

Words of Comfort

by Chuck Smith

The sermon emphasizes the importance of faith and trust in God, rather than rules and regulations, and how Jesus Christ is the mediator between God and man.

Duration: 50:53

Scripture: Isaiah 40:1, Matthew 6:33, Acts 15:28-29, Acts 15:31, 2 Timothy 2:14, James 1:22

Topics: "Comfort"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of putting our trust in the Lord. He highlights that God will bring forth victory and comfort through the scriptures and the Holy Spirit. The speaker encourages believers to speak words of comfort and exhortation to one another, strengthening the body of Christ. He also addresses the issue of a man named Charles Templeton, who has renounced his faith in the Bible and Jesus Christ. The speaker concludes by reminding listeners that God is there to comfort and take care of His people.

Transcript

The early church was basically comprised of Jews only. Many of them were traditionalist, that is, they did believe that salvation was only for the Jews. And that as a Gentile, in order to be saved, you had to become a Jew.

By proselytizing. And that was done through the ritual of baptism and circumcision and adherence to the Mosaic law. As the Gospel began to spread, it was spreading more rapidly among the Gentiles than it was the Jews.

And so, there came a clash in the early church. A clash between the traditionalist Jews and the Gentiles, who the Jews did not believe could be saved. And so, they came to one of the most prominent of the Gentile churches, there in Antioch.

Having heard that there were many believers, Gentile believers there, they came to find out the true genuineness of that work of God's Spirit among the Gentiles. And they began to create some problems, because they came with the Jewish tradition, and thus they said to the Gentiles, unless you are circumcised and you keep the law of Moses, you can't be saved. Paul and Barnabas, when they found out what was going on, stood up to these fellows, and there was a big argument over what relationship the Gentile believer had to the Jewish laws.

It was decided that they would go back to Jerusalem, and there before the church council, they would establish the principle that dealt with Gentile conversion. Can a Gentile actually be saved without becoming a Jew? And so, the council in Jerusalem was called. Peter, first of all, addressed how that the Holy Spirit had divinely called him to take the Gospel to the Gentiles, and how the Holy Spirit had come upon the Gentile believers without their being converted to Judaism.

Paul and Barnabas shared the many miracles of the Holy Spirit among the Gentiles that they experienced in their first missionary journey. And so, James, who seemed to be the leader, the chief spokesman for the church, recommended that they write a letter to the church in Antioch and let them know that it was determined that they didn't have to keep the Mosaic law in order to be saved. That they should just abstain from pollution of idols, from fornication, things strangled, and from blood, and that would be fine.

So, it, verse 22, pleased the apostles and elders with the whole church. This solution was acceptable by all. Evidently, and I do believe, that James was given by the Holy Spirit a word of wisdom.

And I believe that the proof of that is in the fact that James' recommendation was something that they all assented to, agreed with. So, they decided to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, namely, Judas, whose surname was Barsabbas, or actually, the word Barsabbas is son of Sabbaths. Bar is son in Hebrew, and so wherever you have the bar, it is son of Sabbaths.

And Silas, who was the chief among the brethren. So, these are two prominent members of the body of Christ there in Jerusalem. It was decided that they should go with Paul and Barnabas with the letter from the church, in which the decision would be given to the Gentile believers.

And in case there was any doubt or question, these two leaders from the church in Jerusalem would be there to affirm that this indeed is the decision of the church council there in Jerusalem. So, the gist of the letter is this. The elders and brothers send their greetings to their brothers of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia.

Note that they are calling them brothers. Jesus is breaking down the walls that separate men. It is interesting how that man so often seeks to build walls by which he can be isolated and separated from others.

But Jesus tears down the walls that divide people. We all stand on common ground when we stand in front of Jesus. He is the one who has broken down, Paul said, that wall of partition that separated the Jews from the Gentiles.

And so, it is interesting how men like to build walls. And even within the churches today, we seek to build walls. We build our Baptist walls, our Methodist walls, our Lutheran walls, our Pentecostal walls.

And here's the very thing that Jesus came to dissolve, to get rid of. The walls that would seem to make you different from me, when in reality we are all one in Christ Jesus. And there is no superior denomination.

