minimum wage jobs. And once he came to know the Lord, he was thankful for that work history. He said that if he had had any more money, then he would have killed himself with the drugs. But he would always come to us for money and that guy had more stories! Some of you who come from that background know the kind of stories that you can come up with in order to get money. And we heard quite a few stories throughout the years. There was always a pressure in the tale that: “If this does not happen, then they are going to do this to me, and this thing will happen, and then I will lose this.” Sometimes it was the hardest thing in the world to say, “I cannot run the risk of giving you the twenty dollars. It will kill you. I cannot live with that.” And I had to know that it was the loving thing to do.

Paul prayed: “That you may approve the things that are excellent.” In other words, Paul prayed that excellence would be what they would aim for in their Christian lives. That was the standard that the apostle Paul set for his own life, and not just doing what is lawful, not just what is expedient. But he aspired to what is good and what is best. He said that these are the things that he wanted to go after. He said that he did not want just an average kind of Christian life. Paul said to the believers at Philippi, “Listen, do not settle for eighty percent, but go for excellence in your life.” We are to test all things that we allow in our lives. Is it excellent? If it is not excellent then we are not to waste our life on anything less. Sometimes we have to be in prison in order to recognize how valuable life is.

We can go to a hospital and get checked in and all of a sudden we realize how valuable a day is and how valuable a week is. And I can realize that I am just frittering away my life by the week, and by the month, and that is when I realize how valuable each day is. I want to live for excellence in my Christian life. Paul realized this and he also prayed: “that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ” ([Philippians 1:10](#)).

Sincere is from the Latin word *sin cero*, which means “without wax.” The word that is used in the Greek language that it refers to means, “to be sun-tested.” They had these statues in the ancient world and when someone had worked on marble for years sculpturing something, all of a sudden while tapping away with some finishing touches he could hit a weak spot in the rock and a crack would go up the entire statue or a nose falls off. What in the world was he going to do? Nobody would buy this statue now! So, what he would do is take some of the granules from the marble and mix it with wax and he would put it into the crack and then he would sell it because nobody could see the flaw. But you know it gets hot in the Mediterranean. And so, summer would come and the heat would rise to 105 degrees, and all of a sudden the wax would begin to run out

of that opening and the buyer would realize that he bought a statue that was not sincere—it had wax.

In other words, Paul is telling us, as Christians, to be without wax or without hypocrisy. What people see in us needs to be what we really are. In the heat of life, we will not be exposed as something other than what we have presented ourselves to be. And so, that is the call to holiness without offense. Again, he is speaking of holiness and that our lives would not offend others. That word “sincere” speaks of what we are inside, and “without offense” means that we are not offending people or living our personal life in a way that is stumbling people outwardly. Paul exhorts us, Christians, “to be holy until the day of Christ” ([Philippians 1:10](#)).

[Verse 11](#) says, “being filled with the fruits of righteousness which *are* by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.” We live in this agricultural area which is beautiful in July and August. We enjoy driving around out through the orchards, just past the subdivisions, where we can smell those peaches. God bless the Lord for making peaches! That is the greatest smell in late summer when it is just hot and sticky. But they irrigate those fields and there is a coolness coming off of it in the orchards, and then you can smell those peaches! And you can see these trees that are propped up with these props—and I am sure there is a specific name for them. But the branches are propped up because they are so laden with fruit.

Paul was speaking to the Philippians with that kind of agrarian background and he related to them how their lives must also bear righteousness, goodness, and ripeness. Our lives should manifest fruit in a way that a tree just needs some help to hold up the abundance of fruit. And that was his prayer for this church. It was a beautiful prayer. You could not go wrong if someone asked what they could pray for you and you said, “Well, pray the Philippians chapter one prayer for me.” But there is one other prayer that I personally like even a little more than this one and that is the prayer in Colossians. They are all beautiful prayers, inspired by the Holy Spirit and penned by the apostle Paul.

Grace and peace be with you.

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

BY

Calvary Chapel Outreach Fellowship

Lesson 24

The Supremacy of Love

By

Wayne Taylor

Calvary Fellowship in Seattle/Mountlake Terrace, Washington

Brought to you by:

The Blue Letter Bible Institute

www.blbi.org

A ministry of:

The Blue Letter Bible

www.blueletterbible.org

Servant Leadership – Lesson 24
The Supremacy of Love by Wayne Taylor

1

We are reading [John 13:18-35](#) (NKJV).

18 “I do not speak concerning all of you. I know whom I have chosen; but that the Scripture may be fulfilled, ‘He who eats bread with Me has lifted up his heel against Me.’

19 “Now I tell you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe that I am He.

20 “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me.”

21 When Jesus had said these things, He was troubled in spirit, and testified and said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me.”

22 Then the disciples looked at one another, perplexed about whom He spoke.

23 Now there was leaning on Jesus’ bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved.

24 Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask who it was of whom He spoke.

25 Then, leaning back on Jesus’ breast, he said to Him, “Lord, who is it?”

26 Jesus answered, “It is he to whom I shall give a piece of bread when I have dipped it.” And having dipped the bread, He gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon.

27 Now after the piece of bread, Satan entered him. Then Jesus said to him, “What you do, do quickly.”

28 But no one at the table knew for what reason He said this to him.

29 For some thought, because Judas had the money box, that Jesus had said to him, “Buy those things we need for the feast,” or that he should give something to the poor.

30 Having received the piece of bread, he then went out immediately. And it was night.

31 So, when he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man is glorified, and God is glorified in Him.

32 “If God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and glorify Him immediately.

33 “Little children, I shall be with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come,’ so now I say to you.

34 “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

35 “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:18–35, NKJV)

The love of Jesus is that supreme mark of being His disciple. His love flowing out of our lives, was what He meant when He said, “By this all men shall know that you are My disciples.” Christ’s love is that mark of genuineness of servanthood. It is interesting He did not say, “Good sermons are the mark of My servant.” We should be encouraged about that. He did not even say that people would know us by our holiness, faith, or even our Scripture knowledge—as important and vital as those things are. “The greatest of these is love,” His Word tells us ([1 Corinthians](#)

[13:13](#)). That is the supreme mark of Christ's servant. Is that the chief characteristic of my life and of your life?

When I think of marks and being marked, I think of my grandpa who owned a ranch in Wyoming. He raised all kinds of great animals, like pigs, chickens, and cattle. When I was a boy we would go over and visit the ranch. I got to see him do all kinds of cool things to these animals, like chopping off the chickens' heads. I loved that. That was so great because then the chicken would run around without a head, just bumping into everything. It was cool to see. Watching my grandfather brand the cattle was another very interesting sight. He would take this red-hot iron and press it upon the hide of the cow. The cow's flesh would sizzle and even smoke. Even those big strong bulls would whence and pull back in pain. I enjoyed watching that. You know how boys are—they love that stuff. But even though that brand hurt the cow, it was so beneficial to the cow so that everyone for miles around knew that those cattle belonged to my grandfather, because they had this brand on their flesh. I thought it was a beautiful brand. It was a big "T" for Taylor. It was great.

The Lord Jesus Christ has put His mark on us. It is His love that He has placed upon our hearts and upon our lives. And by this people know that we are His servants. How are they going to know? We can say whatever we want about how they are going to know but this is what Jesus said. This is what He said would be that supreme mark, and He wants everyone to see it.

The truth is that loving with His love can be painful, right? It can be hard. Sometimes human sheep will bite the hand that feeds them. Those you are trying to love will hurt you. It can be difficult.

We look at Jesus' life and how He was crucified. Never was greater love shown, but never was greater pain experienced than in His love. And here in [John 13:21](#), on the night before the cross, it says, "Jesus became troubled in spirit." The word "troubled" means stirred with anguish. And why was He so troubled? He said, "Because one of you will betray Me." That really saddened the Lord. It troubled His spirit.

In [verse 18](#) He quotes the prophecy about this from [Psalm 41:9](#). The full verse really gives us an impact. It says,

Even my own close friend, in whom I trusted, who ate my bread,
has lifted up his heel against me.

In other words, my close friend turned on me and kicked me. It is one thing to be attacked by an enemy; it is another thing to be betrayed and attacked by a close friend. That hurts very deeply. It can cut and crush your heart.

Maybe you have been betrayed by someone who you thought was a friend or a loved one. That hurts so deeply. Perhaps someone has undermined you, lied about you, or stabbed you in the back, who you thought was a strong supporter. Now, I am sure it has happened to most of us to one degree or another. If it has not, it will. It is just one of those guaranteed things.

But the question is: how do I react? How do I respond when I have been hurt, betrayed, or attacked? That is when it is the hardest to love. Do I harden my heart? I have been hurt so I want to harden my heart. Or do I become calloused and negative? If so, then God's love is choked out. Do I become bitter, close my heart, or hold on to ill feelings? It is easy to do that, isn't it? It is very natural, but it is not supernatural.

Jesus said, “As I have loved you, even so, love one another” ([John 13:34](#)). It is not a natural love. It is a supernatural love. If we become bitter, if we harden ourselves, if we get callused or cynical, even as pastors, then God’s love is choked out. It cannot flow. So the Lord wants me to run to Him. Only with His love can my heart be strong and yet tender at the same time. How do you keep a tender heart in this world? It is really easy to see how people get hardened in this world and how people get cynical or closed off. But with Christ, we cannot afford to do that because He has called us to love. We can keep a tender heart and yet be strong through the power of His love as He heals us.

A couple years ago, I had an experience where someone close to me in the ministry betrayed me and sinned against me. Afterwards, this person was very sorry and appeared to be repentant. But I was so hurt, I did not trust him anymore. I did not want to forgive him. I just wanted to cut him off because I had been grieved. I was angry. One day I was telling this person, “Just leave me alone.” And he said he would, but on one condition—“If you will call Pastor Chuck Smith and ask him what you should do. I have called him and talked to him and he told me he wants you to call him.” I was betrayed again! I thought, “No, I am sure he will agree with me.”

So I called Chuck and told him my side of the story. He was sympathetic to a degree, but he began to ask questions about this person’s repentance. I had to admit the person appeared repentant. He seemed sorry. But I said, “Chuck I do not believe him. He is a deceiver.” Chuck said, “He seems very sincere to me.” “Yeah, Chuck, but you do not know him like I do. You see, I love him, Chuck, but I do not trust him anymore.” And he said, “Wayne, I think you are bitter.” I said, “No, I am not bitter. I am just hurt.” He said, “You are hurt and you are bitter about it.” It was not funny at the time, though. He said, “I think you need to forgive.” And I said, “Chuck, I think I need to cut him off.” He said, “Well, Wayne, it sounds like your mind is made up. So I have to go now.” It seemed kind of abrupt to me. I said, “Well, will you at least pray for me before you hang up?” “Sure.” And so we prayed. Chuck prayed, “Lord, thank You for loving us so much. And thank You that You do not love us like Wayne says that he loves this guy.” He actually said that. I thought, “Are you praying to Him or me?” But he prayed and said, “Thank You that You are so merciful. And yet, when we ask forgiveness, You do not cut us off. You keep loving us and You restore us. Amen.” You know it really struck a note. Not a good one, but it struck a note. I told him thank you for praying for me. And I think I mentioned something about faithful are the wounds of a friend.

Through that God began to show me that there was bitterness that was choking me. It was choking my life and it had to go. The Lord asked me to fully forgive this person, to restore him, and cover that sin. Love covers. It forgives and cleanses and forgets. He said, “My love suffers long and is kind” ([1 Corinthians 13:4](#)). I am just really being honest here. I began to think about this. And honestly I told Him at one point, “Lord, I do not think I want to love like You do if this is what it is about. I mean, You died for us. I do not want to suffer long. I will suffer short maybe, but not long. This is just too much.” But He said, “Don’t you want to be like Me?” “Yes, I absolutely do.”

Then that Scripture [1 John 3:16](#) came to mind.

By this we know love, that He laid down His life for us and we
ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

Love is not just good feelings and saying sweet nothings. It is covering, forgiving, encouraging, and being the one who will reach out when it is hard.

The way Jesus deals with Judas here is so amazing. In [John 13:26](#), He tells John,

“The one who will betray Me is he to whom I shall give a piece of bread when I have dipped it.” And having dipped the bread He gave it to Judas Isacariot the son of Simon.

This is a special thing that is happening because they had a custom in that time and culture that at feasts, the host of the banquet could choose to honor one of the guests. The way he honored them is that the host would take a piece of food or bread and dip it in the sauce and then give it to them. It was kind of like making a toast today. They were toasting them in friendship and in love. I think that is what Jesus is doing here because it was not an insincere gesture on Jesus’ part. It was an awesome example of a final extension of His love to this guy who had closed himself off time and time again. Judas would more readily receive Satan and his plans and ideas, than Jesus. Judas constantly refused even though he had every opportunity just like all the other disciples. He had the same privileges that they had but he was not receptive.

I think receiving the love of Jesus every day and being sensitive to what He says is the most important thing if we are going to be men who love. They say that the same sun that melts ice also hardens dirt. The effect of Jesus’ dealings on us depends on our heart’s attitude toward Him. No matter how prominent or expansive our ministries may become, it is critical for us to keep a receptive, humble heart toward Jesus and His Word. Without that, the mark of His presence in our lives is squelched.

Judas made his final choice of whom he would serve.

Now after the piece of bread Satan entered him. Then Jesus said to him, “What you do, do quickly.”—[And notice verse 30. This is the big turn.]—Having received the piece of bread, he then went out immediately and it was night. ([John 13:27, 30](#))

To me that is spiritually descriptive of what happened here. He rejected and turned away from Jesus and His love. He was swallowed up in the darkness because he walked away from Jesus.

I love the way Peter answered the Lord in John 6. Jesus asked him, “Do you also want to go away from Me?” He said, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You alone have the words of eternal life” (cf. [John 6:67–68](#)). To whom are you going to go? To whom am I going to go? There is nowhere else to go for love than to Christ. Yet, we see that Peter too, struggled within himself. He even denied Jesus in the next verses, as Jesus said he would do.

The main hindrance to the love of Christ in my life is myself. It is my flesh, my weaknesses, and the flaws in my life.

Jesus said to the disciples, “Most assuredly I say to you, one of you will betray Me” ([John 13:21](#)). Remember, Mark’s Gospel tells us that each one of the disciples began to ask Him, “Is it I?” ([Mark 14:19](#)). Every single one of the disciples except Judas, realized, “It could be me. Is it I?”

Do I have the capacity to betray the Lord in my fallen nature? We have that capacity in our flesh, given the right temptation that appeals to our particular weakness or a trial severe enough that would come along. We have seen some guys go through some really hard times. And yet, Christ is faithful. If it were not for the grace of God, we would perhaps deny the Lord like Peter. Do we

say we are better than Peter, or James and John, the sons of thunder? They were men of temper and selfish ambition. My flesh is no better. When I choose temptation instead of Jesus I am choosing selfish love instead of His love.

God sees the private times when no one else sees, right? He sees that. When I choose anger, fear, or lust rather than obeying Christ, it is in some measure the betrayal of my allegiance to the Lord. And so when Jesus said to Peter, James, and John, “Watch and pray that you do not enter into temptation, because the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak” (cf. [Mark 14:38](#)), that is something we have to take heed to or it will choke us, right? It will choke that fire of God’s love from our life. Bitterness, jealousy, lust, anger, fear, these are like weeds that choke. They choke out God’s love from our lives. And I have noticed something about weeds. You do not have to plant them, they just grow. They are floating around in the air or something. They are just there.

Saturday I weeded our rose garden. It was covered with weeds. It is about the size of this platform. We had roses, or I thought we did, throughout the garden. I could not see one rose; the weeds were so tall. From fall to spring I had not really touched it. I did not plant any weeds, but they were all there. They had basically overcome the entire garden. So as I was going through pulling out weeds frantically and just conquering that garden because I could not even see the roses, I got cut all over. I even had a splinter on my forehead that I brought down to the retreat here. As I was washing my face I noticed I had gotten a little thorn caught in my forehead from the rosebush and I have a scar.

Spiritual weeds are already planted in your flesh, in our natural hearts. They have to be weeded. Maybe you are being plagued and defeated by these things that we mentioned. Some weed pulling has to take place. You are not going to have a beautiful, fragrant, fruitful garden without the pulling out, the mortifying of the flesh.

Now, as I weeded my rose garden, there were some weeds that had pretty little flowers on them. They are actually beautiful. I thought they were flowers, knowledgeable as I am. But I asked my wife and she said, “No, they are weeds. Pull them. It is a rose garden not a weed garden.” So I pulled them out.

I noticed there are certain things that are carnal in my life that I do not think are too bad. They are actually helpful or maybe even spiritual. We rationalize that striving and being critical can be called zeal. It is just zeal, that is all. Anger and wrath are just righteous indignation. It does accomplish the righteousness of God, no matter what James said. Fear is not unbelief; it is just practical faith. Even lust is just helping a needy sister. But a weed is a weed. We know that in our hearts because the Holy Spirit is faithful, right? He is faithful. He sees even the beginnings of your heart turning away and He begins speaking to your heart.

Several times I have heard Pastor Chuck say, “The Lord does not warn you about something that you do not need to be warned about.” When He warns us about something, it is because we need to be warned and we have to pay heed.

When we love the flesh and the world, the love of the Father is pushed out. And there is a lot of world to love, it seems like.

Now this is where the cross becomes so special, so dear really. In [John 13:31–32](#) it says,

So, when he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man is glorified, and God is glorified in Him. If God is glorified in Him,

Servant Leadership – Lesson 24
The Supremacy of Love by Wayne Taylor

6

God will also glorify Him in Himself, and glorify Him immediately.”

Look at how many times the word “glorify Him” is used. What is it talking about? It is really talking about Him going to the cross. Look at [John 12:23–24](#). It says,

But Jesus answered them saying, “The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified. Most assuredly I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone. But if it dies, it produces much fruit.”

So the cross brought glory to the Father and glory to the Son. From a human viewpoint, it looks like defeat, not glory. But we know that it accomplished the most glorious of all works—salvation and redemption. And the fruit that has come through the cross is amazing.

Only Jesus and the Father, of course, could accomplish redemption. The twelve could not do it. In [John 13:33](#) He says, “Where I am going, you cannot come. I told the Jews already that where I am going you cannot come. Now I am telling you too. Where I am going you cannot come” (paraphrased). They could not be the ones to go to the cross to die and save us.

Nor can we pastors today be saviors to people. That is not our job. We are their pastors, but not their saviors. And that is a relief. I think it is a great relief when we realize that we are not the Messiah. But we have the privilege of showing them the Messiah. And how do we do that? We show them by loving them and by loving one another. All of them will know and will see.

The cross really helps us because it is the flesh that gets in the way of that. It keeps me from being loving because it focuses on self. Sometimes we treat people like the focus is on us when really, Jesus’ focus was on ministering to them. “Whom the Lord loves, He disciplines” ([Hebrews 12:6](#)). Those stern words pierce us, don’t they?

I love Paul’s motto. He said in [Galatians 2:20](#),

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

How do we live the life where Christ is living through us? How do you do that in a practical way? It is Christ who lives through me. And the life that I now live, I live by faith. I believe, “Okay, Lord, live through me.” I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me. So I believe in Him and I just want Him to love them through me, live through me, shine through me. That has to be our motto.

Samuel Rutherford was once asked, “Isn’t taking up your cross a burden?” He said, “Yes, the cross is a burden to me like wings are to a bird.” Birds have to carry those wings around but it is not like a burden. They do not complain, “Ooh, get these wings off me.” No, they can fly. They can get off the ground. They can soar. Through the cross, we can be delivered from being earthbound. We can rise with Christ through His power. It is a thing of faith, obviously.

I remember years ago I was working at a job that was during one of those key times. I was working every day next to this guy I could not stand. Do you ever experience that? Of course, you

probably do have that sometimes. This guy was so irritating and self-absorbed that it was torture every day. And one day I was so fed up, I went into the bathroom just to get away from him. I even cried out, “God, deliver me from this guy.” I was not expecting an answer from the Lord, but I did clearly hear the Lord speak to my heart, “Do you love Andrew?” “No.” “Didn’t I say love your neighbor as yourself? Even love your enemies.” “Yes, but that was before this guy came along. I cannot love him. He is a jerk.” “I know. And I know about you as well. Do you think I love Andrew?” I had to think about it, but then I realized, “Well, You love everyone, Lord.” “If I give you My love for him, will you love him for Me?” There was a long pause. “If You give me a supernatural love, I will do it. But that is the only way.” It is crazy, but the Lord began to change my heart about that guy. He showed me things about him and gave me a real heart for him. Andrew came to the Lord and God has done a marvelous work in him.

The key to loving like Jesus is receiving the love of Jesus regularly. How can we love like Christ without receiving the love of Christ? I really like what John says in [John 13:23](#). “Now there was leaning on Jesus’ bosom one of His disciples whom Jesus loved.” Now John wrote this, right? We know that. He refers to himself as “that disciple whom Jesus loved.” It is himself he is talking about. The thing I love about that is how confident he was that he was the Lord’s beloved. That is how he spoke of himself.

You can have that confidence. I can have that confidence. We have a wide array of churches. Sometimes you might think, “Oh my church is not like this, or like that. He does not love me as much. I am not blessed as much.” Hey, who is the disciple whom Jesus loved? You are. I am. He loves us just as much. It is not that He loves us more than all the other disciples. That is not a stable thought. But He loves you just as much. He loves you infinitely, totally. That is what needs to fill our minds and our hearts in order to love like Him, because when we are full of His love, we will be loving.

He said, “As I have loved you.” How has He loved you? How has Jesus loved you? Has Jesus loved you? Has He forgiven you? We can be like Peter, “Lord, how many times do I have to forgive? Seven?” I think Jesus’ response to Peter indirectly was, “How many times have I forgiven you?” Have you ever thought about the seventy times seven? Of course it is 490. I have thought about certain sins and how many times I have committed them. You can get into adding it all up. But the Lord forgives if we confess. He is faithful and just to forgive us. We love because He first loved us. Our hearts can be channels of His love and forgiveness. Our lives can be instruments of His love. Each day the Holy Spirit wants to pour out the love of God and flood our lives with the love of Christ (cf. [Romans 5:5](#)).

Paul said in [Galatians 6:17](#), “I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.” It is interesting that back then in the Roman Empire, often slaves were branded by their masters, so that everyone would know who their owner was. Paul is sort of using that as an illustration about all that he had gone through. He wanted everyone to know he was the slave of Jesus Christ. And his life was driven. He said, “The love of Christ constrains me. The love of Christ controls me and compels me. That is what motivates me to do what I do, to say what I say, and to respond the way I do. It is the love of Christ that I yield to.” That was the mark he was referring to. Obviously he had physical marks, but this mark was the love of God.

What is it that marks your life? What is it that controls and compels you and affects how you respond? What motivates you? What things are not going to burn up? When we stand before Him—not to be judged as far as salvation, but as far as rewards—will it be gold and silver and precious stones? Those are the works that are done in the Spirit by love. People will know it is

from Him by the love. They will say, “That is the Lord! That cannot be you, that is the Lord.” That is not natural, that is supernatural. And that is what needs to be supreme in our ministry.

Turn to [2 Corinthians 4](#). God uses broken vessels. That is what we are going to talk about. The Lord wants me to share with that He uses broken vessels, earthen vessels, and even cracked pots. So there is hope.

One of the great stories of the Bible is about how Gideon and his army fought the mighty Midianites. The Midianites were an army of scavengers. They would come up to the land of the children of Israel at harvest time and steal their crops. They were a huge army of at least 135,000 men. Gideon’s army was only 32,000 men, so they were out-numbered more than four to one. I am sure Captain Gideon was thinking, “We have to get more men.” But as he was thinking these things, the Lord spoke to him and said, “Gideon, you have too many men. I want to give you the victory but unless I lessen the troops, you are going to think that the victory comes through you and your army. People are going to think it is the army and not realize it is Me. And so I want you to tell whoever is afraid to go home.” He did and 22,000 went home. That is not a good sign. Two-thirds of his army was totally filled with fear and they went home. Now there were 10,000 men. They were out-numbered thirteen and a half to one. And the Lord said to Gideon, “There are still too many” (cf. [Judges 7:1–4](#)).

To make a long story short, the Lord weeded it down to 300 men. Now the odds were four hundred fifty to one. And the Lord said, “I like it. That is good. Now I can give you the victory. This is what I want you to do, Gideon. I want you to take these 300 men and I want you to give each one of them three things. I want you to give them a trumpet. I want you to give them a clay pitcher and a torch lit on fire. I want you to tell them to put the torch in the clay pitcher. Have those 300 men take the pitchers and the trumpets tonight at midnight and go out and quietly surround the army of the Midianites.” They did as they were told. They crept up and quietly surrounded the enemy. Then at the signal all those 300 men blew their trumpets, broke their pitchers, and the torches glared out. The Midianites must have thought it was a nightmare. (cf. [Judges 7:16-22](#)).

Normally an army will have just a few men who will blow the trumpets. A few guys at the front of the troops will blow the trumpets. But in this case all 300 men were blaring their trumpets. The Midianites must have thought, “Man, they have an army of a million.” They became confused and confounded, and the Lord delivered the Midianites into the hands of the children of Israel.

Now each of these three items is very significant to us as New Testament believers. First of all, the trumpet represents trumpeting the gospel. It represents blowing the horn of the Good News. And notice that every single one of them was to do it. Not just the leaders, not just a few, but every single person was to blow his trumpet. And this is true of Christians and of the disciples of the Lord. We can all be witnesses. In fact, we are all commanded to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. Each one of us can do it in our own way. That is the beauty of the New Testament. We are all priests. We all have that ministry to go to the people on behalf of God. Whether you are a pastor or a common lay person, every person can share Christ in his or her own way.

Now what about those clay pitchers? Those clay pitchers represent the believer, the Christian in whom is the treasure. It says [2 Corinthians 4:7](#), “We have this treasure in earthen vessels.”

The torch, of course, is the light of the world, Jesus Christ. Unless the pitcher is broken, the light, the warmth, and the glory of Jesus Christ cannot be seen. And so it is that unless we are broken,

the glory of Jesus Christ and the work of God cannot be accomplished to the extent that God wants to happen.

Let's read about that.

7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.
8 We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair;
9 persecuted but not forsaken; struck down but not destroyed—
10 always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.
11 For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.
12 So then death is working in us, but life in you.
13 But since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I believed and therefore I spoke," we also believe and therefore speak,
14 knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you.
15 For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God. ([2 Corinthians 4:7–15](#), NJKV)

So we have this treasure in earthen vessels. God is really different from human beings. If you had the Hope Diamond, this big, blue, forty-four carat diamond of India and it belonged to you, would you put it in your cookie jar and leave it on the counter there in the kitchen? I do not think so. Or say you had a million dollars, a thousand one-thousand-dollar bills with Grover Cleveland's face on it. If you had a thousand one-thousand-dollar bills, I do not think you would put them in one of those clay flowerpots that crack and break. I do not think you would do that. What would we do? We would put it in a vault. We would put it in a bank. We would make sure it was as secure as possible, so that no one could get at it.

But that is not the way the Lord does it. He puts Himself in earthen vessels so that people can get at it. In fact, there are three reasons why God uses broken vessels. We see here three great reasons why God has chosen to do it this way. First it says, "That the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us."

What if we were really powerful people or perfect people? Then people would look at us and they would admire us. They would think, "Oh, you are amazing." But we are not. We are imperfect people.

It is kind of sad that we do not want our imperfections to be seen. We want to be honored. We want to be admired. We have this weakness—we want the attention. We want to be focussed on. And so we act very strong and wise. We go around like we have it all together. We do that because our egos crave admiration. Naturally we do not want to show our weaknesses or our imperfections; we might feel humiliated.

Here is something really interesting about Paul. He says in [2 Corinthians 4:8](#), "We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair." Here is the apostle

Paul, probably the most amazing teacher and writer of the Word—pastor extraordinaire, preacher, and apostle of God—and yet he says, “I am perplexed.” The word “perplexed” is very interesting. Literally in Greek it means: at a loss mentally.

We are at a loss mentally. We do not understand. We are confused. Most normal pastors today would not share that. They would not get up and say, “I am mentally deficient,” even though it is true. They would not get up and say, “I am totally confused. I do not realize what is going on.” No, instead they say, “I have the answers for you.”

Paul was going through stuff he did not have the answers for and people are going through things around him. He could not just give them perfect pat answers. He did not understand; but he knew the One to point them to, even though he himself was not mentally capable of explaining it to them.

I just sat at the bedside of a forty-year-old mother who has three children. She has a husband who loves her dearly, two young teenage daughters, and a twelve-year-old son who is handicapped and needs full time attention, which she provides. They are dear, wonderful, committed Christians in our church. She had terminal cancer. We have been praying for months and she was not physically healed. It came down to the point last week where we had to begin to plan her funeral. And she died a few days ago. What am I going to say to her husband? He understands she is in paradise. She is with Jesus. We all rejoice in that. But here he is and I do not know what to say. “God loves you? He is with you? We are here standing with you?” It is tough. Mentally, I am unequal to that. I cannot explain it.

My wife has a saying which she has not used lately, but she says, “Wayne, you have PMS.” I said, “What? What do you mean?” She said, “Pastor’s Mental Syndrome.” “What is that?” “I do not know, but all you pastors get it.” It is true; we are not perfect. We do not have all the answers.

This ought to be encouraging because we look at our imperfections and our flaws and we think: “How could we ever be used for the Lord?” Brother, you can be used because you are what you are. You are an earthen vessel. You are not perfect and therefore the treasure, the glory of Jesus Christ, can be seen. You see it is not the container, it is the contents, right? That is what the Lord wants to show off, the contents. And the contents of our life, the treasure, is Jesus Christ.

I think of the Dead Sea Scrolls. They were forgotten for a thousand years. They were put in these jars and hidden in caves. A little guy was walking around Kumron and just throwing rocks like boys do. He was throwing rocks up into the cave and all of sudden, he heard a clang. He wondered, “Whoa, what is that?” He was curious and wanted to find out what was going on. He climbed up and saw a bunch of these clay containers and pots. He looked in there and there was all of this old writing and everything. It probably did not mean anything to him. It was the Word of God. Now everybody wants to see it. It is the most amazing thing. But it was in those clay pots.

Jesus Christ resides within you and within me. As you are hiding His Word in your heart, His eternal Word lives in you! And it has to get out, so you must be broken and I must be broken. Maybe you are a cracked pot or a leaky vessel. That is good. The Lord is doing a work.

The first reason is so that the glory and the excellency might be of God and not of us. The second reason God chooses weak and fragile vessels is because He wants breakable vessels so that common people can partake of the contents.

Let's refer back to how we as human beings lock up our treasures. We put them in impenetrable vaults and in places where they are secure because we do not want anyone to take our treasures. But God wants people to take His treasures. God wants us to go tell everyone the combination: repent and receive Christ! He wants us to spread high and low that the door is open because of what Jesus Christ did. And then He lets us be broken so the contents will come pouring out.

That is what Paul is talking about here. He says, "We are hard pressed. We are perplexed, persecuted and struck down, bearing in our bodies the dying of Jesus in order that the life of Jesus may come pouring out and may be manifested."

You see when we, as servants of Christ, are hard pressed by difficult circumstances, when we are confused, when we do not understand what is going on, when we are hurt deeply by people, when life has knocked us down, when we feel we are going to die and it is impossible for us—what do we do? We cry out to the Lord and we find His grace is sufficient. He pours His grace into our hearts and He heals our hearts. He works in our hearts. He fills our hearts. And we find that there are people all around us who have the same exact needs, and now we can relate to them. We know what the answer is because we had that too. We can say, "Here is the comfort I received when I was going through something like that. This is what the Lord did in my life. This is how He ministered to me." It is a hard but blessed process.

And part of it is that we are being emptied of ourselves and emptied of focussing on ourselves. We cannot really be very useful vessels when we are full of ourselves. I think of Stephen who is really an inspiration. He is such a great example. In [Acts 6:3, 5](#) it says of him that he was a man full of faith, full of the Holy Spirit, wisdom, and power. Why? He had these qualities because he was full of Jesus.

What are you full of? What am I full of? When people say, "You are full of it," what is "it"? You are full of yourself. You are full of pride. You are full of baloney. But it boils down to being full of myself, and that has to change, right? There has to be an emptying process that takes place. Even for wonderful people, even for very useful people like Paul, there is the process of emptying so that we can be filled. Then we can have His love, which is a greater love. Perhaps we are loving people, but do we love like Jesus loved?

Maybe some of you have seen movies depicting the terrible cost of God's love, as Jesus dies on the cross covering a multitude of sins, absorbing sin and showing God's grace. Recently the Lord was telling me that is what He wants to do in my life. He wants to make me more like Jesus. And it was killing me. I will have to admit I said, "Lord, I do not want to be like You to that degree. I mean, I want to be like You, but not totally, in the sense of dying." He said, "Well, that is My love, you see. You can absorb things. You can be a shock absorber and you can bring Jesus into the midst of that." I was protesting. And He said, "Well, not your will but Mine be done. I desire what is best for you. I really want you to be like Me. And I want to bless you and use you, and I want you to be filled with Me."

He empties us of ourselves and then He causes us to be broken-hearted through the ordeal. Now, there is something beautiful about a broken-hearted person. It is a lovely thing when our self-will is melted, when our stubbornness is softened, when our pride is humbled and the tenderness and the grace of Jesus Christ shines out. That is a beautiful person. That is a wonderful person.

David talked about a weaned child in [Psalm 131:2](#). What is a weaned child? A weaned child is one who cannot get fed the way it used to be fed. That time is over; now there is another way. They do not like that at first.

We had to say, “Well, now it is time to eat on your own.” There is a breaking process, an accepting, and a surrendering. And that is not easy. But in that surrender there is so much peace and there is a whole new level of growth. And that is what God wants to do.

David experienced this after his failure with Bathsheba. When he finally confessed and repented, he prayed in [Psalm 51:10](#),

10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.
12 Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit.
13 Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners shall be converted to You.
15 O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Your praise,
16 For You do not desire sacrifice or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering. (cf. [Psalm 51:10, 12–13, 15–16](#))

What does he mean? God does not just want religiosity. God does not just want us to go through the motions, doing all the right rituals and that kind of religious thing. “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart—these, O God, You will not despise” ([Psalm 51:17](#)).

The offering of a broken heart is very beautiful to God. That is what He wants. The flesh resists what I am saying, but brothers and sisters, He wants this. He wants our hearts melted and broken and He allows us to go through these things so that we are tenderized; we are opened up. There is something so beautiful in a person who is vulnerable—that brokenness is so attractive. The love of Christ becomes accessible to people. It draws people and they open up. They want that grace that you have received because they need it as bad as you, or worse. And so they come to Him.

Back in [2 Corinthians 4:15](#) it says, “That grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God.” It is more and more glory for God.

