

Apostolic Foundations - Part 6

by Art Katz

Art Katz emphasizes the necessity of apostolic character and blamelessness as essential standards for believers in a corrupt world.

Duration: 1:00:12

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 5:11, Hebrews 3:13

Topics: "Apostolic"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on a situation where four well-known women in a charismatic fellowship fell into moral disgrace without the church being aware of it. The speaker emphasizes the importance of discerning subtle changes in behavior and personality that may indicate underlying issues. They also discuss the increasing power and subtlety of temptations in today's age and the need for vigilance in guarding our hearts. The sermon concludes with a powerful anecdote about witnessing fervent worship and a miraculous healing at a conference.

Transcript

I'm feeling very diminished, just getting over an illness and so it should be very modest, low key, famous last words. About my being an apostle, I don't want to have any controversy with God, I think it's much safer to say more of a prophetic man who is keenly inspired for apostolic themes. Someone, I think, suggested, perhaps wisely and rightly, that God is restoring the fivefold ministries in inverse order to which they were initially given, because God gave it the first apostles, then prophets, evangelists, teachers, so on, and now in this hour of restoration, he's given us teachers and evangelists, now prophets, and the last will be apostles, and it seems to make some kind of sense to me, all the more if prophetic men are speaking about apostolic things, to prepare the church for the advent, the recognition and the acceptance of such men and such ministries when they come.

And I've always been a little bit shy about titles. If it's really authentic, I don't know that it needs to be sounded, so let the Lord establish what he will, but we know that Paul said that the apostles are last, they're the offscouring of the world, they're the target of every abuse and every struggle and every suffering, they're defamed, they're known and they're unknown, and it's a remarkable burden as well as a remarkable calling privilege. Now I don't feel that we have finished with last week's topic.

How many people, I didn't catch that, are here for the first time tonight? Can you raise your hand once more? Okay, not too many. How many people are here who were not here last week? Oh, that's, okay.

Well, we're talking about apostolic character, and I brought the congregation to a text in 1 Thessalonians, I don't know that we're going to go there again, but just to remind us.

You are witnesses, Paul says in verse 10 of the second chapter, and so is God of how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behave toward you believers. You are witnesses and so is God of how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behave toward you believers. And the word blameless is not infrequent in Paul's vocabulary.

He talks about presenting you blameless in the day of the Lord's appearing. And a word like that sounds to us somewhat luxurious, blameless, it's too absolute, it's too impeccable, it doesn't allow for any condition. Our age is not aligned for a word like blameless because of its total and unsparing absoluteness.

But I believe with all my heart that Paul was not a woofing, that when he said blameless, that's exactly what he meant. Impeccable, unadulterated, unaffected, unconditioned, unrelieved, un-anything, pure, unmitigated, blamelessness. To be without blame before men and before God.

Having a conscience without blame before men and without God. That sounds too absolute a standard, but I'll tell you that as I go on in the faith, and I go on in a world that is becoming increasingly vile and corrupt, you know what I believe? That what the world would consider ideal or absolute or unattainable is really for us the only standard. If you don't insist on blamelessness, you're going to find yourself eroding and condescending and yielding and giving in to compromise and other kinds of mitigating circumstances that before you know it, and when the smoke clears, you will be blamed.

You understand what I'm saying? Blamelessness is the only realistic apostolic standard for God's people at the end of the age. And we just need to repent of other kinds of mindsets that tell us that such things are unattainable. After all, it's perfectly in keeping with God's other injunctions to be holy as he is holy and perfect as your father in heaven is perfect.

And either God is taunting us or provoking us or is raising the standard, which if we are serious enough about its fulfillment, he'll give us the grace to attain. You understand? I think that it would be wise for us to fail with every intent of succeeding in blamelessness than to succeed by finding for ourselves a more modest and acceptable standard of conduct and character. Am I getting too fancy already? Because you're looking at me somewhat perplexedly and bewildered.

It's all straight English. The only thing is what these English words mean that makes the flesh very restive and uncomfortable. So I just want to repeat again, if we really have an eye to perceive what is moving in the world in terms of filth, darkness, subtlety, vileness, temptation, evil, wickedness, violence, and it's going to mushroom and cascade and cover the earth until the whole world will be in a thick darkness.

