

Reality & Paul 3

by George Verwer

The sermon explores the life of Paul as a model for spiritual growth and the importance of setting high aims in the Christian faith.

Duration: 56:39

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Acts 8:1, Acts 14:19, Acts 14:22

Topics: "Reality"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of understanding God's grace and how it pleases Him. He encourages believers to come to God with all their imperfections, knowing that He understands and loves them. The sermon then shifts to discussing the experiences of the Apostle Paul in the Book of Acts, highlighting his encounters with spiritual warfare and persecution. The preacher also mentions his own personal experience of being arrested in the Soviet Union for distributing the Word of God. The sermon concludes with a reminder of the command to go into all the world and make disciples, and the impact that spiritual revolutionaries like Paul can have in turning the world upside down.

Transcript

I'll speak through your word, Lord, and help us to see how the practical things and world vision and learning together and living together is linked with spiritual growth and the message of apostolic Christianity and Christian faith. Speak to us from your word, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Now, I'm just so full of things to share from the life of Paul, and I was just during my quiet time this morning reviewing, especially in the book of Acts, and I'm going to hold off some of the thoughts I had for today concerning the balance we have in the life of Paul. And instead, I want us to study together, Paul, in the book of Acts. So if you'll turn right now to the book of Acts, and we'll start in chapter 8, the first verse.

This is Paul, of course, his name is Saul. Now, we aren't giving these very high standards of Christian conduct and spiritual reality as demonstrated by the Apostle Paul to put everybody under bondage. And a lot of people have a great fear of Bible teaching that involves teaching spiritual principles, and clearly speaking of how things should be.

I personally very, very much appreciate the ministry of Martin Lloyd-Jones, I'd hardly be considered perhaps as Calvinistic as he is, but his books, especially *Spiritual Depression*, I see his commentaries up there on Romans, they are very, very filled with spiritual meat. And he has a very balanced message. I

think maybe some of his disciples who get the letter without the reality, don't have what he has.

That's always true. And he has great spiritual balance, and the emphasis he puts on discipline, on spiritual growth, in some of his writings is really great. You see, unless we see where we're going, it's hard to get there.

I know the only way you can get these spiritual principles is through the in-working of Jesus Christ in your life. So the reality of the cross, and all of us here, most of us here, have heard many messages along that line. If you live in the British Isles, and if you're in contact at all with some of the great Bible teachers and deeper life speakers and others that minister.

But I feel that much of the ministry in that area does not get people anywhere because they don't have any high goals. They don't really see what God can do and wants to do, and what will happen when we do know the crucified life. When we are filled with the Spirit.

And so we get all kinds of people who claim to be filled with the Spirit, who claim to have had some experience, and yet when you live with them, their life isn't any different than someone who has never claimed to have that experience. And it's because so often times we have low aim. We haven't seen apostolic Christianity.

We haven't understood the biblical Christianity as found in the word of God. We haven't been willing for the whole counsel of God, especially the radical, ethical, and moral teachings of Jesus, as demonstrated by Paul. And so we end up short of what God would have us be, in the practical realm especially.

And I believe that we have all this teaching in the word of God, this sermon on the mount, the book of Acts, so that we can know where we're going. We cannot expect at this conference to, through some great special happening, all end up here spiritually, but we should be able at this conference to at least get our aim right. So that we go out from here knowing where we're going.

You may feel after these days together, I'm not a disciple, I don't want to suffer, I don't know how to pray, I'm so far short. Fine. But do you know where you're going? I am short in many of these areas.

I have inconsistencies in my life. I have spots of laziness. I have areas of pride that keep sticking their ugly head up.

I have lust that keeps popping its ugly nose in. But I know where I'm going. And I'm having hard enough trouble at times as it is, if I didn't even know where I was going.

I am out to see every inch of lust destroyed in my mind. I am out to live on this level that we're talking about. And because I've set my sights, I know where I'm going, even though I'm not there yet.

I'm moving in that direction. So many Christians don't know where they're going. And they set such a low aim.

They say, well, I'm not a disciple, I don't really know how to pray like this person, I don't really have the faith of this person. So they just go on and on and on and on. Or they escape into some false message of grace.

Well, I can't really do anything. It's only the Lord who does it through me. And here I sit the next 20 years waiting for the Holy Spirit to do something.

What a subtle, ugly lie of the devil. You're making God into some kind of a schizophrenic. One minute he's telling you to do all these things, the next minute you're sitting down and saying, I'm not doing anything unless he sort of forces me to do it.

We're not robots. If you have the most earth-shaking experience with God, and there are such experiences. You know, they all have them.

Some men of God have had really earth-shaking experiences where they totally leave lightning bolts coming down on them. But even if you have that kind of experience, the next day God will not force you. Because then you would be a robot.