The Lord wants to lighten our load, believe it or not. He wants to rid us of the clutter and the excess baggage. He wants to lighten our heavy hearts and entrust His treasures, which are far better. As we go through things, we find out what is really valuable and meaningful in life. I think we all saw that after 9-11, but we have picked up our clutter again. Family, God, loving people, and traveling light, these things are the important things. The Lord allows disturbances and afflictions, such as Paul speaks about here, in order to refine us. He is pouring us from vessel to vessel.

In [Jeremiah 48:11](#) we read about Moab settling on his dregs. He had not been emptied from vessel to vessel; therefore, his impure taste had remained in him. And this is what they would do with wine in order to refine it and purify it. They would pour it from vessel to vessel so the dregs, the distasteful aspect of it, would be filtered out. Otherwise the wine’s taste would be inferior. We are inferior. We are filled with self unless He pours us from vessel to vessel and we are changed. We really do not change easily. I do not. I should not speak for you. I am probably the worst guy here and it takes some doing a lot of times with the Lord. But He wants us to taste like Jesus. And that is what we want to taste like, right? We do not want to be prideful. We should not be thinking

about ourselves, what we are doing, and what is going on about us all the time. God wants us thinking of Him, others, and His cause.

There was a preacher who preached this really searching, convicting message about pride. Afterward this lady came up and said, “Oh pastor, please pray for me. I need prayer. Your message really hit me.” He said, “Really? How did it hit you?” “Well, pride. I have this pride and I need prayer.” “Well, what is the pride? Tell me about your pride.” And she said, “I am just so proud of my beauty. Just before the service tonight I stared at myself in the mirror for an hour. I am so proud of my loveliness and beauty.” The pastor said, “I will pray for you. But that is not the sin of pride, it is the sin of your imagination.”

That is the thing about pride. It is so blind. It is so stupid. But it is there, in one way or another focussing on self. It can be that you are down on yourself. “Oh I am so bad. I am so sinful.” That is also a form of pride. The Lord presses us into a greater dependency on Jesus.

[Second Corinthians 4:10](#) says, “Always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.”

Verse 13 tells us how this happens. “Since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, ‘I believed and therefore I spoke,’ we also believe and therefore we speak.”

You see the Lord uses circumstances and the things we go through to force us to grow in faith. That is what Paul is saying in all these verses. When he says in [2 Corinthians 4:8–9](#), “We are hard pressed on every side, but we are not crushed,” that is faith. When he says in [verse 8](#), “We are perplexed, but we are not in despair,” and when he says, “We are persecuted but we are not forsaken; struck down but not destroyed,” that is faith. When we look at our circumstances and we say, “I am totally wiped out. There is no hope whatsoever,” that is unbelief. And that is what happens. You start whining “Oh, woe is me. I am nothing.” And you feel that way. But then faith causes you to turn your eyes upon the Lord and you realize there is hope. He is doing a work.

And I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in me will complete it for the day of Jesus Christ. (cf. [Philippians 1:6](#))

He knows what He is doing. He loves me. And that is faith because we are joined to a living Lord. [Second Corinthians 4:14](#) says, “Knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus, will also raise us up with Jesus and will present us with you.”

There are three reasons that He uses broken, earthen vessels. Reason number one is so that the excellency may be of God, that He might receive the glory, not us. Reason number two is so the contents of Christ can get out to people through broken hearts. Number three is so that we will continually come to the Lord to receive, because we are broken vessels and we are always leaking out. It is always pouring out and we always need to be refilled. You see, if we were not broken we would remain self-dependent. We would remain filled with ourselves. But because we are broken we have to go to Him. We have to get under the faucet. We have to keep coming to Him and that is the beauty of it.

When I was reading about the Amazon River, I learned that it is so huge. It is 4,000 miles long. It has a drainage area of 2.5 million square miles. The mighty Amazon is twice as huge as the Mississippi, in terms of drainage area. It is estimated that up to seven million cubic feet of water per second are discharged into the Atlantic Ocean at the mouth of the Amazon. Seven million

cubic feet per second is so much that the power of that fresh water coming into the ocean actually freshens the ocean for 200 miles out. For 200 miles it is fresh water. But do you know how the mighty Amazon begins? It begins as a little trickle up in the Andes Mountains where no one sees it. It just begins to trickle from way up there alone.

And that is where it must start for us. If we are going to become part of a mighty work of God—and God is doing a mighty work—we must receive that living water on the mountain with the Lord. Go to Him to be refreshed each day. Drink in His love and the water of His Word. Then as we are refreshed, we come down and join with others. All these tributaries join together and a mighty Amazon is formed. And as we come down with that living water we have received, and together with others we make it available, things are going to grow! Life is going to sprout up everywhere. It starts small. It is that heart broken before the Lord, receiving, and crying out to God.

Let's bow our heads.

Dear Jesus, Your ways truly are amazing. They are so different from man's ways. They are so pure. We are impure in ourselves, but You are purifying our lives and breaking our hearts so that we have a sacrifice to give You, a broken innocent heart to share with You. Without Your work we would not have that. Lord, we want to yield to that work. We do not want to fight against it. We do not want to resist the beautiful work that You are doing. Though Paul was being insulted and overlooked, when he saw his gross weakness, he finally got to the point where he said, "I glory in that, because then Your power comes through. Then I am made strong in You." Praise You, Lord. Thank You so much that You love us and You want Your love to fill us. It is such a different, higher, surpassing love. Praise You Lord Jesus.

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

BY

Calvary Chapel Outreach Fellowship

Lesson 25 Faithfulness

By

Damian Kyle

Calvary Chapel Modesto

Brought to you by:

The Blue Letter Bible Institute

www.blbi.org

A ministry of:

The Blue Letter Bible

www.blueletterbible.org

Servant Leadership – Lesson 25
Faithfulness by Damien Kyle

1

Turn to [1 Corinthians 4:1–5](#). The apostle Paul declares by the Spirit of God—

1 Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.
2 Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.
3 But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself.
4 For I know nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord.
5 Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God. ([1 Corinthians 4:1–5](#) NKJV)

Let's pray,

Thank You, Lord, for Your Word, the privilege of being able to study it, and the privilege of being able to obey it. We pray that You would freshly fill us with Your Holy Spirit and we pray that You would commune with us by Your Spirit over Your Word. And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

One of the interesting studies that a person can do in the New Testament is to study the autobiographical statements of the apostle Paul, as they are found in his epistles. We read the book of Acts and we get the narrative of the cities that he went to, the events that were associated with the cities, and the establishing of that first-century church. But in Paul's epistles, the Holy Spirit occasionally gives us a glimpse at some of the things that went on in his heart and his mind while he established those churches on those missionary journeys. We get a glimpse at what made this great man of God tick—what went on in his heart and in his mind to keep him faithful through indescribable hardship.

What is it that causes a man to sing praises? It is one thing for it to be just words on a page, but it is another for it to really happen in human history—through real human lives just like ours. What is it that causes a man to sing praises after being unjustly arrested and then savagely beaten and then chained in the bowels of a first-century Roman jail? And what causes a man to rise to his feet after being stoned, dragged out of the city, and left for dead? What causes him to rise up from that condition, dust himself off, and rather than head into the opposite direction, he makes his way straight back into the city in which he was stoned, as Paul did in Lystra?

Many of us saw the movie, *The Passion of the Christ*, and there are some powerful scenes in that movie. If you watched the scourging that occurred, which our Lord bore as was portrayed in the movie, the religious leaders of the Sanhedrin winced and turned away, because they had been instrumental in causing this to occur on a purely physical realm. Then we read, as Paul writes in his epistles, this was also his portion five times in the course of his ministry and his faithfulness to God.

During Paul's second missionary journey, he came to a Greek city by the name of Corinth. He established a church there. It was not an easy thing for him to do. Corinth was a difficult city. It was a tough nut to crack, but the Lord cracked that city and the church was established there in Corinth. The apostle Paul would spend more time in the establishing of the church at Corinth than he did in any other church, except for Ephesus. He spent eighteen months of his very precious

post-conversion life, directed by the Holy Spirit, in establishing that church. The Bible declares that Paul labored day and night at enormous expense to himself, so this group of people might know and experience all that God intended for them as Christians.

Although Paul had birthed the church in Corinth, and he had served them so sacrificially; overall, the apostle Paul was largely under appreciated. Indeed he was completely unappreciated, at least by the believers there as a whole. And though there were many people in the church who loved him, there were many others who were just a constant source of grief to him. As Paul writes his letters to the people of Corinth, there is none of the openness, none of the vulnerability of the letter that he wrote to the church at Philippi. Those who ought to have been unspeakably grateful to Paul for what he had done for them, who ought to have been a tremendous source of encouragement to him and a comfort to him, they displayed none of those things to him. In fact, from the beginning of the first epistle to the end of the second epistle, he is forced to defend himself constantly to them. From the opening line of the first epistle and then very near the end of the second epistle, in what is one of the saddest verses in all of the Bible, Paul declares to this church that he had served in this way:

And I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls, though
the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved.
([2 Corinthians 12:15](#) NKJV)

It seems as if they never appreciated his gifting. They never appreciated his service to them.

Now today it is hard for us to believe that the great apostle Paul could be unappreciated by a body of believers, but it happened in Corinth. And it was not true only of Corinth. I mean amazingly, apart from his Savior, at the end of his life he stood virtually alone in the world. He declared as he wrote to Timothy in that second epistle:

At my first answer no man stood with me, but all [men] forsook
me: [I pray God] that it may not be laid to their charge.
Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me.
([2 Timothy 4:16–17](#) KJV)

While Paul was at Corinth, he was serving the Lord in a situation in which he was unappreciated. That is what I want to talk about—serving the Lord in situations in which that service is unappreciated, and serving the Lord in thankless environments.

You notice in [1 Corinthians 4:3](#) that in Corinth, rather than appreciating Paul, they constantly judged him. And he speaks of their judgment of him. As he speaks of being judged by them, the word there means “to examine” or it means “to scrutinize.” It was not for the purpose of finding good in him; rather, they examined and they scrutinized him for the purpose of finding fault in him. They looked for a reason to condemn the apostle Paul. They were critical of him.

The idea is not that they watched his life and they listened to his teaching and then, having fairly observed his life and having fairly listened to his teaching and then having tested it, they came to a judgment concerning him. That is fair and necessary of people; but instead, their constant attitude toward Paul was a judgmental one. Instead of seeing all of the good things he was doing, they were constantly putting him on trial. In their own hearts they were looking for some fault in him.

There is of course, the discussion about following the Sunday morning service and how often those that have been a part of it can go home for lunch and have “roast preacher.” And they talk about, “Well, he fumbled there a little bit.” Or they may say, “He messed that up” or “Boy, he had a rough day.” This kind of thing is discussed, as all of the faults are brought forth.

And there were many in Corinth, who just did not like Paul because they did not want to like him. And Paul gave some of the reasons that they did not like him there when he spoke about it in his two epistles to them. Some of them did not like his teaching. It was too simple. It lacked great displays of intellectual wisdom and human wisdom that they were accustomed to there in Corinth. And so, they put him down for it. And you remember how Paul came to Corinth, as he declares it in chapter two:

1 And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with
excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the
testimony of God.
2 For I determined not to know anything among you except
Jesus Christ and Him crucified.
3 I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling.
4 And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive
words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and
of power,
5 that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the
power of God. ([1 Corinthians 2:1-5](#) NKJV)

Some at Corinth did not like the fact that his style was non-flashy. He lacked all of the oratory skills that were so highly esteemed by the population there in Corinth. So Paul wrote in his second epistle what he was being accused of by some:

“For his letters,” they say, “are weighty and powerful, but his
bodily presence is weak and his speech contemptible.”
([2 Corinthians 10:10](#) NKJV)

And what they did not realize until later was that Paul possessed a crushing intellect. And he was a man of tremendous personal charisma. But he refused to use either of those things in Corinth so that their faith might be based upon the wisdom of God’s Word and on the power of God.

Some did not like the fact that he would not let them grow comfortable in their sin and in their carnality. Paul was a pusher and he pushed people along. If you sat under his teaching, you were going to continue to grow.

There is a famous illustration which I doubt is true—hardly any of them are. But there is a famous illustration of a man whose church had been canvassing for a new pastor. They found the one that they liked and he came in and that first Sunday he taught this tremendous message. And everybody is clicking their heels saying, “How wonderful it is. We have the find of the century here in the pastor that we have got.” The following Sunday he got up and he preached the same message a second time. And the deacons thought, “Well, you know, it is good enough to hear twice. It really was that good.” And so they were willing to live with that. And then the third Sunday he got up and he preached the same sermon the third time. And it greatly disturbed them, as you might imagine. So the deacons came up to him and they said, “Listen, you know, one sermon? Do you have another sermon? And if you do have another sermon this would probably

be a good time to use that.” And the young preacher said, “I will go on to a new sermon when this one is obeyed.”

There is a little bit of the apostle Paul in that illustration. The repetition of the apostle Paul in his teaching was intentional.

Others did not like Paul. No matter what he said, no matter what he did, they just were not going to like him. They did not want to like him. They wanted somebody else other than Paul. They wanted some kind of a dynamic speaker like Apollos or some great exhorter like the apostle Peter, a man that they had heard about. Instead, they got this methodical teacher who reasoned with them from the Scriptures and would not allow them to think that they were spiritual solely on the basis of what they knew, rather than what they knew and what they were practicing in their lives.

I would like us to notice seven things in our text that helped the apostle Paul maintain perspective and remain faithful in that thankless setting of Corinth.

First, notice in verse three that he considered it a very small thing that he should be judged by others. Literally, he said, “I consider it the very smallest thing” (cf. [1 Corinthians 4:3](#)). Paul is declaring that their personal opinion of him amounts to nothing. He is not being arrogant here in what he is saying, he is merely stating the truth. No personal opinion of him mattered at all in comparison to God’s opinion of him. And he did not let those with a judgmental, critical spirit get him down. He did not give undue importance to it or let it dominate him. And what people with critical spirits think should be kept a small thing in our hearts and in our minds. The apostle Paul did not give their assessment undue weight.

One must not let the unjust criticisms of others drive us out of where God has called us to serve Him. Someone has noted through some kind of study of the church, that the average pastor leaves his pastorate because of seven people. Now how tragic is that? In a church of fifty, forty-three people lose because of seven. In a church of one hundred, ninety-three people lose because of seven. In a church of 300, 500, 1,000 whatever it might be, but it is a great illustration of the kind of undue weight that we can be prone to give to this kind of voice. Seven people can seem like 700, depending on the seven.

The apostle Paul knew it. God had called him to Corinth. God had told him to stay there because He had many people there in Corinth. And that is what he had to do no matter what other people’s opinion of him might be. “As long as I know that I am pleasing Him—the One that sent me,” Paul would say, “then I am not greatly concerned if I displease you.”

And so Paul, first of all, did not give the judgmental opinions of him undue weight. But notice secondly, in [1 Corinthians 4:3-4](#) that he refused even to judge himself. And that is as dangerous as the first behavior. There is a certain kind of personality among us, as God calls us into the pastorate, where the greatest danger to our longevity will be what other people think of us or the tendency to give that undue weight. But there is another kind of personality in this room where the greatest danger toward our longevity will be our own critical attitude toward ourselves. We are our own worst enemy. And we can be prone to give undue weight to what we think about ourselves, or God’s choice of us to do what it is that He has called us to do.

We are called to examine ourselves concerning sin and holiness. Paul declared, “For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged” ([1 Corinthians 11:31](#), NKJV). What he is talking about here is not about that. Here he is talking about our own ability to come to an accurate opinion

about the effectiveness of our own ministries and our own service. Paul was saying that even he does not have the ability to properly evaluate his own effectiveness.

So we cannot say, as we leave the pulpit on Sunday morning or the midweek service or any type of ministry situation and say, “That was a great teaching.” Because I do not know that it was great—maybe it was. We cannot leave the pulpit and say, “That was a lousy teaching.” There are some sermons where you feel like you are in *Chariots of Fire*. I mean, you are running and it is effortless. How do you bottle this? And it is hard to stop. And you just know that God has taken the whole thing over. And then there are other times, from the opening line, your heart sinks. You immediately know you are in four feet of mud. One message is light. It pops. It moves. And during the other one, you struggle. And what happens? His strength gets seen in our weakness. And we never know what He is coupling with our ministry by the power of His Holy Spirit, or what people are hearing and receiving. And the second one can be the greater message so often. It can be just right for the moment, but we completely misjudge it and do not know how many lives have been changed that heard the message.

One pastor can go to one city and great effort is expended in that city, and it bears little fruit. Another man can go into another city and comparatively much less effort is given to establish a church, and it becomes very, very fruitful. And this great church is established in the eyes of everyone. And we are prone to judge it, but both have been equally faithful in what God has called them to do. Who can figure it out?

And Paul declares that he cannot figure it out. So here he gives as little weight to his own natural opinions and criticisms of himself, as he did to the natural and fleshly opinions made by others. He is not being arrogant. He is not being unteachable, but he recognized that he was as incapable of judging himself as fully as others were incapable of judging his effectiveness. We have to be careful because we can condemn ourselves right out of the ministry.

Now notice point three in [1 Corinthians 4:4–5](#). Paul entrusted all judgment to the Lord, because only the Lord knows the whole subject. Only the Lord knows everything that is going on in all given issues—the heart issues. The motives of why we do what we do will all be brought out one day. All the dark things will be brought out. All of the envy and the jealousy and the pride and the carnality of those who were critical of Paul will be brought out. One day all of that will be exposed as being the real reasons for the criticisms of Paul.

Nobody comes up and says, “Listen, I am a pathetically shallow and selfish person and so I am going to do everything I can to undermine you.” It is always couched in noble themes such as: “I am looking out for the greater good of the people.” And this and that, and it always sounds good. We are all crafty enough to do that and experienced enough to do that. But one day it will all be brought out into the open—what the real motivations were. We have to leave that with the Lord.

I remember hearing, in the early years of my service to the Lord, that somebody said, “If the devil can peg us as a person who has to run out and put out every single fire that the devil starts concerning us, that is all we will do for the entire duration of our ministry. And they will put that on our tombstone—‘The man who spent seventy years putting out fires that the devil started.’” No, the ministry has to be entrusted to the Lord. And Paul did that.

Again in the early years of my ministry of serving the Lord, I remember hearing Greg Laurie speak at a conference and he said, “You take care of your character and God will take care of your reputation” —and He will. And Paul understood that and he trusted the Lord to do that.

Point four is that Paul reminded himself that he was a servant and in 1 Corinthians 4:1, he says that he needed to be a servant where the Lord had placed him. Now the word “servant” that is used there is not *doulos*, or “the bond servant.” It is a word that means “an under rower.” On those ancient Roman ships, the larger ships would have a group of men who would be on the upper deck of the ship, on each side of the upper deck. And they would have the oars and they would row the ship into battle at ramming speed. And so they would be chained into their place.

Now if the ship was large enough, there was a lower deck down below that deck and there was another set of rowers. If you have ever seen Ben Hur, Charlton Heston is sitting there on that upper deck. And he is looking fit and tan like a commercial for a spa or something. You can get a wrong idea about what it was like to be a rower. But that was a hard, dangerous kind of thing that he was doing. It was back breaking, with blisters and that kind of thing. But as hard as it was to be a rower on the upper deck, as miserable as that was, there was another place that it was even more miserable, because coupled with all of the hard work and all of the sweat and all of the blisters, was an environment that was absolutely miserable. There was no ventilation and there was the stench of the bodies. No sunshine. All of this on top of all of the exhaustion of the rowing, it was a miserable environment for an under rower. And Paul said in [1 Corinthians 4:1](#), “I am an under rower.” And to take the position of the under rower in Paul’s day, it was the lowest position that a person could take.

Self-pity can be a great danger to God’s call upon our lives. Paul looked at the position that God had called him to there in Corinth and he did not entertain thoughts like: “I do not have to put up with this. I do not need this. I do not need the aggravation. I think I have saved enough to get out and do some other kind of thing.”

I have always appreciated the strength of what the Lord said in Luke 17. Let me read it to you. He said,

7 And which of you, having a servant plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, “Come at once and sit down to eat”?

8 But will he not rather say to him, “Prepare something for my supper and gird yourself and serve me ‘til I have eaten and drunk, and afterward you will eat and drink”?

9 Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not.

10 So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, “We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.” ([Luke 17:7–10](#) NKJV)

When you read that for the first time you may say, “Wow! That is pretty hard.” But He is protecting us from self-pity.

Paul realized when God called him that he was already wasting his life. Every one of us would be thoroughly wasting our lives tonight, if not for God. When God calls us, He is free to use our lives any way He sees fit. But He will never waste a life. He would not even waste the remains or the leftovers after the miracle of the feeding of the five thousands with the fish and the loaves. One would think you could waste that. You would say, “Listen, throw that away. We will just do this again tomorrow.” But He is not going to reinforce that type of thinking in His disciples. The leftovers were to be gathered. If He will not waste something as easy for Him to produce as that, He is not going to waste a servant of His.

Point number five is that Paul also considered himself in verse one to be a steward of the mysteries of God. And as a steward, he was committed to being faithful to where God had placed him as a steward. Now a steward was a servant or a slave who managed another man's money or resources. So, when a man would develop or gain enough wealth that it was too much for him to keep track of personally, out of an empire, he would have a steward. He would give that steward instruction on how and what he wanted done with his wealth. He would make decisions and say, "I want you to do this and I want you to invest over here and do all of these things." And he expected that what he told the steward to do with that wealth, the steward would do. And of course the wealth that Paul had was the gospel, the great New Covenant in Christ's blood that he spoke of.

But the steward was not free to have this incredible wealth delivered to him and then just go and say, "Well, I think I know more than my master and I will invest the entire portfolio in tech stocks." And then lose the entire thing. What was most important in a steward was faithfulness. That he would just hear what God (the Master) told him to do, and then he would obey what God told him to do, with that wealth. He did not need to be super-talented. He did not need to be wise. He did not need to be eloquent. The one thing that was critical in a steward was faithfulness. And Paul stayed in that difficult place out of faithfulness to God. God had called him there for eternal purposes and, to his credit, Paul stayed there.

Sooner or later it all comes down to that. We are in the service of the Lord. God calls us as pastors and there can be a lot of motivations in there, can't there? All of them are high and lofty. There can be a lot of carnal motivation in that. The Lord has a way of putting us through the different things that He puts us through, and the ups and downs, until you finally reach a place where you say, "I would not do this for anyone else. And I would not even do it for myself, but Lord, I will do it for You, to stay faithful to You." And ultimately everybody comes to that place. And if you are there now, you are right on schedule. It is perfectly normal.

I have a little saying and I do not think it is going to make me either rich or famous. But it goes something like this: "If I can't quit, you can't quit." And this could be the making of country western song.

I had a friend that served with me at the church in Modesto, and he was beginning quite an endeavor. He was starting a pretty big ministry and heading into it. And of course, we are all confronted with our sense of inadequacy in the face of what it is that we were starting. So I was talking with him and he said, "But I am afraid." I said, "Well, join the crowd." I said, "By the way, if you take that to God and He accepts that excuse, would you let me know? Because the last time I tried that out on Him, He was not really accepting that from me."

You know during the building project that we went through some time ago, there were times when things were kind of overwhelming. And during that time I had a reoccurring dream. My reoccurring dream was that I worked at Target. And it is a funny thing; I was not in management or at a cash register. I did not want anything with that much responsibility. I was at Target and my only responsibility was to collect those red carts all day long every day. And I got off and I was done and I went home. And you know, I would be miserable in another forty-eight hours. It is a ridiculous kind of dream, but it is just the Lord working. I was in that place where I just said, "No. I am a steward here. And if this is where the Lord wants me to spend my life and to be faithful, then that is what I am going to do." And that is what the apostle Paul did. He viewed himself as a steward at that place.

Point six, in [1 Corinthians 4:5](#), is that he stayed conscious of the Lord's return. Paul said, "Until the Lord comes." Here is Paul, doubtless the greatest missionary in the history of the church, next to the Lord Jesus Himself. But it is interesting as we read through his epistles over and over again, there is this almost constant reference to heaven, to eternity. And one of the things that this tells me is that the eternal perspective was one of the keys to his effectiveness and his longevity in the ministry that God had called him to. That realization that one day, all of this ends up in a very real heaven, which is more real than the chairs you are sitting on. It is more real than the floor that is under your feet. And one day, at the end of our three score and ten, or one day when we hear that trumpet and the Lord draws us in through the Rapture, one day we are going to stand on that glassy sea and we are going to sing His praises forever and ever. And we must realize that this could happen today.

Paul said, "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us" (cf. [Romans 8:18](#)). This world is not my home. I am just passing through. My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue. The angels beckon me from heaven's open door. And I cannot feel at home in this world anymore. And it gets stranger and stranger by the day. We wait for that last gentile, don't we? That is when the fullness of the gentiles has come. And then one day we will be face to face with the Lord.

Several years ago, I heard Warren Wiersbie teach that for the Christian, heaven is not just a destination, but it is also a motivation. That was true of the apostle Paul. The coming joy of heaven was a strong motivation for the apostle Paul. I mean, he almost smacks his lips as he writes about it. He wrote to Timothy,

5 But you be watchful in all things, endure affliction, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.
6 For I am already being poured out as a drink offering and the time of my departure is at hand.
7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.
8 Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.
([2 Timothy 4:5-8](#) NKJV)

And finally in 2 Timothy 4:8, the apostle Paul reveals part of what drove him through all of those difficult years. It was that heaven is on the other side of all this and it is a very real heaven.

C. S. Lewis declared,

If you read history you will find that Christians who did the most for the present world were precisely those who thought most of the next. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of that other world that they have become so ineffective in this.

So we live for eternity, and eternity is a very, very long time. Think about eternity and how long it is going to be.

There is a guy by the name of Hendrik Van Loon, who, just his name captures one's imagination. But he declared in a way that I can understand concerning eternity and I have always appreciated it. He wrote this:

High up in the North in the land of Svithjod, [he said] there stands a rock. It is a hundred miles high and a hundred miles wide. Once every thousand years a little bird comes to this rock to sharpen its beak. When that rock has thus been worn away, then a single day of eternity will have gone by.

All right! It is worth living for, and it is worth being faithful for.

Finally, in [1 Corinthians 4:5](#), number seven is that Paul was confident that at the end of such a life was the greatest reward that one could ever have. And that is to one day hear the praise of the Lord Himself—to hear Him, with eyes looking into ours, and from His very lips, “Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Lord” (cf. [Matthew 25:23](#)). And Paul wanted to live every day of his life here so that one day he would hear that from the Lord Jesus who had done so much for him and had been so much to him. We have been so well taught through the years that no person who does not hear that from the lips of Jesus can ever be considered successful. And yet for Paul, to hear those words from the Lord meant that a long period of his life would need to be spent in one of the most difficult circumstances a person can find himself in. Perhaps this was every bit as hard on the inside of his heart, as stoning was on the outside of the body. There are times when God calls us to be faithful to Him in an environment that is devoid of any appreciation.

Perhaps the Lord has called you, like Paul, and entrusted such an experience to you. It may be that the circumstance that God has you in, in your service to Him, is completely one sided. You do all of the giving and everyone else does all of the taking. This is true not only of the ministry, but it can be true of a marriage. It can be true in a family. It can be true in many arenas.

Remember the seven things that helped the apostle Paul maintain his perspective and remain faithful in just such a setting:

- 1) Do not let the unjust criticism of others get you down. Do not give it undue weight. Consider it a very small thing compared to what God thinks of you and what you are doing.
- 2) Do not judge yourself. You know as little as they do.
- 3) Entrust all judgment to the Lord.
- 4) Remain a servant where God has called you. You are an under rower. You are not too good for where God has placed you and what He has you doing. Be careful of self-pity.
- 5) Stay faithful in that situation.
- 6) There is a praise coming your way one day that will make you forget all about its long absence in this life.
- 7) Remember that the Praise Giver may come tonight, so let us be found faithful.

So, Lord, we pray that You would bless this section of Your eternal Word, and plant it in our hearts tonight. We pray that You would use it for the remainder of our pilgrimage and service to You. Protect us from all of these things that You protected Paul from, and I pray that we might be found faithful, Lord, to You at Your coming. Bless my brothers, Lord. Protect each one, I pray. And I ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Lewis, C.S. *Mere Christianity*. Macmillian Company. 1985. Page 104. 5 February 2001.

Loon, Hendrik Van. *The Story of Mankind*. Boni and Liveright. 1921. Page 3. 9 November 2006.

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

BY

Calvary Chapel Outreach Fellowship

Lesson 26

Encouragement for the Troubled Heart

By

Greg Laurie

Harvest Christian Fellowship

Brought to you by:

The Blue Letter Bible Institute

www.blbi.org

A ministry of:

The Blue Letter Bible

www.blueletterbible.org

Servant Leadership – Lesson 26
Encouragement for the Troubled Heart by Greg Laurie

1

Let's turn in our Bibles to [John 13](#). I would like to speak on encouragement for the troubled heart. Let's have a word of prayer together.

Father, we thank You for the power of the Word of God. Even though we are called to teach it, we still love to hear it. It is precious to us and we want to hear Your voice today. Help us to keep our focus clear and know what it is You want us to do. We want to be fed and built up as believers. We commit this time of Bible study to You now. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Have you ever had your world turned upside down? Maybe everything was going along wonderfully and all of a sudden, some crisis, some tragedy, something out of left field just hit you like a ton of bricks and everything changed. Well, if you have ever felt that way then you have a general idea of how the disciples felt in the upper room when Jesus dropped a bombshell on them and told them things they had never heard before. It all started out when Jesus was troubled.

[John 13:21](#) says that Jesus was troubled in spirit. Why was that significant? It was significant because Jesus was not really troubled about anything. This was the kind of guy who could be asleep in the boat while the storm was raging; who would walk through a hostile crowd even though He knew they wanted to kill Him. Jesus was always cool as a cucumber under all circumstances. And suddenly our Lord was troubled. It was, of course, because He was going to reveal to them that one of them was going to betray Him and another one was going to deny Him. This affected them immediately because He was their rock. He was the one that they looked to in all matters, and He was troubled.

I remember a number of years ago when we were over in Hawaii holding a crusade and at about four in the morning, I got a call from Bill Stonebraker, the pastor of Calvary Chapel Honolulu. He said, "Greg, turn on the TV." So I turned on the TV and every channel told of this ominous storm coming toward Oahu called "Hurricane Aniki." I think we were two nights into our crusade. The weather report said, "It is going to hit the island of Oahu. Tidal waves are going to hit." I could not believe it. Pastor Chuck and I were staying in these two little houses right on the beach that had been loaned to us. We were right in the impact zone of where this tidal wave was going to hit and I did not know what to do.

Dennis Agajanian was out there playing and he just freaked out. He said, "Greg, I was just stuck in Florida for Hurricane Andrew and I saw the devastation. It is going to be horrible. We have to go out and get food right now. Let's go get food." So we got in the car and went driving around. All the markets were closed. All I could find was Subway Sandwiches, so I bought thirty Subway sandwiches. I do not know what I was going to do with them, but I had thirty sandwiches and we brought them back to the house. The more Dennis talked to me, the more panicked I became because we had our youngest son with us who was very young. He was probably about four or something like that. Dennis was saying, "Buddy, we are going to have to tie him to a post and hold onto him."

There I was with my box of sandwiches and we were figuring out how we were going to tie my son to the post. I walked over to Chuck's place and he was in the kitchen cooking a stew. "Chuck, what are you doing?" "Oh, I am just cooking a stew." He was so calm. Then the local radio station called Chuck and he prayed: "Lord, just protect us." And the storm ended up turning. I thought, "This is something classic. I am in a state of panic buying sandwiches, and Chuck is cooking a stew!"

Servant Leadership – Lesson 26
Encouragement for the Troubled Heart by Greg Laurie

2

This is how the disciples must have felt. They were probably freaking out like I was. You know how that can be.

Jesus had shared some really incredible things with them. He had told them that one of their own was going to betray Him. Every one of them said, “Is it I, Lord?” (cf. [John 13:24-25](#)).

Now a lot of times we think that Judas Iscariot was pretty obvious. Everyone knew who Jesus was; and all of the disciples probably had white robes except Judas, who must have had a black one. He probably had a black leather robe with the collar turned up. But the truth is that I do not think Judas was obvious at all. In fact, if Judas was as obvious as we would have thought, when Jesus said, “One of you is going to betray Me,” then they all would have stood up in unison, pointed, and said, “It is the guy in the black robe, isn’t it? We always knew.” But no, instead they said, “Is it I, Lord? Is it me?” And then the Lord identified Judas Iscariot as the betrayer.

Peter thought this would be a good opportunity to boast of his commitment to Jesus at the expense of the others. We pick the story up in [John 13:36–38](#).

36 Simon Peter said to Him, “Lord, where are you going?” Jesus answered, “Where I am going you cannot follow Me, but you will follow Me afterward.”

37 Peter said, “Lord, why can’t I follow You now? I will lay down my life for Your sake.”

38 Jesus answered him, “Will you lay your life down for My sake? Most assuredly I say to you, the rooster will not crow until you have denied Me three times.”

If identifying Judas as a traitor was a bombshell, identifying Peter as a denier, was a thermonuclear explosion because Peter was the leader. When Peter said, “I am going fishing,” the others would say, “We are going with you.” The men looked up to Peter. His name, “Rock,” was fitting. And for him to be identified as one who would deny the Lord was something they could not grasp.

Luke gives us an interesting detail about what happened on this night. It is not found in John’s gospel. But in Luke 22, Jesus turned to Peter and said,

31 Simon, Simon, indeed Satan has asked for you that he may sift you as wheat.

32 But I have prayed for you that your faith would not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brothers. (cf.

[Luke 22:31–32](#))

Peter went on to say, “Lord, I am ready to die for You,” and so forth.

Can you imagine how you would feel if you were hanging around with Jesus and He turned to you and said your name twice? “Peter, Peter” or “Simon, Simon” rather. He did not use his name that He had given him. The Lord used his normal name, Simon. “You are going to have this problem. You are going to be attacked by the enemy. He wants to sift you as wheat.”

It reminds us that when the devil comes knocking in the life of the child of God, he has to ask permission first. We know, of course, that all the attacks that came against Job were screened first by the Lord, because the devil accurately understood that there was a hedge of protection around

God's servants. The Lord did not give Job more than he could handle. But at the same time, He did allow the devil's attack in his life. Satan is cunning. Jesus said, "He wants to sift you as wheat. He has been asking for you by name."

A lot of us will say, "Well, the other day the devil was really tempting me." I do not know that I have ever really been tempted by the devil. And by that I mean I do not know that Satan himself has come and tempted me. Maybe he has. I do not know if I am a big enough fish for that.

We know that Satan is a fallen angel. We know that he is not omnipresent. We know he is not omnipotent. He can only be in one place at one time. Of course we have all been tempted by his minions, by his demon powers that do his bidding.