And yet at that time, God says, arise and shine for your light has come. At the very hour when the world is going to be pervaded in such unspeakable filth and darkness, God is wanting in the midst of it a light, the light of his glory, the light of his beauty, and the light of his holiness to be reflected in his people and nations will find the way to that light. So we have an example of a man who not only believed it, but walked in it.

And he walked in it with such almost audacity. He said, he says that as you know, what manner of man I was with you from the beginning in all seasons, you are my witness, and so is God. I don't know how many of us are willing to invoke God to be the witness to an impeccable standard of conduct and

character.

So we have one flesh and blood man who was at one time a murderer and a persecutor, who by the grace of God moved in a standard of conduct that no one could fault him. That no one who saw him in any of the churches with whom he labored day and night could say that there was inconsistency or contradiction. It's of the same piece as Jesus saying to those who laid hold on him, which of you can convict me of sin? And I'm just speaking off the top of my head tonight.

I don't have much else left in God. I feel that depleted to say that this is with the Lord. I'm almost surprised to hear the direction I'm taking right from the outset.

If you knew what I knew, my ignorance and my unpreparedness, you would know it's the Lord. That the Lord is wanting to impress us to have our minds renewed in an apostolic way. And that the greatest guarantee that we're going to fall, or that we're going to bring shame to the name of the Lord, or we're going to infect the church with a leaven that will ultimately corrupt and leaven the entire lump, is our own softness to ourselves, our own condescension toward ourselves, that we don't establish a standard too difficult for us to attain.

I mean, after all, as we Lutherans are very fond of saying, we're only sinners being saved by grace, right? If I've ever heard anything from Lutheran mouths repeatedly again and again, it's that. After all, Lord, you know we're only sinners saved by grace. We're always speaking apologetically.

We're always, in a sense, making room for ourselves. But it's a room that Paul never allowed for himself. And therefore, it is not reflected in the standard that he put before the church, even the church that was newly saved out of paganism and idolatry, to serve the living God, because the gospel came to them in power and in full conviction of the Spirit, even as you know what manner of men we prove to be among you for your sake.

Are you following me? I mean, we're going to find out if God is the God of grace indeed, if we can, in an age such as this, with all of its filthy and vile influences and subtleties, not just live what would impress the world as being moral or ethical or decent or respectable, but blameless. Because our approval does not come from men, but from God. He's not a Jew who is one inwardly, whose circumcision is of the flesh, who goes by the letter, but he's one whose circumcision is of the heart, goes by the Spirit, and whose praise and esteem is not from men, but of God.

So, as we mentioned many times in these weeks, Paul is one who lived in an acute consciousness that his life was being walked out before God, the judge, and before whom all things are transparent and before whom all things are known. You are witnesses, and so is God. And if we really believe that, if we really believe that, how much hanky-panky would there be going on? And if not, in fact, how much hanky-panky would we be contemplating? And for the want of courage, we're not doing, or for the want of opportunity.

But as I hope to show tonight, what is the apostolic standard is not just an outward correctness, not just a formal absence of grievous sin, but a total thing that is consistent within and without, the inner man and the outer man. The unseen life, the hidden life, the thought life, and the life that makes itself manifest in conduct and in action, as being one thing through and through the cookie. That is apostolic character.

Apostolic character is never satisfied with only the outward phenomenon, but the whole thing through and through. So how we conduct ourselves privately and personally is really a statement to whether we believe

or not, whether our life is being lived in his sight. And really, if it were known, it's scandalous, the liberties that we take and the things that we allow ourselves in our thought life and in the secret life, because somehow it can't be observed.

And it's not going to catch up with us. It's not going to have any consequence that will catch us in a situation that will be embarrassing or worse. And yet so long as we allow an interior life that is not consistent with the outward life, where there's blame, we've not attained to the apostolic standard.

And I think it's only a matter of time before what we think will become what we do. Can I read you a little quote that I wrote in the back of my Bible? This is a priceless Bible. If I go before you do, don't forget to look at the back for all of my notes.

Like, for example, this one from a little-known saint by the name of Samuel Bengal, a Salvation Army officer of the last century, who writes that the secret of all failures and of all true success is hidden in the attitude of the soul in its private walk with God. When have we heard anything like that last? Is it worth hearing again? The secret of all failures and of all true success, of all true success. See, true success or all apostolic success is not just measured by whether something works, or whether it's expedient, or whether it's utilitarian, or it gets by.