Then the Christian life would just be a matter of getting to a point where you got the final spiritual pet pill, and after that you would move from being a free-will creature to a spiritual robot controlled because you swallowed this pet pill. No. You always had free will.

And so you always, every day, must re-consecrate your heart or life, use whatever terminology you want, take up the cross, and follow him. If God hammers us with the word hard, it is because he wants to pick us up. As long as you're running in your own energy, it's the greatest hindrance there can ever be to God's word.

And so God uses the word to humble us. He uses circumstances to humble us. Have you ever had a really catastrophic failure in your life? Something that really, really, you never forget it.

You never forget it. But wasn't that, at least in some of your lives, one of the biggest steps towards spiritual reality? In so many lives I have known, it's true, God uses circumstances. I sat under the ministry of Alan Redpath, Moody Church in Chicago when I was a student, and I tell you, when that man finished preaching, I figured, man, I'm dead.

And then I realized, praise God, I am dead. I am dead. And Christ liveth within me.

And so if any of the word is hard on you, if you're feeling that deal, you're coming down, good, except a corn of wheat falling to the ground and die. But if it dies, it brings forth much fruit. And I don't believe this is a once and for all thing in the Christian life.

I find that in my life, constantly, I have to go through this process of death and life. I know it only happened once on Calvary, but as we trod along after the Lord Jesus many times, the experience of death and life has to work again through us, through many experiences. And today's victory is no guarantee that one month from now we will not have to go through God's process again.

And I wanted to read a quotation just to set off this lesson or this lecture or whatever you want to call it this morning, Bible reading, that will help us keep the balance. It's from Mr. Tozer and his book, Rooted the Righteous. Listen to this, this is me.

He says, God is easy to live with. It's interesting for him to say that because his writings are the most powerful and pulverizing books that I've ever read. God is easy to live with.

You see, that's the balance. The fellowship of God is delightful beyond all time. He communes with his redeemed ones in an easy way, uninhibited fellowship, what is restful and healing to the soul.

He is not sensitive, nor selfish, nor temperamental, even though we often are. What he is today, we shall find him tomorrow, and the next day, and the next year. He is not hard to please.

He is not hard to please, though he may be hard to satisfy. He is quick to mark every simple effort to please him. I tell that in ministries to me.

He is quick to mark every simple effort to please him, and just as quick to overlook imperfections when he knows we meant to do his will. Of course, they already are completely covered by the blood, so it's no great problem for God to overlook them. Let me read that again.

And just as quick to overlook imperfections when he knows we meant to do his will. He loves us for ourselves and values our love more than the galaxies of new created worlds. Some of us are religiously jumping, self-conscious, because we know that God sees our every thought and is acquainted with all our ways.

Religiously jumping. We need not be. God is the sum of all patience and the essence of kindly goodwill.

We please him most not by frantically trying to make ourselves good, but by throwing ourselves into his arms with all our imperfections and believing that he understands everything and loves us still. It's truths like this from the word of God, expressed through a human instrument of God, that minister to such a wretched heart as mine. And I thank God for his grace.

Now, keeping that as our foundation, we're going to look at a product of grace. The Apostle Paul, we're going to trace him through the book of Acts. We're going to go a little quicker than other mornings.

Some of this is in the way of background, but let's move. We have Stephen being stoned, and we know the Apostle Paul was there at the time. Of course, that's what it says in chapter 8, verse 1. The Apostle Paul was consenting unto his death.

What a beautiful picture of Stephen. By the way, he was a deacon. That's quite interesting, because you get some people in church who say, well, I'm a deacon.

I just do the practical things. I don't pray. I don't preach.

I'm a deacon. Well, Stephen was a deacon. And you know the qualifications for being a deacon.

You get them there in the book of Acts, being filled with the Spirit and the other things. And the first thing he did as a deacon was to go into open air meeting. And that was the last thing he ever did as well, because he was martyred in the open air meeting.

So those of you who think, well, you know, I'm going to take the less spiritual task in the church. I'm going to be a practical man. I'm going to be a behind-the-scenes man.

You need to restudy Stephen. Because you see, in the word of God, it's not just a group of specially trained theological men trained in homiletics and hermeneutics and spiritual politics and gymnastics that are going to guide the church. But it's ordinary people.

Ordinary people whose hearts are thrilled, and they just step out on their feet and, hey, Jesus is alive. What? You what? Take this stone. And he's in heaven.

God wants to use ordinary people, right, Stephen? You get this idea that there's going to be a preacher, there's going to be a missionary. Boy, he needs to be filled with the Spirit. But Mary, you know, hey, I'm just a housewife.

You don't need to be filled with the Spirit, do you, to make your fish and chips? You don't need to be filled with the Spirit to clean the dirty ring around the bathtub my husband leaves every time his eggs are bad. We all need to be filled with the Spirit. We need to be filled with the Spirit for the practical jobs as much as for the ministry of the word.