But in this case, Satan himself was coming after Peter. The devil personally said, "I want Simon Peter." Why do you think that was? It was probably because Peter was a man who was influencing others. He was a leader.

You can be sure that the devil will set his sights on leaders. God will allow attacks in our lives but I am so glad that Jesus said, "Do not worry about it, Peter. I am praying for you." That is the same thing that we all need to know. There are attacks that can come our way, but the Lord is interceding for us as well.

Romans 8 says,

34 Who is he that condemns? It is Christ Jesus who died, and was raised to life. He is at the right hand of God interceding for us.

35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or persecution or hardship or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? (cf. [Romans 8:34–35](#))

Were it not for the intercession of Jesus, we would not stand a chance. I am glad that our congregations pray for us. I am glad that we pray one for another. Right when I was coming in I ran into some of the other pastors and they said, "Let's pray for you." I appreciated that. But even more than their prayers, as wonderful as they are, is the knowledge that Jesus is interceding for me. And when the devil comes knocking I can say, "Lord, would You mind getting the door?"

Peter was going to go through some hard times. The Lord was going to allow it. Notice that Jesus said, "You are going to be hit in this way. And when you have returned, strengthen your brothers." In other words, "Peter, you are going to have a failing, but you are going to come back again" (cf. [Luke 22:32](#)). We are all going to have those times when we make mistakes and we stumble, but are we going to learn from the mistakes we have made? Jesus said, "When you have returned, strengthen your brothers" (cf. [Luke 22:32](#)). And Peter did just that.

In 1 Peter 5, he wrote:

10 And the God of all grace, who has called you through His eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, He will restore you and make you strong and firm and steadfast again.

11 To Him be the power, forever and ever, amen. (cf. [1 Peter 5:10–11](#))

Peter says, “Listen, I have gone through these sufferings, through these difficulties, and now I want to help you.” Paul said pretty much the same thing in 2 Corinthians. All that he had gone through was so that he might comfort others as he had been comforted (cf. [2 Corinthians 1:4–5](#)).

When I first started out preaching I had everything figured out. I was twenty years old and I thought I had all the answers. I mean, whatever your problem was I had a quick biblical response for you. “You need to do this. Here is the answer. Why aren’t you doing it?” You should have come to me when I was twenty. I could have answered any question you would have had. Well, I am going to be fifty this December and I do not feel quite that way anymore because I have been through a few things. I have experienced a few things. Now when I look at people and the problems they are facing, I realize that God wants me to comfort them with the comfort that I have been comforted with. When you have gone through a hardship you can minister in a way that you could not have ministered prior to that. When you have gone through a difficulty, you can say, “I know what you are going through. I do not have a quick and easy answer but I care. I am listening. And let me just be here with you.”

When counseling people I have discovered that sometimes one of the best things you can do is just be there. This is especially true when a loved one has experienced—the death of a friend, a spouse, or a child. I have discovered that they do not need quick and easy answers. They need someone who will just be there with them, love them, and go through it with them. We must weep with those that weep, as the Bible says. That is not to say there is not a place for the truth of the Word of God, for indeed there is. But we want to ask the Lord to give us wisdom so that we do not just rattle off clichés, but that we think about it and pray for the right words at the right time. Scripture says, “A word that is fitly spoken is like an apple of gold in a frame of silver” ([Proverbs 25:11](#)).

Here we see that Peter was going to go through hardship and he was going to be able to help others as the result of what he had gone through.

Satan was targeting Peter because he was being groomed to be a leader in the church. And that is why Satan is targeting you. It was Spurgeon who used to say, “You don’t kick a dead horse.” And if a person is just sitting around idly, making no difference for the kingdom of God, I suppose the devil does not really need to do all that much in their lives because they are basically where he wants them to be—immobilized and ineffective. But when a man or a woman is saying: “I want to make a difference for the kingdom. Let’s reach our community. Let’s reach this place. Let’s just do something for God’s glory,” you better know that the devil is going to attack you. Just as surely as Nehemiah said, “Let’s rise up and build,” there was Sanballat who said, “Let’s rise up and oppose.” Whenever you take a bold step forward, you better brace yourself and prepare for opposition. It is not a matter of *if*; it is only a matter of *when* and *how* it is going to come.

The devil wanted to bring down Peter. Unfortunately Peter fell into his trap. He was filled with self-confidence. “Though all deny You, I will never deny You,” he said to the Lord. In Matthew’s Gospel he said, “Even if all are made to stumble, I will never be made to stumble” ([Matthew 26:33](#)). Now what caused Peter to say this was the revelation that Judas was a traitor. Peter essentially was saying, “Look, even if Judas lets You down, Lord, You can depend on me. Do not forget that my nickname is ‘Rock.’ I am going to live up to it, Lord. I am going to be here for You. You can count on me.”

You know I think it is always a mistake to boast of how much we love Jesus. I think it is a far better thing to boast of how much He loves me because my love is fickle, as is yours. Peter was

boasting of his commitment to Christ, rather than Christ's commitment to him. He was boasting of his love for Jesus, rather than the Lord's love for him. In speaking these words, Peter was not only revealing an unfounded confidence in himself, but he was really directly contradicting the prediction of Christ. He was essentially saying, "You are wrong on this, Lord. No, it is not going to happen." That is a big mistake. But I think in Peter's mind, in all fairness, he did not think he was going to fail. I think in his mind at this moment he thought, "That is the last thing that will ever take place." Mark's Gospel tells us that he repeatedly said this. It is not that he just said it once, he said it over and over again. Though it can almost sound commendable, we need to understand it was sinful because it was full of pride. The Bible says, "Pride goes before a fall and a haughty spirit before destruction (cf. [Proverbs 16:18](#)).

You can look at so many of the sins that guys get into today in the ministry and I think almost all of them could be initially rooted in pride. You think, "I am going to get away with it. Maybe so and so did not get away with it, but I am going to get away with it. My case is different. My circumstances are not the same as someone else's." We find a way to rationalize it; and with arrogance, we go out and do these stupid things that we do.

Peter is making this great denial while Jesus is saying, "You are going to deny Me three times." The disciples were just absolutely freaking out. Peter is going to deny Him. Judas is going to betray Him. Their whole world as they knew it was crashing down on them. That is why the Lord needs to get things in perspective for them again, which brings us to [John 14:1-6](#). This is the context of it.

- 1 "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me.
- 2 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.
- 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.
- 4 And where I go you know, and the way you know."
- 5 Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?"
- 6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

Our Lord says, "Let not your heart be troubled." This word "troubled" can be translated: agitated, disturbed, or thrown into confusion. He did not say, "Mull over your problems." He said, "Do not be troubled." Now He had been troubled Himself and they were troubled, so Jesus is not saying that there is never a place in our lives to be troubled. What He is saying rather is, "Though there is cause to be troubled, there is greater cause not to be." And He is going to share with them three principles of why they did not have to be agitated, stressed out, troubled, and thrown into confusion, because we all know there are troubles in our lives.

When you give your life to Christ, many of your troubles go away. But in all fairness, a whole bunch of other troubles come into your life, so we do not want to deny the existence of trouble. It is there. We know people go through troubles. We know that we go through troubles. When you get into the ministry, there are all kinds of troubles that come your way. You might have staff troubles. You know when you first start out, you are just stressed because you have to do everything.

I remember when I first started preaching; I led the worship, I gave the message, I locked the place up, I counseled the people—I did everything. The next thing you know, time goes by and you have a little extra money so you hire a secretary, you hire a worship leader, and you hire an associate pastor. You are able to share some of your responsibilities and that is a great relief. And then that can potentially create some new troubles because invariably when you have employees working for you, someone is going to mess up. Someone is not going to perform or they are not going to do the job that they are meant to do. I have found so many times that if you put the wrong person in the wrong place it creates a mess. Just by removing them, things improve. If you can help them find the place they really belong, it is better for everyone. If you can find the right guy that should have been in that place from the very beginning, everything just begins to flow. It is so challenging to find the right people for the right place. Help people develop their gifts and release them. Allow them to make some mistakes and learn from those mistakes so that they can grow and develop. But there can be staff problems.

And of course there can be family problems. You can be out ministering to all these people and maybe you are having problems with your own kids. I think the stories of pastors' kids are legendary. When I meet a pastor's son or daughter that is walking with God, I am so excited because we all know what it is like to have a prodigal son or a prodigal daughter. Here you are reaching all these people and your own kid is not doing it. And that is a trouble as well.

There are troubles that we face on every level. So then, what do we do? Well, we come back to what God has said here. How can we know peace? How can we not get stressed out and troubled? Jesus gives us three things to consider.

Number one, we know Jesus and we need to take God at His word. “You believe in God, believe also in Me” ([John 14:1](#)). Because Jesus is God, He knows all of our circumstances and He is able to deal with them. There is nothing too hard for Him. Nothing is so complex that He cannot unravel it. The Bible asks, “Is anything too hard for the Lord?” ([Jeremiah 32:27](#)).

A. B. Simpson said,

There is no difficulty too intricate for Him to unravel. No little detail of life too petty for Him to take an interest in. There is no toil too tedious for Him to go through with us. There is no tangle too involved for Him to unthread and loose. There is no complication or difficult circumstance too extreme for Him to not be willing to take hold and lead us gently into the light.

Maybe you are facing a crisis right now. You have really been wanting to get away from your problems. You are hoping for some wisdom or some direction. Jesus is saying, “Look, you believe in God, believe also in Me. I have not brought you this far to let you down now. Do not give up. Do not lose hope. I am going to get you through this.”

This is what He is saying to the disciples: “Believe in Me, guys. Come on. I brought you this far. I know you do not understand when I say one of you is going to betray Me and Peter is going to deny Me. I know you do not understand it when I say that I am going to go away and be crucified. It sounds like the world is ending. But guys, trust Me. I know what I am doing.”

Now of course we look at this and we know exactly what He was doing. He was going to the cross to die for the sin of the world and there was no other way that this issue could be resolved. But they did not know that. When He would speak of His crucifixion and resurrection, it just

seemed to go right over their heads. So, as He is sharing these words with them it just seems like the end of everything.

He is saying, “Believe in Me.” And by the way, in the Greek this is a command. “I command you to believe in Me right now. I order you to trust Me in these circumstances.” They knew they were in danger. They knew that they might lose their lives for Him. But I do not think that is what bothered them the most because as we know from church history, His apostles died as martyrs—with the exception of John. They tried to boil him in oil, but we read that he did not cook, so he was banished to Patmos and there he wrote the book of Revelation.

The point is that these guys were all brave, courageous men. I do not think the issue was that they were afraid of danger or hardship. I think the issue for them was “Lord, we are afraid to be without You.” For us too, that is a fate worse than death. We do not want to live without Him.

Remember in John 6, when the Lord shared some words to thin out the crowds, He turned to His disciples and said: “Will you also go away?” They said, “Lord, where else shall we go? You alone have the words of eternal life” (cf. [John 6:67–68](#)). These men had pledged themselves to Him. They had given everything up to follow Him and now He is saying that He is going to go away. They do not understand it, but the Lord is saying: “Trust Me on this.”

We need to do the same because sometimes things are going along beautifully in your ministry and then something unexpected happens. It might be an illness. It might be a tragedy. It might be some upset on your staff or any other thing. And you think: “How could this be a good thing? Lord, why did You let this happen to us?”

The problem is that we tend to think of the small picture. We tend to think of the immediate—what is going on in the here and now. God is looking at the big picture of what He is going to do overall. We think of today; God is thinking of tomorrow. We are thinking about comfort; God is thinking about character. We are thinking of an easy time; God is thinking of making a better man. So we need to trust Him no matter what our circumstances are, knowing that He has a purpose in what takes place in our lives.

The classic example of this is Joseph. We all know his story. He was sold by his brothers into slavery. His father made him that beautiful coat of many colors—a long sleeved tunic. Maybe he went to the brothers and kind of did a little bit of “nanny, nanny, nanny” with it. The Bible does not say. In fact, it is worth noting that there is nothing critical said about Joseph in Genesis. He went to his brothers to check up on them wearing his long sleeved robe. Obviously, he did not get out in the field and labor with them. But finally they were fed up and they said, “Let’s just kill him.” Ultimately, he was sold to a traveling group of Ishmaelite traders for twenty pieces of silver. What a horrible setback in this young man’s life. He wakes up in the comfort of his own bed; the next day he is on his way into slavery. You know the story. He is bought by a man named Potiphar. And after a little time passes, Potiphar gives him some responsibility. The next thing you know, he is running the whole house.

Things are going wonderfully. Joseph could have said, “Okay Lord, now I understand. You let this happen so I could come to this place and be used by You. I am learning how to be a servant.” Little did he know what was still ahead in his future. Potiphar’s wife started hitting on him. She was far from subtle. She just said, “Sleep with me.” Day in and day out she came to him with these temptations, probably using every technique she could muster up to pull this young, good looking man into bed with her. But he resisted and he resisted. The reason he gave was: “How

can I sin against God? And besides, Potiphar has put everything under my care and I do not want to disappoint him.”

We need more people like that who would think about God’s glory and His reputation. I wish more people would think about that before they do crazy things. How is this going to impact people if they hear that you, the leader, have fallen? Oh what a coup that is for the devil! If he could bring you down, think of the people that he could stumble, the people that he could devastate. Think of the ammo it gives to the enemy and to unbelievers so they could say, “What about that guy over there? He is the pastor and he fell into this sin.” Do not let it happen. Put up barriers around your life. Take every precaution possible.

And Joseph did that. He stayed away from her, but still she hit on him. Finally one day, she tried to pull him into bed with her and he ran. She held onto his garment and then she falsely accused him of rape. He was sent off to prison. You know the rest of the story. Through a chain of events, he ultimately became the most powerful man in the world under the Pharaoh. And when his brothers were brought before him because they needed food, they did not even recognize who he was. It would have been the ultimate moment of payback but instead he said to them, “You meant this for evil, but God meant it for good” (cf. [Genesis 50:20](#)).

We need to remember stuff like that. [Romans 8:28](#) is for us too. It is not just for us to preach but for us to believe. “All things work together for good to those that love God, the called according to His purpose.” So when that crisis hits, when that hardship hits, when that thing that does not make any sense takes place, you have to know that God is still in control of your circumstances. As a pastor, as a leader of your church, He is going to use the crisis for His glory.

I can think of setbacks in my life that were used by God to ultimately accomplish His purposes. When our church was starting to take off, we were meeting in an Episcopalian church and using their facility. They had come down to Calvary and wanted someone to come up to their church and do Bible studies. A group of guys did teach at the church and then ultimately, it ended up with me and I was doing these studies. The Lord was blessing and we began to experience some growth. I do not think these guys at this church really liked what they were seeing because they wanted control of it. They said, “We want you to come on staff and be a minister with us.” I did not see myself wearing a collar and being an Episcopalian pastor. We were sort of a church within a church, using their facility. I knew they did not like what was happening.

One day I was down at the office of Calvary Costa Mesa. I walked in and there, sitting in the chairs waiting to meet with Chuck, is the pastor of the church and one of his head elders. I was shocked to see them. I said, “What are you guys doing here?”

And they said, “We are here to see Pastor Chuck.”

“Oh really, what for?”

“To get rid of you.”

“What?”

“Yeah, we want to get rid of you. We do not want you in our church anymore and we are going to talk to Chuck about getting someone else to come in.”

I was devastated. I went up into this office and I was waiting. I knew they were meeting with Chuck and I just thought, “This is the end of my ministry. It is over with. Why did God let this happen to me? What did I do wrong? I was trying to do the right thing.” As I was calling out to the Lord, a peace just came on my heart. God really spoke to me—“I am going to take care of it.”

Then I got a call, “Greg, come into my office.” It felt like the principal just called me. I sat down. Chuck looked at me and said, “Well, I just met with those men from the church.”

I said, “Yes?”

“And they want to get rid of you.”

“Yeah.”

“Greg, it is time to find you a new church.”

“Yeah!” I said, “That is funny you should mention that because just the other day someone told me about this abandoned Baptist church. They had a split and it is an empty building. I think it is available, but it is for sale. I do not know for how much.”

He said, “Well, let’s go up and look at it.”

I said, “Okay.”

So the next day Chuck came up. I think I was nineteen, maybe twenty at that point. He was talking with the realtor and I was just sort of looking at this huge cavernous building and trying to imagine how we would use it. Then I saw Chuck pull out his checkbook. He wrote out a check and gave it to the guy. Chuck walked over to me and said, “Greg, I just wrote a check for your first few months and I have to go now. This is your church. Goodbye.” And he drove off into the sunset.

God took the worst case scenario and turned it around to bring our church into existence. If I would have had my way, I probably would have stayed in that place because it was easy. I just showed up and everything was set up for me. I did not have to worry about anything. But the Lord forced me to take a step of faith and that has happened many times since then in many things that we have done.

Maybe that has happened to you. God has actually smoked you out or you would not have done it. Oh, I know you look like the big man of faith now when you look at your ministry, but you know what really happened, right? You know the truth.

So this is what Jesus is saying, “You believe in God, believe also in Me” ([John 14:1](#)). That is reason number one why we should not be stressed out and troubled.

Here is reason number two. “In My Father’s house are many mansions” ([John 14:2](#)).

No matter what happens to you in life, it pales when you compare it with this great hope that we are going to heaven. We are going to meet the Lord one day. He has a place waiting for us. He is saying, “This is the hope I am giving to you—in My Father’s house are many mansions.” A better translation would be “dwelling places.” He probably was not talking about an actual palatial estate like you would see in Beverly Hills. Most likely He was referring to a new body that was waiting for them on the other side. He was saying, “You guys remember this: keep the eternal perspective, you are going to heaven. No matter what happens to you, you are going to heaven.” We need to remember that as well, that we are going to go to heaven. And that is such a great hope.

As you get older, that becomes more real to you. When you are young, you think, “Oh yeah, eventually.” But as you get older you think, “It might be sooner than I thought.” There are those telltale signs. The hair does not grow where it is supposed to grow and it grows in places it should never be growing. Why do we have hair coming out of our ears now? When I go to get my hair cut she spends as much time cutting my ears as my head. That is humiliating. I used to have a nice wave, now I just have beach! And I see many of you have it as well. I see a lot of beach out there right now. I feel very much at home.

You are going to heaven. So He says, “Keep that in mind. Keep that in the forefront of your mind.”

The final reason they do not have to be troubled is that Jesus is coming again. Look at [John 14:3](#). “I will come again and receive you unto Myself that where I am you may be also.” He is coming again. This is something we need to keep in front of our people, because we are living in a crazy world.

I was just reading in the paper on the way up here about the potential for nuclear war between Pakistan and India. They said if this war were to break out, it could blow the economy apart. It could cause refugees like we have never seen. It could affect the whole planet. We think, “Well, that is just those guys over there.” It will be coming to our own backyard. And then of course there are all these other problems such as the conflict in the Middle East and the threat of terrorism in our own nation. People are frightened right now. We are living in frightening times and we need to remind them that Jesus is coming back again.

Do not forget to give that message to them because the Scripture tells us in [1 John 3:3](#), “He that has this hope purifies himself, even as He is pure.” If a person properly understands the teaching of the imminent return of Christ, it will cause them to want to live a more godly life. And so Jesus is saying, “I am coming again to receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.”

I love the way the story ends. Jesus said, “And where I am going you know and the way you know.” Thomas responded, “We do not know the way.” I love Thomas. If I had been one of the disciples I know I would have hung out with Thomas because he was a skeptic. He was not a person who was filled with unbelief. There is a difference between skepticism and unbelief. A skeptic, when presented with the truth will believe. An unbeliever, when presented with the truth, will not believe. It is a choice they have made. Thomas was skeptical.

I have never been one to believe something just because someone said it was true. I have always wanted to know for myself. And Thomas wanted the same. We call him “Doubting Thomas” because after the crucifixion when the Lord appeared to the disciples, Thomas was not there. When they told him about it he said, “Well, I will believe it when I can put my hand in His side and actually touch the wounds in His hands.” The next time they met together, Thomas was there. I love the fact that the Lord just appears and says, “Thomas, go ahead. Put your hand in My side.” That reminds us that He is the unseen listener to every conversation. “I was eavesdropping on what you said, Thomas. Go for it. Here I am.” And in defense of Thomas, he said, “My Lord and My God” ([John 20:28](#)). He did not need further proof. That was all he wanted. He wanted to know for himself. He just wanted to be convinced.

Jesus is talking to the disciples. He says, “I am going to prepare a place for you and I will come again and receive you unto Myself. Where I go you know and the way you know.” And I think all the disciples were thinking, “Man, that is so deep.” I do not think they had a clue.

It is sort of like when you are in class and the teacher does some complex problem on the blackboard, turns back to the class and says, “Now, does everyone understand?” Everyone nods, “Yeah, yeah” because you do not want to be the one person that says, “Excuse me. I do not understand it.”

Jesus says, “Where I am going you know and the way you know.” The disciples were probably nodding, “Oh yes, yes.” Thomas was probably in the back. “I have a question, Lord.” “Yes,

Thomas?” “We do not know where You are going. We do not know the way. What are you talking about?” Jesus does not reprove him. He does not correct him. He just says, “I am the way, the truth and the life and no man comes to the Father but by Me” ([John 14:6](#)). It was as if to say, “That is a good question, Thomas and here is a good answer.”

We are living in a time when it is becoming more and more unpopular to say, “Jesus Christ is the only way to the Father.” It is not politically correct to stand up and have to say, “Folks, the other religions of this world are false. These other belief systems are not true. Only Christ is true.” I am amazed that even in the evangelical world you see liberalism seeping in. Even people who call themselves evangelicals are actually beginning to fudge on this a little bit. Obviously this is a non-negotiable issue. We have to hold this one hard. We need to proclaim it to people and they need to understand this is true. It is not just that they have chosen to be a Christian and that is the way they are following. Other people have their own way. No, we need to help people understand. It is through Christ; this is the only way to know God. They need to share this with other people.

Maybe you have a troubled heart today. Maybe your world has been thrown into confusion. Maybe a bombshell has recently come your way. What do you need to do?

Number one, you need to believe in God. Just remember that God knows what He is doing. He is the author and finisher of your faith. He is going to complete what He has begun in your life as an individual and in your ministry. As God says in [Jeremiah 29:11](#),

I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord,
thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope
[or literally, an expected end].

There is an expected end. There is a conclusion. He is going to bring it all together. It may not be until much later in life. For Joseph it certainly was not until much later when all of it came together. And maybe for some of us it will not be until we get to the other side, where all of our questions will be answered.

Number one, believe in God. Number two, remember you are going to heaven. Number three, remember Jesus is coming back again.

Let’s pray.

Lord, we thank You for Your Word. Help us to not be troubled today. Help us to not be agitated, stressed, and thrown into confusion. Help us to believe what You have said, take it to heart, and then to live by it. Thank You for the position of responsibility You have given to us. We know that the enemy has set his sights on us. He would love to sift us as wheat. But Lord, we thank You that You are interceding for us and You will not give us more than we can handle. At the same time, Lord, help us, like Joseph, to take practical steps to keep as much distance from anything that could pull us down as possible. Help us remember the importance of Your glory and Your name. Lord, we would never want to do anything to bring dishonor to it. It is a great privilege You have given to us to be in a position of leadership. As it has been said, “It takes a steady hand to hold

Servant Leadership – Lesson 26
Encouragement for the Troubled Heart by Greg Laurie

12

a full cup.” So Lord, give us a steady hand and give us a heart that is turned toward You. Keep us strong until that day when You call us into Your presence. We thank You now, in Jesus’ name. Amen.

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

BY

Calvary Chapel Outreach Fellowship

Lesson 27

An Abiding Relationship with Christ

By

Brian Brodersen

Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa

Brought to you by:

The Blue Letter Bible Institute

www.blbi.org

A ministry of:

The Blue Letter Bible

www.blueletterbible.org

Let's turn to [John 15:1-11](#).

- 1 I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.
- 2 Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.
- 3 You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.
- 4 Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.
- 5 I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.
- 6 If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.
- 7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.
- 8 By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.
- 9 As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love.
- 10 If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.
- 11 These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.

Let's pray.

Lord, once again we are asking that You would speak to us. Lord, how good it is to just come, sit, be refreshed, and hear from You. Lord, our desire is that as we would stand behind this pulpit, and that each one of us would be the oracles of God, not speaking our own minds or thoughts but speaking Your heart. As we look at this great portion of Scripture, we pray that You would speak to us about what it is to bear fruit and what it is to abide in Christ. Help us now we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

The grapevine, with its many branches and abundance of fruit, was a symbol of the nation of Israel. This symbol was stamped on their coins, carved on their synagogues, and even carved on the door of the temple in Jerusalem. It was a familiar picture to every Jew of what God had in mind for the nation. But as we all know, Israel failed to bring forth both the quantity and the quality of fruit that God was desiring through them and so He set them aside.

Now Jesus says to this small band of disciples, "I am the true vine. You are the branches." And then He says in essence, "By abiding in Me, you will bring forth fruit. You will bring forth that which delights the heart of God and fulfills His intended purposes" (cf. [John 15:4-5](#)).

Here in our text, Jesus reveals to us the secret of a fruitful life. What we want to talk about is the secret of a fruitful life. I am not going to try to do an exposition of the eleven verses and look at

each and every aspect of these verses. Jesus, of course, is speaking parabolically. In every parable there is generally one main thing the Lord wants to communicate. And I think in this parable it is pretty clear—He wants to communicate the vital necessity of staying as connected to Him as we possibly can. That is what we want to consider in this passage.

There are three things I want to concentrate on from the text. The first thing is the definition of “fruit.” Jesus is talking about bearing fruit. This is what He desires, so we want to really try to grasp what it is that He is referring to. Secondly, we want to consider how fruit is born. And then thirdly, we want to look at how fruit is increased.

First of all, what is fruit? That is what He is talking about here. That is what He is stressing. “Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away. Every branch in Me that bears fruit...” All the way through, bearing fruit is the emphasis.

As pastors, we often make the mistake of thinking that fruit is a reference primarily to the number of converts that we made under our ministries. That it is the number of people attending our church services, the number of churches that we have been instrumental in planting, or any other number of things like that. And although I think that is an aspect of fruit that we will talk about a bit later, I do not think that is primarily what Jesus is talking about. I do not think that is really what He had in His mind first and foremost when He was talking about bearing fruit, bearing more fruit, and bearing much fruit.

If we were to ask Him for a definition of what He meant, I think what He was really referring to is something much more basic and fundamental. I think He was indicating that His life, His attributes, and His character would flow from us just as the sap flows from the vine into the branches and brings forth fruit.

So, I would say that the first definition of fruit, as Jesus was talking about it, would really be “Christ manifested through us.” Another way to describe it would be “personal godliness.” I do not want to overstate the case because I think that the problems we see in the ministry are probably a minority, at least I hope so. But it does seem that we have come to a stage in the ministry, as a body of churches called Calvary Chapel, where we have maybe to some degree missed the main point of personal godliness. Sometimes we even see people who have no regard whatsoever for personal godliness; yet, they are having an element of success or prosperity in their ministry. Even though they have no regard for personal godliness, they are talking about all the fruit: “Look at the fruit that is being born.”

I will never forget a situation that occurred a couple of years ago. There was a guy who was having great success in the ministry. He was building a new church and more people than ever were attending. The messages seemed to be more powerful; yet, at the same time he was having an affair and he was a drunk. When he was challenged, his response was: “Hey, we are bearing fruit.” No, he was not bearing fruit because first and foremost fruit is personal godliness.

There are four aspects that I want to consider regarding personal godliness. Remember that Jesus is saying, “I am the vine, you are the branches.” The picture is whatever the vine is, the branch is going to produce in fruit. So if Christ is the vine, then the production of fruit from us—the branches—is really going to be His life manifested through us. What do we see, first and foremost, when we look at Jesus? I think the very first thing that we would probably have to say in consideration of the life of Christ is that Jesus was love. He was loving. He was full of love for people. Jesus was not aloof or detached from people. Jesus loved people, not theoretically, but practically. It is easy to say, “I love you guys” in theory. But what about practically?

I was involved this past weekend with a church where there has been a resignation and just a lot of really bad things have happened in this fellowship over the past couple of years. In the course of events, the pastor had ended up resigning and so forth. The assistant got up and said to the congregation, “Pastor *So and So* wants you to know he really loves you.” I just think if he really loved them he would not have done all this stuff that he has done and dragged them through the whole thing.

That is what I mean. Sometimes we talk about loving, but it is more theoretical than actual. It is more theoretical than practical. When you look at Jesus, He really loved people. He did not see people as a commodity. He did not see people as a means to a greater end. He loved people for who they were. He loved them because they were precious to Him. I think if we want to consider what it is to bear fruit, this is where we have to begin our consideration: do we love people? Do we love God’s people? Do we really care about them? Do we see that that is what the ministry is all about?

I remember years ago when I was an intern at Costa Mesa with Pastor Chuck Smith. He would call us in once in a while to have a little pastors’ meeting with us. A problem that occurs over and over again is that there are tons of people, there are all kinds of needs, and the pastors quite often cannot be found because they are busy studying. Pastor Chuck would often bring up the question: “What are you guys in the ministry for? What is your goal? What is your object?” And of course, it was to minister to God’s people. But every time a ministry opportunity came up, we seemed to be saying, “I am too busy for that. I have got to study right now. Please do not call me. Call somebody else.”

We can forget so easily that the ministry is about loving people. Preaching is an important thing, obviously. Teaching the Bible is vital to any ministry, but you can sort of undermine what you say by how you treat people. How you deal with people and the attitude that you demonstrate toward them is vital. People always knew one thing about Jesus—they knew that He loved them. And if we are really bearing fruit, I think God’s people are going to see that in our lives. They are going to see that their pastor is interested in them and he cares about them.

You guys have all had this experience. We have all had it. There is nothing worse than talking to somebody that you really want to talk to, but you sense as you are talking to them that they do not really want to talk to you because they are looking away. “What were you saying? Uh-huh. Right.” They are looking all around and you know that they really would rather be talking to somebody else. Sometimes that happens at conferences. I have talked to people over the years who have come and said, “When I talk to my pastor I just feel like he is not really interested in anything I have to say. He seems to be distracted. He does not really look at me. He is always looking away. Then he just sort of dismisses what I say and runs off looking for the next person.”

That is just an example of what can happen when we lose perspective on what Jesus is really talking about and what it is to bear fruit. Personal godliness is going to manifest itself, first of all, in love.

Secondly, as we consider Jesus, we would of course all agree that Jesus was holy. He said, “I always do those things that please the Father” (cf. [John 8:29](#)). It is so easy to get caught up in ministry and making sure that you are getting the right message out to everybody else, that you can neglect your own personal development. You can just overlook your own need to increase in holiness and become more and more like the Lord. Sometimes in our quest to be relevant, we compromise holiness. I think there is a lot of that going on in the church today.

I have an interesting article here from the *Times*. The title of the article is, “Fear in Church?” Pray for England.

England’s first match against Sweden is Sunday, kicking off at 10:30 a.m. U.K. time. The Church of England, realizing that soccer is a religion unto itself, sent an email to the diocese throughout the country, advising that they arranged to televise the game for parishioners, and also approved changing the time for services. So Saint James Church in London will screen the game and cut short its customary Sunday service to make way for St. Michael Owen. The church also will allow parishioners to bring their own beer. [Here is a church spokesman]—“It is part of our way to show that Christians are not complete weirdos who sit in the monastery and never have any fun.” Vicar Andrew Boggin told the national public radio, “Smoking, swearing and verbal abuse of the opposition will not be allowed.” In other words, the Swedes cannot smoke, swear, or cuss at you. They are the opposition and that will not be allowed, according to the Vicar. Churches in England will be competing for attendance with pubs and restaurants which have been granted permission by the high court to open and begin selling alcohol at 7 a.m. during the World Cup.

In our quest to be relevant, sometimes we compromise holiness. And I know that there are some of you who are a bit inclined to drift maybe a little more toward that seeker model that emphasizes relevance. I will tell you this—the Anglicans invented relevance. If you want to see where it leads, just go live in England for a few years and visit the Anglican churches. It is horrible. It is pathetic. We do not need to go there because what makes a difference in people’s lives is not that I am so relevant that they think I am cool and they cannot help but want to be a Christian. What makes a difference is the life of God shining through the Christian. Holiness is what we see in the life of Christ and that would certainly be an aspect of bearing fruit.

Thirdly, we can very clearly see humility in Jesus. If there was ever anybody on the planet that could have been on an ego trip, it was Jesus. He was the epitome of humility. He was utterly and completely humble.

We see that demonstration of humility in John 13. Remember there at the supper when He took the towel, girded Himself, and He began to wash the feet of the disciples. They did not understand what He was doing. Peter said, “Lord, what are You doing? You cannot do this.” Jesus said, “You do not understand what I am doing now, but you will understand later. You call Me Master and Lord and you are right because that is who I am. But if I, your Master and Lord, have done this for you, then you ought to do it for one another” (cf. [John 13:6-7](#); [13-14](#)).

Peter wrote in [1 Peter 5:5](#) about submitting to one another and he said, “And be clothed with humility.” I am certain that as he penned that he had in his mind the night when Jesus took that towel and girded Himself. A literal translation of “be clothed in humility” is “put on the costume of a slave.”

I think sometimes we lose sight of what a minister is. I was thinking about even the term “prime minister.” Prime Minister today denotes a person of importance. That is a person who is to be

admired and a position to be aspired to. But originally the prime minister was the chief servant of the rule. And of course, that is the meaning of minister—a servant.

What slave had anything to be proud of? It is totally inconsistent with who we are to manifest any arrogance because it is just so contrary to the character of our Lord. And so there is going to be humility in a true servant.

Fourthly, there is going to be grace. Jesus overflowed with grace. He was gracious. Think of Jesus in contrast to the other leaders of the day. Think of Jesus and that contrast in the eyes of somebody like Matthew, for example. Matthew was a tax collector. He was among the most despised people in all the land. The rabbis actually taught that very few people were beyond redemption. However tax collectors, being traitors, were among the few that were beyond redemption. The tax collector had betrayed his people and he was serving the enemy. I can just imagine that as Matthew sat at his tax booth and collected taxes, whenever any of the rabbis passed by, they would have probably spit his way. They would have uttered or maybe muttered curses under their breath. They would have pointed in his direction with a condemning finger. The last thing Matthew would have ever thought by the impression being given by these guys was that there was any possible redemption for him.

But Jesus was obviously entirely different. I imagine that Jesus occasionally ministered near to where Matthew was stationed. I would imagine that at times Matthew overheard some of what Jesus was saying, or even maybe observed His interaction with people. Matthew probably began to think: “That rabbi is different. There is something about Him. I feel like I could approach Him. I feel like I could talk to Him. I feel like if I were to come to Him, He probably would not condemn me.” And then suddenly what happens? One day he is sitting there, collecting taxes, and Jesus walks by and says, “Follow Me.” I know it was that grace that exuded from Christ that drew Matthew to the Lord.