If it's true, it's true through and through, or it's not true. It's the whole truth, or nothing but the truth, or it's not true. I mean, a schoolchild will tell you that.

Maybe not a schoolchild of this generation, but of mine. Here's a statement by A. W. Toza. How many people here have never read A. W. Toza? Raise your hand.

Oh my, get thee to the library of the Christian bookstore immediately. A. W. Toza, precious. What we think about when we are free to think about what we will, that is what we are or will soon become.

Our voluntary thoughts reveal what we are. They predict what we will become. All conscious behavior is preceded and arises out of our thoughts.

Anyone who wishes to check on his true spiritual condition may do so by noting what his voluntary thoughts have been over the last hours or days. What has he thought about when he has been free to think of what he pleased, and toward what has his inner heart turned when it was free to turn where it would. My Lord, I'm glad that these talks are being recorded.

We need to play that again, and again, and again. It's a kind of voice and insight and statement that is just completely uncommon in our generation. It's so insightful about the interior life and what it really is, and what is its massive significance that we will be poorer for indifference to such a writing.

When the bird of thought was let go, did it fly out like the raven to settle upon floating carcasses, or did it like the dove circle and return to the ark of God? If we are honest with ourselves, we can discover not only what we are, but what we are soon to become will soon be the sum of our voluntary thoughts. I think Paul was that kind of a man. He was consistent.

He didn't have one kind of life publicly and another kind of life privately. And as a minister of the pulpit, I know how easy it is to have that. And not only to have it, but to have it in such a way as not to be faulted or to be criticized.

Because who is going to rebuke you? Because the other men who are ministers are also doing the same. And our poor wives have to suffer the discrepancy between what we are publicly and what we are privately, and live with what seems to be irreconcilable differences. And we allow ourselves the luxury of going on like that all the more if the public ministry is anointed.

I think God is calling to the church in preparation for its final hour, and it's to be a glorious hour, that these are standards that can no longer be suffered. And God is calling for a consistency within and without, publicly and privately, that is one whole same thing. For I believe that the archaic and original primitive meaning of the word holy derives from the word wholeness.

To be holy is to be whole, is to be consistent, is to be one thing, before God and before men, within and without, in all seasons, from the beginning to the end. And it's evident as I go on talking like this, and in all of the other talks, and it will continue to be true to the end, that what God is raising for us is a standard that in no way can ever be fulfilled out of well-meaning religious intention. This is going to require a shifting of gears and a coming in to a transcendent knowledge of the reality of the resurrection life.

That it's no accident that the same Paul who speaks about blamelessness is the same one also who says, for me to live is Christ. This is not humanly attainable. But if we have been living on the basis of what is humanly attainable, and have been nice guys and moral guys and decent guys, on the basis of our own intention and strength and energy, we have been outside the faith.

We have been in some religious realm, something outside of the kingdom and apostolic glory. Because the standard of God is always beyond what is possible for us to attain in our own power and ability. And as I said once before, and I'll say again and again, at the end of the age, the thing that distinguishes the false church from the true is not whether one ascribes or agrees with the doctrine of resurrection, and the other doesn't.

Even the false church will nominally subscribe to the correct doctrine. But the one is in the power and the reality of resurrection, and the other is not. So if you've not shifted those gears, I'm encouraging you, and you'll find opportunity to stretch, be stretched, and to find the grace of God.

And it's a remarkable experience when you hear yourself saying things that you know are not out of your wisdom. When you see a quality of courage that you know is beyond your own mortal frame. When you experience a strength that is beyond your own weakness.

When you see a steadfastness and a faithfulness that you know is beyond your human resolution and resolve. That you have tapped into the power of the resurrection life. I want to encourage you in that.

Because without it, we're going to find ourselves in the day of his appearing to be blamed. Paul speaks of having a conscience without offense toward God and toward men. And that's where the area of our private thoughts and our hidden life is most revealed.

How critical are our private thoughts? How selfish? How resentful are they? How sensual are they? How ungodly are they? If you're going to have a conscience that is free from offense toward God and toward men, it must include your thought life. And what shall we say of the enormous battering that is continually playing upon us? And even when we, I'm not talking about opening ourselves to the things that are vile, but watching a ball game or turning through the day's newspaper or reading the Time or Newsweek magazine or whatever it is, you're going to find some inadvertent thing slipped in. Some kind of seductive

thing included.