We're all together. Each member needs the other member. We have all chapters in the word of God trying to get that teaching into our heads, how important it is.

So Paul, named Saul at that time, consented unto his death. And at that time there was a great, we're in verse 1 of chapter 8, a great persecution against the church. God really used that, didn't he? Which was at Jerusalem, and they were all scattered abroad throughout the region of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

And we know what happened as a result of that. Look at verse 4. Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word. And I feel in my heart that if more people don't start moving from this country that has such a great church, you may think the church in Britain is so weak and so small, but how many of you really know much about the church overseas? I've been to 50 countries.

I've spent time ministering in churches all over the world, and I can tell you the British church is probably as good and as spiritual as most churches in the world today. And we have had the advantage in this country of a spiritual heritage and a spiritual literature that almost no people have had in the world today. And that is a very important thing.

And we have and should be making as a nation, a little hard to say as an immigrant, but as a nation we should be making a far greater contribution to worldwide spiritual revolution. Praise God for what has happened in the past. We think of the men that have gone out from this country like Hudson Taylor, like C.T. Studd, and many, many others, unnamed, less famous people.

And we must cry out to God, O Lord, do it again. And I believe if we don't start sending more forth, and we're going to see that in Acts and the life of Paul, the church sending people forth, we may find that God allows major persecution, that we may be scattered abroad. Many, many years ago I was ministering in Northern Ireland, years before all the trouble.

There is no place that made me quite as ill as Northern Ireland. Because of so many Christians, and many dear Christians, but a vast majority of them just content. Just content.

And I spoke, I believe under the authority of the Spirit, several years before the trouble, and I said, I believe something catastrophic is going to happen here, that more people one way or the other will get out of this. There's probably more evangelicals per person in Northern Ireland than any other place in the country. And you know, we've seen what's happened over the past years, and we've seen it drive people out, and become witnesses in many different parts of the world.

God's Spirit is a way of overruling man's hideous and terrible acts, as we've seen in Northern Ireland. And let's not point any fingers up there, because so often we're not any different. Let us move on.

We don't see anything of Paul now, there in the book of Acts, for a while, but rather we get involved with Peter. No, we have Paul's conversion in chapter 9, and then we have a little lapse period in which we get involved with Peter. I don't want to go into the details of this conversion.

I just wish that more people, when they were in the process of being converted, would pray and cry out, verse 6, what will thou have me to do? You see, not because salvation is of works, but because salvation is a revolutionary experience, when we are converted, almost in the same breath we should be crying out, Lord, what would you have me to do? The night that I was converted to Jesus Christ in Madison Square Garden, 20 years and a few months ago, I knew that I was to be his witness. I was pretty sure it was going to be out of my own country, and I was from a non-Christian home. And I just feel that even as we're converted, we should cry out, Lord, what would you have me to do? Even in the middle of it, this is sort of in the middle of Paul's conversion, because he didn't know what he was even asking for.

And God, in Paul's case, led him to a rather strange situation. He lost his sight, and he had to go find this man down this road. No one knows, pinpoint, when exactly did saving grace flood the heart of the Apostle Paul.

I guess we have a great argument about that. You know the story of Paul's conversion, and I don't want to dwell on that, because I want us to go on and get into the heart of his ministry. We do find Paul getting baptized in verse 18 and 19.

We do find him being filled with the Spirit in verse 17. I think there's a danger in the book of Acts of trying to get some little orthodox formula of how God works. One group has one formula, another group has another formula.

There are about 25 new books on the Holy Spirit that have come out in the last two years. There are all kinds of formulas. The Holy Spirit will not be put into a formula.

It says that in John 3, the wind bloweth where it will, and ye hear not the sound thereof. Very few people in history have had the formula that the Apostle Paul had in his conversion. One of you will go, well, the Apostle Paul was one of the greatest conversions in history.

All of us should have a similar experience. Should all go blind? Go through all this? But we know that he was filled with the Spirit, seemingly almost at the same time of his conversion. There are some hours here.

We know that he was baptized. That's pretty basic. And the amazing thing is, immediately he preached Christ in the city dogs.

Wow! Boy, that's taboo. He's a babe. He's just been born again.

Now he has to go to Bible school. He has to go to seminary. He's just ignorant.

And he was a murderer. Can I really trust this murderer? He helped murder Stephen. Now we're letting him preach.

I know some people say, well, Paul discovered later on that was an error. He was all in the flesh, and then he went into the wilderness. He really got his theological education in the wilderness.

But I've heard more guys trying to sell theological school, use that wilderness thing. Guys that have never been in the wilderness once in their lives. Spent their whole lives living in some crazy city.

And I don't really think we can equate Paul going into the wilderness with me going to University of London theological school. Not that I don't believe God can use theological schools. God is so great.