When Jesus was talking about bearing fruit I think that He had these four things in mind: love, holiness, humility and grace. He is talking about this being the overflow of our lives.

As I said and I want to repeat it—I think sometimes we get so caught up in the mechanics of the ministry, trying to be a success, that we can even be competing with the church in the next city. We get so consumed with all of this stuff, that we forget the very basic fundamental things of just the life of Christ manifesting itself through us. That is what the Lord is looking for. That is what He is delighting in. Unfortunately, we often do not see that love. There is not that great concern for holiness; there is not that humility; there is not that grace.

I think that the term “fruit” would be a reference to good works. Now we all know we are saved by grace. There is no question about that.

8 But by grace we have been saved through faith, that not of
ourselves; It is a gift of God,
9 not of works lest any man should boast.
10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for the
good works, that God before ordained that we should walk in.
(cf. [Ephesians 2:8-10](#))

Sometimes I get the feeling that we give the impression to our congregations that the Christian life is about going to church and listening to Bible studies. That is certainly an aspect of it, but

that is not the end, is it? That is a means to the greater end of glorifying God. But sometimes I think that this is the impression we give.

On the other hand, sometimes I think that preachers reduce the ministry to sermon preparation and delivery. That becomes what the ministry is all about. But the Scripture says that Jesus “went about doing good and healing all those who were oppressed by the devil” ([Acts 10:38](#)). If we are going to be bearing fruit, I think we are going to be doing similar kinds of things. We are going to be going about doing good.

I am not talking about being on a big “works” trip. Jesus just had that inclination toward helping people and He was drawn to people who had problems. Even His enemies knew that. You may remember in the synagogue they saw a man with a withered hand and they saw Jesus. They knew before it ever happened what was going to happen. They thought: “This guy Jesus, He cannot resist helping people. He is obsessed with helping people. He has this inclination toward that.” And if the Spirit of Christ is filling us, then there is going to be an inclination toward that. Again, it is not a “works” trip.

A while back I did a study on the subject of good works. I think it was [Ephesians 2:10](#) that I was teaching. I went through the New Testament and found all the references to “good works” and there are a lot of them. As far as fruit goes, the Lord is talking about just doing good things, just helping, being there to minister to people, visiting them in the hospital perhaps, or just taking some extra time to pray with them.

We finished up a service one evening and it was pretty late. Usually that is staying around till about 10:00. There were just a couple people left in the sanctuary. I was standing there talking with somebody, and there was somebody else in the back. I was just trying to wrap things up and since it was kind of late, I was anxious to get home. This young guy came and sat right in the front row. He was sitting there and he was kind of bouncing. He was kind of twitching a little bit. I thought, “Oh no, what is this guy about to do?” I was thinking, “Oh, it is so late, Lord.” I was with this person and looking for our assistant so he could do something with this guy. But the assistant was back there talking to somebody else. I was finishing up with this one person and I was feeling like, “I am just going to ignore this and get out of here and hopefully he will go away.”

And the Lord spoke to me so clearly and said, “Talk to that guy.” I said, “Lord, it is 10:15 now and it looks like he may have some serious problems and he will keep me here a lot longer.” But there was just that strong impression—“Talk to him.” I sat down beside him and said, “How are you doing?” And he turned to me. The guy had a mild form of cerebral palsy. He could speak fairly well and he just sat there pouring out his heart about the goodness of God, the love of God, about how lonely he was, and how he needed fellowship. Man, if I ever felt like an idiot, it was right then. I just sat there saying, “Lord, forgive me.” I spent about 45 minutes with him and had the greatest fellowship. I walked away saying, “Lord, thank You.” The blessing God had in store for me that night was meeting him. I run into him in the church now and again and he comes up and gives me a big hug.

Ministry involves those kinds of things. Sometimes it is just taking those extra few moments, just going out of our way. It is not saying, “Well, I put in my eight hours. It is my day off.” We are on the job 24/7. Jesus was on the job 24/7.

Bearing fruit is doing good works.

And then thirdly—and I do not want to underestimate this, but again, I have just been trying to look at it in order or priority—there of course is the issue of converts and disciples. That is certainly an aspect of fruit as well. This is what Jesus is talking about. This is what He is desiring. This is what God was looking for with Israel. They failed miserably. This is what God has been looking for throughout the church age. This is what God is looking for in our lives, that there would be fruit coming forth. That is, personal godliness, good works, and then impacting the lives of other people—seeing converts, seeing people come into a relationship with the Lord, or taking young Christians and building them up in the faith.

When we went to London we just had the most fabulous time. Before we went, God really spoke to me and showed me that our ministry was not initially to be an evangelistic ministry. It would be first of all a ministry to the suffering sheep, and secondly out of that, evangelism would spring forth. And that is exactly what the Lord did when we got to England. He began to bring to us, by the dozens, sheep that had been wounded, sheep that had just been starving and abused. People came from situations where they had been so disillusioned with church that they had not been in a church in ten years. Others were still in the church but they were just hanging on by a thread, just hoping and praying that something else would come along to minister to them. God began to bring them to us and then, out of that, evangelism began to take place as well.

I will never forget when we were leaving London. A number of the families in the church asked me one night, “Would you come over for dinner? We just want to have you over.” They were all of Afro-Caribbean background and they wanted to give me a nice Jamaican meal, which sounded good to me. As we were there, each one of them wanted to just take a few minutes to tell me how much I had impacted their lives. It was one of those heart-wrenching times when everybody was weeping and telling their stories. As I was listening I was thinking, “All these guys are really doing is testifying to the power of the Word of God.” They did not realize it because they were saying, “You did this and you did that.” After about 45 minutes of that I thanked them for their graciousness and all the wonderful things that they shared. I said, “But I want to draw your attention to something. I want you to notice there is a common thread in what you have been saying tonight. What I heard from every one of you was how the Word of God transformed your lives. I did not really do much. I just got up every week and faithfully taught you the Bible and God did the rest.”

That is the kind of fruit that we are talking about—that fruit of conversion, that fruit of discipleship. I believe that is the definition of fruit. I think that is what Jesus is talking about when He is talking about bearing fruit. But now the question is: How is fruit born? Jesus gives us the answer in the text. He says,

4 Abide in Me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.

5 I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit. ([John 15:4-5](#))

We saw what fruit is, now how is it born? Jesus said, “Abide in Me,” but what does it mean? What does it mean to abide?

Jesus said, “The Father and I will come and we will make our abode with you.” I would like to think of abide in that sense of abode. What is your abode? Your abode is your home. Your abode is the place you live. That is the place your life is centered. That is where you dwell. That is the place where everything that is of any importance to you is more or less based, isn't it?

So when Jesus is saying that we are to abide in Him, what He is saying is, “Make your home in Me.” I love that picture of just making our home in Christ, planting our lives in the midst of His life, and clinging to Him.

To abide means to keep up a habit of constant close communion with Him. It means to be always leaning on Him, resting on Him, making Him our fountain of life and strength, our chief companion and our best friend.

In the ministry there is a big danger if we begin to love the ministry and get caught up in the ministry, but forget about the Lord—who we are ministering for? It is a reality, isn't it? We all struggle with it. We all know what it is like to get into the Bible to find a text to preach and to completely miss the application that it might have to our own lives. We all know what it is like to be reading through and saying, “Oh, that is so good. I cannot wait to preach that.” Instead we should be saying, “Lord, I am convicted.” God wants to speak to us through His Word.

This is what He is talking about—We are to be immersing ourselves in Him, abiding in Him. How is that accomplished?

He said, “If My words abide in you.” To have His Word abiding in us is to keep His sayings and precepts continually before our minds. It is that picture of being saturated with the Word of God.

Don't you love it when you see that in the life of a person? That is such an attractive thing to me. Someone said, “If you cut Spurgeon, he would bleed Bible ink.” He was just a walking Bible. Everything he said had some sort of a scriptural element to it. He was full of the Word of God. And as I meet people like that, I think, “Man that is what Jesus is talking about.” He is talking about abiding in Him and His Word abiding in us so that we are just living in this realm of the Word. When the Word has permeated our being, and we are planted and situated in Him, and He is rooted in us, then we are just really consumed with Him. That is the kind of thing that Jesus is describing here when He is talking about abiding.

Hudson Taylor was a great pioneer missionary to China. After a long struggle, Hudson Taylor discovered what he referred to later as his “spiritual secret.” It was that secret of abiding. As I was reading his biography I came to this one portion where it talks about a key moment in his life and ministry. He is really struggling. He is battling intensely because he is wondering if he can truly be a Christian with some of the things that were going on in his life. In his own words, he was struggling with the “sin of irritability.” What is the sin of irritability? I read that and I thought: “Is irritability a sin? I thought it was a caffeine overdose or maybe a low blood sugar problem or something like that.” He was seriously questioning whether or not he was a Christian because he was battling with irritability. The guy was living in China under miserable conditions, and he was sick with all kinds of illnesses. My goodness, I live in relative luxury and I get irritable a lot, but I do not usually think of it as a big sin. That is not really consistent with the character of Christ, is it? We do not read about Him being irritable.

Hudson Taylor was going through this whole battle with irritability. Then he realized that the solution was to abide in Christ. He started trying to really understand what that meant. How do I abide in Christ? He talks about how he committed to reading more of his Bible. He wanted to spend more time in prayer. He had all of these different things that he was going to do that were going to help him to abide and ultimately give him the victory over these things. Finally, after months and months of failure and frustration, he came to the realization that it was really nothing

more or less than just completely letting go and realizing that he was a branch in the vine. He needed to allow the life of the vine to flow through him. He writes in his journal:

The Lord Jesus received, is holiness begun. The Lord Jesus cherished, is holiness advancing. The Lord Jesus counted about as never absent, would be holiness complete. To let my loving Savior work in me His will, my sanctification is what I would live for by His grace. Abiding, not striving nor struggling, looking often to Him. Trusting Him for present power. Trusting Him to subdue all inward corruption. Resting in the love of an almighty Savior, in the conscious joy of a complete salvation from all sin, willing that His will should truly be supreme.

[How then do I bear fruit? Listen.] Only by thinking of all that Jesus is and all that He is for us. His life. His death. His work. He Himself is revealed to us in the Word, to be the subject of our constant thoughts. Not as striving to bear fruit or to increase fruit, but a looking off to the faithful One seems all we need. A resting in the loved One entirely for time and for eternity.

That was Hudson Taylor's spiritual secret. I would imagine that we have all had the experience of coming to the awareness of a sin in our lives, of an inconsistency of some sort, and then determining that we are going to conquer it. We focus on this particular thing and on all of the various steps that we are going to take to deal with this thing. And what happens? Six months pass and we are more miserable than when we started. We feel like greater failures than we ever did. We have also had the experience of seeing a situation in our lives and realizing that something it is not right. But instead of focusing on that, we focus on Christ. And then you find that without even really thinking about it, it is just no longer an issue.

Before I was a Christian, I had a very limited vocabulary. The few words that I knew were words that you would not generally use in mixed company. At one point in time, even though I was not a Christian, I came to the realization that my language was pathetic. I heard a couple of guys fighting with each other, cussing at each other and I thought, "Oh my goodness that is what I sound like." So I determined that I was not going to talk like that anymore. I did pretty well for about three months. And in about ten minutes, all of that hard work was completely blown away when I found myself in a situation where I just completely lost control. Every word that I had not said for three months, I said ten times over in just a short matter of time.

Some time later I came to Christ. And after I received Christ, I never really thought about my language. It just was not one of those things that was big on my mind. Six months later it dawned on me, "Wow, I do not talk like that anymore." I did not focus on the language problem and try to deal with it; I just focused on Jesus. I was so excited about being a Christian. I was so enthralled with the Scriptures and just immersing my life in the life of Christ. Time passed and I realized that swearing was not even an issue anymore.

When we are talking about the "how to" of bearing fruit, Jesus tells us that the secret is abiding.

As we look at the text, we see that it is not merely the bearing of fruit, but there are also indications that God wants to see fruit increase as time goes on. Do not be content with just a little bit of fruit. God wants more fruit and much fruit to be born from our lives. The second verse gives us insight into how fruit is increased. Look at [John 15:2](#).

Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away.
Every branch that bears fruit, He prunes that it may bear more
fruit.

That is the third point that we want to talk about. How is fruit increased? It is increased by purging or by pruning. “Left to itself a vine will produce a good deal of unproductive growth. For maximum fruitfulness, extensive pruning is essential,” according to Leon Morris and his Gospel of John commentary. He says this is the suggested figure for the Christian life. Listen to this: “The fruit of Christian service is never the result of allowing natural energies and inclinations to run riot.”

How much ministry is the result of natural energies? You can produce something that looks like fruit. People in factories today can make stuff that looks like fruit, but when you bite into it your teeth fall out. It is not fruit. You can go into these model homes, see the fruit bowl there and grab that apple. But it is not really an apple; it is synthetic. It is fake. I dare to say that there are ministries where the natural energies have been applied and there is something that looks like fruit, but in reality it is not fruit.

Pruning is that process of cutting back. In order to bring forth more fruit pruning is absolutely necessary. Alexander McLaren did a great paragraph on this. He said,

Were you ever in a greenhouse or a vineyard at the season of cutting back the vines, it might seem a waste to see, scattered on the floor the bright green leaves and the incipient clusters, and to look at the bare stem bleeding at a hundred points from the sharp steel. But there was not a random stroke in it all. And there was nothing cut away which it was not loss to keep and gain to lose. And it was all done artistically, scientifically, for a set purpose; that the plant might bring forth more fruit.

The Lord wants to increase our fruit and sometimes there is that need for cutting back. This is my last point, but I want to touch on this in two areas. I want to touch on it in the area of our personal lives and in the area of our churches as well.

In our personal lives God cuts us back at times. He allows some sort of catastrophic thing to come upon us. He allows us to go through difficulties. These are all means of pruning. These are all means of bringing us to a place where we can actually produce more fruit, although we do not necessarily see it as that at the time.

In my own life personally, I remember many years ago the Lord speaking to me clearly. The Lord just began to say to me, “I want to expand your borders.” I did not read *The Prayer of Jabez*, but for lack of a better term that is the gist of what I thought God was saying to me. The Lord was saying that He wanted to just use me in different ways and capacities where I never thought He would use me. As the Lord began to show this to me, I wrote it in my journal and I still have that journal today. As I wrote this down I was obviously very excited at the prospect of what God wanted to do. But what I did not realize is that before that was going to happen, there was a major pruning that needed to take place.

God had given me all these words of encouragement, these promises, these visions to do these different things, but suddenly I found myself afflicted physically. Suddenly I found myself sicker

than I have ever been in my life. I was so sick I was convinced I was dying. Nobody could be as sick as I was and live through it. That is what I thought. I went into this period of illness that actually lasted seven years. There were times when it was so bad, I was miserable. It was so intense that I would just be crying out to the Lord. I wanted nothing more than to be healed. That was what I wanted. I will never forget one night just wrestling in my spirit, crying out to God, pleading with Him to heal me. Suddenly I had the thought in my mind, “What if I am using this to bring about more fruit in your life?” I was faced with this question from the Lord. It was almost like an option. It just seemed that I could be healed at that moment if I wanted to, or I could allow the pruning process to go on and reap the fruit that God had in mind. And as hard as it was, I just said, “Okay. Whatever You are doing, Lord, just keep doing it.” Now I look back and I still physically battle to some extent, but it is nothing like years ago. I look back and I see that was both the most miserable and in some sense, the most powerful time in my life. God did some things in me that needed to be done.

You remember Joseph had two sons in Egypt. He named one of them Ephraim. The name Ephraim means “fruitful in affliction.” It means “fruitful.” Joseph named him that because it was in his affliction that God brought him fruit.

God has ordained us to bring forth fruit and part of the bringing forth of fruit is that the pruning must take place. There will be those times when God is going to need to cut away. If they have not come yet, they will come. The interesting thing about pruning, which I discovered in reading, is that the older a plant gets the greater the need for pruning. As we grow, age, and mature, we start to see these things. Now I can see more clearly why the Lord does that cutting back. Do not be afraid of that. When it happens realize that God has a good plan here. He is only cutting back to bring forth more fruit.

When I was living in Oceanside we had two plants in our front yard that my wife always called potato plants. I do not know why because there were no potatoes on them. I guess that is the name of it. They were really pretty plants—bushes or shrubs with a long stem and this green bushy thing. It had these nice lavender flowers on it. One of them was always lush with a lot of flowers and the other one you could see more twigs. There was not much greenery on it and there were very few little lavender flowers. I would always look at it and wonder: “Why is this one flourishing and this one is not? They are only about six feet apart from each other. They are right in the same soil.”

But then I got to thinking about John 15. I thought, “Well, maybe pruning is what needs to occur here.” So I got out my little snips and cut that thing back. I cut it so far back that when I looked at it afterward I thought: “Oh no, I killed it. This thing has certainly got to be dead now.” It was pretty much just a stem that was left. My wife came out and said, “What did you do to this bush?” I said, “Honey, this is pruning, don’t you know? This is going to bear more fruit.” I did not know what I was talking about; I was just pretending like I did. Believe it or not, a few months later that thing started to grow back and it was just like the other one. It was green instead of brown. There were lots of these nice little lavender blossoms on it. I was shocked! That was an illustration right there of what Jesus was talking about.

Not only does it occur in our lives personally, it occurs in ministry as well. And remember this—and I think this is important in relation to ministry and church life—the older the plant is the greater the necessity of pruning. As our churches age and grow there are times when we actually need to cut back. It is always a painful process. Whenever you even start to move in that direction, people start screaming. “No, we do not want to do that.”

I think of my own experience at Costa Mesa. I just want to use this one little illustration. Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa is this great tree. Here is this fruitful vine that God has just blessed, multiplied, and increased. There is this beautiful plant, but it is older. It is aged. As I am coming back and beginning to get involved in the ministry, I am seeing that there are ministries that have been going on for years and years and years. They are no longer really bearing fruit but the same people are in the same place doing the same things. Maybe fifteen years ago there was vigor. There was life. There was an abundance of fruit, but now time has passed.

There is one particular ministry that I can think of right off hand. The guy had been involved for eighteen years and now there were just a couple of people involved. In that particular area, it was obvious to me that God wanted to do something fresh and new. The moment you get out the shears and start to prune, right away you hear: “Oh no! What are you doing? You cannot do this.” There is opposition and people think, “You are trying to destroy my life!”

As God is leading, you realize that is not what is happening. You see, what was happening is those people had stopped bearing fruit. They were no longer in that place of vital dependence on the Lord. They were no longer trusting God for new and exciting things. Now it was time for God to put them in a position once again where they had an opportunity to trust Him. They could not see it that way. They saw it as, “You are just kicking me out of here. You are mean and cruel and we do not like you.” But you go with what you sense God is leading you to do, and then you step back, watch, and see. Look what the Lord does. That ministry then begins to blossom again as new leadership comes in. It begins to flourish again. That person who was kicking, screaming, and telling you how horrible you were, when you see them a few months down the road they say, “Man, the Lord is so good. I needed to get out of there. Thanks for kicking me out.” You say, “I wish you would have told me that when I was kicking you out. You told me you hated my guts and wanted to...” And of course that happens so often because we have a tendency to not trust God.

As ministries grow we need to be sensitive to this reality. There are times when you have to cut things back. It is for the benefit of that particular fellowship that it might continue to bear fruit, but it is also for the benefit of that branch as well. I have found that a lot of times people get into a comfortable situation and they are very reluctant to step out of the comfort zone. If you leave it up to them, they will never step out of it even though they might be sitting there bearing no fruit whatsoever. They are branches but there has not been a berry on them in ages. What happens is that it needs to be snipped and you see then that branch becomes fruitful again once that happens.

I have one more illustration. I can think of another ministry where that was the case. I remember as I was talking to the pastor over this ministry that he was very unhappy where he was, but he was not unhappy enough to take a step, go out, and change the situation. I just felt that God was saying it was time to make the move. And now I can tell you he is a happy camper because there has been a new season of fruit in his life. It was a little bit tough because he was in a position for so long and comfortable. He had the steady paycheck and his life was settled. The Lord just did a little trimming back and moved him into a new area. And now the ministry where he had been struggling is prospering. He has gone on to a whole different area and he is flourishing right now too. And that is what the Lord does.

And so as we close, the Vinedresser knows. Jesus said, “I am the true vine and My Father is the vinedresser” ([John 15:1](#)). We need to trust God to work in His church and to work in our lives as we oversee His church. He wants us and our ministries to be producing fruit—first and foremost the fruit of personal godliness, and then those other things that follow. And we do that by abiding in Christ, living in Him, loving Him.

Here is the tricky thing. We are not to try to abide in Him just so we can bear fruit. We are to abide in Him because He is where you should abide. It is not, “Lord, I want to love You more so I can bear more fruit for You.” It is, “Lord, I just want to love You more because You are worthy of being loved more.” It is a very subtle line, isn’t it? So often I find that my motive for seeking after God is this thing I am trying to get. I just come back and think, “Wait a second, that is not it.” What if all of a sudden all ministry as we know it was just taken away from us? We still have Christ. And He is really what the ministry is all about. He is what life is all about. He is what everything is all about. And when it is all said and done, the really good thing is not what I got to do for Him, but the fact that He loves me, He saved me, and I just get to know Him. That is the great thing. He redeemed us to be sons first and servants second.

Father, we thank You that we have a relationship with You, first and foremost, Lord. And You know how all of us sometimes struggle with that balance, Lord. We are so excited about serving You. It is truly the greatest thing in the world. But Lord, sometimes we get so wrapped up in that, we neglect You. We forget that it is really mainly about You. Lord, we want to bear fruit. So help us, Lord, just to abide in You. Help us just to remember You, love You, and seek You not for what we can get out of it, but just because You are worthy to be sought.

Bibliography:

Excerpted from Hudson Taylor’s Journal, Dr. and Mrs. Howard Taylor, *Hudson Taylor and the China Inland Mission*, Overseas Mission Fellowship, 1989.

Leon Morris, *Reflections on the Gospel of John*, Hendrickson Publishers, England, July 1, 2000.

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

BY

Calvary Chapel Outreach Fellowship

Lesson 28

Our Identification with Christ

By

Skip Heitzig

Calvary Chapel Albuquerque

Brought to you by:

The Blue Letter Bible Institute

www.blbi.org

A ministry of:

The Blue Letter Bible

www.blueletterbible.org

Servant Leadership – Lesson 28
Our Identification with Christ by Skip Heitzig

1

Let's read starting at [John 15:12](#):

12 This is My commandment that you love one another as I have loved you.

13 Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down his life for his friends.

14 You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.

15 No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing, but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.

16 You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.

17 These things I command you, that you love one another.

18 If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you.

19 If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet, because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

20 Remember the word that I said to you, "A servant is not greater than his master." If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also.

21 But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me.

22 If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin. But now they have no excuse for their sin.

23 He who hates Me hates My Father also.

24 If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would have no sin; but now, they have seen and also hated both Me and My Father.

25 But this happened that the word might be fulfilled which is written in their law, "They hated Me without a cause."

Years ago, the people of Texas were plagued by a Mexican bandit by the name of Jorge Rodriguez. And his style was to come across the border, rob banks, and then quickly go across to his mountain hide-away in Mexico. And nobody could catch the guy. So the United States decided to hire a well known detective to go down to Mexico, find Jorge, and bring him to justice. Well, the detective went across the border, went into a little small town in Mexico and there in the saloon, in the corner, was Jorge Rodriguez, sitting, having a drink. So the detective walks over to the table, pulls out his gun, points it at Jorge and says, "Ah-ha! I found you. Tell me where you've hidden the money or I'm going to blow you away." Just then, another guy comes up. His name is Juan Garcia. And Juan says, "Excuse me, Señor, but Jorge cannot understand a word of English. He has no idea what you just said. But if you would like, I will translate for you." He said, "Fair enough. You tell Jorge to tell me where the money is or I'm going to kill him." So Juan and Jorge gabber together in Spanish. Jorge is pointing and moving his arms. And he tells the man in Spanish that if the detective would go three miles out of town, he'd find a well. Climb down into the well, go down and pull out the fifth brick. And behind the fifth brick would be three million dollars in gold. So Juan Garcia turns to the detective and says, "Señor, I am so sorry. Jorge says he cannot remember where the gold is. You're going to have to shoot him!"

Now this was a guy who pretended to be Jorge's friend and the detective's helper, but actually he was both of their enemies. He was in it for himself.

In our ministry we have both friends and we have enemies, and sometimes our enemies are disguised as friends. And sometimes our friends start out as enemies. They might come and not really like God or you or your ministry. But slowly, surely, through a process, the Holy Spirit will win them over. And those who were once your enemies become your friends.

In our text that we just read, the word love is mentioned eight times. The word hatred is mentioned seven times, in the same context. This is the context of a very special kind of friendship that Jesus has with His disciples. Now you know this is the last night Jesus spends with His men before His crucifixion. It's sort of like the pre-game get-together with the team. It's those last few moments together and Jesus extends His hand of friendship. He washes their feet. He reaches out to Judas. He instructs them through the evening. But here, He invites them into a whole new relationship of being their friend. The disciples certainly were Jesus' closest friends on earth. And He says here, "I shared with you. I gave you what I had. I revealed Myself to you."

You know, it's interesting that ministers, by and large, many of them, do not have close friends. A lot of research has been done and one researcher says that seventy percent of pastors don't have anyone they would consider a close friend, either inside or outside of their churches. Now, not to sound cliché here, but Jesus Christ is the best friend you could ever have in the ministry. I mean, think about it. He loves us. He chose us. He equips us. And then, after it is all said and done, He rewards us for what He equipped us to do. It's a wonderful set up.

I believe that working for Jesus as a friend is the highest form of ministry. Working for Jesus as a friend—or we might even say, working with Jesus, since we are co-laborers with Christ. Working with Jesus as a friend is even better than working for Him as a servant. Now, we are His servants. In [John 15:17](#) He says, "These things I command you." And a master can do that to a servant. Down in [verse 20](#), He said, "Remember a servant is not greater than his master." And we know that all the biblical authors in the New Testament, be it Paul or Jude or James or John, would open up their letters by calling themselves bondservants of Jesus Christ. Yet the highest form, I believe, is serving with the Lord as a friend in a friendship, because when Jesus is your friend it changes everything. It changes the whole meaning of your ministry. Now it's relational it is not just functional. You are doing something with someone, for someone that you love. And we all love to do things for someone who is a friend of ours.

If a pastor is not enjoying his ministry, I think something is radically wrong. In [John 15:11](#)—even though I started in [verse 12](#), I am going to sneak back to [verse 11](#). "These things I have spoken to you," Jesus said, "that My joy might remain in you and that your joy may be full."

It is not that the ministry is all smiles; we know that there are hardships. There are trials that we go through. But don't you love, doing what you do? In fact, isn't it true that sometimes it is hard to drag you away from the church building? You just love being there. You love what God lets you do, because you are doing it for Him, with Him, as a friend.

Serving the Lord, if He is your friend, is not punishment. It is nourishment. Remember Jesus said, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to finish it." It is what recharges us. It is not like, "I want to get away from these people. They're such a drag, man. They're such a drain." Don't you find that it invigorates you because you are doing it for the right reason?

Well, back in [John 15:16](#), Jesus says that He initiates this friendship. “You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should remain. And whatever you ask the Father in My name, He may give you.”

You know, it’s interesting, in human friendships there is an autonomy of choice. It is mutual. If you meet someone, there are a few options—option number one, you both don’t like each other. Well, you will not be friends. You might shake hands and say a few nice words, but it’s over. Option number two: you like that person, that person does not care too much for you. The result is the same, there will not be a friendship. But if you like that person and that person enjoys your company as well, it is mutual and a friendship is going to develop.

But here the Lord, by virtual of His sovereign position says, “You didn’t choose Me. This choice has been made about you, long before you were ever you. You didn’t choose Me, I chose you. I appointed you that you would go and bear forth fruit.”

Here is the point I want to make for us. The Lord chose you and He did not make a mistake when He chose you for the ministry. God didn’t pick you and then later say, “Oops!” That word is not in His vocabulary. He knew what He was doing when He chose you in the ministry and put you in the place where you’re at. It is part of His plan. Remember that when you are going through dark times. Remember that when you are prone to think, “What am I doing here, Lord? This is so far over my head.” The Lord knows all about that. The Lord knows all about you, just like the Lord knew about Peter, who would deny Him. He knew about Judas, who would betray Him, and about Thomas, who would doubt Him. And yet, the Lord chose them.

The Bible says—and it is my life verse. I suspect it’s probably all of our life verses to some degree—“The Lord has chosen the foolish things of this world to confound the wise” ([1 Corinthians 1:27](#)).

There is a great old story about a block of marble that was cut at the quarries in Carara, Italy and sent to Florence to be made into a statue by one of the great artisans of the city. It was brought into town and one of the great artists, Donatello saw this block of marble; but because of its imperfections, he rejected it immediately. And so it sat in a cathedral yard for a couple of years. Another artist came by and looked at it. His name was Michaelangelo. And Michaelangelo, seeing the imperfections said, “There’s an angel trapped inside and I must set it free.” He began working on the marble, and January 25, 1504 he unveiled his greatest work—David, the great statue by Michaelangelo.

The Lord sees our flaws, the cracks, the imperfections but He also sees the potential. The potential of Him getting a hold of you and reshaping you and restoring you. He loves to do that.

Years ago, my father, before he passed away, gave me one of his prized possessions. It was a 1967 British Land Rover, an old safari vehicle. It was what I learned to drive in. He paid like \$1500 for it and it sat out in the back. It was aluminum, so it couldn’t rust. He gave it to me. I took it home and sort of in his honor, decided to restore it. It became a pet project. I wanted to see it looking good, and running well. It took a lot of time and a lot of labor. But what a joy it was to see that old thing—which others would say should be on the scrap heap—restored and useable.

That is what the Lord does with us. How many testimonies in this room of people who others said, “Flawed, imperfect, should be in the junk heap.” God says, “Perfect. I’ll choose the foolish things of this world to confound the wise. So you didn’t choose Me. I chose you. I appointed you.”

Now as friends, having been chosen by Jesus, He does something for us. He reveals Himself to us and He reveals Himself through us. If you look at verse 15, where He says, “No longer do I call you servants,—[and get this]—for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you” ([John 15:15](#)).

Think of the privilege of being able to do what we do. To stand in front of the congregations God has given to us and tell them the words that Jesus has revealed about Himself. Could there be anything better than that?

I remember when I would come to Calvary Chapel and I would see Chuck Smith on a Thursday night, sit on a stool and just expound the Word of God. I had never heard simple, powerful, Bible teaching. And I said to the Lord, “I want to do that. That’s what I want to do.” And I look back from that point and see where I am today, where we are today and say, “Thank You, Lord. You revealed Yourself and I get to do this.” We get to speak the Word of God to others.

Now, we are His friends so He reveals things to us about Himself—His secrets, His Word. In the ancient times, servants were never given reasons for their tasks, they just had to do them. But there was a special group of people and maybe Jesus had this in mind when He used this. They were called friends of the king. The king had his servants, and the king had his friends. The friends of the king were a select group that he drew around himself. And in his walled garden would reveal his deepest secrets and information would flow freely to this group of friends. Jesus brought them into His inner circle.

The Lord opened up a door for me this last year to be a chaplain with the FBI. And I did not know it, but I have FBI agents that have been going to my church for years. But they never came by to ask for prayer or talk until I became their chaplain. And then they felt like, “Well, now you are in the brotherhood. Now we can trust you. You’ve been approved.” And I am seen differently, I am seen as their friend, once I was on their turf. They will bear their souls quit freely to me now.

Well, Jesus told His disciples so many things. Think of what He revealed in the last three and a half years of His ministry up to this point. Think of what He revealed just in the Sermon on the Mount, the Olivet Discourse, and here in the Upper Room Discourse. In fact, Jesus revealed so much of Himself and His truth to them, that in [John 14:26](#), He says:

The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I have said to you.

So He anticipated that He has given them enough information that they are going to forget a lot of it and will need the help of the Holy Spirit to have it brought back to their memory.

Not only that, but in [John 16:12](#), He said, “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.” So, this was that process of unveiling or revealing Himself to the disciples. He speaks to us in order that He might speak through us to the people that are around us.

Now let me just say something about that before we move on. Because the Lord wants to speak to us and through us from His Word, allow your heart to process the truth of Scripture apart from commentaries first. Commentaries are great, and we all have them. We like certain ones. We do

not like certain others. We recommend them, but before you grab the commentary, just open the Bible. Just take a notepad, open your heart, and pray: “Lord, what are You trying to say to me?”

You know, there is a kid whose dad had to discipline him and he took off his belt and was going to spank him. And the little boy, as his dad turned around to get his belt, put napkins in his britches so that the pain of the belt would not be felt.

I think we can do that with commentaries. We can stuff our theological britches with so much Greek and Hebrew and commentaries, that when the Holy Spirit wants to get through to us, we are padded. We need to feel all of what He speaks directly to us.

Then as He is revealing Himself to us as friends, you are going to notice something in this process. You are going to find yourself experiencing the very things you’re going to teach. Have you noticed that? When you are going to teach on love on Sunday, during that preparation process, you will find it challenged on Wednesday before you teach it. There is some irregular person in your church that is hounding you, hassling you; and you are teaching on love on Sunday. You are going to teach on trials and you will have a few, probably before you get there. It is all part of the Word becoming flesh in us, making it real so you can preach from the heart. Otherwise, we will be like the servant of Elisha who said, “Alas, Master; for it was borrowed when that ax was missing” (cf. [2 Kings 6:5](#)). So just let the Lord reveal Himself, speaking to your heart as His friend. It will change the whole meaning of your ministry.

The second, I think that this relationship changes the motive of your ministry. Again, I am sort of sneaking back, but if you look at [verse 8](#), it runs through the whole text here. “By this My Father is glorified,” Jesus said, “that you bear much fruit” ([John 15:8](#)).

Now there is the aim of the ministry: to glorify Him, to please Him. And when you enjoy this relationship of friendship, when you serve Him as a friend, you want to please Him. You want Him to enjoy what you are doing for Him. You do it, not because you have to, but because you want to do it.

Joe spoke yesterday about going through the weekly routine. You know, we have our days when we do certain things. It is a routine to us, but it is a lovely routine. We are doing this trusting: “Lord, I am doing this to please You because I want to glorify You.” We want to honor that friendship. And because we want to honor that friendship, since He selected us and He is the sovereign Lord, we want to do our ministry in such a way that He gets all the glory. The spotlight must shine on Jesus—not on the minister, but on the Master. We do not want to be celebrities. We want Him to be the celebrity. What Jesus said for the crowd, goes for those in the ministry. He said, “So let your light shine among men that they will see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven” ([Matthew 5:16](#)).