Some kind of illusion. Some TV ad for a new series coming up with just a glimpse of something that is suggestive. It's almost impossible not to feel the increasing power and subtlety of things that cloy at us to receive admission into our thought life.

Keep your heart with all diligence for out of it proceed all the issues of life. It's going to take a vigil to keep ourselves when we're living in such an age. So the apostle is the thing in himself through and through, the incarnate word of truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, even in his private and personal thoughts.

He is conscious of a God in whose sight he is utterly transparent. You are witnesses, he says, and so is God. How devoutly and upright and blamelessly we behave toward you believers and how such a position requires the integrity of the total man both inner and outer and especially in what we think when we are free to think what we will.

If we allow ourselves, I've talked about sensuality, but what shall we say about resentment, irritation, jealousy, envy, anger? How many times do we allow a ourselves with another saint or make some invidious comparison between ministers or we're always taking a pot shot at this preacher or that. Or maybe we don't speak it to another but the thought rolls over in our own spirits. So this is equally an area where our conscience will be defiled in giving ourselves to thoughts of this kind.

And I propose by the grace of God to speak something about the Lord's provision to walk in this kind of impeccability. In the notes that are before me I'm reading, and I marvel because this was an extemporaneous talk that was transcribed. I'm not saying these things to bring us under a condemnation but to show you how high is the standard of excellence that God calls apostolic.

And so it must be for it is the standard that is a plumb line from heaven to earth. It is the direct ladder that connects heaven with earth. A plumb line and a standard for an unbelieving world against which all things are to be measured.

The church itself is the pillar and the ground of truth. I don't know if you're familiar with that scripture. And for us to be it, this is not just an appeal for random individuals who are inspired by a lofty standard.

This is God's normative intention for all the church. The ground and pillar of truth. A plumb line, a standard from heaven.

And if you want to make a case, and I think you can make it, a lot of what is devious and fallen and corrupt and perverse in our world is the statement of the absence of this kind of standard in the world that the church should constitute. That's why judgment begins in the house of God. If God is going to judge the world, what will he have to say to the church who has not been this heavenly plumb line and has not given the world any kind of thing against which its own standard should be measured? Now, this places a tremendous premium on what the church itself is.

Because not only must we emphasize the resurrection life as the enablement to live in this way, but a church that really is church by which we relate to one another in such a way as to provoke and to encourage each other in love to such a standard. Confess your faults one to another that you might pray one for another and be healed. Exhort one another daily while it is yet today.

You know that scripture, I think in Hebrews? Why? Because tomorrow is too late. Next Sunday is definitely too late. Because the first thing that catches us is the deceitfulness of sin.

It says exhort one another daily while it is yet today because of the deceitfulness of sin. And what is its first major deceit? Is that it disguises itself as sin. That we do not recognize it as sin and we make excuse for it or allowance for it.

Its habit, its circumstance, we've got it coming, it's a condition, we were tired, we were under pressure or some such thing. So where then does the grace come from to point to something that we would not otherwise see for ourselves? It's got to come from the church that is church. Exhort one another daily while it is yet today.

So it's a church that is not just a congregation of silent and passive pew sitters. It's a church that meets more frequently than on Sunday. It's a church that knows each other well enough that when they begin to see a deterioration or a slide or an erosion, they'll be the first ones to speak the word of truth and love to that person in whom they see the evidence of sin.

Are you guys following me? You don't sound too enthusiastic about that. Just to give you a little anecdote, I came back from an overseas trip and I had an opportunity to speak in the church where I had spent three or four substantial years of my charismatic life and I won't say where. And I had been away for it for some time and that early Sunday morning, the Lord wakened me with these scriptures.

Exhort one another daily while it is yet today. Beware the deceitfulness of sin. And I fell asleep again.

And then finally the day began and wore on and I came to the service and went into the pastor's study and met with the elders and they checked me out to see if I was still kosher and acceptable. And I went on the platform and I didn't have any message as yet, which was not unusual. And there was a great sense of expectancy in the church and excitement.

I had not been there for years and had some precious people who cared for me and expected a real word from God. And I was still without a word. And when the time came, I still didn't have it.

I was being introduced and I was feeling all kinds of hot spells and flashes and wondering. And just to make sure to see if I was okay, I checked the scriptures to see if I could read them and I could not. It was a blur.