He uses all kinds of things. But I think there's an overemphasis in the church on professionalism. We grind out professional ministers, and if you and I have studied anything about history, we know the first places to go into unbelief and liberalism are the theological seminaries.

And I believe that there needs to be a greater emphasis on the layman, the ordinary man, being a witness for the Lord Jesus Christ. You know, when I read that this morning, I almost came an inch off the bench I was sitting on. So exciting.

Here is this Christ-hating Jew, suddenly saved, and within days he's out proving that he's a Christian. You see, there is intellectual content in our gospel. This is not just emotionalism.

This is not just a matter of getting yourself some kind of religious package. This is determining to follow truth wherever it will lead you. Paul confounded the Jews.

I think one of the great proofs of the Christian faith, of course, first is the resurrection, but another great proof is how so many enemies of the cross became followers of Jesus Christ. I can't believe that was some great hallucination, or some religious trip, or some bandwagon experience, especially when they were being killed off like flies. These men had an intellectual experience.

They knew that Jesus Christ fulfilled prophecy. And you know, if it wasn't for the fact that there is intellectual meat in the Christian faith, and something that my mind can accept as a person who is basically skeptical and basically inquisitive, I wouldn't be able to, as we say, hack it. I wouldn't be able to have a go.

But our minds can be satisfied. There are honest answers to honest questions. I have money.

I still have some. But when I see things like this, I praise his name, proving that this is the very Christ. And after many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel of killing.

All of this has happened in such a short period. One minute he's killing Christians. The next minute, his best friends are out to kill him.

And you say Christianity is dull. You say Christianity is dull. You know, you find a lot of Christian young people, they've sort of got to do all kinds of crazy things to entertain themselves.

They stand on their head, run around in circles. Not that we can't have a little exercise. But I want to tell you, when you get caught up in red-hot Christianity, you need much more.

You need much more. You can't call this a boring way of life. In a short time, he was going over a wall in a basket.

I'm talking about a rock-climbing experience. I'm interested in rock-climbing myself, especially now that my children have grown up. I've begun to do a few things again that I haven't been doing for 18 years.

But there it is in verse 25. And then the disciples took him by night, and this is a great repel in the Bible, and let him down by the wall in a basket. What a life! What a life! And I want to tell you, young person and anyone else, when you get involved in the spiritual warfare, you're going to find some over-the-wall basket

experiences.

You're going to find yourself in prison. You're going to find yourself being stoned. This is quite ordinary for many of our young people.

We have many, many in prison. What's a great prison ministry? Turkey, Libya, Soviet Union. And stoning, well, every week we had a stoning in India.

You know, a few stones. I died a few stones. Only one hit me in the head.

We sang the doxology after that. And I kept preaching. These aren't sort of, you know, unusual things that come upon a few spiritual freaks who are tripping out.

But as we get involved in spiritual warfare, as we begin moving for God across the whole world, these, these are experiences, as they happen in the book of Acts, that will happen to us. I was only in my early twenties when I was arrested in the Soviet Union. I was engaged in a little innocent activity of distributing the word of God, and got picked up by the secret police and accused of being a spy, and spent three or four days in interrogation, and then escorted out of the country with a machine gun.

These things are nothing special. You don't write a book about that. I didn't even love to write two pages about that.

Probably was in there by my own, even stupidity. But as we begin to move in world evangelism, we discover this thing is not dull. And I believe with all my heart, God wants to take some of the young people here, and all of us in one sense, and thrust us into a new spiritual adventure.

I believe he wants to take us out of this conference in the coming days and just throw us into new things. And for some it may mean overseas. Well, Paul had this experience, and then we don't find him very much for a while.

We find Peter coming into the picture, and I wish I had time to speak to you on the life of Peter, especially how he got in prison. But we can't get sidetracked on Peter. We find Paul again there in verse 25.

But the word of God grew and multiplied, and Barnabas and Saul, praise God for Barnabas. He's not seen as much in scripture as Paul, but he's the picture of the faithful man. No leader would amount to anything if you didn't have a Barnabas.

If I didn't have a number of Barnabases in this world, I probably would have been knocked out of the battle so long ago. Only God knows. Faithful men.

Son of consolation, Barnabas. Another man in scripture that you will want to study. Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their ministry and took with them John, whose surname was Mark.

We did miss a little incident there in Jerusalem with Paul and Barnabas. Remember that it was Barnabas who was able to persuade the rest of the fellows that Paul could be trusted. After all, most of these early apostles are there.

How can we trust this fellow? He's been murdering Christians? Barnabas had the discernment, and he saw that Paul was real. He was scared, and was able to say a word and bring Saul into the church, into

the fellowship. He said, wait a minute.