And I think there is some point in our ministries where we are going to have to decide, whether to be a celebrity for people, or to be a friend to my Master and do my ministry in such a way that all of the arrows point to Him and not to me. That is what Paul said. Paul wrote and said he wanted Jesus to be magnified in his body, whether by life or by death. And let’s not forget Diotrephes, who loved to have the preeminence. He was in the ministry and he loved the limelight, more than giving the limelight to the Lord (cf. [3 John 1:9](#)).

We face all sorts of interesting temptations. When we guest speak and somebody gives us a great introduction, we secretly think: “Yeah, keep going. You forgot a few things.” A. W. Tozer once was a guest speaker and somebody gave him a great, flowery introduction. And he got up

afterwards and said, “Well, the only thing I can say to that introduction is, God please forgive him for what he just said, and forgive me for enjoying it so much.” We all find that to be true, don’t we?

But serving the Lord as our friend changes the meaning of our ministry—the whole motive of our ministry. And third, it changes the method of our ministry. What I mean by that is when He is our friend, we want to do the very best for Him. We do not want to give Him the leftovers. We want to give Him the very top.

In verse 16 Jesus speaks about bearing fruit, so fruitfulness is our aim. Of our Master they said, “He does all things well.” Could that be said of us? Or would some say, “He does all things mediocre, just okay.” Do all things well, putting your very best into this calling that God has given to you.

You know the easiest thing to do in the ministry is to perform the routine routinely. That means you just sort of get into that little vibe of, “I have to do this. I don’t like it, but I am after all, a minister, so I am going to do it.”

The church at Ephesus forgot that friendship, didn’t they. When Jesus said, “They have left their first love” (cf. [Revelation 2:4](#)). They were going through all the works and all the motions, but I think that they forgot their friendship connection with Him.

It is possible to minister carelessly, perfunctorily, as a duty instead of as a joy unto the Lord. Or sometimes we may do it just for a paycheck. Remember the priests that Malachi spoke about. It says they offered the blind and the lame and the sick and they said, “Oh, what a weariness” ([Malachi 1:13](#)). And God says, “You sneer at it.”

It is easy to get callused. We have been in the ministry a while. We know about profiling. There is a certain type of person and I know where this person is coming from—been there, done that. And we can get hardened and callused to the needs that are before us and we can start seeing people as an inconvenience rather than as a real challenge that God has given, or as an opportunity to minister to them.

It was George MacDonald who said, “Nothing is so deadening to the divine as the habitual dealing with the outsides of holy things.” We are dealing with things outside of the divine over and over again.

So in order to avoid pastoral arterial sclerosis, hardening of the arteries, you need a friendship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Because when a friend asks you to do something, no demand is too difficult. Then, when He is your friend, “His yoke is easy, His burden is light” (cf. [Matthew 11:30](#)). It is something you enjoy doing. “Jacob labored seven years for Rachel, and it seemed but a few days because of the love that he had for her” (cf. [Genesis 29:20](#)).

My wife reminded me of that not too long ago. I have been telling her she needs to take certain vitamins in the morning because when we reach a certain age, we all need vitamins and supplements. So I said, “Honey, you need to take those vitamins.” She said, “If you really love me, you would set the vitamin out for me or bring it to me.” And I am thinking, “Oh, come on.” And then I thought, “Hey, whatever it takes. I’ll take the vitamins out. I’ll put them out there for her. If I love her, I will give her the vitamins.” And I have done so.

Servant Leadership – Lesson 28
Our Identification with Christ by Skip Heitzig

7

And something else will happen. We are going to start looking at God's church, God's people, even the irregular people, as a great opportunity and not as an inconvenience. We are going to start seeing God's church as Jesus' friends too. They are His friends too.

In fact, look down at [verse 12](#). It's all part of it. "This is My commandment that you love one another as I have loved you." And in [verse 17](#), "These things I command you, that you love one another."

The Scottish pastor, Andrew Bonar, was listening to a famous preacher give a message. The guy was quite good. Afterwards Dr. Bonar said to him, "You love to preach, don't you?" The preacher said, "I sure do." Then Andrew Bonar said, "Let me ask you this. Do you love the men to whom you preach?" You love to preach. But do you love the people to whom you preach?

You know, before Jesus told Peter to feed His sheep, He said, "Peter, do you love Me?" (cf. [John 21:15](#)). That is the basis of it.

There was a pastor, himself he cherished.
Who loved his position and not his parish.
And so, the more he preached, the less he reached.
And that is why his parish perished.

We are to love those sheep that He has commissioned into our care.

Fourth, it changes the whole manner of our ministry. Do you ever think about those twelve, now eleven personalities in the upper room that night, around that table with Jesus? They were so different from one another. They were not the same. They did not even go to the same places. Peter stayed in Jerusalem. Thomas, it says, went off to India. Matthew went down to Ethiopia where he was killed. Philip went to Asia Minor. And they all had distinct personalities, and they were all chosen to be Jesus' close and intimate friends.

Here is the point. Since Jesus chose you, chose us, you can relax in the ministry. You can be who God made you to be in the ministry. You do not have to copy anyone else. You can just be who God made you to be. You are unique with your spiritual gifts and God does not want to destroy your uniqueness by having you imitate anybody else. He has chosen you. And that is so freeing, just to perform the manner of your ministry as God made you to be.

Now it is common for younger ministers to emulate older ministers, doing certain affectations. And one person pointed out to me that a lot of Calvary guys say "you know" a lot, because often in Chuck's tapes we will hear Chuck say, "Now you know." And then he is thinking and he will share. And so a lot of us do this. It is common for that to happen. Even Charles Spurgeon said he found himself doing that and whenever he did, he just let it run its course.

But the key is to ask, "Lord, who am I? What gifts do I have that are unique and let me just be me, redeemed me for Your glory." And some of us can be so insecure in the ministry that we actually wish there were two of another person. "I want to be that person."

I was in Kiev about a month ago, in the Ukraine. And it was really a beautiful town with onion domed churches and architecture. And in the middle of town was a western barbecue restaurant called "The Arizona". And I will tell you, it looked so out of place in Kiev. It would look great in Arizona or New Mexico or California, but not in Kiev.

And we can sort of do that, can't we? We can be like David trying to wear Saul's armor. It does not fit quite right, but we are out there. This friendship with the Lord changes all of those things.

“God has set the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He pleased” ([1 Corinthians 12:18](#)). He did not make a mistake. Let Him work through you.

Finally, this changes the make up of our ministry. In [verse 18](#), Jesus begins something that almost sounds like He is off on another track now with a whole different theme and context. He says, “If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.”

Now remember in this section of Scripture in John 15, love is used eight times and hate is used seven times. All of them are used in the context of this friendship. In other words, when you are Jesus' friend, you are going to have Jesus' enemies. That's part of the package. You know, we would love to ride into Jerusalem with Jesus on the donkey with the hail of the crowd. But after that was the cross. And it was Paul who said in Philippians—“The fellowship of His sufferings, that I might know Him.” The fellowship of His sufferings and the glory of His resurrection, all of those things together make the ministry. We cannot separate one without having the other. If you are Jesus' friends, you are going to have some of Jesus' enemies.

We learned that on September 11th. We learned on September 11th that if you are going to be Israel's friend you are going to have Israel's enemies. A lot of us did not know that until that point. And we have slowly, as a nation, been discovering that.

Well in the ministry, one relationship requires the other. Those who love God and love God's truth will love you if you speak God's truth. Those who hate God and hate God's truth will hate you and hate the truth that you speak. Great persecution is the result of the Great Commission—always. In fact, you can plant this in your mind. If you are doing [Acts 1:8](#) you will have [Acts 8:1](#). [Acts 1:8](#), “Go into all the world,” Jesus said. You will go into Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the uttermost parts of the earth and be witnesses for Him. If that happens, you will have [Acts 8:1](#) which says: “And at that time a great persecution arose in the church that was at Jerusalem.” The Great Commission results in great persecution. If you are My friends, you are going to have My enemies.

I found a news article called, “Not in My Backyard,” concerning the percentages of Americans who would not like the following minorities, as their neighbors. And it starts with Catholics. One percent of Americans say they do not want Catholics as their neighbors. Two percent say they do not want Protestants as their neighbors. Three percent say they do not want Jews as their neighbors. Nine percent do not want Hispanics. Twelve percent do not want unmarried couples. Thirteen percent do not want blacks. And last and greatest on the list, over thirteen percent do not want religious fundamentalists as their next door neighbors. This by the way was before September 11, when there was a new casting on the word fundamentalism. They do not want you living next to them, man.

“The world would love its own,” Jesus said, “If you were of the world.” So it changes the whole make-up of our ministry.

Now when you and I are just faithful to the Word, preaching the truth and going through the Bible—that is going to bring enemies. Because the Bible will say certain things that people do not want to hear. You do not have to go out of your way to make enemies. You do not have to go out

of your way to let people know what you are against. Just if you are for Jesus you are going to make enemies.

I remember one Sunday morning two women came up to me, and I did not even talk about homosexuality, but they were angry. They were lesbians. I talked about Jesus and His love and forgiveness. And they said, “What do you think about homosexuality?” I said, “Jesus loves homosexuals. Jesus is willing to forgive homosexuals. And He is willing to forgive you, if that is what you are talking about.” And one of the ladies said, “I thought so!” And they walked away angry. Hey, but that is okay, isn’t it? I would rather have Jesus as my friend and the world as my enemy, than the world as my friend and Jesus as my enemy. We are on the best side.

Now that is only one side of friendship. We are coming to a close here. Jesus says in verse 14, “You are my friends if you do whatever I command you.” The other side of friendship is not just that Jesus is our friend. What kind of a friend are we to Him, right?

My son just turned sixteen. Nathan drives now. I know, it is kind of scary, but it gives me tremendous leverage, you see. And we have become great friends. It is a whole new relationship, a whole new understanding. And I let him know that with privilege comes responsibility. If you love me, you will keep my commandments. If you do not, you will not drive.

Now Jesus’ friends obey Him regularly. For Jesus said, “If you love Me you will keep my commandments” (cr. [John 14:15](#)). He says, “If you’re My friends you will do whatever I command you to do.” That is in the present subjunctive. It means you are going to continually do it. You will not just do it at the beginning of your ministry and then stop.

And then we obey Him completely, for Jesus said, “Do what I tell you to do.” Whatever. Even in the smallest matters we show our friendship by obeying Him in all things. We cannot pick and choose what we are going to obey Him on. We cannot say, “Well, I’ll obey You in preaching and in the pulpit, but not in my marriage.” Or, “I’ll obey in my marriage and when I preach, but not in my private life. The Internet—that is private time.” You obey Him in all things, if you are Jesus’ friends.

So being Jesus’ friend is a wonderful relationship. We are going to love difficult people. We are going to obey Him in the smallest matters. We are going to speak the truth even when it is not popular. Folks, in order to be His friends, it takes courage.

We have spoken about the filling of the Holy Spirit. God, please give us the courage to be the kind of friends that You want.

In 1877 in his Yale lectures, Phillips Brooks said,

Courage is an indispensable requisite of any true ministry. If you are afraid of men and a slave to their opinion, go and do something else. Go make shoes to fit them. Go even and paint pictures you know are bad but will suit their bad taste. But do not keep on, all of your life, preaching sermons which shall not say what God sent you to declare, but what they hire you to say. Be courageous. Be independent.

Let’s pray.

Servant Leadership – Lesson 28
Our Identification with Christ by Skip Heitzig

10

Lord, make us Your courageous friends. How honored we are that You—though You have every right to just simply treat us as servants—we are unprofitable servants, Lord, doing what we've been commanded to do. Yet You bring it up to the next level—the highest level. For You said, "You're My friends now." What an honor that is, Lord. It changes everything. The whole complexion of our ministry, the way we do things, why we do things, how we do things. So Lord, I pray that You would help us prevent pastoral arterial sclerosis, by kindling, and maintaining, a wonderful, warm friendship with Jesus Christ. Truly, You are the center of everything—of our ministries, of our lives. I pray that will never cease. In Jesus' name, amen.

Bibliography:

Brooks, Phillips. *Lectures on Preaching* at the Divinity School of Yale. New York, E. P. Dutton & Company, 1877.

Lewis, C.S. *George MacDonald. An Anthology*. Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc. N.Y., 1978

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

BY

Calvary Chapel Outreach Fellowship

Lesson 29

What Mattered to Our Master

By

Jon Courson

Brought to you by:

The Blue Letter Bible Institute

www.blbi.org

A ministry of:

The Blue Letter Bible

www.blueletterbible.org

Servant Leadership – Lesson 29
What Mattered to our Master by Jon Courson

1

Lord, it is our desire to be useable and useful for Your purposes.
May this session be used to that end, Lord. Cause us to really
have understanding and insight into that which You want us to
be about for the glory of Jesus Christ. Father, in His name we
pray. Amen.

Please turn to [John 17](#). On the first day of the conference I was sitting in the hospitality room, listening to my son, Peter Jon, teach on ministering in and through difficult days and tough times. I was so blessed hearing Peter Jon share.

I found, though, my mind racing back about twenty years ago when I was lying on the couch spacing out and Peter Jon walked by. He was five at the time. He was making a motion with his hands and fingers. He walked to the end of the room and he came back in my direction again, still doing the same thing. He caught my eye and I said, “PJ, what are you doing?” He said, “Daddy, I am practicing my snaps.” I said, “Oh?” He said, “Yeah. I know how to tie my shoes; I know how to whistle; and once I learn how to snap, all the hard stuff is done.” Well, he learned how to snap but he found out that all the hard stuff was not necessarily done.

It is not done until it is done. I am like you. I think all of us here today want to hear Him say one day, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” That is a desire that is on all of our hearts. That is a goal for all of our lives. We want to do it in a way that is pleasing to You, Lord. We want to hear You say on that day, “Well done, good and faithful servant” ([Matthew 25:21](#)).

The question is, what ought we to do? If we want to hear “Well done,” what is it that He wants us to do? What is it that matters to our Master? In [John 17](#), as we come to this really well-known passage of Scripture, as we come to this place where we hear the high priestly prayer of our Lord and Leader, Jesus Christ. It is here that I think we can see a real key about what matters to our Master.

I was telling Peter Jon a couple of nights ago that I am tempted just to take this chapter and read it through, slowly and prayerfully. And then simply say, “Nothing more could be said, nothing more should be said, so nothing more will be said,” and walk off. I really thought about just reading the passage and letting it stand for itself. John Knox was right when he called this section of Scripture “the holy of holies in the temple of the Bible.” It is holy ground—you know that—because in this we hear Jesus praying for His followers. He is praying for you. He is praying for me. It is heart warming. It is thrilling.

Not only is Jesus praying for His followers, but there is something else that I find interesting here. He is reporting to His Father. He is praying for His followers, it is true. But He is also reporting to His Father about what He has done now that His public ministry is just about finished. I find this intriguing to see what Jesus thought was important in ministry. He never mentions buildings, budgets, or buses. None of that is in His report. What He is focussing on, I think, are the things that you and I ought to have as our priorities as well.

In this [John 17](#) passage, eight times Jesus says, “I have. I have. I have. I have.” Time and time again He says, “This is what I have done, Father.” Let’s take a look at those statements and see what mattered to our Master. Hopefully that will be a paradigm and pattern for you and me to say, “Okay, I got it. That is what we ought to be about too.”

The first time we come to that phrase “I have” in this well-known chapter is in verse 4. Jesus says, “I have glorified Thee on the earth.” ([John 17:4](#)).

Our Lord told us that we are to let our light so shine before men that they may see our good works and glorify the Father which is in heaven (cf. [Mathew 5:16](#)). Did you realize that every time Jesus did a miracle, delivered a person, worked a wonder—in every instance it says that they glorified God in heaven? The miracles never glorified Him in that way. He worked His wonders and did His miracles in such a manner that when He did them, the glory went to the Father. It is an amazing thing to me.

In [Isaiah 42:8](#), God declares,

I am the Lord, that is My name; My glory will I not give to
another, neither My praise to graven images.

“My glory is to only be going to Me. I am not going to share it with you,” the Father would say to us today. Why? Is it because He is a glory hog? Is it because He wants all the glory Himself to exclude you and me? No, it is not that at all. He knows that if people put their trust in me, or if I begin to take the glory, I am going to set them up to be terribly disappointed because I am not going to come through. I am going to let them down. I am going to drop the ball. So will you, by the way. And so the Lord is saying, “I want all the focus to be on Me, all the glory to go to Me. I do not want you to make any graven images.”

By the way, the Hebrew word there is interesting. It means “polished images.” Now, it is tempting to say, “I want to polish my image a bit. I want to try and be a little slicker in my presentation, a little more techno-savvy. What can I do to polish my image?” It is a real tricky thing because there is a temptation to want to present ourselves in such a way that, even though we justify it, in reality we can be taking the attention off the Lord. It is very subtle, but it is very real.

Perhaps some of you guys say, “Well, that is not a problem for me. Nobody knows me. I do not have an image to polish. Nobody knows me. I am not in the *Who’s Who*. I am in the *Who’s He?*” Well I say, “Good for you.” Jesus says that which is done in secret is going to be rewarded one day. Your time is coming. Perhaps it is only indicative of the fact that you are ministering in a way that is not about polishing the image but about seeing that the focus is on Jesus exclusively.

When I was at Biola University, in a one-month period, our school brought in three special speakers for our chapel. A well-known speaker came in to teach the first week. He gave a sermon and I can recall going to the dorm room afterwards and discussing it with those who were Bible majors and studying for the ministry. I can recall the conversation perfectly. We went on and on. “This guy,” we thought, “must read a hundred books a week. Where does he get those illustrations? How does he get all those stories?” It was amazing. This was in the time before the Internet, cassette tapes, or any of that stuff. We thought, “How does he get these statistics, these stories, these illustrations?” We talked about that endlessly.

Two weeks later another noted pastor and author came in to speak. He took a passage and broke it down in the original language in such a way that we thought, “How does he know about all that stuff—the historicity of the verb forms, noun meanings, the voices, tenses, moods, and everything else?” We were impressed and blessed. We thought, “My, this guy has a lot of knowledge.” We talked about it as we were struggling through our verb charts and conjugations. “Man, I have to learn this stuff!” But it was depressing to me.

And then Pastor Chuck Smith was brought in to teach. He was the third speaker that month and he gave a message on keeping yourself in the love of God. I will never forget this because in the dorm room afterward, we talked about God's love. We talked about the love of the Lord and the grace of God.

It is an amazing thing because when Pastor Chuck speaks, the attention is not upon how many illustration books he combed through to find those stories, or on how long he was on the Internet to get those facts. The attention was on the Lord in such a way that as we sat there in our dorm area after he was done, we thought, "That is the key. It is God. It is not Hebrew and Greek. It is not illustration books and statistics. It is the Lord."

That is my desire—I know it is yours too—that we might minister in such a way that people will just be impressed, blessed, and drawn to the Lord like bees are to honey, like moths are to a fire. They should focus just on the Lord.

Jesus said, "I have glorified Thee. Father, this is what I have done." And He did it in such a way that every time He ministered, the glory went to the Father.

Secondly, we see He also says, in [John 17:4](#), "I have finished the work which Thou hast given Me to do. I have finished it." The roads from conferences like this are strewn with the carcasses of people who determined to begin but never followed through to the end. When I come to a conference like this I get pumped up. I am determined to do this or do that. But the key is not what we determine to do, but what we end up doing, practically.

In [2 Chronicles 2](#) we read that Solomon determined to build a temple unto the Lord. In [2 Chronicles 3](#) we read that Solomon began to build a temple to the Lord. In [2 Chronicles 5](#) we see that Solomon finished building the temple for the Lord.

Determining, beginning and doing, that is the pattern Solomon demonstrated. I am glad Noah did this as well. I am glad Noah finished what he was supposed to do. If he had not finished the project that was given to him, we would all be sunk, quite literally. He started it and he completed it all the way. He finished it.

That is my desire. That is what I see mattered to our Master, that He finished the work.

Saul, on the other hand, was told to go and wipe out the Amalekites. And he goes and wages war against the Amalekites there in [1 Samuel 15:13-15](#). As he makes his way back again, Samuel is before him. "Oh, blessed be thou of the Lord," Saul says, "I have done all that the Lord has commanded me to do. I have finished it. I have done it," Samuel says, "Then what meaneth this bleating in my ears?" Saul was told, of course, to destroy all the Amalekites, all the cattle, and all of the sheep. Samuel says, "What does this mean, this bleating in my ears? It sounds really baaaad." "I have saved a sheep to sacrifice to the Lord." Samuel looks at Saul and says, "Well, what is that? Who is that?" "Oh, he is the king of the Amalekites. I have saved him as a trophy." "Is this a joke? Is this a gag?" Yes! He saved Agag. (Pun intended).

The end result was that he did not finish the work. He did not finish the job. And so, there on Mount Gilboa, as Saul is laying there in his wounded condition, the life draining from him, a man is about to do him in. "Who are you?" Saul says. And the man responds, "I am an Amalekite of the tribe that you were supposed to kill, Saul. You were to finish us off. You were to do the job. You did not and now you are being undone. You are going to be thrust through by the very one that you were supposed to wipe out because you did not finish the work."

Now, watch this. Jesus says, “I have finished the work which Thou hast given Me to do.” I can never finish the work that people expect me to do or demand from me. There are pressures and expectations that will drive me crazy. But I can always finish the work which He gives me to do because His burden is easy and His load is light.

Brothers, listen to me. I have found this to be a real key in my own personal walk over these many years. It works. How can we really do what the Lord wants us to do? “I have finished the work which *Thou* hast given Me.”

In Mark 1 at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry there in Capernaum, we read that Jesus awakes a great while before the breaking of the day. He goes into a quiet place and there He prays. While He is in prayer, Peter tracks Him down. Peter finds where He is and says, “Master, everybody is looking for You and asking for You. Hey, our ministry is launched. It is underway. Everybody in Capernaum (the hot spot there in Galilee) wants You. They are impacted with what You did yesterday. They are impressed with what You had to say. They want You!” Jesus says, “No, we are not going to go to Capernaum today. We are going to go to some unwalled villages and towns” (cf. [Mark 1:35-38](#)). That is the only time that word “unwalled village” is used in the New Testament. It is a podunk place, a hick town. We are not going to go to Capernaum and do the big fancy thing. We are going to go to a podunk town, a hick town. Why? “For this reason came I forth,” Jesus said. He came forth from where? Not from heaven, but from His time of prayer.

He was in prayer and the Father whispered in His ear or wrote on His heart, “Here is what You are to do today. You are to make Your way to this podunk spot and there You are to share with the people.” Even though there were opportunities in Capernaum or expectations from His men, Jesus knew that He had His marching orders for the day.

This is very, very important. I have found that when I start my day early, find a quiet spot, have a quiet time and a quiet heart with the Lord, and say, “Lord, direct me today,” inevitably He will put one or two things on my heart. I write them down. I always keep a journal close by. He gives me one or two things. Now there are other things that I will do during the day, but in the morning, there are one or two things that are specifically placed on my heart or put in my mind. I know that this is what He wants me to do, and the burden is easy and the load is light. It is [Ezekiel 44:17](#) linen garments. It is inspiration, not perspiration. And as I do that in the morning time, I am set free. Oh, others might say, “Jon, come here. Jon, do this. Jon, take care of that.” And those are not going to be the priorities of my day. I am not going to be yanked around. I am going to seek to do what the Father put on my heart and in my mind at the beginning of the day. It is such a key for me.

It was on my heart a few months ago, to do some reading on the Middle East situation. “Go to a used bookstore and find some books. Just go do some reading, Jon.” I really felt that was from the Lord, to take some time in the afternoon to do some study on some issues that I had been wondering about and I was not clear on. So I made my way to a used bookstore where there are all kinds of older books. I was in line with a couple of books in my hands to purchase. The person in front of me had a book in his hand and it too was on the Middle East, interestingly enough. He went to the counter and said, “Look, can I buy this book? I really want to read this book. I only have ten bucks. Can I buy it for ten? I know it costs twenty-five. Can I buy it for ten? I will bring the money back in a few days.” The clerk said, “We cannot allow that. We do not work that way. We cannot do it.” He was talking with the clerk back and forth. And I said, “Can I buy that book for you?” He turned around to look at me and I repeated, “Can I buy that book for you?” “Well, yeah.” So I bought the book and then he said to me, “Why would you want to do that?” I said,

“Because my best friend is from the Middle East.” We began to talk and to share a bit. A wonderful, wonderful witness was given and we engaged in a wonderful conversation.

And I say that because I know that was the Father’s will for that afternoon. I know it. And the same thing is true for any day, for every day, for everyone who will come and say, “Lord, speak to my heart today.” I find that one hour in the morning of waiting on the Lord makes a huge difference for the rest of the day. One day a week which I set aside to slow down and to seek Him for the week, makes a huge difference in my week. We have a little mountaintop retreat at our fellowship, and I get away one night a month and just say, “Lord, I am here to seek You.” And then four times a year I get away for a couple of days and say, “I need direction and vision.” It makes all the difference for me.

This I do know—Jesus did get away early in the day to pray. It made a huge difference. He was able to say at the end of the road, “I have finished the work which Thou hast given Me to do.” And the same thing will be true for you. You will never finish the work that others want you to do or expect from you, but you will be able to do what He wants you to.

“I have finished the work which Thou hast given Me to do.” See, the work that He gives me to do is going to be different than the work He gives to you. Each one of us has a specific job to do. You know that. I look at that house that Jesus loved to hang out at, that Jesus loved to go to—the house of Mary and Martha. It intrigues me that He was drawn there, that He spent time there, that they were His friends because Mary and Martha were very different. We often put down Martha and elevate Mary. Mary is worthy of elevation, without question. But it says there in [John 11:5](#) that Jesus loved Martha and her sister what’s her name. I would have thought it would have said, “Jesus loved Mary and who is that other one in the kitchen all the time?” But you see in Luke 10, Martha was there, wasn’t she? She was serving. “Tell my sister to come in here and help me.” “Hey, Martha, no. You are stressed out. She has chosen this and it is a good thing to be at My feet.” We see Martha later on in [John 12](#). She is in the kitchen once more. She is still serving, only this time she is not complaining. And Jesus loved Martha.

What am I suggesting? Just that Martha ministered to Jesus’ humanity. Jesus was hungry, we are told. He would go there to that house and He would be served in that way, practically. Martha cooked up meals. She is seen over and over again serving. Mary ministered to Jesus’ divinity. She was the worshipper at His feet, sitting there listening to the words that He would share, wiping His feet with oil and her hair. Jesus was ministered to in His humanity by Martha and in His divinity by Mary. No wonder He loved to go there.

What was the end result? Their dead brother, Lazarus, was raised. In a church where the humanity of the body of Christ—the practical stuff—is being taken care of, and the divinity—that is where there is worship, ministry, communion, and praise happening—when those two come together in a house, the dead brothers come to life. There should be worship, praise, and practical service day after day. There should be those with bent knees and those with rolled up sleeves. The point of it is this: it is all needed. But if I look at somebody else and say, “Well he does these things” or “They do those things,” and I try to do what they are doing, I am going to miss the role that I have been called to do.

Now Jesus was able to say here, “I have finished the work which You, Father, have given Me to do.” That means when I go into the area where there is a multitude of lame people, I do not just go say, “Everybody rise up. Everybody walk.” There might be one person that You have put on my heart, placed in my mind, that I am to make my way to and say to that man, “Stand up and walk.” I have finished the work which Thou hast given Me to do. That is such a key.

The third time Jesus uses the phrase “I have” He says, “I have manifested Thy name.” Number one, I have glorified Thee. Number two, I have finished the work. Number three, I have manifested Thy name.

The idea of manifesting the name is not so much proclamation in this case, it is demonstration. I have let them see Your name, Your nature. It is not just expounding or expositing Your nature from the pulpit, but letting them see Your nature in me, personally, practically. It is the incarnational stuff, the Word being made flesh. It is the stuff that really makes a difference. A sermon born in the head reaches the head, but one that comes from the heart reaches the heart. We all know that to be true. Jesus was saying, “I have manifested Thy nature. I have not just taught on it, but they have seen it in Me.” On the mountaintop, the Mount of Transfiguration, when He began to glow, Jesus was saying, “That is the glory of You, Father, shining through Me and from Me.”

It was not just on the mountaintop, it was also in that upper room where He said to Thomas, “Touch My wounds” (cf. [John 20:27](#)). He manifested not just the glory, but also the grace.

This is what sin does. It destroys, it scars. It was not His sin, of course; it was our sin that He absorbed. “Thomas, touch My wounds. I once was dead but now I am alive.” And Thomas said, “My Lord and my God!” ([John 20:28](#)).

I have found that in the hard times, setbacks, and the disappointments I have been through, that it is not just somebody showing me the glory of the mountaintop. There can be shiny examples that are very helpful. But in my own times of deep need, it has been people who have also said, “Touch my wounds. This is what I have been through. This is what happened to me. Touch my wounds and see how the Lord saw me through, lifted me up, and got me going again.” And I would say, “He is Lord and He is God.”

This incarnational stuff is important. You have to let people touch your wounds. I do not mean indiscriminately, but there are times when the Lord is going to send people your way who are doubters or who are cynical. The way to minister to them is to say, “Let me tell you what I have been through. Let me tell you a bit about my story that others might not know. Let me tell you something. Let me show you my wounds, my own sin, stupidity, setback, whatever it might be. Let me share with you how the Lord resurrects the dead and gets them back up again.”

Can I encourage you to be incarnational preachers, teachers, and ministers? Can I discourage you from falling into the error of Jeremiah’s day in which it says the prophets stole their words one from one another? Can I encourage you to watch out for Internet downloads of sermons and copying messages verbatim that are not really worked through your own experience yet? Can I encourage you to be able to say, “This is what the Lord has shown me?” That is such a key.

Jesus has said: “I have glorified Thee,” number one. “I have finished the work which Thou hast given Me to do,” number two. “I have manifested Thy name,” number three (cf. [John 17:4-6](#)). Number four is found in [John 17:8](#). “I have given unto them the words which Thou gavest Me.” Look at [verse 14](#) for the second part of this. “I have given them Thy word.” “I have given them the word which Thou hast given Me. And I have given them Thy word.”

Now there are two different things being said here. I have given them the word. In verse 8, the word “word” is *rhemata*, from the word *rhema*. It means the exacting, specific, anointed word for that occasion. [Ephesians 6:17](#) uses the same word *rhema* when it says, “And take the sword of the

Spirit [the *rhema*] which is the Word of God.” The word “word” there is *rhema*. “Take the sword of the Spirit which is [the *rhema*] the Word of God.” And the word “sword” is *machaira*; it means an exacting, surgical type of instrument.

In contrast to that, in [John 17:14](#) the word “word” is *logos*. It is not so much the exacting word for that moment (the *rhema* word), but rather it is the word that is being taught and presented. In [Revelation 1:16](#) it says that out of His mouth came a two-edged sword. And regarding that two-edged sword, [Hebrews 4:12](#) says: “The Word of God is quick, and powerful, sharper”—than what? It is sharper than a two-edged sword. The word “sword” in [Revelation 1:16](#) is *rhomphaia*, which means it is the big sword that you just use on the whole congregation. You are just teaching away and you are just ministering to everyone.

But there is also the word that is specifically intended for a given situation. There is a difference. We do the big stuff on Wednesdays and Sundays. That is great and necessary. But Jesus also had the precise, exacting word for the right occasion.

How did He get that word for the right occasion? How would He know what to say on any given day? In [Isaiah 50:4](#) it says concerning Jesus:

The Lord hath given me the tongue of the learned that I should
know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary. For
He awakeneth morning by morning, He awakeneth my ear to
hear as the learned.

I get that word, day by day, morning by morning, that I might have the right words to speak to the one who is weary. It makes a big difference.

It was over twenty years ago that I was in an ambulance and the paramedic was caring for me as I came to. I said to the guy that was putting stuff in my arm and working on me a bit, “How is my wife?” He said, “She is fine.” I said, “No, she is not.” And then I said, “Yes, she is because she is in heaven.” And that guy looked at me right then and had a decision to make whether to tell me what really happened or to keep it from me at that moment. He said, “You are right. She is no longer with us.”

At that moment in my life, the Lord spoke to me in a way unlike anything else that I have ever experienced personally. I do not know if it was audible, but I am not sure it was not. I just do not know. The word I heard in that ambulance going down towards the hospital in Medford was simply this: “I know the thoughts I think toward you, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to bring you to a glorious end.” I heard that. As a young man of twenty-eight, I did not know that verse at that time. Oh, I am sure I read it, but it was not familiar to me like it is now. There are plaques, posters, and banners. There is even a book out there called something like that. But be that as it may, I did not know I knew that verse. I am sure I read it, no doubt, but I did not know it. I never preached on it. I never heard a sermon personally from it.

I know the thoughts I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts
of peace and not of evil, to bring you to a glorious end, or give
you a future and a hope. (cf. [Jeremiah 29:11](#))

I was brought into the hospital, and after being out for several hours, I came to again. My mom was there with a couple of close friends. I said to them, “The most amazing thing has happened. I heard something. I think it was a voice, I’m not sure. ‘I know the thoughts I think toward you,

thoughts of peace and not of evil to bring you to a glorious end.”” As I finished telling my mom that and these two colleagues of mine, my mom was crying because my wife was in heaven. My children would be stuck with me raising them. Immediately after had I told my mom that and these two friends who were with me, Pastor Chuck called. Pastor Chuck had the word. After expressing his heart, he said, “Jon, I have a word from the Lord for you. ‘I know the thoughts I think toward you, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to bring you to a glorious end.’” And then he said, “And now we get to see what kind of man the Lord has made you.” It was exactly what I needed to hear. It was the *rhema*. It was the exacting word that penetrated my spirit, taking the sword of the Spirit, which is the *rhema*, the exact word. It was the sword, the *machaira*—that is the exacting knife.

Sometimes people say, “Well, you do not need to say anything. Just be there.” I appreciate that and I understand that sentimentality. I know that. But I will tell you what is even better—when somebody has a *rhema*—a word from the Spirit that is exacting and precise. They can say, “This is what the Lord has for you. This is what He is doing in you.”

Seven and a half years ago, as most of you know, I was sitting there at our morning worship on Monday. We had just finished a retreat on the mountaintop. It was grand. It was great. We taught the book of Revelation over one weekend, which was a challenge. We sent the participants out to ponder and consider certain passages. My daughter was sixteen at that time. Her assigned section was that which dealt with the bowl judgments. We gathered again in the upper room and we were sharing what the Lord was speaking to our hearts. My daughter raised her hand and said, “Dad, I got this section here about the bowl judgments. Did you ever notice, Dad, how the seven bowls correlate with the seven last sayings of Christ on the cross? Bowl one correlates with saying one and bowl two with saying two, even as Christ received the outpouring of God’s wrath.” And she went on. She had that kind of insight. That was on the weekend.