And I said to the pastor, I said, is it hot in here? He said, no, it must be you. So I stood up and I thought, well, the best I can do, I'll give them a report of the overseas trip from which I've just come. After all, I can't even read the scriptures.

So I took a deep breath and I was just going, I prayed and I thought after I prayed and I'll just begin a kind of report, which would be interesting and challenging. And as I prayed, the Lord then reminded me again of the scripture, exhort one another daily while it is yet today. And I was reminded at the same time in a few days, I was back in that town that I learned that four of the most spiritual women in that congregation had everyone without exception fallen away, left husbands, divorced them, taken up new mates, fallen into whoredom in complete moral disgrace and collapse.

Not just your average saint, but some of the four among the most spiritual. And the Lord, and I just by faith continued after that scripture to raise the question, how is it that four women so well known to the

congregation as that could suffer a fate like that without the awareness of the church itself until it was too late. It was one of the leading charismatic fellowships in the nation, full of amens and hallelujahs and back slappings and bear hugs, but they did not know each other well enough to note and to see and to discern the subtle indications of changes in personality, in voice, in speech, in countenance, in conduct that would indicate that something that was already working which it was not identified, corrected and repented of would take its inevitable and full toll.

Exhort one another daily while it is yet today. So the point I'm trying to make and I'm asking you to be alert with me now because this is critical. We shall not attain to the standard of blamelessness individually and independent of each other.

If we are earnest about being God's people in a final hour in an apostolic standard, it throws a whole new weight on what is the character and kind of thing that we call church to which we belong and to which we give ourselves. So even as we have to repent of a standard for morality that was higher than the world's but less than God's as not being adequate, so too must we repent of a definition of church which was better than most but still less than God's. Are you following me? Charismatic church is better than most but is yet less than God's and just as we must be vigilant to keep our hearts with all diligence, so too must we give ourselves much more demandingly to this kind of church than what charismatic church requires.

Exhort one another daily while it is yet today. It's Sunday services with mid-week Bible studies will not suffice and somehow we have to break out of the mold and the character and the form that the modern church has taken as an appendage to the world that in no way seriously is an incursion or threatens the business of the world or even the business of a ball game on Sunday so that we can get it in and have all this in heaven too and find the time, the attentiveness to each other's life that will enable us to be blameless before him and have a conscience undefiled before God and before men. That's going to be sacrificial but I don't think that we have an alternative if we believe that this is a standard that God requires.

I wrote here, we are not going to obtain this in a day but we will not obtain it at all if we do not consciously see it as an object to be desired. As an object that can be obtained, walked in, to move from our present fear of man to the restoration of the fear of God must be our apostolic goal and mission for which we need the participation of everyone for we are all in this together. Can you see then how extraordinary and necessary a requirement true church is? They went from house to house daily breaking bread.

They didn't have any TV sets to turn off. There was no phone to use to say I'm coming. So they came at any untoward and unexpected hour.

You didn't get a chance to tidy yourself up. You were what you are when they came in which is not always good and yet is the greatest good if that's where you realistically are and what the saints need to see that they might counsel you and pray with you and help you from that place to a place that's more to be desired. And how many of us are saved from that because our life has taken on more of the semblance of the world.

We are too distant from each other. We have cars. We can live in different neighborhoods.

It's too inconvenient to visit. We have to make appointments. It's just different.

But need it be that? Need we subscribe to the form that the world itself has established or can we if we think that this is significant enough break out of it and find a mode of apostolic living that would make the church the kind of authentic thing that would encourage us and strengthen us in our determination to be blameless before God and before men and have consciences that are undefiled. Exhorting one another daily while it is yet today because next Sunday is too late. By the way, just a little P.S. I lived in community for ten years with the same saints on the same hundred and sixty acre farm and actually where our households were was probably less than four acres and for ten years and yet that in itself was not a guarantee that we lived in this kind of ruthless honesty and light by which we could exhort and rebuke and encourage because even in that if you want to hide you can still hide.

Merely arranging the physical form of our life and seeing to the frequency of our getting together will not guarantee that we're going to exhort one another and avail ourselves of the things that God has given the church about speaking the truth and love if we still desire to remain hidden. So in the last analysis whatever the form of our life whether we're in a community on a farm or living in St. Paul in an urban situation the first requisite is a heart's desire for apostolic lifestyle. A heart, a love for the truth and for righteousness and for blamelessness and for holiness as unto God as first consideration and if we don't have that we'll not be willing for any sacrifice that would make it possible and we'll not have a love for the truth if we have not a love for God because truth is not some abstract thing it's what he himself is as is also righteousness and holiness.