We are all one in Christ Jesus. And he breaks down those walls. So, they call them brothers.

Now, that was probably a difficult thing for many of the Jews to call a Gentile a brother. On the strict Orthodox, when the Pharisees would walk down the street, they would wrap their robes close to their body. They'd hold them so that the robe would not swish.

They were fearful that if the robe would swish, it might touch a woman or it might touch a Gentile. And so, they didn't even want that kind of a contact. But here, the Lord is breaking down those kinds of barriers that men build, and they call them brothers, recognizing that in Christ Jesus, we are all of us brothers.

Jesus, of course, is the great equalizer. Later, Paul will write to the Galatians, there is neither Jew nor Greek. There is neither bond nor free.

There is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And so, those things that usually separate have been removed in Christ, and we are all one in Him. Writing to the Gentile church in Ephesus, Paul said, but now in Christ Jesus, you who were at one time far off, have been made nigh by the blood of Christ.

For He is our peace, who has made both one. He has broken down the middle wall of partition between us. He's abolished in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments that was contained in ordinances, for to make in Himself of the two one new man, so making peace.

And that He might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby. And He came and He preached peace to you, which were afar off, and to those that were close. For through Him, we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.

Now therefore, you are no more strangers and foreigners, but your fellow citizens with the saints, and you are of the household of God. And so, Paul is declaring that being a Jew doesn't allow any privileges. Being a Gentile doesn't allow any privileges.

We all come unto God through Jesus Christ, and coming through Him, we are all one. Again, a little further on, he, in Ephesians, he refers back to this passage. He said, how that by revelation, I made known, that He made known unto me by the mystery.

He said, as I wrote before in a few words, which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit, that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the Gospel. So, this is that glorious mystery, that the Gentiles have become fellow heirs. We are the same body.

We are partakers of the promises of Christ. So, the letter was, first of all, sent by the elders to what they referred to as brothers. We acknowledge that we're one.

We're brothers together. But then, the letter was a disclaimer. For as much, they said, as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting the souls, saying, you must be circumcised and keep the law, to whom we gave no such commandment.

Those fellows that came did not come with our authority. They were not sent by the church in Jerusalem. They were renegades.

They came on their own. The thing that they were teaching was of themselves. They subverted you.

It's interesting how that so often, people seek to subvert the work of God's Spirit within a fellowship. And how many times people become troubled by the words of those who come along pretending to have superior spiritual knowledge, or pretending to have some special revelation, or pretending to have some authority by which they are coming and declaring to you some different kind of doctrine or belief. It's

amazing when a person speaks with authority, how many people will just follow along because he speaks with authority.

And rather than really checking out what the person is saying, he says it with such authority, you just sort of accept it. I mean, he speaks with such authority. Herbert W. Armstrong was such a one.

I don't know, of course, he's been gone for a little while. How many of you really remember, but it used to be that he was on the radio an awful lot. And he had a large radio ministry, but he spoke with authority and gained many followers just because of the way that he would speak.

Interestingly enough, basically the things that he was saying were what these fellows were saying to the Gentile believers. You've got to sort of keep the law. You've got to obey the Sabbath law.

And he was putting the people back under the law, but he was doing it with authority and he subverted many believers and brought them back under the bondage of the law. Since his death, the Worldwide Church of God has been taken over by new leadership. And as they have studied the Word of God, they realized that Herbert Armstrong had made a lot of mistakes in his interpreting of the Scripture.

And the Worldwide Church of God has now become really a very sound fundamental body of Christ, part of the body of Christ. And I don't know of any other cultish group that has had such a transformation as the Worldwide Church of God. I'm praying for other groups.

I'm praying for the Mormons that they will come to the real acknowledgement of the truth that is in Christ Jesus and be delivered from the works programs. Even the Jehovah Witnesses also. These people are sincere.

They're earnest. And it would be marvelous if they would realize and come to the knowledge of the truth and realize the errors that are being perpetrated by their leadership. And so, you know, God can do it.

He did it with the Worldwide Church of God. And I'm praying that he'll do it with some of these other groups because they're wonderful people. And it's just that their leadership has led them down the wrong path.