The next Monday after that my daughter comes into morning worship at six o’clock in the morning. She sits right there in row four in our church. I am back further and we are worshipping the Lord. The leader opens it up for some time of prayer and praise. My daughter stands up and says, “Lord, I thank You for the promise of Your Word: ‘I know the thoughts I think toward you, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to bring you to a glorious end.’” And that touched me because she did not know the story I just told you. I had never let that out to my kids or publicly. Few people knew. The guy that was leading was one who knew that. He knew what that verse meant to me. He looked at me and I looked at him. He wrote a song right then. [Jeremiah 29:11](#), he wrote it right then. I sat there and I thought, “I am so blessed.”

Ten minutes later there was a tap on my shoulder. “There has been a wreck.” I thought, “No, I have been there. I have already done that. That cannot be.” But it was. My daughter was ushered to heaven. The last thing I heard from my daughter was, “I know the thoughts I think toward you, thoughts of peace and not of evil.”

It is that specific word. She prayed that prayer. She said, “Thank You for that promise. Amen.” She gave me a wink and a smile. She walked out and I will not see her until I get to heaven, but I will see her.

There is an exacting word for the congregation that I am going to be teaching on Sunday morning. There is an exacting word in every message. I believe there needs to be that precise word. There needs to be not just the meat of the word, but also the manna which is from heaven for that day for those folks. I believe a message ought to have three components: meat or commentary work, where you study to show yourself approved, rightly dividing the Word; milk,

always making sure the gospel is being preached so that the people hear the Good News; and manna, that specific prophetic word. These are important.

We have all sat through sermons that made us think, “Well, that is a fine presentation, but it did not touch the heart.” Why? It is because the manna is not there. When is manna found? When did the manna appear? It appeared in the morning. By the time the sun rose and the temperatures went up, it would melt away. That is such a key.

The first thing is to feel the full force of the Word. I think that is wise. Get the manna first. “Lord, what are You saying to me and to the folks that will be gathering in this retreat, this study, or at that church meeting? What do You want to say to them?” Get the manna first and then go to the commentaries, the tapes, or whatever. And then always make sure there is milk so that people who are not sure of the Good News might have the opportunity to hear.

“I have glorified Thee. I have finished the work. I have manifested Thy name. I have given the word”—both the *logos* and the *rhema*. Number five is found in [verse 12](#): “I have kept the flock—those that Thou gavest Me I have kept. I have kept the flock” (cf. [John 17:12](#)). That is what mattered to our Master, keeping the flock.

How about you? How about me? We too, ought to say that we are going to keep the flock. Now they might leave. They might not be at my study or they might not be in your church, but you can still keep them. How? We are told in the book of Exodus that the high priest was to wear over his heart a breastplate. There were twelve stones representing what? They represent the twelve tribes, the people. Also, those stones were on shoulders too. In other words, the people were to be on his heart. They were to be on the shoulders as well.

Here is what I am finding at this point, after twenty-five years of ministry in the same place, people come and go, and they will come and go from your fellowship too. It does not mean that you have to lose them. Oh, they might be mad at you, disappointed in you, ticked off at your youth pastor, or what have you. They can still truly be on your heart. You can pray for them. I can bear their burdens. I keep the lists of all of our church directories in my study at home, from the earliest days until now. I still pray through the whole kit and caboodle. Some folks have long since gone. Some folks are mad at me. I have not lost them. I keep them. I get to keep them in prayer and I do. I keep praying. And here is the cool thing—I no longer view myself as the pastor of Applegate Fellowship. I view myself as a pastor in the Rouge Valley, which means wherever the sheep are they are the Lord’s. I get to serve them whether they are sitting in the pews at Applegate or not. It has freed me up.

I have found myself over the years saying, “Well, if this guy goes to our church I will take time for him. I will answer questions. I will pray. But if he is going to the new fellowship down the road, he should go see his own pastor.” What happens in my heart is not healthy when those things occur. I am set free to say, “No matter where you are going to church, it does not matter. I am here in this valley.” I am now the oldest pastor, in terms of longevity, in our valley. I cannot believe that. I still think I am the new kid, but I am not. I am now the old guy and this is the opportunity for me to be a pastor over the whole flock in that valley.

Let me ask you a question. Have you kept those that the Lord has given to you or have you let them go because they are not in your church anymore? How do you know? How do you respond at K-Mart or at McDonald’s when somebody who used to go to your church but does not go there anymore, comes over and says, “Hey, can I talk to you for a minute?” What is your reaction? “I

am busy. Go talk to your own pastor.” Or is your response, “This person is still linked with me and always will be, even if they deny me?”

Simon, Simon, Satan desires to sift you like wheat, but I have—
[What?]
—prayed for you. You will deny Me, but I am praying
for you. And when you are converted, when you come back,
strengthen the brothers. (cf. [Luke 22:31-32](#))

I can stay linked with people, truly, through prayer. And it has been such a freeing, joyful, exciting thing for me. It is huge in my own life, to say I do not view myself as pastor of that fellowship. I am a pastor. I am an old pastor in the Rouge Valley and I get to care for all the Lord’s flock. Jesus says, “I have kept the flock which Thou hast given Me.” That is important.

He also sent them out. The sixth thing we see that He did is in [John 17:18](#). He says, “I have also sent them into the world.” He took chances with guys that probably were not really ready. Chuck did that with me. Chuck did that with you. We were not ready.

I can recall the first time I was sent out. I was fifteen years of age. My youth pastor said, “Jon, go preach at the rescue mission for me.” I did not know what a rescue mission really was, so I prepared a message on Zachias up in the sycamore tree. I studied really hard. I had a fifteen page typed-out manuscript sermon about how the sycamore tree relates eschatologically to a certain group of people and how it ties into future things. I get up there. I am not kidding you, I wore a suit and tie to the rescue mission with my fifteen page typed manuscript lesson on Zachias.

At the rescue mission in San Jose, the guys had to go to the church service before they could eat. That was the deal. So here I come. They sing a couple gospel songs and I stand up there in my suit and tie. I began to give this message on Zachias and I was on page two when a guy from the back row stood up and he wanted to eat. He said, “Sit down you overgrown tomato.” I could feel the sweat break out. I was only on page two! I quickly flipped to page fifteen. I was not ready for that.

I was not ready. The book of Proverbs says, “An empty stable stays clean, but an empty stable brings no profit” (cf. [Proverbs 14:4](#)). There has to be some messes or some chances. The barn floor might be a little bit messy, but that is where the profit is going to be too.

Jesus said, “I have sent them out.” This is what mattered to our Master. “I have sent guys out. I have done what You have wanted Me to, Father. I have brought glory to You exclusively. I have given them the Word, the *logos* and the *rhema*. I have kept the flock. They are on My heart. They are linked to Me. I have sent them out.”

“I have given them glory.” Number seven is in [John 17:22](#). “And the glory which Thou gavest Me, I have given them.” I have given them the glory. Simply said, “I see them in their potentiality.”

Whom He foreknew, He predestined. Whom He predestined, He
called. Whom He called, He justified. Whom He justified, He
glorified. (cf. [Romans 8:30](#))

Paul said in [2 Corinthians 5:16](#), “I know no man after the flesh.” In other words, do not look at people in the flesh anymore; see them positionally and potentially. Jesus said, “I have given them

the glory. I see them. The glory that we have shared, I see that in them. I have given that to them.”

What a wonderful thing. Jesus touched that blind guy’s eyes. He was blind and then he could see. He said, “I see men as—[What?]-trees.” He lifted up the man’s head to heaven and the man could then see clearly. He said, “I see men clearly” ([Mark 8:24-25](#)).

Sometimes we see people as bad trees. We want to cut them down, chop them, burn them, and get rid of them. We wish they would leave. I have found—so have you—that what is needed is a touch from the Lord to say, “Look how they are going to be in heaven. Look at the way I see them. Look at how I care about them.”

This blessed me so much from our own paper, from our own fellowship.

Eleven days before Christmas somebody stole our live Christmas tree out of our yard. It was a tree we cared for and watched as it grew. Finally this year it was big enough to decorate for Christmas. To the Christmas tree thief, we forgive you. You stole it while we were visiting our twenty-six year old son at Providence Hospital, who had just suffered a stroke and is paralyzed on the left side of his body. He has a wife and four-month-old baby. We all salute you, because when we told him that our tree had been cut down, lights and all, and stolen away, he, for the first time began to laugh out loud. Even though his laugh and speech are somewhat slow and slurred, it sparked a sense of humor in this young man. It was a blessing in disguise. So, may this tree that you stole, warm your heart and be a special one for you and your family. Merry Christmas. Sincerely...

I like that. That is seeing stuff through the tree, the cross. That is seeing stuff in its potentiality. It is beautiful.

The eighth thing that He says, “I have done,” is in [John 17:26](#). “I have declared unto them Thy name.” Previously He said, “I manifested Thy name,” which is a demonstration. Now this is information or a proclamation. “I have declared Thy name.”

“Who are You?” Moses said. “I AM that I AM.” You are what? I am whatever you need. Jesus came and said, “I am the way, the truth, the life. I am the vine. I am the bread.” He is everything. And Jesus would say, “I have declared Thy name, that You are everything that people need.”

Listen carefully to me. People do not need principles from us; they need a Person. They need the Lord. If I can take a book and cross out “Jesus” and it does not make any difference because the principles on parenting, the principles on finances, or principles on marriage all work whether you are a Christian or not, then something is definitely missing. Jesus said, “Without Me you can do nothing” ([John 15:5](#)).

“I have declared Your name, that You are the I AM. I AM whatever is needed. I AM that I AM. Without Me, nothing can be done.”

Servant Leadership – Lesson 29
What Mattered to our Master by Jon Courson

12

I want to encourage you, in preaching, in writing, in teaching, or in speaking, if you can omit the Lord and the stuff still seems to work, then it is not what the Master did. When all of what Jesus did was about the Father, so all of our work ought to be as well.

Father, I pray that these things which we see that Your Son focussed on, gave account of, reported to You about, that these things might be worked out in our lives. Oh Father, help me. Father, I thank You that Jesus is praying for us. We ask that we might be about the stuff that matters to You and not the stuff that may be impressive to others. Help us, Lord. Help us. Work in us. Have Your way. In Jesus' name. Amen.

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

BY

Calvary Chapel Outreach Fellowship

Lesson 30 **Prayer and the Word**

By

Bob Hoekstra

Living in Christ Ministries

Brought to you by:

The Blue Letter Bible Institute

www.blbi.org

A ministry of:

The Blue Letter Bible

www.blueletterbible.org

We are in the book of Acts chapter 6 and we will begin to read at verse 4. We are looking at a very great matter, the kingdom of God and what it has to do with prayer and the word of God. We will start out in a moment looking at the overall general importance of prayer and the Word operating in our lives together. Then we will look at prayer affecting the work of the Word in our lives. Then we will turn it around the other way and look at the Word as it affects our prayer life. Finally, we will have a brief little postscript on prayer and the preaching of the Word of God. And that also involves something that most of us do together at least once each week and sometimes more.

Let's begin in ([Acts 6:4](#)) concerning the overall, general importance of prayer and the Word working together. "But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." That is what the early apostles said. "But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." Let's think for a moment on that simple little connective word, "but." Why did they use that term? It is because they had just described what God wanted to do in order to meet a very, very important need in the body, the supply of the widows needs—particularly in the area of food. The Lord showed these apostles that other spiritual and wise saints would attend to those important matters and that the apostles must be involved in the vital areas of prayer and the Word.

This is a serious matter, I think to all of us, not to let the important eclipse the essential. And that is something that can happen so easily, particularly when you come to know the Lord and you hopefully want to be more responsible than ever before. Some of us did not even know how to spell "responsibility" until we met the Lord. I am making a personal confession on that one. But when we meet the Lord, His Spirit urges a responsible life of stewardship within us and important things become important to us. But it is very easy to get distracted and have the important things eclipse the essential things and that is disastrous in the kingdom of God. It always leads to a heaviness and burdensomeness weariness and lack of true spiritual productivity, though it might lead to a busyness of activity. "But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

There are many important things in the kingdom of God and those who were going to lead the early church were bound by the Spirit of God to give themselves to some essential things. They knew that the important things would have to be taken care of by spiritual and wise saints, who are full of the Spirit and full of the wisdom of the Lord. "But *we* will devote ourselves" The "we" in this case is the apostles, the leaders of the early church. It was critical for the church to have, pressing on in the forefront of the flock, those leaders who would be giving themselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word. I think it is a good reminder to all of us, and it is a good word to pastors in this day and age, to teachers, to parents, to all who have any responsibility to give direction to others. These leaders need to give themselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.

We, God's leaders, are the leaders of the church. In the true sense, every one of us is a leader in the Lord for someone else. This is a good word for all of us. There are many leading the people of God today who do not give themselves to prayer and the ministry of

the word. It can be weakening and tragic when that happens. There is no way to really lead without prayer and the word, being right with the Son. Because that is where the Lord reveals Himself and displays His life and power.

And these men said, “But we will devote ourselves to...” Devote is a heavy word and it does not mean “dabble in.” It does not relate to a weekly prayer meeting that you go to monthly. The weekly prayer meeting would not be enough for this, let alone dabbling in it! “We will devote ourselves to [an earnest, serious, persistent, intensive commitment to] prayer and the ministry of the word.” That is what the apostles were after. I confess personally that I see these two matters as my two basic shepherding responsibilities here in this part of God’s flock. There is no way in which prayer and ministry of the word would define the things the Lord has me involved in every week. It would only begin to describe it because there are so many other important things in the kingdom of God. But I cannot even begin to touch the others unless these two areas are happening in abundance. “We will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” That is my desire.

Sometimes I sense a proper moving in that direction in my own heart and life. When it is not happening, it catches up with me really fast. How about you? There are times when the Lord has us moving and doing something so urgently and so strongly that the centrality of these matters may for a moment look like they fade a bit, but the fruit of them stay in the center of everything. In that sense they never fade. But if they seem to fade for a while, there is soon a sense that they need to get right back in the middle of who I am and what I am doing.

There is only one true shepherd and Jesus said, “I AM the good shepherd.” The real responsibility of undershepherds, which I feel God has called me to be, and I think God has called most of us to some type of shepherding of other lives—whether it is with our children or newer believers. Our basic responsibility in shepherding, the most critical one, is getting to know the only one who is the true shepherd and staying very close to Him. He knows where He is going, He does care for the sheep, He does lay down His life for the sheep. If you want to shepherd, stay close to the only Shepherd there really is. And prayer and the ministry of the word are critical to walking close to the Shepherd, because in that we hear from Him and he hears from us. And communication back and forth is vital to producing true intimacy between two persons. “But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”

Prayer is talking to God, communicating with the Lord. The ministry of the word is letting God speak to us and then helping others through the Word hear from Him. Certainly these leaders were not going to neglect both of these things, but more than that, they were not even going to rely on one alone. “We will devote ourselves to prayer. That is it. We will just pray.” Wrong, that is not enough. “Ok then, we will just devote ourselves to the ministry of the word.” Wrong, that is not enough. Something is missing. Something vital is missing in both instances that only the other can provide and make each whole. It is prayer and the word, the word and prayer. These are essential to the progress of God’s people.

I went to a seminary that is dedicated to the Word of God and the preaching of the Word of God. I have shared this before and I think it is ([2 Timothy 4:2](#)) that is their model. They are so dedicated that written on the walls, not in English but in Greek—I can still see it—was: *Kēruxon ton logon*. What did it mean? “Preach the Word.” And my heart thrills when I hear it. I remember one time in seminary when we almost died getting into the word, wanting to preach it and forgetting to pray! One of the easiest places to die on the spiritual vine is in seminary. There were more days with more hang-dog expressions, coming out of hang-dog spirits saying, “I have another lesson, another analysis of another book of the Bible.” And we would be bleary-eyed up all night, not praying, just studying. And the same can happen on the other side. Praying, praying, praying until you fall over weary from praying, but never hearing from God. So the prayers get stale and ramble off target, and they are not a joy but become a load to carry.

These early leaders of the church were going to devote themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word. May the Lord give us nothing less than that same commitment. If God ordained to start the church that way, how is He going to finish the job? “Okay, they prayed, they heard up, they taught up, the rest of you can coast on to glory on the coat tails of the early apostles.” Not quite. If anything, the warfare is more intense today. Some do not agree with that and it baffles me how they cannot see it. I remember saying that once at a home Bible study and some young guy (maybe that was the deal, I did it too when I was young) begged to differ with me. Things have always been awful, granted, but they are worse now. The Scriptures say that in the last days, “evil men will go from bad to worse” (cf. [2 Tim 3:13](#)). They will wax worse and worse. May the Lord give us this heart to devote ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the word.

And there was a man of God who pastored a big city church in Chicago whose name is A. W. Tozer. And that man has been an instrument used of God to touch my heart. He pastored a big city church and he walked what we are teaching right now. And someone shared a few sermons of his on tape with me recently. They are very precious. Oh, my heart just burned with the fire of God, as I listened to that man teach!

He was teaching on the classic rapture passage and those who sense the word teaching that the Lord is coming back before the great day of trouble. And then in the great tribulation there will be trouble like the world has never seen. Then the Lord will come back with His saints, according to Revelation 20 and establish His kingdom for a thousand years. And I was listening to A.W. Tozer teach on that great passage, which I have heard so many times, in fact, it is one of the cornerstones of the background of my teaching in the word. And I was just about to weep because my heart was so softened by his teaching in that passage. And what hit me as I was listening—get this—that man went into that passage devoted not only to the word and the truth of it but to prayer. He met God in that passage.

I have taught about the Lord’s return so many times where the major points of the passage are to order your prophetic calendar. Now have you got it right? Shift your pieces around, I mean you need to get it right! Amen, there is nothing wrong with being right. I have been wrong too much, maybe you have too. I would like to be right more often,

right in the Lord's sight. But there is something bigger than that. Tozer was teaching and preaching and boy, my heart was lifting up in the rapture of worship. I was not checking my calendar to see if I had the pieces on it right. He was dwelling on "and the Lord Himself will descend with a shout" (cf. [1 Thessalonians 4:16](#)). And he began to elaborate on what that meant to his heart. His eyes were off the calendar and on the Lord. "The Lord Himself will descend with a shout." He will catch us up and so shall we ever be with the Lord! And he preached the Lord Jesus Christ.

He challenged the saints and all of us. We are too earthly minded and we forget our citizenship is in heaven from which we look for the appearing of our Savior. We do not get shaken loose from earthly things or even from earthly religious things unless we are devoted to prayer and ministry of the word. It takes going to the word to get our prophetic calendar and some kind of accuracy, so we can walk in light of it. It takes some prayer to get light on it. It takes more prayer to go past that and have a revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is coming back and then our citizenship will be made complete. Until then, we are "strangers in an alien land" (cf. [Hebrews 11:13](#)). We are pilgrims on our way. What are we leaning on—our prophetic calendar? And how right it is? If it is absolutely perfect and we lean on it, we will fall. He is the only rock we can stand on. He is the only rock.

It takes prayer in the word to meet the Lord in the word. It is prayer that rescues the Bible from being just a book, really a library of 66 books. Prayer lets us meet the Lord and God lives in our hearts as we commune with Him in the word. We must devote ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the word.

Let's look now at prayer affecting the word in our lives. Let's look at that first because it is listed here first—'prayer, and the ministry of the word.' I think it is also listed first because we must approach the word prayerfully. That is the way to approach the word, seeking. You may say, "Yes, but I do not know how to pray, I am new at this." Get into the word saying, "Lord I want to find You." That is all the prayer you need to start out with, to begin with say: "Lord I just want to find You."

We have sung part of it Psalm 119 which was sung by Israel and it is good to be a psalm singing gentile. ([Psalm 119:18](#)) is a prayer that affects the working of the word in our lives. "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things from Your law." That is the way to go to the word. "Open my eyes!" We do not have the sight we think we do. We can go into the word and read it and read it and then let someone else humbly seek God, read the same passage, open their mouth and we wonder where they got that! God opened their eyes—that is where they saw it. Have you not had that experience many times? I have countless times. You hear someone read a passage and you think, "I have that one tucked away." And then you hear them start to talk and you think: "What? Well, I'll be—they are right!"

Lord open my eyes. We can be so blind when we go to the word. So blind, we cannot see what God wants us to see in the word unless He opens our eyes. He can do it and He is willing to do it. And He wants us to behold wonderful things. The word is not just full of nit-picky details of history and religion. There are some of those details, but even they

can have a glory of their own. God wants us to behold wonderful things—wonderful things of salvation by grace, of new life in Christ, of faith and hope and love and peace and righteousness and power. Wonderful things!

That verse reminds me of a word God gave Isaiah the prophet. ([Isaiah 9:6](#)), “And His name shall be called, Wonderful” There are many wonderful things in the word but the one whose name is called “Wonderful” is the most wonderful One of all. There are many wonderful things in one way or another and if we ask God, He will show us how they are all tied into the One whose name is called “Wonderful.” His name is called: “Wonderful.” And then it says, “from whence cometh all these wonderful things?” This is right out of the Bible. The things of the Lord Jesus Christ are what make up the kingdom of God. And they come from God’s law which is another synonym or broad term for God’s word.

Also in ([Psalm 119:33](#)) is another set of prayers showing how prayer can affect the word of God in our lives.

33 Teach me, O LORD, the way of Your statutes,
And I shall keep it *to* the end.
34 Give me understanding, and I shall keep Your law;
Indeed, I shall observe it with *my* whole heart.
35 Make me walk in the path of Your commandments,
For I delight in it.
36 Incline my heart to Your testimonies,
38 Establish Your word to Your servant,

Is it not clear there, the perfect partnership between prayer and the word of God? This servant of the Lord knew how to go to the word, prayerfully, that the word might affect the life of the seeker. Do we not want to have the word taught to us? Do we not want understanding of the word? Don’t we want to walk in the path of God’s commandments? We want our hearts inclined to His word just naturally tending that way, instead of the unnatural bias our unredeemed heart had for the things of the world and the things of man. Don’t we want the word established to us where it is just a rock that is established in our hearts and holds us stable? How are we going to get these things? Prayer!

All of these phrases we just read are prayers concerning how we need our lives to be touched by the word of God. And the way we open up for it is through prayer: teach me, give me, make me, incline my heart, establish Your word. Those are not vows and promises made to God. Those are requests for God to go to work in us. It is such a bigger way to walk! God I promise that I will read Your word every day for the rest of my life. Eight days later, you oversleep, you are too busy, or a little mad at God anyway—I mean what is He pulling, it is not long before something new comes along. There goes a day and there goes the vow. How much better that God knows the hearts and He can see the hearts behind those promises. But there is a bigger way to live by casting our care upon Him. Do we care about these things? I think we do. Let’s cast them on Him. “Lord, You

teach us. You give us understanding. You make us walk. ‘You work in us to do of Your good pleasure’” (cf. [Philippians 2:13](#)).

Prayer and the word, they just go together like love and marriage. They ought to anyway.

Let’s look at the other side, the word affecting our prayer life. It works back the other way. We pray that the word might affect us. As the word affects us it affects how we pray. It works in a reciprocal, back and forth, kind of arrangement. We looked earlier at the prayer promises of the Lord. His promises stir faith in us to ask great things of God. That is one way that the word works. We have already seen that as we looked at the prayer promises. Let’s look at one other word from ([1 John 5: 14-15](#) NASB).

This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him. (NASB)

I just love that reasoning, it is so fantastic—that is heavenly reasoning. I do not know how it hits your heart, but it is convincing to me. That sounds good! This is the confidence which we have before Him as we go before God in prayer. “If we ask anything according to His will He hears us.” How do we know whether it is His will? The safest way of all is to pray in accord with His will as revealed in Scripture. Pray according to the word of God, letting the word define our prayers. If we are praying things revealed in the word that are the will of God, knowing they are things He wants then, oh, what a confidence we have! “If we ask anything according to His will, He hears us!” And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the request which we have asked from Him. When we pray that way, we can know that the moment we ask, it is not a matter of waiting for the answer, we know that we have the request which we have asked. That is a pretty quick answer, isn’t it?

We are to pray for things according to His will and as we ask them we have the confidence to say: “I’ve got it, it is mine!” I will just rise up and walk and see it revealed—it is mine. That happens as the word reveals the will and guides our prayers and we know He hears. We are then confident that we have it. That is the word affecting our prayer life.

I tucked this little sheet in my Bible and it is from the study when we were looking at praying together in one accord, out of ([Acts 1:14](#)) and elsewhere. This fits just as perfectly to what we did then because these dozen or so prayer requests were written out of the word, out of Ephesians where the will of God is abundantly revealed. We ask Him to let us join together in speaking and praying these matters to our Lord in heaven. Do you know that as we pray these, we can stand up confident that we have what we have asked? Why? It is because these requests are according to the will of God, revealed in His word. Oh, how the word can affect our prayer life! It shows us what to pray in accordance with God’s heart, but it also gives us such confidence. “Hey we’ve got it!”

Oh, to pray like that way, according to His will, knowing that we have what we have asked.

One last little postscript: prayer and the teaching of the word. In ([Ephesians 6:19](#)) Paul writes: “And pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel” (NASB).

Oh, how God revealed the mystery of the gospel to Paul! The mystery of the gospel being those aspects of the Good News that could only be understood as God revealed it. That is the mystery of the kingdom. The mystery part is that which can only be known as God reveals it. And that basically applies to the whole kingdom. There is not a kingdom known by man that isn't revealed by God. God so richly showed the mystery of the gospel to Paul. But Paul did not take that for granted. He did not say, “Oh, God has shown me the mystery of the gospel, I will just go out now and proclaim the mysteries of the gospel. No, he said, “Pray on my behalf that utterances may be given me in the opening of my mouth to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel.”

God wants us to open our mouths to share what He has shown us of the gospel of Jesus Christ. He wants us to make it known so that others might know. He wants us to make it known with boldness. Do you know what that calls for? Prayer. As a preacher of the word of God, I would ask the same thing. And I know some of you do that and I rejoice in that. My heart appreciates it and I know it is in accordance to the will of God. Myself and others stand among us to preach the mysteries of the gospel. It is so good to know that there are, in the family of God, saints praying that utterance will be given to make known the mysteries of the gospel and to do it with boldness. I confess that I need that absolutely!

If you have recently opened you mouth to make known the mystery of the gospel, haven't you wanted others to be behind you in prayer? Don't we do that sometimes? “Hey, I am going to go spend the weekend with Aunt Rose. Pray for me that utterance will be given to me in the opening of my mouth that I might make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel. That is what Paul is telling us. We need that and we should be doing this for our teachers as they teach the children. We should be doing it for each other as we minister the word to others and to ourselves. It is right. It is the will of God!

Do you know that you can affect the preaching of the word of God in the church that God has you in by praying this to the Lord? Why? Because it is His will and it is His word. Pray it and I wonder if you will get it? Pray it and you have it! If I am not opening my mouth and uttering with boldness the mysteries of the gospel, shame on me!

Through the years, how many preachers I criticized when I should have been praying for them. Boy, did I waste my time! And the most that the criticism did was lend to their discouragement or irritability or whatever else that the flesh begets. I do not mind saying it, “I need your prayers.” You may say, “I thought you were the professional.” Since when is the kingdom of God a job? I believe I am called to this, but I cannot do it. But

God can and I am willing to stand and see if He will do it, if you will pray with me in the project. That is how it happens.

Prayer and the word of God. The early church leaders devoted themselves to both. I want to do the same. I do not want to neglect any important thing that God wants me to do. I do not even want important things to eclipse my own desperate need and responsibility to God to devote myself to prayer and the ministry of the word.

I can remember when the revolution began to dawn in my own teaching ministry many years ago. It was when I got my nose out of the lexicons and I got my knees more on the floor and with the word open I talked to God. I have learned more in prayer with the word open before God than I ever learned out of any book on earth. I am not downgrading that which others have done to bless us in the academic field. If that is approached prayerfully, that can also be sanctified as a vessel of value. But prayer and the word are critical to the kingdom of God. It is prayer and the word together.

We have looked at prayer affecting the word in our lives. Whatever we need the word to do in us, we ought to pray to God to do it for us. That is the way it is to work. We looked at the word affecting our prayer life. Also in 1 John we see that keeping the commandments keeps the doors open for God to say, “Yes.” A willingness to obey lets the Spirit move without being quenched in rebellion. And then if we pray anything according to His will, we have it. This is the word affecting our prayer life.

Preachers and teachers of the word need prayer for their ministry of the word. They need this desperately.

May the Lord grant in our lives that we would respond to God like Mary did in Luke 1:38 when she had a word from God through an angel, she said: “Behold the bondservant of the Lord, be it unto me according to your word.” She is an example for the ages to everyone. May it be this way for us. We also are bondservants of the Lord. We can say with Mary, “Be it unto us according to Your will.” In this great area of prayer and the word let us be together as a church.

The church of the Lord Jesus Christ is in grave danger of repeating a tragic mistake that God’s people, Israel, made more than two thousand five hundred years ago. We need to understand what this mistake was and then like Daniel of old cry out with prayer for God’s people. Again this study on prayer involves a prayer from God’s word. This prayer was a prayer uttered unto God by Daniel, one of the most unique and godly men in all of the history of the kingdom of God. Daniel was drug off with many of the Israelites by the godless kingdom of Babylon. He grew up as a young teenager in what is called the Babylonian captivity, yet he had a resolve to follow the Lord and there was no turning back. He faced many tough consequences in light of that but the Lord kept honoring his faithfulness and commitment. And he rose to be a prime minister, a leader in that godless kingdom.

Daniel saw the people of God, Israel, much hampered, hindered in bondage, and oppressed. He saw their great needs and in captivity he cried out this prayer for God's people. The prayer is in ([Daniel 9:4-19](#)). Verses 4-14 are a confession of sin. In the first three verses 4-6, we will see the sin that is their tragic mistake.

I prayed to the LORD my God and confessed and said, “Alas, O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments, we have sinned, committed iniquity, acted wickedly and rebelled, even turning aside from Your commandments and ordinances. Moreover, we have not listened to Your servants the prophets, who spoke in Your name to our kings, our princes, our fathers, and all the people of the land.” (NASB)

This is another prayer that begins with the attention on God, just as we saw in the disciples' prayer, “Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name,” that is the basic way to start in prayer is to put our attention on the Lord. One of our greatest needs as people is to get the attention off of ourselves and on to the Lord. And prayer is a beautiful opportunity to do that. We put our attention on the one we are speaking to. We do that when we speak to each other, but we often fail to do it when we speak to the Lord.

And so as Daniel begins to pray he says: “Oh Lord, the great and awesome God.” He speaks of the glorious nature of God and the fact that God strikes awe in his heart when he thinks of the Lord. And he describes God as the One who keeps covenant and lovingkindness. He told the Lord he knew that He was the one who keeps His commitments. He is going to speak about how Israel did not keep their commitments, but God keeps His commitments. He keeps His covenants and He pours out loyal steadfast love. That is lovingkindness to all who love Him and obey Him. Daniel knew that and that is really the foundation of anyone's relationship with the Lord, knowing that this is the kind of God that we seek and serve.

And then he said in ([Daniel 9:5](#)), basically that we have been sinful, wicked rebels. Basically that was it. There are two aspects to the sin: one, he said that the people of God turned away from the word of God. And second: they did not listen to those who warned them. Those were the basic sins of Israel and it brought them into captivity. Israel who was given the word of the Lord, through Moses and through the prophets, they were told God's heart and His plans and His purposes. They had turned away from the word of God. They had become more interested in the ways of the nations around them. They wanted to be like all the other nations. They wanted a king, they wanted idols, they wanted indulgences. And then when God sent the prophets to warn them, they did not listen to those who warned them. In fact, they stoned and killed some of them. Their basic sin was turning away from the Lord's word and not listening to the warnings of the Lord's servants.

You know the church world in many ways is doing the same thing. It is not that different from Israel's sin. It is amazing how we can read about Israel and say, “My word, how can they be so dumb and blind and hard? Look at what God did for them. Look at what God

gave them. And look at how they responded.” Have you looked lately at the church world today? Think of these two sins of Israel, their great tragic mistake was turning from the word and ignoring those God sent to warn them that their actions were wrong, dangerous, and troublesome. In the church world, in church after church there is little attention to the word or no word at all. Some of you have been in this church or a church like this and it is the only kind you have ever known. You can hardly imagine that you could go into other churches and they would not do what we are doing. They would not open the word and spend a significant portion of their time in the word of God. I will guarantee you that is the way it is out in the church world.

There are some thirty churches in this city and do you know that significantly less than half of them preach the word of the Lord. Do you know that? Right here in this city! This is what Israel did and this is what the church world is doing today. The church has become more interested in entertainment than in the truth of the living God. The church has sold out to the, “whatever attracts people,” philosophy—do it. Instead of looking into the word of God to see what God has to say and just saying it; Instead of looking into the word to let Christ build His church, men are out trying to build religious organizations and plaster the name of the Lord Jesus Christ upon it. Whatever it takes to get people—that is what the church world is tempted to do today. This is just like Israel twenty-five hundred years ago. God’s people were in a miserable path then and many are walking that path today.

God in His word has told us how to find wholeness of life, but now the church is more interested in what the psychologists have to say. What the sociologists have to say. What the consultant has to say. It is tragic. It is the same tragic mistake that Israel made. When problems come into people’s lives, if they are not too serious, the church might address them. But if they look real serious, we recommend them to the so-called “experts.” Basically we are throwing the lambs to the wolves. It is a tragic mistake. It is an absolute kinship with the path that Israel was walking.

The apostle Peter wrote that “the Lord Jesus has given us everything that pertains to life and godliness” (cf. [2 Peter 1:3](#)). And the church turns from that promise and goes out to feed on the dregs of this world. It is a pitiful situation. It is a tragic mistake. Any believer who walks that route is going to diminish their walk with God if not eventually destroy it. And I am personally not talking in just theological or theoretical terms, though these statements are true from that perspective. I have watched it happen in life after life and in church after church. This is the path the church is walking. We actually think that insights to living from men like Freud and Jung and Maslow and Rogers can actually do more for us than the living word of the Lord Jesus Christ applied by the Spirit in the ministering context of the family of God. How blind can we be? This the same mistake as in Daniel’s time.

The Church world is turning away from the word of the Lord. I know as a pastor it is the passion in my heart, as long a God gives me life and breath on this earth, to just be consumed with a fire to preach the word of God. There is no other light shining to show us where we are. “It is a lamp to our feet.” (cf. [Psalm 119:105](#)). There is no other light

shining to show us where to go. It is a light unto our path, only the word of the Lord. The Lord Jesus Christ is going to be allowed to shine forth across this nation the way He wants. And here is the lamp that He is going to shine it through—the word of God. May we treasure it, love it, give into it, live by it, and freely give it away to anyone who will listen.