So in the last analysis what is the condition of our love for God will find us out. After all why was Paul concerned that the saints whom he brought to the Lord and nurtured in the faith should on the day of the Lord's appearing be blameless and that they were somehow his trophy and his joy that he could present them to the Lord blameless in the day of the Lord's appearing. What was his motive? Was it gold stars or a bonus or was it just to delight the Lord? Was it just to lay a treasure a crown before the God who saved him out of being a persecutor and a murderer? If we don't regain that motive no amount of exhortation is going to stir us to be blameless and without offense before God and before men.

And also that precious statement of Paul unto him be glory in the church. That's the glory of the church is such a church unto him a jewel in an age in which thick darkness pervades the earth and all peoples. So we need to pray that we're not dilettantes, you know what a dilettante is? A coffee table talker.

One who likes to sound spiritual at the coffee table and quote a scripture and cite a favorite passage or something like that. The world has its equivalent and so does the kingdom of dilettantes whose Christian life is fixed at a verbal level. Pray that we are not dilettantes wanting to hear some new thing and titillated by apostolic concepts but having no high serious intention to fulfill them.

It would be better for us that we had never been there, that we had never heard these things than to hear them and have no serious intention of fulfilling them. Oh by the way, I don't think I ever mentioned this till now, but I might as well go the rest of the way tonight. We're going to be responsible for all that we're hearing Wednesday by Wednesday.

I don't know if that thought has occurred to you. These have been blessed weeks and the Lord has been giving us his purest heart and richest understanding but we are accountable for what we're hearing. Do we know that? I often feel sorry when people have me as a speaker, maybe it's going to happen Friday and Saturday at the Full Gospel at the Municipal Auditorium and I ask you to pray for that.

I'm the speaker Friday and Saturday afternoon together with the happy hunters and that invitation I believe is from the Lord and I don't right now know what I'll be speaking, but I often say to churches who are thrilled to have a Jewish personality and someone who suggests something novel and interesting, hey this might prove more expensive to you than you realize. You're likely to find God saying something of an unusual kind and once it's said in your hearing, you're accountable for that word. And don't think that's cat speaking to us.

How about the guy who's speaking it? What does it say about don't all desire to be teachers? Because teachers have yet a greater responsibility before God? So you can see how many things are touched by the issue of apostolic character. We can't speak of it without referring to the reality of the resurrection life because mere human intention and goodwill and sincerity will not of itself accomplish it. And on the other hand, without the intention it will not be accomplished either.

And then it brings into question the whole issue of the church, it's character, it's reality, the truth of the relationships by the people who make it up, their courage, their love, their faith to exhort one another daily while it's yet today. How do you like to be exhorted? Is that pleasant to the flesh? And this guy is going to say something to you and you're going to rise up in great indignation for the great saint you are and be insulted? And how dare he? And who does he think he is? And his condition is far worse than yours and where does he come off to say that about you? It's going to take courage to exhort. It's going to take love to receive.

The whole character and the atmosphere of the church is going to have to change from the kind of brittle and touchy thing that has prevailed till now where we're walking on eggshells and are afraid to break through from the pat on the back and the full gospel bear hug. And God has called us to that breakthrough. He has called us to that reality.

He has called us to a real love. Somebody who has a King James would want to turn to 1 Peter. I don't like the way it's written here in the New American Standard.

1 Peter 1.22, since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart. Who could give that to us in the King James? Please. Can you bring that up to me? I'm going to pull my wire here.

That's too much. That's okay. Seeing that you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the spirit unto unfeigned love.

Paul talks about hypocrisy and I was thinking tonight, I don't know if I'll have the strength of the time to remind you of a text in Galatians where Paul confronted Peter to his face because he was walking in insincerity. And he was one thing when the Jewish believers were not in what city were they in? Outside of Jerusalem. And he was another thing when they were absent.

There was dissimilitude, there was feigning, there was a double standard by the foundations of the church. The one to whom the keys had been given was one thing with Jewish believers refraining from fraternizing and socializing with the Gentiles and eating at table. And another thing with the Gentile believers when the Jews were not present.

