

Substituted Standards

by Major Ian Thomas

Major Ian Thomas's sermon 'Substituted Standards' explores the critical distinction between God's standards and human substitutes in the context of the Christian faith and the role of the Holy Spirit.

Duration: 1:16:14

Scripture: Exodus 12:13, Numbers 16:3, John 1:6-8, John 10:10, Acts 13:2-4, Romans 8:4, 1 Corinthians 12:13, 2 Corinthians 1:22, Ephesians 1:13-14, Hebrews 9:4

Topics: "The Role of the Holy Spirit", "True Holiness vs. Substituted Standards"

Description

Major Ian Thomas emphasizes the significance of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer, contrasting the true Christian experience with a mere religious practice. He illustrates how the Israelites, despite being redeemed from Egypt, failed to enter the fullness of God's provision, symbolizing the struggle many face in living out their faith. Thomas highlights that true holiness cannot be defined by personal standards but must align with God's standards, as demonstrated through the story of Korah's rebellion. He stresses that only a ministry empowered by the Holy Spirit can endure beyond the individual, as seen in the example of Aaron's rod that budded. Ultimately, he calls for believers to recognize the necessity of being sent by the Holy Spirit to fulfill their divine purpose.

Transcript

This is the last session of this short-term mini-Bible school, and we're going to speak in this third session that comprises the background of the person, work and office of the Holy Spirit, whom we considered more particularly during the seminar yesterday afternoon, and we'll try to draw in the threads in the time that is available to us. In the thirteenth chapter of the Book of Exodus, just to recall our mind and to introduce some who may be with us this afternoon for the first time, in the thirteenth chapter of the Book of Exodus concerning the Passover, that feast that was to be celebrated by God's people Israel every year in the land that God had provided for them, and of course it was no coincidence that the Lord Jesus was crucified at the feast of the Passover, for this we have seen foreshadowed his coming. And that atoning work upon the cross as the lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

The shed blood of that unblemished lamb that was to be pasted upon the doorpost and the lintel beneath the shadow of which God would move into the situation of his people, and by that divine intervention bring them out of slavery, Egypt, to poise them upon the threshold of that journey that should have taken them on and in to the land of his provision. Not heaven, but all the fullness of God's provision that is yours and mine by virtue of the fact that the one who died for us, our once crucified Lord Jesus, rose again from the

dead in all the fullness and power of the Holy Spirit to give himself to us. So that Christianity ceases to be an academic proposition, something impersonal, purely a religion to which you subscribe, or an excuse for our Sunday services.

The Christian life nothing more nor less than the creature on earth actually enjoined by and sharing the life of his creator, as the Holy Spirit indwelling us, credits us with the life of our risen Lord. This is of course what makes the Christian life relevant for you and for me. Christianity as a religion is as dead as any other kind of a religion.

But Christianity isn't a religion, and the Lord Jesus didn't come into this world to establish a religion. He came to this world, said he, that you might have exactly what dead men need, life. That quality of life without which you and I are born, that quality of life that the presence of God alone can impart, for that life is eternal.

And John reminds us that this is the record, that God has given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that has the Son, somebody, a person, he that has the Son has life. He that is not the Son of God does not have life.

So all that the gospel about is not simply that we might get out of hell and into heaven, but supremely that God might once more get out of heaven into you and to me. And where we share his life then becomes totally irrelevant, whether on earth or in heaven, in time or eternity, in the body or out of it, physically alive or physically dead. This now becomes totally irrelevant.

All we need to know is that to me to live, now or then, here or there, on earth or in heaven, is Christ himself. What a fantastic privilege. And this is what the Bible is all about, from Genesis to the Revelation.

No matter how God presents it to us, either in the crystal principles that are so clearly enunciated for us in the New Testament, or in the fantastic illustrations that God, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, as holy men of God spake in time past as they were moved by him, has given to us in the Old Testament. And no coincidence that the one of whom that Lamb spoke, our Lord Jesus, was crucified at the feast of the Passover. From which, of course, that arrived at his instruction, our remembrance of him around the Lord's table, in the communion service, or the breaking of bread, or the Lord's supper, as it's variously described.