How can that be a mistake? I believe because when we do that, our ministry becomes man-centered. When you talk to someone, and if you haven't learned their terminology, you've had it. You might as well speak Greek, because you don't understand this fellow's special brand of deeper life terminology.

I keep changing my terminology over the years, trying to, because I believe God has fresh ways to communicate. I like Biblical terminology, but the English language changes. The English language changes.

This is where we need balance, and we need flexibility. I very much feel that what DeVoe Frumpkin, in this book, emphasizes very, very good, that our ministry, our whole life is firstly the Lord. Unto the Lord.

And we see that here, and it's many, many other places in scripture, as they minister to the Lord. If we're ministering to the Lord, when we finish ministering, immediately, Lord, have I been faithful to your word. If we're ministering to man, and there's a subtle way that when we minister to man, we're ministering to ourselves.

Preachers all know how to do that. When at the end of the ministry we're waiting to see, what does man think? Somebody comes up and says, Brother, that really spoke to my heart. I got ministered to.

Because if I minister, and God uses me, and someone tells me that, not that we should never say anything like that, I think we should be honest in expressing ourselves, but that should be water above the glass. My joy is God himself. Anything above that, that the saints may give, praise the Lord, water above the glass.

He is my sufficiency. And as I minister, I must minister unto the Lord very hard for my type of person. I'm very much man-oriented.

Very pragmatic. In business when I was 11 years of age, three businesses by 16, I know precisely at times in the business world what to say to get the client to do what you want them to do. Now God has thrown me into a ministry where oftentimes I'm saying things that very much upset people.

They never want to hear it from me again. And certain places where I've been invited to speak and then someone heard about it, was upset with my ministry, blacklisted me, he must not speak here. He'll upset everyone.

Especially holiday camps. How you ever invited me to anything that even borders on a holiday, I am known to be anti-holiday. You know, I love tennis, swimming, rock climbing, let me climb some of these trees actually, and I'm quite open to relaxation.

I'm known as being anti-holiday. I'm known as being bolting, I preach discipleship, and I make Christians nervous. They get nervous about their possessions, they get nervous about their laziness, they get nervous about lots of things.

So don't invite him to the holiday camp. He'll ruin the whole holiday. We'll all be weeping and some will be repenting and who knows what may happen.

What kind of a holiday is that? Well, it may be a holiday from hell eventually for somebody. And really, every Christian is on a holiday from the day he's born again. I often have people come up to me and say,

let me take a holiday.

Really, you need a holiday? Look man, I've been on a holiday for 20 years. I was ensnaked by Satan. I was the son of the devil.

I was an enemy of God. I've been released. I've had 20 years holiday.

And every year it gets more exciting. Makes butlins look like a prison cell. We are free in Jesus Christ.

We are saved from sin, from death, and from chains. Certainly Paul knew this in his life. Ministry unto the Lord.

Not easy. Not easy for me. This next part especially is unpleasant and fasted.

Fasted. What kind of a subject does that have to bring up? Alan Redpath speaking at Moody Church some years ago, really, he really upset those people. And we're used to a very, very much, the kind of message there before he came in which, you know, grace and lovely Bible teachings fill up in their book with Bible lessons.

And you know everything in the Old Testament has meaning and types and study Leviticus until you can expand what every bush and tree and twig means. And I'm not saying there's no significance in all that kind of study. But if Christianity is a matter of intellectual knowledge, just filling our heads with Bible truths, then it certainly is a very, very insipid religion.

God puts these things in His Word for a purpose. That our lives may become more like Jesus Christ. And he came in there and Moody Church and that big church started to preach the Lordship of Christ.

And I tell you, some of the old deacons and elders from who knows what generation began to get itchy and he's preaching the law! And they gave that dear brother such a rough time there in Chicago, he wouldn't stop preaching. And he said once, we don't fast anymore because we don't have hunger for God. What a congregation! I thought stones were going to come hailing off the balcony.

And he organized nights of prayer. Imagine nights of prayer. It's alright for Jesus Christ to pray all night.

He did it, Luke. We have that recorded. And these disciples, when Peter was in prison, that was no little 20 minute prayer meeting.

But if you preach fasting or you preach having a night of prayer, oh no, that's not grace. It's law. Anything we don't want to do, all we have to do is say, that's not grace, it's law.

I've seen people even do that in driving. I actually told a man once, Luke, there's a speed limit here. He said, 70 miles an hour.

He said, brother, I'm not under the law, I'm under grace. Wooo, down the road he goes. And I tell you, there's a law he's going to discover.

There's a law of gravity. And we have been set free. We have been set free that we may be obedient sons and daughters of the living God.

While Paul ministered to the Lord, fasted, the Holy Spirit said, Wooo, that's spooky, isn't it? The Holy Spirit speaking. And I believe the Holy Spirit wants to speak here in these days. We have the word as our guide.