And when Paul saw that, he did not hesitate for a moment to confront Peter and that publicly to his face for the truth of the Gospels sake. We need to be reminded of that. And because there were men that had

hearts like that and took the risks of that kind of confrontation, the Gospel was preserved for us in all truth and integrity.

That's Galatians chapter 1 or 2. The first Peter, 1 Peter 1.22. The other is Galatians 2. But when I, in verse 14, when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the Gospel, I said to Cephas in the presence of all, dot dot dot dot. That's the apostolic standard. That's the truth.

That's love. And love itself has lost its meaning. It's become sentimental and condescending when it may be greatest love to exhort and to confront and if need be publicly and face to face for the truth of the Gospels sake.

And yet there's nothing in the epistles that suggests or the book of Acts that there was any kind of strained relation between Paul and Peter. I would think if a man spoke like that to me, something that I was not seeing about myself that I had slipped into in a kind of mindless and unconscious way, I would owe that man an eternal debt of gratitude. And in fact, for the want of such men, we are slipping.

We are falling. We are deteriorating in the quality of our walk. So listen to this.

Seeing that you are purified, seeing that you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit. It takes the Spirit to obey the truth. My God.

So even Jesus made himself a sacrifice by the eternal Spirit, not by human will. And obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren. Unfeigned love.

Not some kind of sugary outward seeming affection or polite or cordial reference, but something that is authentically so through and through. Because you work your way through envy, jealousy, suspicion, hostility, anger, irritation, something that the other brother has occasioned in your thought and rather than live with it and swallow it and let it continue to affect you, you have come to him, you have talked, you have shared, you have expressed your concern, your doubt, you have worked it out, you have done him a favor by confronting him. It is purest love.

And the end result will be unfeigned love of the brethren. What an atmosphere. It will be burning.

It will be crackling with the presence of God. We won't have to hope against hope that when we pray, God will touch that one for whose body we are praying. The greatest experience I've ever had in God exposing me to this kind of apostolic reality is when I was yet a young believer and was invited to a fellowship in Japan called the Tabernacle Movement.

I've never seen anything like it before nor since. They believed in that love that is a melting fervent heat and everything takes place in the field of love, they say, like the term in physics. And I would get up from the hotel room and begin to move down to the conference hall on the mornings and two blocks away I heard the most uncanny sound.

Like what is this? This is heavenly. I've never heard such a thing. What? I couldn't wait.

I'm getting closer and closer and outside on the grounds around the building are people in different groups praising God and singing in the spirit like nothing I'd ever seen. Like so enwrapped around one another in such fervency, women with women and men with men, that something was going forth in the fervency of love in a burning way that penetrated. And those days I was walking through in the conference in some

break and I'd seen a woman carrying a girl about 9, 10, 11 years old with her legs dangling like jelly.

I don't think she had ever walked. She was born crippled. And I'd noticed that little girl and I'm walking through the building one day and I just passed a women's prayer circle.

They were intertwined like a twisted candle. You couldn't tell where one body left off and the other began. They were so enwrapped with each other and calling out to God.

And the little girl was in the circle in the middle of them. I don't think she was even being explicitly prayed for. And I had hardly gone past the room when all of a sudden I heard a shriek.

But it was not a shriek. There must be another word for it. A shriek suggests horror or something frightening.

It was a shriek appeal of delight, of unexplicable surprise, of joy unspeakable. And I came rushing in to see what had happened and this little thing whose legs had been dangling like jelly and was on her back was standing erect on her legs. And I found out they were not even explicitly praying for.

She was healed in the field of faith that works by love. Come on guys, we're a long way from where God would have us to be. Obeying the truth of the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that you love one another with a pure heart fervently.

And maybe the absence of the fervency is the lack of the pure heart. And maybe the lack of the pure heart is the condescension to questions of sin and conduct and other kinds of shadowy things that are not too conspicuous that we somehow swallow down and live with that doesn't seem to affect anything. It's not registered in our conduct, maybe it's just our thought life or something that we're contemplating that's a little bit questionable.

But that's just all it takes to make something impure that God intends to be pure that would then free us to be fervent. That's what the scripture suggests to me. But we need to see that our standards are so beneath, so much less than other than what they could be, what they have been in apostolic times and what God would again have them to become.

If we live like that, our life would be a sacrament. I like what Oswald Chambers, his definition for a saint, a saint is a sacramental personality. And I think in that statement, he's summing up all the kinds of things that I'm suggesting tonight.