Paul wrote to Timothy about those that would subvert the souls of the believers. In his second letter, chapter 2, verse 14, he said, "...of these things, put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord, that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers." People strive over words. They strive over semantics.

And churches are split over semantics, striving over words. The doctrine, once saved, always saved. I was talking with a fellow the other day who holds to that.

And so, I mentioned Charles Templeton, whom he knew quite well. Anybody that's been around for 50 years or so knew him. He was with Billy Graham and the Youth for Christ back in the beginning of the Youth for Christ movement.

He was an evangelist, very powerful evangelist, led thousands of people to Jesus Christ. He has recently written a book entitled, Farewell to God, in which he declares that he can no longer intellectually accept the Bible or believe in the God of the Bible. He cannot believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

And he has just come to the place intellectually where he could no longer hold on to these beliefs. And so, he has said, farewell to God. Written a book in which he sort of seeks to destroy people's faith in the Bible and in Jesus Christ.

Now, in his book, he testifies of his conversion experience, of a greater joy than he had ever known before. As he went home from that experience, the peace and the joy that he had, and he gives witness to it and how that he went on into the ministry. The person I was talking to when I brought up Charles Templeton said, well, I don't believe he was ever saved.

I said, oh, well, I believe that he is backslidden. So, we are now disputing over semantics. We're talking about an obvious experience of a man who testifies of once having been saved, who disclaims his salvation now completely.

One says, well, he was never saved. The other says he was backslidden. You're talking about the same man.

You're talking about the experience this man had. What is our argument? Our argument is over what we call it. So, it's an argument over semantics.

Because it all depends on what you call what's happened to that man. And these kind of things are no profit. They're not beneficial.

They're not really edifying. I hesitate to get into arguments with people over the scriptures. There are people who ask questions.

But they are not really looking for an answer. They're looking for an argument. And the script, the question is a lead question designed to lead into an argument.

Because they have a special kind of a viewpoint. And the question is to open up the door so they can promote that viewpoint. They're not really looking for an answer.

I receive many emails and in them there are oftentimes questions. And I usually last thing in the evening sit at my computer and answer the questions that have come in through the email that day. And most of the questions are honest, genuine questions.

But there are those that I get caught every once in a while. And the question that they're asking, they're not really looking for an answer. They're looking for an argument.

And so, sometimes I'll get caught and I'll answer those questions. And then I'll get an immediate email back and they're now presenting there. And I realize, ah, I got caught again, you know.

And so I never respond the second time. They've got a position, fine. They're welcome to it.

I respect their right to be wrong. I got that from J. Bernard McGee. He said that about me one time.

But Paul instructs to sort of beware or to avoid the foolish questions that are just designed to create arguments. Here to Timothy said, striving about words that have no profit, they only subvert the hearers. They deny in this letter to the church in Antioch, they deny that the people that came to them actually represented the church or the authority of the church in Jerusalem.

And so in the letter they said, it seems good to us that we might send choice men with our beloved Barnabas and Paul. And here the church was endorsing and affirming the ministry of Paul and Barnabas. Now, Paul and Barnabas were two of the leaders of the church in Antioch.

And they had gone from the church in Antioch on the first missionary journey together. And now the church in Jerusalem is recognizing the legitimacy of their ministry, calling them beloved. And they actually are in one accord with the message that Paul and Barnabas have been teaching.

They recognize the hazards that Paul and Barnabas faced in their missionary venture, even hazarding their own lives to take the gospel to the Gentiles. And so the letter said, in order that they might confirm the genuineness of the letter, they are sending Silas and Judas, who were elders in the church of Jerusalem, that they might confirm to the people orally what had been written in the letter. Now, with Silas, we will find that he will become an associate with Paul on the second missionary journey that Paul takes.

And we'll get that in our next study, where they decide to go out again and confirm the people that, visit the people and find out how they're doing that came to Christ in their first journey, and how Barnabas and Paul had a dispute over John Mark. And so Silas went with Paul. So Silas is one of the church leaders, but he's evidently fascinated with Paul and Paul's ministry, and decides to go with him on the second journey.

Of Jude, we know nothing more about him than he was just one of the chief brethren in the church in Jerusalem. Now, they declare, it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us. They had gathered in Jerusalem to deal with this divisive issue.