The Holy Spirit spoke and said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work unto which I have called them. I don't believe this is necessarily a calling in the way some people describe a missionary calling today. But I believe it was guidance.

I believe more than some special calling, we just need basic guidance. We need to know where God wants us to go and what God wants us to do. All Christians need that.

Don't expect people to go to Operation Mobilization without guidance. And yet many people are confused about guidance. And I think one of the reasons, and again I must avoid getting in sidetracked, but one of the reasons is we get too much of a stereotyped way or view of how God works.

And we read somebody else's book, that's how he was guided, and we wait weeks and months and years to get that particular kind of guidance. God doesn't give it. God works in different ways and different people.

And you know, even when we go forth, we ought to go forth in humility. And to me, you know what that means? It means as I go forth, I want to admit that I may be wrong. I may be wrong, I'm a human being.

This is the earth. And I may sense I have guidance, but as I go down the road, I say, well, actually, I was wrong. Why is it so hard for Christians to admit they're wrong? Especially if they put something spiritual into it.

You know, the man in the world, he makes a mistake sometimes, well, there's another one. But the Christian, somehow he feels, well, am I saying that the guidance I said I had, in fact, I didn't have it? And so he gets much more involved, emotional. And I've had people come to me sharing that guidance about a particular girl.

She was the one. Boy, I tell you, this is an area where people really become irrational. This is the one.

Had a revelation. He was a fellow in London. Not too long ago.

Had a revelation. And a prophecy. That he had the wrong wife.

So he got rid of her. No problem. You think divorce courts make it easy? You get off on some kind of religious quirk and get away from the word of God, man, you can really move.

Met recently another church in Thailand, a pastor, huge church. I don't know how many people, he got a revelation, he had a vision, he had the wrong wife. No, she was all right, but he needed to know, he needed a concubine.

So he took only a wife, two wives, put the church down the middle. Those who were for two wives, those who were against two wives. You don't think these things aren't happening in the 20th century.

So this fellow in London got another girl who was more in line with his new way of seeing things. The devil is very subtle. That's why he's given us the word of God.

And that's why he's given us one another that we may exhort and encourage one another. I was telling you how people have come to me sharing that this girl was the one. The funny thing is, the next day a brother came, another brother, and he had a word, people get quote, a word.

About the same girl. And I want to tell you, if there's any area where you can't trust yourself, it's in this area. This is where you need to counsel others.

We have a brother in the room, he says, look, get your Joshua. When you discover a girl, you think she's the one, get Joshua and Caleb. They're going to the promised land.

Spy out the land, bring back the information. What's she like? Is she already married? Does she snore? You know, whatever. Maybe then you can make more intelligent moves, either forward or backward.

Well, you may not agree with that strategy, but I hope you'll agree a little bit with using your head. Some of you may think, well, it's too late for me. Why didn't I hear this fellow 20 years ago? But you better hang on to the sovereignty of God and press on.

All right, we better move on. Notice there was this tremendous opposition from Satan as they moved out to minister the word of God. And we have a long sermon here, relatively long, as far as sermons that are found in scripture, starting at verse 14.

And then we move on to verse 43, where again we see this simple word. Paul and Barnabas, who's speaking to them, they minister together. Paul, almost his entire life, worked on a team.

And I believe we need more teamwork in the Church of Jesus Christ. If Paul, as strong as he was in Christ, generally worked on a team, how much more should we? Our whole work is built on teamwork, and this is one of the reasons we have had very few casualties. Because when you're on a team and you're beginning to go down, the team pulls you up.

When you're a lonely missionary out in the middle of nowhere, all by yourself, and you start to go down, who's going to pick you up? Who's going to exhort you? Who's going to challenge you? And we found it very, very important to work as teams. Sometimes a team is small, other times a team is big. Almost all of Buck Sinsworth, a very unique evangelist in India, has planted two or three hundred churches.

A human being, a man God has used, some of his teams have been up to a hundred strong. He moves into a city with a team of a hundred. And when they're done, three months later they planted a church.

A very unique spiritual movement. So Paul and Barnabas, who were speaking to them, verse 43, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. Now, they did not only want to persuade people to be converted, but they wanted to persuade people to continue in the grace of God.

I have as much burden that people continue in the grace of God than that they be converted in the first place. Because the fact is, if they don't continue in the grace of God, how do I know if they've even been converted? And many times we have found people being converted in the process of following them up. They made a decision, we'll follow them up, and they got converted there.

Because a decision is not always a conversion. You all know that. Very easy to get decisions, relatively speaking.

But in the book of Acts, we have the number of disciples multiplied in Jerusalem, not the number of decisions. This is a great concern on our own hearts. Well, let's move on and get a few other pictures of Paul.

We had Paul stoned a couple of times in chapter 14. And then we move on, and I want you to notice verse 22. Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must, through much tribulation, enter into the kingdom of God.