We'd be on the way to being a witness unto him, not doing witnessing for him. Maybe even one day, as I suggested was it last week, that we could stand before the world and make the kind of statement that Jesus made to his generation. If you see me, you see the Father.

You want to know what God is like? Take a look at this people. You'll not see it in any single one of them by themselves, but you'll see it in the extraordinary quality of their relationship. You want to know what God is like? Look at the transparency of this people.

Look at the unfamed quality of their faith and their love. Listen to the way that they talk to each other. Listen to the quality of their voices.

Look at their eyes. Look at the self-sacrificial quality of their love. Look at the way they extend themselves in relationship with one another and are willing to take the risks of love even to exhort, even to rebuke.

You want to know what God is like? Look at the revelation of him as is seen in his whole people. If you see them, you see the Father. And I think it was for that reason that the early church had something to say that has been lost to us and for which reason the whole character of our evangelism is something less.

They could say to their generation, repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. It's visible among you. There's already a demonstration that can be observed.

There's a piece of heaven already working in your midst. Why look at these Jews, knowing what their reputation has been and their profound individualism and self-centeredness and disputationism and argumentativeness and all the kinds of things that have characterized them throughout the generations, but look how they're living. Look how they're loving.

Look at the quality of their life and their relationship. The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Repent.

God is waiting for people who will be able to say it again. And I don't believe that we shall be able to until we have made the apostolic standard of blamelessness our own. Our thought life and our private life and the hidden life as much under the scrutiny of God as the outward acts.

Will we be careful about what we allow ourselves to think when we're free to think whatever we want to think? Will we reject thoughts of envy and disdain and contempt and jealousy? Will we be through and through consistently one thing before God and before men and have consciences undefiled? I'm as far from this as anyone in this room, but I know it's right. I know what God wants, and I know that we cannot have it except by and with each other. It's going to take a determination to be this kind of church, or we're just talking about a lofty standard that will never be attained, and we shall see therefore increasing victims to sexual sin, to perversion, to marital breakdowns, to divorces and remarriages that are already too much with the body of Christ.

We have no alternative, I don't believe in blamelessness. It's not a luxury, it's the standard of God. He'll give us the grace to attain it if we will.

Let's pray. So Lord, with all apologies for having to be the messenger of this word, and so far from the attaining of it myself, yet not flinching Lord from things which are needful for all of our hearing, I speak in behalf of this people and myself and ask mercy Lord, mercy precious God and great grace, mercy for our many offenses against you already, even those of us who have our lives have been circumspect, we've not fornicated, we've not cheated on our wives, we've not been guilty of any conspicuous sin, but if our secret and private life and the thing that was hidden were as conspicuous and revealed, it would be a scandal. And we've allowed ourselves that luxury because somehow we did not have the sense of God as Paul had, that somehow all things are transparent to your view.

And we've allowed ourselves this mental sensuality of enjoying thoughts that somehow we thought we could get away with because we didn't realize that it affected the issue of purity and that purity affects the issue of fervency and that the issue of fervency is the issue of love and that the issue of love is the issue of truth and the issue of power and the issue of the church. Lord I ask grace as we seek precious God to move to the standard that you're raising before us. I ask that your spirit Lord would show us even tonight and tomorrow and the days that shall follow the places where we've cut corners, taken liberties, allowed ourselves indulgences, joked with the fellows at the water cooler, given ourselves the such things my God that compromise your truth, your integrity, your righteousness.

If we cannot control the TV set my God and it's finding an insidious way into our spirits, give us the courage to pull out the plug or to carry it out of the house, to declare war on whatever instrument or agency is bringing such temptation and stress upon us that makes us to compromise in critical areas. Precious God, give us a desire to be the kind of church that you're setting before us and to be willing for the sacrifices required to attain it. Thank you for Paul, thank you for his generation, thank you for those who shall stand blameless in the day of your appearing who have painfully put away things that have brought them pleasure for a season that they might eternally rejoice around the throne of the Lamb because they could be before him with a conscience undefiled, without regrets, forever and ever.

Thank you Lord, bless this speaking, show us the practical ways to implement it, to do it, to be the hearers and the doers of your word. Let it begin even tonight as much as you give opportunity. Bring us, my God, from faith to faith, from purity to purity.

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