Turning away from the word of the Lord is a tragic mistake. Israel not only did that, but she did something else. When God sent forth men to warn the church, they would not listen to those who warned. Now we ask: “How could they do that?” We are doing the same thing today! God is sending forth men with a warning message that churches are being seduced and Christians are ignoring the word. God has sent forth the men and what does much of the church do? They say that these men are on a witch hunt. That is a tragic mistake. When God raises up people to warn us that we are off track, we need to humble our hearts before them and listen. We need to listen, and repent and turn.

I thank God for these bold men. I rejoice in their spiritual courage. I know these men have broken hearts for the people of God. I know that they are not vindictive men. I know that they are not out to shoot people down. They are out to win the war for the hearts and souls and minds of men. God forgive us and protect us and change us. May we not turn away from the word and when the Lord sends those who warn us that we are doing it, may we listen to them.

I am so blessed by a man who read “The Seduction of Christianity,” which is about the seduction of the church, and he put a two-page ad in a magazine. It said, “Thank God for telling us what we needed to hear. When I read this book I fell to me knees and wept for hours.” That is responding to the word of God. He came from the theological tradition that could have had much reason to get uptight over that book. Praise God when men will humble themselves in the sight of God when they hear the truth. May we not make this tragic mistake again. God protect us from turning from the word and then not listening to the leaders of God’s people when they warn us.

Well, that is how Daniel started out his prayer. May we pray like Daniel. We talk about praying like Daniel, here is how Daniel prayed. He cried out to God in light of God’s glory and he cried out to God that the people of God were turning from the word and would not listen to the prophets. May we pray that way for God’s people. This is a day and age to include in our prayers, prayer for God’s people. Oh, yes, we need to pray for the world. Yes, we need to address our own brokenness and needs. But may we include in our praying, prayer for God’s people.

In verse 7, ([Daniel 9:7](#)) addressed their shame.

Righteousness belongs to You, O Lord, but to us open shame, as it is this day--to the men of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem and all Israel, those who are nearby and those who are far away in all the countries to which You have driven them, because of their unfaithful deeds which they have committed against You.

See this is the problem with all of this sort of living is against God; it is not just against a religious movement or against man, it is against God. And Daniel called this shameful. Again he ascribed truth to the Lord, “Righteousness belongs to You O Lord.” It is so right for us to intersperse in our prayers telling the Lord what we have found Him to be. He is the one who is listening. He is the one we are talking to. It right through our prayers time and again to ascribe unto the Lord that He is righteous and to tell Him that righteous belongs to Him.

And then Daniel contrasts that, “But to Israel, shame.” He said, “You are righteous, God, and Your people are shameful. We have become a disgrace and a dishonor to You.” It was not just Israel then though, again it is the church now. There is much disgrace in the church world. I read the “religion” page of the local newspaper. Somewhere in there every now and then you find the church of the living God. But in article after article I am just amazed when I am through reading them. Inside I feel like: “Lord that is disgraceful. That is not pleasing to You.” It is disgraceful and we call ourselves the church and speak in these ways. I read an article the other day from one of the biggest churches in Orange County. The Lord Jesus Christ was not mentioned once. The word of God was not mentioned, and prayer was not mentioned. What can you talk about as a pastor if you do not address those things? It talked about issues with people and making them happy, blessed and more comfortable, I guess. It is disgraceful and it is a shame.

Twenty-five hundred years ago people shamed God by the way they lived and we are on the same path today. May God shake us and wake us up.

In ([Daniel 9:9](#)),

To the Lord our God belong compassion and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against Him; nor have we obeyed the voice of the LORD our God, to walk in His teachings which He set before us through His servants the prophets. "Indeed all Israel has transgressed Your law and turned aside, not obeying Your voice; so the curse has been poured out on us, along with the oath which is written in the law of Moses the servant of God, for we have sinned against Him [against God]. “Thus He has confirmed His words which He had spoken against us and against our rulers who ruled us, to bring on us great calamity; for under the whole heaven there has not been done anything like what was done to Jerusalem [their bondage, their captivity].”

Again Daniel ascribes truth and glory to the Lord. Verse 9, “To the Lord our God belong compassion and forgiveness.” That is exactly what Israel needed—the compassion of God and the forgiving work of God. And there is another work of God that we will see in a minute as it comes forth in his prayer.

Daniel said what they were experiencing was a curse which came through an oath that Moses delivered to his people. He is speaking of passages like Deuteronomy 28 and

elsewhere. Do you remember Deuteronomy? *Deuteronomous* means “second law.” This was the second giving of the law. Why give the law again? God gave it to Israel coming out of the land of Egypt; but after they wandered in the wilderness and it was time to go into the Promised Land, He sat them down and gave them the law again.

And in ([Deuteronomy 28](#)) there was a promise of blessing for obedience, and a curse for disobedience. Another way of saying it is: “We reap whatever we sow.” And that is what is being spoken of here in Daniel. He knew the word of God. Remember if we ever want to learn to pray God’s way, we will learn to do it in the word of God by praying and letting the word be our guide in prayer. And that is what Daniel is doing. In his prayer he sees that the curse that God had given is sort of a conditional threat: “If you live wrongly, this will happen to you.” And God gave it with an oath. He said, “It will happen. I swear it will happen if you rebel against Me.”

You cannot get away from the promise of God. There are many rebellious people in the church world today. There are many rebellious people in leadership and there are some rebellious who are currently training to be leaders. God will not let them get away with rebellion. Although they may look like great things to the religious world, God will humble their hearts one way or another before He is done. There is a curse that comes upon rebelliousness and God has an oath to go with it, “I will take care of it.” It was the oath written in the law and it is written in the word of God. It shall hold up in our experience. The curse was for disobedience, for rebelliousness, and for idolatry; and Israel went that path. The promise was that it would bring upon them destruction, scattering, bondage, fear, misery, and every uncertainty of life. That is exactly what Israel found when she rebelled. Daniel called this great calamity or disaster—“the captivity of God’s people.” The tragic thing, and some of the saddest parts of the word of God, is to read what happened to Israel.

But you know the history of God’s people, in another way, is still being written now. We are the people of God upon the earth today. We are the form of the kingdom He is building. Jesus said, “I will build my church.” We may be headed toward a great calamity just like this. You say, “Well, what do you mean? They are not going to come and drag us off to Babylon.” Well, no the man who tried to rebuild Babylon was greatly disappointed recently, although in the end the Babylonian system of humanism and self-centered living will circle the globe. It will fall when God judges it in the tribulation. But the Babylonian system, the world’s system is against God. It is everywhere. It is thriving in commerce and in education and in government.

([Genesis 11:4](#)) says, “With God out of the way, let us build for ourselves a tower to heaven” (paraphrased). And I think the church world is crawling into captivity through worldly ways. We are slipping into captivity and do not even know it. Just because they did not come and change our geography, we may think we are doing okay because we are in free America. Listen, most Americans are turning away from the word of God. Most Americans are not listening to the Lord. Where are most Americans today? They are out getting the BBQ ready and they are living it up! They are going to celebrate this weekend. But will they have anything to do with listening to God—for most Americans,

no. Our nation could fall under a similar kind of judgment that the whole nation of Israel fell under when her godly people strayed away from the Lord.

The church is being pulled into the ways of the world. We are to be influencing the world as salt and light. The world is beginning to dictate how we think, how we function, what we say, how we minister, and whether or not we minister. That is just bondage. That is just a subtle form of spiritual captivity. In the midst of that Israel was not turning to God, verse 13.

As it is written in the law of Moses, all this calamity has come on us; yet we have not sought the favor of the LORD our God by turning from our iniquity and giving attention to Your truth. Therefore the LORD has kept the calamity in store [He has done what He said He would do] and brought it on us; for the LORD our God is righteous [He does rightly, He is righteous, He is just] with respect to all His deeds which He has done, but we have not obeyed His voice. ([Daniel 9:13](#))

In the midst of this mess they were drug off from their beloved land where they were to live under the rule of God, and they were taken to a godless nation. Don't you think that people would be crying out to God? They were not. "Yet we have not asked Your favor." They did not turn to God for grace. They did not turn from their wicked ways or turn to God's truth. In Babylon they kept sinning as they sinned in the Land of Promise.

But there were some who turned to the truth of God; there were some Daniels. Praise the Lord for the Daniels! May God give us a generation where many Daniels rise up who will not compromise the things of God. The health of the church will depend upon it and even though our nation does not know it, the health of our nation will depend on the health of the church. If we are not salt and light, they will be decaying and in darkness.

God is righteous and His judgments were right for Israel. You know if God judged the church of America or judged America as a whole, it would be deserved. You heard the statement that someone made and I think it is quite accurate, "If God doesn't judge America there will be an apology due Sodom and Gomorrah." There is a lot of truth in that. If we do not turn to God, there is going to be some heavy judgment and calamity upon our nation. We have already seen some cracks and crevices. You can see how easily a nation can fall. We are straining and groaning as a nation. May we be turning to God and not go on in our blind ways.

Well at this point, the last and smaller portion of this prayer in Daniel turns from confession of sin to request for restoration. And in the beginning of ([Daniel 9:15](#)), Daniel asks God to shine upon his people.

And now, O Lord our God, who have brought Your people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand and have made a name for Yourself, as it is this day--we have sinned, we have been wicked. O Lord, in accordance with all Your righteous acts, let now Your anger and Your wrath turn

away from Your city Jerusalem, Your holy mountain; for because of our sins and the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and Your people have become a reproach to all those around us. So now, our God, listen to the prayer of Your servant and to his supplications, and for Your sake, O Lord, let Your face shine on Your desolate sanctuary.

He was referring to the headquarters of God on earth, the temple at Jerusalem that was desolate and destroyed.

In this part of Daniel's prayer, he recalls God's mighty deliverance from Egypt—when Israel was in bondage to the world and yet God brought her out. And that was the basis of their expectation for new and mighty works. They were in bondage again. It is sort of like, "God you did it in Egypt, do it again now in Babylon, would You?" And of course that is a picture of our deliverance from bondage. Israel is being brought out of bondage in Egypt and it is like us being brought out from bondage to sin and death and into Christ. God saved us from the deadness of the world when He forgave us in Jesus Christ our Lord. And in this study on prayer, the central issue is speaking to a God of deliverance, a God of rescue and a God of salvation.

If you have never been forgiven your sins; if you have never come out of the world to live in Christ and among His people, I am sure this is what God would want you to consider today. You cannot really pray to a God that you do not really know. You cannot really talk in depth to a person you do not know. You get acquainted with the Father of glory through Jesus Christ the Son. He died for your sins. He paid the price to set you free from the spiritual Egypt—sin and guilt and death.

Call upon the name of Jesus and you will have an exodus. He will bring you out of sin into forgiveness and out of darkness into light. And then that deliverance that we found in Christ becomes our basis of expectation for God to work some more! We who had Him save us from sin and guilt can see challenges, problems, needs, and we can pray to the God of deliverance: "Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus who delivered us, work now. You saved us, deliver us. You gave us new life, set us free to fullness of life."

And Daniel says that God's people Israel at that time had become a reproach—that is a discredit to God. They were to be an honor to God and they had become a reproach because they rebelled and turned from His word. They walked in the ways of the world. And in the midst of all that Daniel says in his prayer to God in verse 17: "Listen to the prayer of Your servant and to his supplications, and for Your sake, O Lord, let Your face shine on Your desolate sanctuary." Daniel cries out for God to shine His favor on His people. Daniel asks God to pour out His grace on His people, to shine His light upon His people, and basically to restore His people. In the mess therein he cries out, "For Your sake, just grant us favor, restore us."

And then in verse 18-19 he concludes his prayer by asking God to forgive and act on their behalf.

O my God, incline Your ear and hear! Open Your eyes and see our desolations and the city which is called by Your name; for we are not presenting our supplications before You on account of any merits of our own, but on account of Your great compassion. O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and take action! For Your own sake, O my God, do not delay, because Your city and Your people are called by Your name.

Oh, this is tremendous praying! This gets right down to the heart of the kingdom. Daniel says, “See our desolations and forgive us.” He says, “We are called by Your name. We know we are doing wrong, but we have dug Your name down into the mud. And we ask these requests, Lord, not on our merits but on Your great compassion.” You see that is the way we come to the Lord. We do not come to Him and say, “Now Lord, You watched me this past week and I was pretty good, huh? I know You are probably feeling a little bit ingratiated and indebted to me, and so I come before You now to take what’s mine.” Can you imagine praying like that?

Some of our modern day “Use-God” theology prays like that, talks like that, and thinks that. It is ludicrous, isn’t it? It should be: “We are begging You for all sorts of things and believe us it is not because we think we deserve it. We are not crying out because we think You owe us anything, God. We are crying out because of Your great compassion. We just know the heart You have for Your people.”

And then Daniel said, “Forgive us and take action for Your own sake. For Your honor and glory, lift us out of the muck and the mud and the mire. Pull us back to give attention to Your word. And with every servant You send forth, cause us to listen to him. And shine forth upon us. We want to see Your work restored upon the earth.”

Now that is praying. That is the way that God would have us pray. Listen, there are many, many things to pray about. Let’s be sure in our praying that we include prayer for God’s people. We need to pray this kind of prayer. Daniel’s prayer is one of the greatest prayers in the Word of God. And God can teach us to pray like that. God can use us to pray like that.

We can be the Daniels of our generation who see the work of God restored in a Babylonian world. It is not because we deserve it and not because we can do it, but because we know the God of deliverance, power, might, righteousness, compassion and forgiveness. And if we will call out like this, I believe He will shine upon His people and restore us, just like He did the nation of Israel. He gave them permission through their worldly rulers to go back into the land where Ezra and Nehemiah rebuilt the work of God. Let’s ask for the same passion for prayer. I do believe that He will be faithful to answer.

Let’s pray,

Father it is the desire of our heart to call upon Your name even as Daniel did. May our confession be, “I will call.” And may we call upon You

Servant Leadership – Lesson 30
Prayer and the Word by Bob Hoekstra

17

consistently and persistently until we see You do among us that which is pleasing in Your sight, restoring Your people and bringing them wholeness of life. Lord we call upon You in Jesus' name. Amen

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

BY

Calvary Chapel Outreach Fellowship

Lesson 31 **Keep a Pure Heart**

By

Chuck Smith

Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa

Brought to you by:

The Blue Letter Bible Institute

www.blbi.org

A ministry of:

The Blue Letter Bible

www.blueletterbible.org

Servant Leadership – Lesson 31
Keep a Pure Heart by Chuck Smith

1

Speaker uses KJV Bible in his references unless otherwise noted.

The Lord gave Moses the plans and the instructions for the building of the tabernacle which is a model of heavenly things. The tabernacle was built; and thus, in the book of Leviticus the Lord begins to instruct Moses concerning the various offerings that were to be offered unto the Lord. There was the burnt offering, the offering of consecration unto God; the peace offering, that offering of communion with God; and then the sin offerings, and the trespass offerings. And so, having given him now the instructions on how the various offerings were to be made, the various ways the animals were to be cut up, and the various parts of the animals that were to be burned unto the Lord, the whole thing is all set up.

That beautiful moment has come for a trial run. Now they are going to actually do it. God has given all the instructions. The tabernacle has been built and so the congregation of Israel gathers together around the tabernacle. And according to the instructions of the Lord, Moses and Aaron went in and offered before the Lord a sin offering, the burnt sacrifice, and the peace offering.

In Leviticus 9 we read,

And Aaron lifted up his hand toward the people, and blessed them, and he came down from offering the sin offering, and the burnt offering, and the peace offerings.
And Moses and Aaron went into the tabernacle of the congregation, and came out, and blessed the people: and the glory of the Lord appeared unto all the people.
And there came a fire out from before the Lord and consumed upon the altar the burnt offering and the fat: which when all the people saw, they shouted and they fell on their faces. ([Leviticus 9:22–24](#))

This was a tremendous movement of God and tremendous excitement among the people. God was being glorified among His people. The offering had now been offered. They had obeyed the commandment of God; the tabernacle was built. They are now going through the actual ceremonies to inaugurate and to initiate this whole thing, and God's presence, God's power, and God's fire came down. The glory of the Lord appeared to the people and the fire of God came out. And the people saw it and they were in awe of this glorious work of God. They fell on their faces worshipping God.

And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the LORD, which he commanded them not.
And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD.
Then Moses said unto Aaron, "This is it that the LORD spake, saying, 'I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified.'" And Aaron held his peace. ([Leviticus 10:1–3](#), KJV)

God wants to work among His people. God wants to manifest His glory to His people. God wants to move, by His Spirit, among the people. But unfortunately, many times as it happened here, when God's Spirit begins to move and the hearts and the lives of the people are being touched by God, there are certain people with spiritual insensitivity. And because there is an excitement and an emotion of the moment, because God is moving, they do not have enough spiritual

discernment to just let God move. They have to somehow insert and interject themselves upon the scene.

Now the Scripture does not really specify what the strange fire was, so it gives us an opportunity of exposition. The fact that Moses explained that this was what God was talking about when He said, “I will be glorified,” would seem to indicate that somehow Nadab and Abihu were trying to catch some of the glory. “Hey man, I am pretty important here. Look at me! I have my golden incense. Look, I am offering it before God. You see, I am trying to get on the scene. God is moving I want to get in. I want people to see me. I am important around here. I am a priest. I am in this thing, too, folks. See, what I am doing.”

But God will not share His glory with man. And God has no intention or desire to bring glory to your name. One important thing in the ministry is that we must minister in such a way that when men see the good works, they will glorify your Father which is in heaven (cf. Matthew 5:16). We let our lights so shine before men. Now it is possible to let your light so shine before men that when they see your good works, they go around saying what a wonderful person you are. Your light is shining the wrong way. Let your light so shine that it brings glory to God and not unto man.

There is an evil about our flesh. I have come to hate my flesh. But there is this crazy mix of emotions because I love it too. It is a love/hate relationship. Even when I am engaged in some of the most spiritual activities, my flesh can get in the way. My flesh wants recognition. My flesh wants a little glory and a little attention. I want people to think that I am a deeply spiritual person. I want the people in the church to think that I am really a spiritual giant. I want them to admire my walk with God. And because of that horrible desire of my flesh, there are times when I sort of let it slip that when I was in prayer this morning, waiting upon God, the Lord came into the room and spoke to my heart. And the people think, “Oh, he was up in the morning praying. Isn’t that beautiful? My, that is powerful. God bless him! Oh, I wish I were spiritual like that.”

Jesus said,

Take heed to yourself that you do not your righteousness before men to be seen of men. For verily I say unto you, ye have your reward. (cf. [Matthew 6:1](#))

Then Jesus talked about how you prayed, and how you gave, and how you mortified the flesh. And there are two ways to do it. There is a way to do it by which you draw attention to yourself, and people know how deeply committed you are to God. And there is another way to do it by which God knows how deeply you are committed to Him. But if you are doing it in such a way that people might know of your deep commitment, then God does not seem to know of it. I am doing my works either before man, to be seen of man and to receive the glory and the credit from man; or I am doing it before the Lord, as unto the Lord, to receive the glory from Him.

It is not enough that I am just serving God. God is interested in how I am serving Him and why I am serving Him. God is looking at my heart. God is looking at the motivation. And when God looks at my works, He is not just looking at what I am doing; He is looking at what motivated me to do it. Did I do this because I felt it would bring a lot of attention to my ministry? The reporters might come out and find out what is going on out here. Maybe my motivation was for some fame and some notoriety. What was the true motive? Why did I really do it? That is the thing that God examines. I will be honest with you, I do not always know what my true motivation is, and many times God nails me. After I have done something and I think, “Well, that was all right, wasn’t

it?”—then the Lord really nails me. He shows me that my motivation was wrong. “You did not do that for Me. You did that because you wanted this person over here to recognize what you are doing. And that really was not for Me.” So it is not enough that I just serve the Lord. That is not enough. For Jesus said,

Not all who say, “Lord, Lord” are going to enter the kingdom of heaven. But he who does the will of My Father. For many will come in that day saying, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name? Did we not do miracles? Did we not heal people?”
(cf. [Matthew 7:21–23](#))

Wait a minute, these people are talking about serving God. But Jesus said that it is possible to be doing things of service and yet not really be doing the will of the Father. Not everyone who says, “Lord, Lord,” is accepted, but it is he who does the will of God.

Now we are talking about what these people were doing, but it was not the will of God. What they were doing was, no doubt, motivated by improper motivation and the Lord is not about to accept it.

It is difficult to be in the ministry. It is difficult to maintain a true balance in the ministry because there are always people who are trying to heap rewards upon you now. Our flesh would love to receive it, accept it, and acknowledge it; but God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of Jesus Christ.

So, it could be that Nadab and Abihu were glory seekers. Things were moving and they were possibly thinking, “Hey people, we are spiritual. We want you to see our spirituality. We are a part of this whole thing, man. We are an important part here. Look at us!”

I have found so many times when God’s Spirit begins to move that, quite often, it is an open door for the flesh. And many times that work of God, that beautiful work of the Spirit, is actually quenched and destroyed because someone wants to get some glory out of the move of God. They are not moving in the Spirit, but moving in their own flesh and seeking to show that they have gifts too. And I have seen marvelous moves of God’s Spirit quenched by people who were looking for glory for their own flesh, seeking to draw attention unto themselves.

Now in the exercise of the spiritual gifts—which we desire, which we want, which we need, or God would never have given us—I cannot buy into this theology today that says, “Well, I really do not want those gifts. I feel that I have all that I need and I really have no desire for the gifts of the Spirit.” I do not agree with that theology because I know that I need everything that God has for me. But in the exercise of our spiritual gifts, we must be careful that we exercise them in such a way as not to draw attention to ourselves. We must not bring glory to ourselves because the moment we do, we are taking people’s attention off the Lord.

There have been times when I have been in beautiful worship. The Spirit of God has given me such a glorious revelation of the glory, and the beauty of Jesus Christ, and I am just caught up in the Spirit. It is just so glorious. And right in the middle of this glorious move of God’s Spirit, someone will shout, “HALLELUJAH!” with a shaky, dramatic voice. And it causes me to look around and say, “Who said that?” But what has happened? My mind and my heart have been taken off of the Lord completely and on to someone who was carried away in his flesh, who was seeking to draw attention to himself. He was not really praising God. He was conscious that God’s Spirit was moving, that people were being blessed. And so, he thought, “I want some

attention here, folks. I am spiritual. I am holy. Look how I can yell, ‘Hallelujah!’ I can shake and all when I do it.” But I am surprised sometimes that God’s fire does not come down and consume some of these people.

The Holy Spirit did not come to magnify or exalt Himself. The Holy Spirit came to exalt and magnify Jesus Christ, and to testify of Him. The effect of a true manifestation of the Holy Spirit will be to draw men’s attention and hearts unto Jesus. And in the exercise of your gifts, be careful that you do not do them in some kind of an odd, weird way that draws attention to you. Seek to exercise them in such a way that you blend, that you flow, that it brings the worship and the praise unto the Lord with the whole flow of the Spirit. Be careful that you do not get involved with “strange fire” and seek to offer strange worship to the Lord. The Lord does not want “strange fire.”

This strange fire was no doubt fire that God had not kindled. Now God kindled the fire there at the altar and it consumed the burnt offering, the fat and all. Where they got the fire, the Bible does not say, but it was not a fire that was kindled by God.

We have to be careful of “fire” that is kindled by our own emotions. And when God’s Spirit is moving, there is a glorious, emotional response within our hearts. But I am not to serve, or to make my commitment to God out of merely an emotional response.

Now many times there are services where an evangelist or a minister will deliberately work up the emotions of the people. And there are men who have, through experience, learned how to get certain emotional responses. By doing a certain thing, by saying something a certain way, or by manipulation, they know how to manipulate people’s emotions, and build people up into a high emotional pitch. And then people are offering fire that is not really kindled by the Spirit of God. They are offering fire that is kindled by their own emotions unto God, and that is strange fire.

There are attempts to work up the Spirit in a meeting, and there are men who are masters in the ability of working up a feeling and a frenzy within a crowd. They say, “All right, let’s all say, praise the Lord! Hallelujah! Oh, bless God!” They can really begin to work people into a frenzy. They try to work up the Spirit, rather than to pray down the Spirit upon a meeting.

God wants to work. God wants so much to work. God wants to work more than any of us really desire for Him to work. We think, “Oh God, we want You to work.” Hey, you do not want Him to work nearly as much as He wants to work, but God has a difficulty working because it is hard to get a group of people who will stay in the flow of the Spirit. It is hard to get a group of people without someone wanting to receive a little glory or attention all for himself. And God, so many times, begins to work and then there is a quench from the flesh.

Let’s go back to Leviticus 10.

And the LORD spake unto Aaron, saying,
Do not drink wine nor strong drink, thou, nor thy sons with thee,
when ye go into the tabernacle of the congregation, lest ye die: it
shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations. ([Leviticus
10:8–9](#), KJV)

Now remember in verse 3, Moses said, “This is what the Lord was talking about, Aaron, when He said, ‘I will be sanctified in them that come near Me.’” Aaron’s sons, evidently had not really been sanctified. They had probably been doing a little drinking and their judgment was probably

clouded a bit from their drinking. And so God warned, “Aaron, do not ever come before Me when you have been drinking, lest you die. And warn your sons too.”

Now, some of you feel a liberty in Christ to think that you can maybe have a little wine with your dinner now and then, or maybe an occasional beer. But God said, “I will be sanctified in them that come before Me.” And God warned that this is a statute forever. Do not come around if you have been drinking because God does not want you serving Him out of any false stimulation. God wants your mind to be totally clear and your judgment totally clear, when you come before Him.

Paul, in writing to Timothy concerning the choice of elders, said that they are not to be given to wine ([1 Timothy 3:3](#)). If you want to be an elder, an overseer in the body of Christ, then you are not to be given to wine. And you should make your choice. You may say, “But I like my wine. I want to have a glass of wine now and then.” Fine, have it, but step down. You can still be a deacon because he is not to be given to *much* wine ([1 Timothy 3:8](#)). But if you want to be an overseer in the house of God, let’s face it, you are not to be given to wine. And do not beg the grace of God as a cloak for deliberate disobedience to the command of God.

God is not interested in any service that comes from false stimulation. And herein, I feel terrible concerning the early years of my ministry. God knows I did it out of ignorance. I am guilty of stimulating people to serve God out of false motivations and false stimulants. I have motivated people to serve God by offering them, new bicycles, beach balls, and giant lollipops. I have sought to motivate people through carnal motivations, getting them all whipped up in a contest such as pitting the men against the women or the reds against the blues. And in so doing, I am guilty of encouraging people to serve God out of a wrong heart and out of wrong motivations. I have handed them the strange fire, so to speak. And I am guilty before God of giving false stimulation to these people in their service of God.

God does not want any service from us that is out of false stimulation. God wants us to only serve Him from a pure heart of love. Paul the Apostle said, “For the love of Christ constrains me” ([2 Corinthians 5:14](#)). Now if you are in the ministry for any other reason—for your sake, for your church’s sake, and for God’s sake—get out. In looking at your own heart, if you cannot say, “For the love of Christ constrains me,” as you are looking at your ministry; if it is not that compelling love for Jesus Christ, then get out! God does not want you to serve Him out of any other motivation than the compelling love of Jesus Christ that He has placed in your heart for Him, and for His work in serving Him. When this is our motivation, we will not go around talking about our sacrifices, or our commitment, or anything else.

I wonder how God feels when He hears us complaining or bragging about what we gave up in order to serve Him. “What could I have been if I had not given it all up for Jesus Christ? I could have been a total flop, an absolute failure, and I gave it all up to follow Jesus.” I wonder how He feels when He hears us complaining about what we have to do. I know how He felt when He heard the children of Israel complaining. He does not like complaints. He just does not take kindly to gripes.

In talking about giving to God, Paul said that it should never be out of constraint, never out of pressure, for God loves a hilarious giver ([2 Corinthians 9:7](#)). I do not care what you are giving to God—if it is funds or if it is your life—God does not want you to give it out of pressure or out of constraint. He wants you to give it willingly, from a willing heart, hilariously, so that you have given it to God from your heart because of your love for Him. You will not be going around griping about what you have given up, or griping because you gave it. And we have to be careful as we motivate our people to serve God that we seek to motivate them only through one

motivation—giving to God. Let them be motivated by only one motivation, their love for Jesus Christ.

You are not helping your people; you are hurting your people if you play upon their own vanity in order to get them to give to God. Some will say, “Now how many will give a thousand dollars? I feel led that there are ten people that are going to give a thousand dollars.” That is pandering to the flesh of man, getting him to receive glory because man wants the glory of standing up. “Oh, I will give a thousand.” “Ooh, isn’t that wonderful? Yes!” And if you use that kind of motivation, you are encouraging people to offer strange fire to God. They should give only for one reason, because God’s love is constraining them. You should serve God for only one reason and that is because God’s love is constraining you.

God does not want false fire. God refuses to accept false fire. It is interesting and also very gratifying to me to recognize and to realize that God will not even recognize my works of the flesh. You know one of the most killing things in the whole world is to try to do the work of the Spirit in the energy of your flesh. That is disastrous. Nothing will wear you down more, and wear you down to a frazzle quicker, than trying to do the work of the Spirit in the energy and the ability of your flesh. I know because I have tried. The work of the Spirit cannot be wrought with the energy of the flesh. And if I am able to simulate some work that is the result of my flesh, God does not even recognize it; and I will never receive any kind of credit, glory, reward, or anything for it. It is wasted effort. It is wasted energy and you might as well not do it.

If you are encouraging your people to serve God in the energies of their flesh, pressuring them and pushing them, you are hurting them. You are going to make them rebel against the church and ultimately, against God. And there are millions of people across the United States today that are burned out on church because they have been pushed into serving God rather than being called. They have been burned out in their flesh and they want nothing to do with church and nothing to do with God. They have been pushed and pressured into areas where God never called them, by pastors who were eager to see the work of God done, but did not have patience to wait upon God to do it.

In ([Genesis 22:2](#)) it says that God appeared unto Abraham and said to him, “Abraham, take now thy son, thine only son, Isaac...” Abraham did not say, “Wait a minute, God. Aren’t You overlooking something? What about Ishmael out here? He is a fine young man.” God did not even recognize Ishmael. “Yes, I am overlooking something. I am overlooking your work of the flesh.” That is what Ishmael was. He was Abraham’s attempt to fulfill the promise of God. He was the result of Abraham’s fleshly endeavors. “Doesn’t God want me to have a son? Yes, He wants me to have a son. Isn’t it obvious that Sarah will never be able to produce one? Yes, it is obvious Sarah will never be able to produce one. Well, if God wants me to have a son, and Sarah cannot produce one, then let’s get busy. We are going to have to help God out, obviously. God cannot do His program.” So in the works of the flesh, he took Hagar and she conceived and bore a son. And when Ishmael was thirteen years old, the Lord came to Abraham and said, “Abraham, I am going to bless you. Blessing, I am going to bless thee. I am going to give thee a son.” And Abraham said, “Oh, that is all right, God. Let Ishmael live before You.” “Yes, I will let Ishmael live before Me, but I am still going to give you a son by Sarah” (cf. [Genesis 17:17–18](#)).

God is still going to accomplish His work. But when we try to do it in our flesh, we only get in the way of God and we create future problems. Look at the problem that Abraham’s flesh brought upon him and upon his descendants. It is a problem that exists to the present day, for Ishmael is still after Isaac. One man’s work of the flesh created havoc for the people of God. It was a work

of the flesh that God refused to recognize. “Take now thy son, thine only son, Isaac.” God did not recognize Ishmael because he was the product of the flesh.

People are going to be coming to God and they are going to be offering the fruit of their flesh to God. “Look God, what I have done. Here Lord, I offer this to You.” God will refuse to recognize that which you have done in the energy of your flesh, or that which you have done for the glory of your own flesh. So we need to let God’s Spirit search our hearts, for they are deceitful and desperately wicked. But the Spirit searches the things of the heart. Let God show us what our motivation is for being in the ministry. And if any of us are offering strange fire to God, let’s just thank God for His grace in not consuming us, and let’s either get in or get out. Get into the flow of God and the flow of the Spirit, or get out of the way and stop hindering the true work of God.

Let’s just wait upon God. Let’s ask the Holy Spirit to search our hearts, revealing unto us that which we do not even know about ourselves—motivations that may not be all that they should be. God desires to bless our life and to bless our ministry. One thing that stands in the way of God’s blessings is us, and our own failures. Now the reason why we stand in the way is not because God does not want to bless us as we are, but it is because of what we believe. We feel and we believe that God will not bless us. The blessings of God come to us because of God’s grace, not because of our works. If they came to us because of our works, then they would be of our deserving and not of His grace. God wants to bestow His grace upon our lives by blessing us.

So put aside from your thoughts your own unworthiness in order to receive the blessing. And believe and expect God to bless you now with a new anointing of His Holy Spirit upon your life, just simply because God loves you. Even though He knows you and He knows your heart, He still loves you, wants to use you, and wants to draw you into a deeper love relationship with Himself. He wants to show His love unto you by giving to you, as love is demonstrated by giving. And thus, He wants to demonstrate His love for you by giving you His blessings, His power, and His anointing. And the goodness of God will bring you to that change, that repentance that you need, as you begin to experience God’s power, God’s work, and God’s love in your life. So just open your heart now to the blessing of God. Now receive from God a fresh anointing of His love and of His Spirit upon your life, just because He loves you and for no other reason—just because He loves you.

Now turn to ([Acts 20:19](#)). Paul is talking to the elders from the church in Ephesus of the true ministry, and his ministry among them. Paul had spent three years ministering to those at Ephesus. But as Paul talks about his ministry, we are reminded of his statement when he said, “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Jesus Christ” ([1 Corinthians 11:1](#)). For God has called every one of you to a ministry. Paul wrote to the Philippians and said, “I have not yet apprehended that for which I was apprehended by Christ Jesus” (cf. [Philippians 3:12](#)). When the Lord apprehended you, He had a plan and a purpose for your life. God has a ministry for each of us.

Now, unfortunately, we have sort of divided the ministry. We have labeled some people, “the laity.” We say, “Well, he is a minister; I am just a member.” There is no difference. We are all ministers of Jesus Christ. Now there are different functions of ministry. Not all ministry involves the preaching of the Word. The whole body is not the mouth. Now God has called me as a mouth in the body, and I stand up here and teach. But that is not the whole body. The whole body is much more than just a mouth. Thank God! And thus, there are the eyes, there are the ears, there are the feet, there are the hands, and there are the fingers. There is a ministry that God has for each one of you and it is all vital in the total ministry of God to the community.

So, as he speaks about the ministry, it speaks to each of us because each one of us has been called of God to fulfill a ministry for the kingdom of God. And there are certain things about the ministry that are important to us. As we look at Paul's discussion with these men of his ministry, we find a beautiful example for our own ministry, as we seek to discover that ministry of God for our lives.