I'd like to just insert here the fact that one of the most important things in my spiritual life when I was first converted, was memorizing the word of God. It is my deep prayer that during these days, there will be definite decisions made that will go into practice not only here, but next Monday and weeks to come. And I would challenge you to make this decision.

If you want to grow in your spiritual life and experience more reality, start memorizing and intensively meditating on the word of God. I can't tell you how important that was in my life as a young Christian. Now you are clean through the words spoken unto you.

I just had a letter yesterday or the day before from George Duncan up in Scotland, asking me to come up and preach in his church. And I remember a message I heard from him years ago on memorizing the word of God. He says, this is the way we cleanse the subconscious.

So many of our problems are in the subconscious. And we don't even seem to have control of some of our habits and some of our actions. Haven't you ever had that experience of doing something that was actually contrary to everything you wanted to do? Because we're emotional beings and these impulses come from within.

And it's the word of God that can get into the subconscious. I've seen even mentally disturbed people healed by the power of the word of God. Bill Gothel in the United States has been used to help tens of thousands into spiritual life.

His one main thing, main message among all the other things, a fantastic minister of the word, is meditation and memorizing the word of God. But you know some of us are too lazy and we pay for it. We don't want to get down into really memorizing and meditating on the word of God.

And some of these verses I'm giving you today I would love to see you committing to memory. I'd like to move on now to Acts chapter 17. We have Paul entering Europe.

We have Paul casting a demon out. And I might just say a word here, a word of warning. I believe that this is a very, very dangerous and difficult area.

I've studied it now 19 years. I have been involved in praying for demon-possessed people out in Asia. First of all, because the church so totally lacks discernment in our day.

And if we lack discernment in one area, we will generally lack it in other areas. There are very few who seem to be able to understand when a man or a woman is truly demon-possessed, and then to discern what to do. And I feel there are a lot of other things in terms of spiritual life that must be built into our lives first, before we're going to be able to get into some of these heavy tasks that in the word of God we mainly see were done by the apostles.

Men with gift, men of tremendous spiritual power. And of course, God was working in a very special way as well in this transition period. And oh, how we need such men today.

And at the same time, there are many faults, many, many faults. Prophets, the devil comes as an angel of light. I think of how many in my own country, the United States, have been led astray by angels of light.

I think of a man years ago named Brennan, who is considered one of the most holy men in our country. He had all the so-called gifts of the Spirit. He had everything, and he had tens of thousands of followers.

And once in a meeting, a halo appeared over his head, and you may laugh. They had photos of that halo, and tens of thousands believed. They believed this was the most spiritual man in America.

And they followed. And he led them astray, into denying the Trinity, into denying basic doctrine. And he's dead, and now we've got a Madras, India.

We've got a Switzerland, Brennanites. I don't know how to pronounce it, but followers of him. Tozer said something that I wrote in my notebook.

I tell you, it has helped me so much, if I can find it. It has helped me in this whole area of having a little bit of healthy disbelief. Let me read this.

In our constant struggle to believe, we are likely to overlook the simple fact that a bit of healthy disbelief That's what I like a little more about the British than the Americans. They seem to be a little stronger on this point. A bit of healthy disbelief is sometimes as needful as faith to the welfare of the soul.

I go further and say that we would do well to cultivate a reverent skepticism. It will keep us out of a thousand bogs and quagmires where others who lack it sometimes find themselves. It is no sin to doubt something, but it may be fatal to believe everything.

Everything you read, everything you hear. I think that's very, very important. So when we come to this area of demons, and we know that there is this tremendous force in the world, and demons are moving, they always have been.

It's an area where we need a lot of prayer, a lot of reality. And the messages we're giving in these days, we hope will be foundational for many other things that God wants to do in his timing. Of course, the result of all this was verse 23.

And when they have laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailer to keep them safe. Quite different, isn't it? Today, when you do some of these things, you're made into a Christian hero. Your name goes in the Gospel Gazette, and pretty soon your head is bigger than a balloon.

And then the devil moves in. Merrick Hutchings was just sharing with me yesterday what happened to someone in England like this, who started being used and had a great testimony, and it went to this person's head, and one thing led to another. But with Paul, it wasn't becoming a great feature figure in the Gospel Gazette.

After he did this miracle, it was getting beaten. And Paul, basically, most of his life was despised, even by many people in the Church, born-again people. You know what they said about him.

And this is why he wrote some of his defenses. The Thessalonian Church, as soon as he finished there, we're going to see that in a minute. As soon as he finished there, people came in, and he was just after their money.

That's why he wrote, one of the reasons he wrote the Thessalonian Epistle back. We go into chapter 17, after we see this incredible jail experience. Paul in the middle of the night, praising God.

Notice verse 25, and at midnight, Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises unto God, and the prisoners heard them. Talk about a prayer life. Talk about praising the Lord in all situations.