They had talked it over, no doubt had prayed about it, and now have come to a conclusion. And it is interesting that in the conclusion, they recognized the place of the Holy Spirit in the guiding of the early church. It seemed good to the Holy Spirit, Holy Spirit first, and to us.

Again, I believe, sort of confirming that James, when he spoke, was speaking through the gift of word of wisdom from the Holy Spirit. It seemed good to the Holy Spirit in us that we lay no greater burden than these necessary things. So this is what they considered necessary for the Gentile believers.

Abstain from meat that has been offered to idols, from blood, from things that were strangled, and from fornication. And if you will keep yourself from these things, you will do well. God bless you.

So it was a very short note, but it was one that brought great rejoicing to the Gentile believers. I think what is important is what was not said in the letter. In other words, there was no reference to Sabbath days, new moons, feast of the Jews, and so forth.

No mention of these at all, but just keep yourself from idols, meat offered to idols, from fornication, from blood, and from things that were strangled. We find that in the reading of this letter, it brought rejoicing and consolation to the Gentiles. It should bring rejoicing and consolation to you tonight, because it means that we can relate to God through our faith and trust in Him.

We do not relate to God through rules or regulations, through the keeping of the laws. For the Jew, the approach to God was a very complex thing. A Jew could not directly approach God.

It was necessary that they have a priesthood established, and the priest was more or less the mediator between man and God. When you sinned, you would have to bring your animal sacrifice to the priest. He, in turn, would take the blood of that animal that had been slain and put it upon the altar, and there he

would make a covering for your sin.

You then would offer a burnt offering sacrifice, which was the sacrifice of consecration unto God. And then you could offer the peace offering, which was the offering of fellowship with God. But coming into a fellowship with God was a complex process, taking several offerings before you could actually have peace with God and sit down and fellowship with Him.

Jesus Christ became our sacrifice for our sins. Once and for all, He offered Himself, and not just a covering for our sins, but His sacrifice could put away our sins. And thus, He is the mediator.

He is our great high priest. And through Him, we can approach God and have fellowship with God through Jesus Christ and through His sacrifice once and for all. Our fellowship with God thus is not predicated upon my keeping His Word.

But my fellowship with God is predicated upon God keeping His Word. Now, as a result, my fellowship with God is a constant. If my fellowship with God was predicated upon my obedience, my work, my effort, then my fellowship with God would be very tenuous, because I don't always do the right thing.

I often do the wrong thing. And if my fellowship with God was based upon my works, my doing, then there would be days I would have fellowship with Him, and many days when I would not. But because it's predicated upon His work, His work in my behalf, God is faithful.

God will not change. And thus, I have this constant fellowship with God because it's based upon God's faithfulness, not my faithfulness. Paul wrote to the Romans about a difference between the Orthodox Jew and the Gentile believer.

He said, Brethren, Romans 10, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they might be saved. That's my heart's prayer and desire for God, for the Mormons, for the Jehovah Witnesses. For I bear them record, they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.

How true that is. There is that zeal, but it isn't according to truth or knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.

And these things that he is saying about the Jews can be said about the other groups that we have mentioned. They're ignorant of God's righteousness. Righteousness, which is imputed unto me, or imputed unto my account by my faith in Jesus Christ apart from works.

And they're going about by works to establish their own righteousness. And thus, they haven't submitted to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believes.

The law was a schoolmaster to bring me to Jesus Christ. Once it has brought me to Jesus Christ, it has accomplished its purpose. I'm no longer under the law.

It has fulfilled its purpose to drive me to Jesus Christ. It was a schoolmaster driving me to Christ. Having brought me to Christ, the law is now finished with me.

Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to those that believe. For Moses described the righteousness which is of the law, that a man which does those things shall live by them. That's what the law says.

You have to keep the law. You have to do the things that are in the law to live by them. But the righteousness which is of faith, in contrast, speaks on this wise.

Do not say in your heart, who will ascend into heaven, that is to bring Christ down from above, or who shall descend into the deep, that is to bring Christ again from the dead. But what does it say? The word is near you, even in your mouth and in your heart, that is the word of faith which we preach. That if you will confess with your mouth, the Lord Jesus, or literally, Jesus is Lord, and shall believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

For with the heart man believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made to salvation. For the scripture says, whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed. For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him.