First of all, in ([Acts 20:19](#)) Paul points out that true ministry is serving the Lord. The true ministry is always a ministry to the Lord. Our true service is always that of serving the Lord. We have to keep this in mind whenever we minister. We have not been called to please men. We have been called to please the Lord. Paul said, "If I seek to please all men then I am not a servant of Christ" (cf. [Galatians 1:10](#)). I need to be more interested in God's approval than I am in man's applause.

So many times we get in a trap in the ministry and we look for recognition from man. We look for their approval. And we forget that, in reality, what we should be chiefly concerned about is what God thinks of my ministry. What does God think of what I have done? For that which is highly esteemed of man is often not esteemed at all by God. And so, in looking at my service I must always realize that behind it all I am serving the Lord. Thus, I look to the Lord for the rewards of service, instead of looking to man for the rewards of service.

I look to the Lord for the direction of my service, rather than looking at man for the direction of my service. There are many people who feel that God has shown them exactly how Calvary Chapel should be run, and they come and tell me how wrong we are in some of the things we are doing. "This is what we ought to be doing. And if you do not start doing it this way, we are going to go to another fellowship." And I say, "We can suggest some fellowships for you." It is not that I am not open to suggestions. I prayerfully consider each suggestion that is brought to me, but I never respond to suggestions. I always seek the direction from the Lord. Now I have been given some excellent suggestions. I have prayed about them and the Lord said, "That is right. You should do it." But I always reserve that privilege of seeking the Lord for the directions for the ministry because in reality, we are serving Him.

But in serving the Lord, we are also serving men because the Lord has told us that we should serve men. He has told us that we are to go. He has told us that we are to give. He has told us that we are to love. And so, in serving Him, I have to go the second mile. In serving Him, I have to give to him who asks of me. In serving Him, I have to love even as He loved me. And so the service unto man is, in reality, a service unto God. It is that which God has commanded me to do for men.

But really serving man can sometimes be sort of a bummer. You can really sort of grind under this. I think one of the most unpleasant tasks that I have is picking up cigarette butts around here. I just do not like it. I have searched within myself to find out why I have such a horrible aversion to picking up cigarette butts. I have come to the conclusion that it goes way, way back to my early childhood. From the time I was just a little guy, my mother used to always say to me, "Son, never touch a cigarette. Never touch a cigarette." And every time I reach down to pick up a cigarette butt, I think, "Oh, I am disobeying my mom. She told me never to touch these things." And I find that I hate to touch them.

A lot of people come to weddings here on Saturday. They are going to church and they are nervous. They have to get braced to go into church and so they will smoke right up to the door. Then they toss the cigarette down and they will squeeze it. They will twist their foot on it. It makes it harder to pick it up. And then they come on into the church. Well, it is unsightly to have

those cigarette butts out there on the patio. And so I walk by and see them, and I start mumbling about litterbugs, air pollution, and inconsideration. And as I am just sort of muttering to myself, the Lord speaks to me and says, “Who are you picking that up for?” “Well, some inconsiderate person that is in there.” The Lord says, “No, who are you really picking that up for?” And I say, “Well, I am picking it up for You, Lord. It is Your house.” And He says, “What are you griping about then?”

Now, if you realize you are serving the Lord, even in such a dumb little thing as picking up cigarette butts, you are doing it for the Lord. You are doing it as unto the Lord and it changes the whole thing. I have actually come to where I can whistle while I am picking up cigarette butts.

The Bible says, “Whatsoever you do in word or deed, do all to the glory of God” (cf. [Colossians 3:17](#)). Now, you wives, if you would take that Scripture and put it into practice, you would realize that whatever you do is a ministry unto the Lord. Rather than saying, “I do not know why I have to clean up after that slob. He ought to be able to hang up his own clothes.” You realize, “Well, it is unto the Lord. I am really serving the Lord.” And your kitchen sink can become your shrine of worship. Maybe you really do not believe that.

Perhaps some of you fellows are having a tough time on the job. You feel that the foreman has it in for you, and going to work is just sort of a grind. You find yourself really chafing under it. Hey, whatever you do in word or deed do all to the glory of the Lord. Say, “Hey man, I am not serving you. I am serving the Lord. I am going to do this as unto the Lord. Not as a man-pleaser, but I am going to do this as unto the Lord.” For I am God’s servant and whatever I do, I am doing for God and I am doing for the glory of God. Whatever I am doing in word or deed, I do all to the glory of God, and it can change the complexion of your whole situation. It can cause it to turn into a joyful experience thinking, “Lord, I am doing this for You.”

I have done some rotten tasks for the Lord, but the fact that I do them for Him makes them bearable. There are some things that would be totally unbearable if I were not doing them for the Lord. There are things that would just absolutely have made me totally sick, but I was doing them for the Lord, and He gave me the grace, the strength, and the ability to do it. I pray, “Lord, I would not do this for myself, but I will do it for You.” And working and doing things as unto the Lord brings a glorious joy to every task. It gives sort of a halo to every activity as I serve the Lord.

Now this is what I must keep in the back of my mind: in all of my service, it is really serving the Lord. The true ministry is that of serving the Lord. And so Paul said that he was with them in all seasons, serving the Lord with all humility of mind (cf. [Acts 20:19](#)).

Now one of the greatest dangers in serving the Lord is being exalted and lifted up in yourself. It is one of the greatest traps. Many ministers have been destroyed by this business of becoming haughty and filled with pride. It is such a destructive thing. It is possible that it can happen to any of us who serve the Lord. Maybe your neighbor is sick, and so you fix a bowl of soup and you take it over to them. And they say, “Oh, that is so kind of you! You are just the greatest neighbor anybody could ever have. Oh, I am so glad to have you in the neighborhood here. I wish everybody in the neighborhood were as lovely as you are and as sweet as you are.” And you may begin to think, “Well, I guess I am pretty lovely and pretty sweet, aren’t I?” And you start getting a little haughty and think, “How sweet I really am, and what a wonderful neighbor I am.” And you get lifted up in these things.

But Paul says, “Serving the Lord with all humility of mind.” It is a tragedy when ministers become so important that they do not have time for individuals. It is interesting how God always has a way of keeping us humble. He has His ways of just sort of putting us in our place.

One minister told about a Wednesday night when he was ministering to the believers’ meeting. It was one of those services where everybody was blessed, and it was one of those neat, flowing kind of experiences. And he was saying, “Oh man, I really did it.” And he started to leave the platform to go down and mingle with the people, thinking that it was such a marvelous moving of the Spirit, and that he was such an instrument of God. And as he started down, he slipped and fell on his face right down on the floor. That is a humbling experience to look up at the people from that position. And the Lord just sort of took the whole wind out of his sails.

Another example is after the third service when I have been standing before the people and go out to the patio to shake hands with everybody and greet them. As I am getting the feedback from the people, someone comes up and says, “Pastor, your zipper is down.” Oh, what a wipe out that is!

Now the Lord said, “He that exalteth himself will be abased” ([Matthew 23:12](#)). It is much better that you do not exalt yourself.

Serve the Lord with all humility of mind. The Bible says, “Let every man esteem others better than himself” (cf. [Philippians 2:3](#)).

And then Paul goes on to talk about the ministry. And he said, “with many tears” (Acts 20:19). It is so important in the ministry that we really be truly sensitive to the needs of others and that we weep with them in their sorrows, that we genuinely share with them in their trials, that we weep with them over their failures.

And really, I have shed many tears for my own failures. There are many times when I feel that I have just totally failed the Lord. When standing before you, I have taken a Scripture that is so filled with truth and potential, and I feel like I have totally mishandled it. Somehow it just was not there, and it just did not come out right. There was so much that could have been said, but it just did not come together. And I go back and I just weep. I think, “Oh God, how I failed to really represent You and bring Thy truth to the people. Lord, I am such a failure.” As I weep over my own failures and over my own inability, I am serving the Lord with tears.

([Psalm 126:6](#)) says, “They that go forth with tears, bearing precious seed, shall no doubt come again bringing their sheaves with them” (paraphrased). Oh, the attitude with which I go to do the work of the Lord is so important.

There was a young fellow just out of seminary who was filling his first pastorate. He had had all of the background, the seminary training, and all of the self-confidence that one can become endowed with this kind of education. As he came before this new congregation to ministry the Word of God, everything was just perfect. The cuff was showing just the right distance under the sleeve and he had superb diction. Everything was just so perfect—he had his act together. Everything was right but as he tried to minister to the people, it just was not there. In a sense, he fell flat on his face in his attempt to communicate God’s truth to these people, to the extent that he finally just broke down and began to weep. He closed the book and walked off weeping. Then a dear old saint down in the front row said, “If he had come in like he went out, he would have gone out like he came in.” We are to be going forth with tears bearing precious seed.

Then Paul says, “with temptations” ([Acts 20:19](#)). Now that word “temptation” is actually persecutions or trials or testings. As Paul was ministering, he was always being persecuted. He speaks here of the persecution arising out of the Jews who were actually going around resisting his ministry wherever he went. Yet with tears he was ministering to them, in spite of the persecutions that were going on. You would think that if a person was going around doing good, seeking to help people, and share the love of God, that they would just be warmly received wherever they went. But this was not so.

Jesus said,

If they have not received Me, they are not going to receive you.
The servant is not greater than his Lord. If they have not listened to Me, they are not going to listen to you. If they have not accepted Me, they are not going to accept you. (cf. [John 15:20](#))

Paul was serving the Lord in spite of the obstacles and in spite of the persecution.

And then Paul goes on to say, “Holding back nothing that is profitable unto you” (cf. [Acts 20:20](#)). As a minister, you cannot hold back. You have to give until you have nothing else to give, holding back nothing that is profitable to the people. You must give whenever possible to help their physical needs; giving to help them in their emotional needs, and giving to help them in their spiritual needs. Never hold back, but always freely give all that you have, in order to minister and to help others as you serve the Lord.

Then Paul said, “showing unto you” (cf. [Acts 20:20](#)). He said, “For I have shown you.” The most powerful lessons are those that we can see, not those that we hear. There is tremendous value in the demonstration of truth. People learn far more from what they see than they learn from what they hear. And your life should always be a reflection of your teaching. So Paul says that his ministry to them was that of demonstrating—showing unto them. And that should always be the case in our ministries. Our lives should be a practical demonstration of that which we are declaring. If we say to people, “God wants you to love your neighbor,” then we should love our neighbor. If we say, “God wants you to be forgiving,” then we should show forgiveness. “God wants you to be generous and kind,” then we need to show generosity and kindness. We have to demonstrate and that is where many ministries fall down. There is not a practical demonstration of the truths that are being proclaimed.

And thus, Paul speaks of his ministry. The true minister is not one who just tells people how to live; he is one who shows people how to live by the example of his own life, living before them, showing them. He demonstrates to them how they are to love, how they are to forgive and how they are to serve the Lord.

And then Paul said, “And I have taught you...” Where did he teach them? He says, “I have taught you in public places, and from house to house. I have taught you publicly, and I have taught you from house to house” ([Acts 20:20](#)).

There are a lot of people that really dig that public ministry. They do not care so much for the house to house service. They like the idea of standing before great multitudes, but they sort of shy away from an individual ministry. God help us. The day you become so important that you cannot minister to an individual, you have become more important than your Lord. He was always willing to take time for the individual, and to minister to individual needs.

And so he said, “I have taught you publicly, and I have taught you in your homes, from house to house.” Paul was going around, giving individual instruction and exhortation to a brother.

What did Paul teach them? He said, “I have taught you that you should turn to God, and that you should believe in the Lord Jesus Christ” (cf. [Acts 20:20-21](#)).

And then he went on to say that he did not count his own life dear to himself ([Acts 20:24](#)). Now actually, to really serve the Lord, you cannot count your life dear to yourself. You have to be willing to make sacrifices of your own time, of your own resources, of yourself, and maybe even of living standards.

You know, when Satan was before God, he accused Job of serving God for the material benefits. He said, “Look at the way You have blessed him. Anybody would serve You if they were blessed like that. Do not tell me Job is such a big guy and doing so good. You have prospered him and blessed him. It is no wonder he is serving You” (cf. [Job 1:10](#)). And he was accusing Job of serving the Lord for the monetary gain, or for the material gain.

Now many times people today are trying to make the same innuendoes that we are serving the Lord for material gain, that we might live in a nice home, or that we might drive a nice car. And Satan’s accusations are still prevalent, attributing false motivations towards the ministry.

I thank God for the first seventeen years of my ministry. No one can make false accusations against me saying that I ministered for the material gains because for seventeen years, we sacrificed and did without. My wife and I were just relating to each other this week how glorious it is the way God has blessed us. Now we are so thankful. We were remembering the day when buying a can of Crisco was a major problem in our budget. We would have to figure out what we could do without in order to buy a can of Crisco. It was a major disaster in our grocery budget. It would just wipe us out.

Our first pastorate was in Prescott, where we got fifteen dollars a week. When we took our second pastorate in Tucson, we got a raise in salary. We were getting twenty dollars a week. And they gave us a parsonage, which was one big room behind the church. We put a curtain up to separate our bedroom from the living room because people were always coming into the parsonage. It was right there at church. They would say, “We came to church early tonight, so we thought we would come back and say, ‘Hi.’” We were often trying to get ready and we would have to brush our teeth. Our kitchen sink was actually a dishpan. And we had a facet coming through a hole in the wall with no hot water, just the cold water. We had to heat our hot water on the big, old-fashioned stove with the high top oven and the burners. We wanted to brush our teeth before church, but people would come in. We would have to go over and get the glass full of water, take the toothbrush, and go outside. We had to spit the water out in the yard because we did not have any drain or anything back there.

We had to use the restrooms in the church, which were up at the front end of the church. And on the cold winter nights, that was tough. We had to go to a neighbor’s house to get a bath. And we lived back there just as happy as if we had good sense because we were serving the Lord and that was our desire, that was our life. We wanted to serve the Lord more than anything else. If serving the Lord meant living behind the church in that big room and getting twenty dollars a week—praise the Lord! We were happy to be serving the Lord.

And thus, for seventeen years we lived in great sacrifice of many things because we were serving the Lord. I worked, laboring with my own hands to provide for the needs of the family. I did all

kinds of jobs in order to provide for the family's needs, so that I might stay in the ministry. I used to get calls all hours of the night. And they would say, "Chuck, we have a body to go pick up." I used to get five dollars a body working for the mortuary. That was great because that meant that we could maybe have meat the next day. I would get up, get dressed, go out and pick up the bodies, and just really rejoice that God was providing for the needs of the family. They are going to die anyway so you might as well rejoice. Someone has to pick them up.

And so Paul the Apostle, speaking of the ministry says, "Not counting our own lives dear." In other words, we are not looking for the soft life, not looking for the easy way, and not looking for the comforts. We do not count our own lives dear. Do not have an attitude like, "Well, I am too good to do that. Well, I am too good to live there. Well, I am too good to drive that kind of a car." When I am serving the Lord, what difference does it make what kind of a car I drive, or where I live if I am serving the Lord? I do not count my own life dear. I am nothing special. The Lord is the one that is special.

Paul said, "That I might finish the course with joy" ([Acts 20:24](#)). Paul looked at life as a race course that was set before him. He wanted to finish that race, but he wanted to finish it up in front. He said,

Know ye not that they which run a race, everyone runs, but only one receives the prize. So run that you might obtain. (cf. [1 Corinthians 9:24](#))

He later wrote to Timothy and said,

I have fought a good fight. I have finished the course. I have kept the faith.
Henceforth, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, our righteous judge shall give. (cf. [2 Timothy 4:7-8](#))

My desire is that I might finish the course with joy, knowing that I have done the work that God has called me to do, and knowing that I have been faithful unto the Lord. Now there remains for me that glorious reward, as I go to receive the reward from the Lord for the things that I have done while in this body. I will receive from Him that glorious approval as He says, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant" ([Matthew 25:21](#)) Oh, the joy that awaits me when I have finished the course! And that is the way I want to run the race so that when I have finished the course, I can stand before the Lord and say, "Lord, I did my best."

We are to finish the course with joy. And then Paul said, "That I might finish the ministry that I have received from Jesus" ([Acts 20:24](#)).

The Lord has called each of us to a ministry. It should be the purpose of our lives to finish or to complete that ministry to which God has called us. And as I said, your ministry may be at a lathe, it may be at a desk, it may be behind the counter, or it may be at the kitchen sink; but God has a ministry for each of us. And your life is His; you are His servant. You are serving the Lord and you belong to Him. And the Lord is going to reward you for your service. And if God has called you as a mother and a housewife, then rejoice in it! Do your best to show by example to your children that love of Jesus Christ, that kindness. Show them the mercy and grace of God, so that you might live before them in such a way that, as they grow up, they will want to follow your faith and your walk with God.

Let us be showing, teaching, admonishing, fulfilling, and finishing the ministry that God has called us to. When I lay down the Bible, having preached my last message, and the Lord says, “Okay Chuck, that is it,” I will have not only the joy of having served Him while on earth, but also the eternal joy of reigning with Him. Oh, what a blessed hope we have and how marvelous it is, the privilege of serving the Lord!

Father, we ask that You would help us today to more fully understand our place of ministry within the body. And we thank You that You have called each of us for a special place and a special ministry. Lord, may we serve Thee with gladness of heart and with a cheerful spirit. Whatever we do, Lord, may we do it as unto Thee for Thy glory. In Jesus’ name we ask it. Amen.

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

BY

Calvary Chapel Outreach Fellowship

Lesson 32

A Commitment to Holiness

By

Chuck Smith

Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa

Brought to you by:

The Blue Letter Bible Institute

www.blbi.org

A ministry of:

The Blue Letter Bible

www.blueletterbible.org

Servant Leadership – Lesson 32
A Commitment to Holiness by Chuck Smith

1

Speaker uses KJV Bible in his references unless otherwise noted.

A certain psychologist has written to me because several Calvary Chapel pastors had gone to him for counseling. He sought to analyze the problems that they were having and the reasons for the problems. Many of them were marriage problems. Some of them were pornography problems. These pastors were willing to go and bare their hearts to the psychologist. He wrote to me and said, “There are a lot of troubled pastors that maybe you are not aware of, but I see them in my practice.”

As we got together to plan this conference, I brought a copy of the letter from the psychologist with me and I gave it to each of the men who had come to help us in the planning of the conference. We came to the realization that one of the greatest needs that we have is for a real sense of holiness before the Lord.

There is a danger when we use the term “holiness” because there have been holiness groups and holiness has been defined in many different ways. So often, holiness is defined as sort of an outward form of dress or things of that nature. Many times I feel that I am holy because of what I do not do, rather than truly understanding what holiness is. Holiness is a response of my heart to the awareness of who God is. And the closer I get to God, the greater the realization of my own sin, my own sinful state, my worthlessness, and my total dependency upon His grace and upon His mercy. I realize that I must never presume upon the grace and the mercy of God.

I feel like a father to most of you. I feel like Paul. You are my sons, my “Timothys” in the faith. I have a heart for you, a concern for you. When one of the pastors falls, my heart breaks and I am disturbed. Unfortunately, we have had so many this past year who have fallen that we felt it was important that we talk very straight about these issues and give a warning. We cannot be there next to you day by day; but we can help set principles, as the Bible gives us certain principles. Peter said, “And if you do these things, you will never fall” (cf. [2 Peter 1:10](#)). There are guidelines and principles that we can establish in our lives that will keep us from the edge. I do not want to live near the edge at all. I am anxious to live close to the center, just as close to God as I can.

When you are living as close to God as you possibly can, then you are not concerned about where the edge is. There are so many people who want to live next to the edge. In fact they come to me all the time with questions—“Can a Christian do this and still be a Christian? Where is the edge? How close can I get? How much can I dabble? How much can I do? How far can I go and still be on the safe side?”

A king named Asa in 2 Chronicles had a tremendous encounter in experiencing the delivering power of God and the victory that God had wrought for them. Coming back flushed with the victory, the prophet came out to meet them and said unto the king, “The Lord is with you while you will be with Him” ([2 Chronicles 15:2](#)). And yes, the Lord is with us. We have just seen God work. Oh, it is glorious to have the Lord with us. And if you seek Him He will be found of you. We sought the Lord and He gave us victory. Glory to God! You are flushed with God’s working. But then the prophet went on to say, “But if you forsake Him, He will forsake you” ([2 Chronicles 15:2](#)). Maybe Asa was thinking, “Oh well, yes, of course. Thanks but why would I forsake God after what God has done? Are you kidding? No way! I appreciate the warning, but surely it is not necessary.”

You have to be careful about that. God is faithful and God warns us. The problem is that many times we do not feel the warning is necessary. God never warns you unnecessarily, though you may think so at the time. I have to confess that whenever I have fallen, God was faithful and He

warned me in advance of the fall. Many times I felt like saying, “Lord, thank You. It was nice of You, but really, there is no problem there, Lord. I had that area wired a long time ago. I do not need the warning; but thank You, Lord.” And invariably, when I have ignored the warnings, I have fallen.

Because of what God had done and because of the excitement over seeing the work of God, they decided to initiate even further spiritual reforms. Though they had gone through once and cleansed the land of the high places and the altars of the pagan gods, they went through again to remove any possible remaining idols or places of worship. They all made a covenant together to serve the Lord. These were great and exciting times. As a result, God blessed and prospered the kingdom under Asa. As long as he sought the Lord, God made his ways prosper. God was sought and found by Asa.

Then we read that in the later years of Asa’s life, the king of Israel decided to invade the kingdom of Judah. He began to build fortified cities. The purpose was to cut off the supplies coming south and to set siege against Judah. We read in 2 Chronicles 16 that Asa took money out of the treasury and sent messengers up to the Syrian king, Ben Haddad. And he said, “We have a covenant and I want you to attack Israel from the north.” Asa sent money to hire the mercenaries to invade Israel from the north so that Baasha, the king of Israel, would have to stop the building of these fortified cities to defend the northern borders. So the Syrian troops attacked the city of Dan, the northern outpost of Israel. Baasha was forced to take the troops building Ramah and these fortified cities next to Jerusalem, and send them north to defend the northern borders. King Asa sent his troops out and they dismantled these fortified cities. They took the materials that were being used and they reinforced and fortified the cities of Judah. It was a successful, brilliant strategy, and it worked.

Whenever you have an idea or a brilliant strategy and it works, you feel sort of proud about yourself. The prophet Hanani came unto Asa and said,

Because you have relied on the king of Syria and not relied on the Lord your God, therefore the host of the king of Syria escaped out of your hand. [And he reminded him] In the beginning of your kingdom, when the Ethiopians came, were they not a huge host? And you called unto the Lord and the Lord delivered you. But now, you are not relying on the Lord. Do you not realize that God is looking throughout the whole world to find people in harmony with Him that He might bless them? (cf. [2 Chronicles 16:7-9](#))

Asa’s response was that he was angry with this prophet. He had him thrown in prison. He was in a rage and he began to oppress some of the people at the same time.

How is it that a man starting out so well, starting out so right, can end up so wrong? It is a tragic thing, but prosperity is probably one of the most dangerous things that can happen to your ministry. We all pray for success and for God to prosper our ministries. But the more prosperous your ministry becomes the greater the danger of no longer trusting and relying on God, like Asa. Instead you begin to rely upon your devices, your schemes, and the resources that God has begun to supply you with. There is no longer that sense of the necessity to rely on God. “We have to trust God. We do not know what else to do. We have written to Calvary Chapel and they cannot send us any money. What are we going to do? We are going to have to trust God.” That is a good position to be in. What is so bad about trusting God? What are you telling these people to do all

the time? It does not hurt us to trust God. It keeps us close. And that time of necessity is a good time. It is growth time.

God has such a difficult time though, blessing and prospering His people, because it seems like when the blessings and the prosperity come then we sort of feel independent. Like Asa we start thinking, “Well, I can take money out of the treasury. I will just send it up to Ben Haddad and have him send his troops. We do not have to call on the Lord for this one.” Read the tragic story of Asa. In the end he became diseased in his feet and he sought the aid of physicians who did not seek the Lord. And Asa died of the diseased feet ([2 Chronicles 16:12](#)).

The intimation in the Scripture is that had he sought the Lord, the Lord would have healed him. It is possible to work with God, to see the power of God, to experience the work and the blessing of God, to make that commitment, and to feel that you would never, ever, turn away from it. You think that because of your full, total, long commitment, God blesses you. The church grows. Things are prospering. In this period somehow we do not feel the same necessity of keeping so close to God. Somehow we think that we can now do it ourselves and we begin to forsake the Lord. Before we know it, we are doing things that we never dreamed that we would ever do. We have been caught in Satan’s grip and with the prosperity and the notoriety have come groupies, hangers-on, and temptations.

There have been too many pastors who have fallen this past year because somehow, some way, that commitment to holiness, that commitment to serve God has completely diminished. Somewhere Satan made an inroad. Somehow Satan got in and destroyed their marriages, and destroyed their ministries. Thank God He loves His church. The churches are going on. These pastors have lost everything and they do not know where to go, they do not know what to do. They are wondering, “Where do I go from here?” God help us. I want to keep you from that place if possible. I am tired of these guys coming, crying, and repenting. Oh, they have to do that and I know that, but I do not want to hear it. I would rather hear, “We are just serving the Lord and God is so good. I am walking close to Him.” I want to hear about continued blessings. I do not want to hear of the break-ups, of the pain, of the misery, of the hurt, of the lostness when everything has gone down the tubes.

We have to be on guard because Satan is out to destroy you and he is out to destroy the ministry that God has given to you. He wants to put you on the shelf. He wants to remove you out of the loop. You cannot give any foothold. You cannot open the door even slightly. Do not even give the slightest little opening because he will take it and use it as a beach hold. He will seek to expand it in your life. You must not open the web to the pornography that is available—not even out of curiosity. You do not need to know what is there. The Bible tells us to be simple concerning evil (cf. [Romans 16:19](#)). I am not even interested in what might be available to titillate my senses. That is not my desire. My desire is to live close to God, to walk with Him as closely as I possibly can.

Paul gives some good rules for a continuous walk. He said, “You are not to walk as the other gentiles walk” (cf. [Ephesians 4:17](#)). You are not to walk as the world. And he seeks to describe the way the gentiles walk in the vanity or in the emptiness of their minds.

Have you ever noticed how many things of the world are just so mindless? On Halloween I was watching the news on television and it gave a report about how Halloween was being celebrated in San Francisco. As you can probably imagine, in San Francisco there were strange people out in the street with crazy costumes. I saw men out there dancing with tutus and all. That is mindless. I

mean, who in their right mind would dress up like that and parade in the streets of San Francisco? That is just mindless.

To be perfectly frank with you, I have a problem with the robes that the Pope wears and his tall hat, and the Masons who put on their little bit with the robes and costumes. It does not make sense! People do not seem to stop to consider why they are doing these things. To me it is mindless.

Isaiah said, “The problem with people is that they do not think.” And that is true of the world—they do not think. Isaiah said,

They have not known or understood, for God has shut their eyes that they cannot see, their hearts that they cannot understand. And none considers in their heart, neither is there knowledge or understanding to say, “Well, I took this branch of a tree. I burned part of the branch in the fire to keep the house warm. I put part of the branch in the oven so I could bake my bread. And then I took my knife and I carved out a little god from the rest of that branch. And I covered it with gold and I set it on the table and I bowed down to it and I said, ‘You are my god.’” [Isaiah said,] They do not stop to consider that is just a branch of a tree. Part of it you burned in the oven, or burned in your fireplace to keep your house warm. Part you put in the oven to bake your bread. And with part of it you make your god. (cf. [Isaiah 44:14-19](#).)

It is mindless. It does not make sense. When you really look at sin, it does not make sense because it is so destructive. As someone has shared, we need to stop and consider the possible consequences when we begin to even entertain sin in our thoughts. Temptation starts with the thoughts. And then when the will embraces it, you are in trouble.

We need to put up safeguards because we want to continue to be ever closer to the Lord. May you never be in that state as the Ephesians where you have left your first love or you have grown cold. May you be ever closer to the Lord.

In Ephesians 4:18, speaking of the gentiles, Paul said that they were walking in the emptiness of their minds, having their understanding darkened.

In Romans he said,

Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools. Their foolish hearts were darkened because the god of this world blinded their eyes. Because they did not want to retain God in their mind, God gave them over to reprobate minds. (cf. [Romans 1:21-22](#))

The world does not stop to think. Being alienated from the life of God through the mindless ignorance that is in them, they are living in that fallen state of the two-dimensional man—body and mind. The mind is absorbed only with the body and there is no awareness or consciousness of God. And thus, they are dead in their trespasses and sins.

Jesus said,

Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both fall in the ditch. ([Matthew 15:14](#))

Paul gives us the key:

That you put off concerning the former manner of living, the old man which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts. (cf. [Ephesians 4:22](#))

Lust is so deceitful. The mind is where things seem to start. The genesis of sin begins so many times in the imagination. You begin to fantasize, and the problem with fantasy is that it can never be fulfilling. Reality is never as exciting as fantasy. Fantasy is exciting but reality is always disappointing. You were hoping, you were dreaming, you were thinking that it was going to bring so much more than it does. Lust is a deceiving thing. To give into it is not going to bring you all that you were thinking, hoping, and believing that it was going to do. It was a sham. So we “put off the former manner of life which was corrupt according to the deceitful lust.”

And be renewed in the spirit of your mind, that you might put on the new man. (cf. [Ephesians 4:23-24](#))

So, here is the thing with holiness: it is not only what you *don't* do, but it is also what you *do* (emphasis added). In other words, there is the negative and the positive side to holiness. Too many times we only hear the negative side of holiness emphasized. When we were kids growing up, we used to recite, “I don't smoke and I don't chew and I don't go with girls that do.” That was our way of saying, “I am holy.” Holiness is far more than just what I do not do; it is what I am doing.

We put off, but then we put on. Paul said,

You put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. (cf. [Ephesians 4:24](#))

It is not true holiness until you “put on” the positive aspects.

He goes on to say, “Therefore, put away lying.” That is the negative side. What is the positive side? “Speak every man the truth with his neighbor.” The negative is put off lying, but you do not stop there. You begin to speak the truth every man with his neighbor (cf. [Ephesians 4:25](#)).

In ([Ephesians 4:28](#)), he said, “If you have been stealing, do not steal anymore” (paraphrased). That is the negative side. The positive side is: “But rather, let him labor, working with his hands the things which are good that he might have to give to those who are in need” (paraphrased).

It is more than just not stealing—it is getting a job so that I can help provide for those that are in need, so that I can give.

Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, [That is negative.] but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it might minister grace to the hearers. ([Ephesians 4:29](#))

It is not just that I quit telling dirty jokes and corrupt communication and so forth. The positive side is that I am ministering to people when I speak to them. I seek to say those things that are going to edify them, build them up, and enrich them in the things of the Lord in order to draw them closer to Him.

Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. ([Ephesians 4:31](#), NKJV)

That is negative. Put those things away and do not do that anymore. But the positive side is:

Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake, hath forgiven you. ([Ephesians 4:32](#))

Holiness is not just what I don't do anymore; it is what I am doing now, as I walk close to God and I seek to emulate God in all things.

We sang the lyrics, "Refiner's fire, my heart's one desire is to be holy." How do we do this? We accomplish this by getting close to God. Our God is a consuming fire and the closer you get to Him, the more the junk, the dross, and the chaff will be consumed.

Draw close to God. Live close to God. Give no occasion to the enemy. Do not open the door even a crack. Make that a purpose of your heart. Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the king's meat. Make that the purpose of your heart. "I am not going to be defiled. I am going to live holy. I am going to live for God. I am going to live a committed life. I am not going to give any place for the enemy to come in."

God has been good to us. I look around at the ministries and I see what God is doing, what God has done, and I am overwhelmed. I know that it has just got to be a work of God. Man could not do it. It is God's work. We have had the joy and the blessing of seeing God give great victories, but let's not become complacent. Let's not begin to rest upon the prosperity that God has given. Let's not begin to look to these things for security, but may we continue to look to the Lord and trust in the Lord. Let's not follow the pattern of other movements of God. God help us.

If you look at history you get extremely discouraged because there have been other great movements of God throughout history. What happened to Asa is a pattern of movements of God throughout history. They started out right. "You did start well. What did hinder you?" Paul said to the Galatians, "Oh foolish Galatians, having begun in the Spirit are you going to be made perfect in the flesh?" (cf. [Galatians 3:3](#)). Guard yourself. Keep yourself. Satan is out to destroy you. He is out to destroy the work of God. And Paul said, "We are not ignorant of his devices" ([2 Corinthians 2:11](#)). Well, I think sometimes we are. He speaks about the wiles of the devil. He is a wily guy and he can come in where you are least expecting it. Keep close to God, as close as you can. God will give you the wisdom that you need. God will give you the discernment that you need. And Satan will not have a chance as long as you are close to God. It is when you begin to drift that he moves in.

I think of when the sons of God were presenting themselves to God and Satan also came with them and God said, "Oh where have you been?" Satan said, "Oh, I have been going up and down throughout the earth, to and fro through it." God said to him, "Have you considered My servant Job? He is a good man, a perfect man. He loves God; he hates evil. Have you considered My servant Job?" The word "considered" in the Hebrew, is a military term. It is a word that is used to

Servant Leadership – Lesson 32
A Commitment to Holiness by Chuck Smith

7

describe a general studying a city to develop a strategy for attacking. “Have you been studying that fellow Job? Are you looking for the weakness, looking for the place to attack?” And Satan’s awesome response is “Yes, I have been studying him I am sure I found the place of weakness. Does Job serve You for nothing? Look at how You have blessed him. Anybody would serve You if You blessed him like You have blessed Job” (cf. [Job 1:6-9](#)).

Satan has been studying this movement, you can be sure of that. And as God begins to bless your ministry, he is going to start studying you to develop the strategies to seek to destroy. These are the wiles of the devil. Satan has desired you that he might sift you as wheat. Stay close to Jesus. He said, “Peter, I have prayed for you” (cf. [Luke 22:31-32](#)). Stay close to Him. We do not have to go the way of all movements. We do not have to turn to the flesh to be perfected. We can continue in the Spirit. We must continue in the Spirit, or else the day will come when “Ichabod” will be written over our doors and God will look for another group to use and to bless. Keep yourselves in the love of God. Keep yourself in that place where God can continue to do what He longs to do through you and in you. Do not let Satan put you on the ash heap wondering what happened.

Father, we thank You for Your Word that is a guide to our lives. May we follow after it, Lord, diligently. Lord, we look at this past year and we see how Satan has come into the ranks. We see those who have been put on the sidelines and are sitting there just wondering what they are going to do next. How can they get back in the mainstream? Lord, it hurts to see the pain that they are going through. Lord, keep us. Help us. Lord, shake us. Do whatever is necessary. Help us, Lord, because You have told us to keep ourselves. And so, with Your help, with Your strength, with the power of Your Spirit, may we keep ourselves close to You. In the name of Jesus we pray, Father. Amen.