It's quite funny, you get some people also that get very upset about this work in Soviet countries, where you have to work in closed countries. I can't even tell you some of the closed countries we're working in. And they say you must obey all the laws of man.

But you know when the laws of man go absolutely contrary, straight forward to the laws of God, and you have to make a choice. Where do you choose? Peter said we have to obey God rather than man. And if you say we can never, never, never break the laws of man, then I want to know what you're going to do with the angel who broke into the prison when Peter was there.

She had no warrant, caused a lot of damages. This angel could have gone to court for that. Who sent the angel? God.

And here we have an earthquake and the whole prison is broken down and every other crazy thing happens. And I think that's just one beautiful example of how at times the laws of man have to be circumvented. If those laws are absolutely contrary to God's command to go into all the world, there is no border that I cannot go over, or under, or parachute over, or what.

The whole world is my field. And that command has been given to me by Jesus Christ. Well, I won't get into that.

We find Paul in chapter 17 in Thessalonica, and notice verse 6, coming at the end of our time. When they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come yours. In another version of the Bible it says, These spiritual revolutionaries.

I like that term. Not in the political sense, but in the spiritual sense. Revolution means change.

And God wants to change our lives. God is not firstly concerned with changing your vocabulary. He's not even firstly concerned with changing your theology, though sound theology is important.

He is concerned with changing your life and my life, and making us different, and revolutionary, and loving, and dynamic. Even if it's in a quiet way, because we're not all the same. And don't think for a minute how I think that most of you should become like me, or like Hudson Taylor, or like any favorite person you have.

God is not trying to annihilate you. He's not going to destroy your personality. He's going to work through you.

And if you're basically a quiet person of a particular temperament, he won't annihilate that and make you into something that you're not, but he'll work through that. And he'll break, and he'll bend, and he'll work through you. Well, they were spiritual revolutionaries, and that town of Thessalonica was really turned upside down, and in a matter of weeks a church was born.

In a matter of weeks. And Paul left. Talk about a man who's on the move.

I have been studying his life for 20 years. I haven't caught up with him yet. I haven't figured out all the places he's gone to yet.

You study. And we're not all called to that kind of ministry. There were many who were in the local church that Paul came and ministered to, but he said, be ye followers of me.

So he didn't mean in journeys, but he meant in attitude, lifestyle, mentality, spiritual quality, ethical quality. Some would travel. Some may not.

Well, you know what happened then in Berea. He liked the Bereans. He said they were more noble than those in Thessalonica, and that they received the word with all readiness in mind and searched the scriptures daily, whether they be so.

And I hope that we here at this conference will be like the Bereans. Well, after the meetings, take some time in these beautiful woods and environment to search the scriptures. Anybody can study the Bible when you're in a meeting, and you're all supposed to be here.

But to take that little extra time to get into the word, morning, evening, or both, and search the scriptures like the Bereans to see if these things may be so. While I wanted to get into Acts 20, which is an incredible bombshell of spiritual truth, so maybe we could just close by looking for a few minutes at Acts 20. Notice verse 2. When he had gone over those parts and had given them much exhortation, he came unto Greece.

In other words, when Paul went around ministering and reministering to the churches, he went with much exhortation. Some of what I'm giving you in these days is Bible teaching, and some of it is exhortation. But I believe we need exhortation.

I need exhortation. That's why I read so many of these hot books. So many of these books I'm challenging you to get.

And they've just been such a challenge to me. Because I naturally go downhill. I'm a natural downhiller.

And I need constantly to be challenged and exerted. That's why I believe in setting goals. That's why though I hate to get up in the morning, I get someone to wake me up at 6 or 6.30, and I get out and run.

Because I don't like that. That I know as I run, my lungs start going, my heart starts going when I'm finished, and then I can go into the world and I'm awake and ready to go. And I believe many of our spiritual problems are because we're out of shape physically.

And our hearts and our lungs are not able to do what God wants us to do. We're great neglecters of the physical body. We may do a little exercise during our holiday, but exercise means very little unless it's all year.

All year. That's why some of the great football players become the most ill men you could ever talk to. Because one period of life, exercise, exercise, fanatics, and then negligence.

And I've seen many people hindered in their spiritual life because of poor lungs and poor heart. Of course, some of those things happen later on no matter what. And I recommend that kind of discipline.

Well, Paul moved in a mighty way and in much excitement. Now, if you could just read chapter 20, perhaps it would lay a foundation for tomorrow's thinking. Because it's a chapter that reveals much of the spiritual reality demonstrated by the Apostle Paul.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for so many spiritual truths and so many practical truths from the life of this year's servant, Paul. Help us, Lord, not to forget that which we have heard this morning.

But to apply it. And to act upon it. For we pray in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and our Savior.

Amen.

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