For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. So the Gentiles have actually attained to the righteousness. How or why? Because they believed.

Whereas the Jews who are seeking to attain by their works have not attained to that righteousness. So the letter sent to the Gentile believers brought rejoicing and consolation as it should bring to us tonight, because the door is open wide for each one of us to come and to simply believe and trust in Jesus Christ, and be pardoned and cleansed from whatever sin we may have committed. We are righteous through him and through faith in him.

So coming back to the book of Acts here, we read, so when they were dismissed they came to Antioch, verse 30, they gathered the multitude together, they delivered the letter, which when they read they rejoiced for the consolation. And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words and confirmed them. Back in the 13th chapter of the book of Acts, when we first are introduced or when we are told of the church in Antioch, it wasn't the first introduction, but when we are told of the church in Antioch, it said now there were certain prophets in the church of in Antioch, Barnabas and Paul and and other certain prophets that were there.

Now Paul writing concerning the gift of prophecy in 1st Corinthians 14, declares that he who prophesies speaks unto men words of edification, exhortation, and comfort. In the Old Testament, the prophet was one who spoke God's word to the people. Many times it took on an element of predicting future events, and that was to confirm that it was the Lord that was speaking through the individual.

In the New Testament, the gift of prophecy was again speaking God's word to the people. However, in the New Testament, there was not the element as much of predicting the future. There was some.

Agabus was a prophet and he predicted a drought that was going to come. Agabus predicted that Paul would be bound when he came to Jerusalem and thus there were predictive aspects, but for the most part it was speaking forth God's word to the people. Now to me it is interesting that God's word to the people for the most part was edification.

God wants to build you up. Edify means to build up, and God wants to build you up in the faith. And so when God is speaking to you, it isn't to tear down.

Who is he that condemneth, Paul said. It is Christ who has died, yea rather has risen again, is at the right hand of the Father, making intercession for you. Satan wants to tear you down, God wants to build you up.

And so he who prophesies speaks unto men for edification, God wants to build you up, for exhortation. And the exhortation is exhorting you to pray, to trust, to believe God, and exhorting you to draw close to God, and to seek God. And it's exhorting you to sort of, like James said, be doers of the word and not hearers only, that's exhortation.

And then comfort. God said to the prophet, comfort ye my people. Satan loves to agitate, create doubts, create fears, create anxieties, create distress.

And God speaks to comfort, to comfort your heart. And so Silas and Judas were both of them prophets. And so they exercised their ministry there in Antioch, speaking to the church to build them up in the Lord, build up their faith.

Speaking to them to exhort them to holy living, to following the Lord completely, and then to comfort them. God's going to take care of it. Put your trust in the Lord.

God is going to bring forth victory, and the comfort of the scriptures, the comfort of the Holy Spirit. Wonderful ministry. God help us that we might exercise it toward each other.

Father, thank you for the lessons that we can learn from the early church. We ask, Father, that we indeed might also speak words of comfort, building up the body of Christ, strengthening the believers. Lord, that we also would speak the words of exhortation, exhorting one another to love, to service, to obedience, to worship, to praise.

Lord, we're so grateful that the issue was settled, that we can relate to you in a love relationship rather than a legal relationship. A relationship not based upon the law, but a relationship based upon your love, your love for us, and the response in our hearts, love for you. Draw us ever closer, Lord, into that loving relationship.

In Jesus' name we pray, amen. Let's stand. The pastors are down here at the front tonight to pray for you.

If you have any special needs, they're here to minister to you. Men ought always to pray and not to faint. Some of you are fainting over the situations.

Don't. Pray about it. Cast all your cares upon Him.

He cares for you. So, as soon as we're dismissed, we encourage you to come and spend some time in prayer, waiting upon the Lord, casting your burdens upon Him. These men are here to join with you and to pray with you, for the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

Love, love, love, love, Christian, this is your call. Love your neighbor as yourself, for God loves all. Love, love, love, love, Christian, this is your call.

Love your neighbor as yourself, for God loves all.

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