But thou shalt show thy son, said Moses, in the eighth chapter of this, eighth verse of this thirteenth chapter, thou shalt show thy son in that day, saying, this is done because of that which the Lord did unto me when I came forth out of Egypt. It shall be for a sign unto thee upon thine hand, a memorial between thine eyes, that the Lord's law may be in thy mouth. For with a strong hand, the Lord brought thee out of Egypt.

And in commencing this study here in the dealings of God with his people, we saw that it was to celebrate the fact that on the basis of that divine intervention, it was going to change everything they ever did, it was going to change everything they ever thought, and it was going to everything they ever said. A sign upon thine hand, a memorial between your eyes, that the Lord's law might be in your lips. Eleven days journey from Egypt to Cana, but they got dumped in the desert.

And for forty years we saw in Deuteronomy chapter twelve that far from changing what they did, they did still there as they had in Egypt, every man what he considered right in his own eyes. We saw in the

eleventh chapter of the book of Numbers that far from being excitedly preoccupied with all that God had marvelously provided for them in the land of Canaan, they were hopelessly preoccupied with all that that they should long since have left behind in the land of Egypt. But we've seen that if you must live in the wilderness and won't go on and in, inevitably you'll want to go back.

They had no memories of Canaan. They knew nothing of the golden ripening corn beneath blue skies. They knew nothing of the pomegranates that God had promised.

They knew nothing of the milk and the honey. They knew nothing of the grapes of Eshqal. They had no memories of Canaan.

They only had memories of Egypt. Because brought out to go in, they got stuck halfway. And we've seen that clearly to be a picture of a redeemed sinner, reconciled to God on God's terms of reference, who was shed blood of his own dear son.

As Paul puts it in the tenth chapter of his first epistles of the Corinthians, baptized into Moses, taken by him into the place of death, that God intervening miraculously might bring them through that place of death in dividing the Egyptian waters of the Red Sea and lead them out on dry land upon the threshold of a new life. A marvelous Old Testament picture of our identification with Christ in death and resurrection, as they were baptized into Moses and taken through the place of death to be brought out into resurrection life. So we are baptized into Christ, identified by God with him as the one who vicariously bore our sins upon the cross, that his death being credited to us now by the gift of his Holy Spirit, his life may be credited to us, that we might be poised on the day of our redemption upon the threshold of that new life that would lead us into the adventure of being caught up in him as members of his new body into the timeless purpose of a timeless God.

Redeemed, yes, they were. But coming out, they never went in. And yet we saw yesterday that they were sealed in spite of their rebellion, in spite of their grumbling, in spite of the fact that they could have been nothing but a grief, not only to the heart of Moses, but a grief to the heart of God.

Every morning there was the stamp of a redeemed people, manna, the bread from heaven, called as some of us saw last evening manna, because that word means, what is it? Something I've never tasted before, something that has never ever been my experience before God brought me out of Egypt, the Holy Spirit, divinely sealed. And this manna, a portion, to be kept in the golden pot that was part of the content of the Ark of the Covenant, that was to be kept in the holiest of all, beneath the mercy seat sprinkled with blood. For the mercy seat sprinkled with blood tells us of the redemptive work of Christ, and the Ark of the Covenant contains that which is to be the substance of our salvation, that Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the Lord being made a curse for us, that we might receive the Holy Spirit, that he by his presence restoring to us the life that was lost in Adam, the very life of God himself, might stamper as his purchased possession, who paid the price of our redemption, sealed with the Holy Spirit, and by his presence sharing the life of our risen Lord, baptized into the body of Christ, a member in particular of that body of which he is the head, and exclusively so in general, divinely sealed.

We know what they were thinking about, Egypt, and yet God never once forsook them. Well we know what they were doing in the wilderness, every man that was right in his own eyes. We know what they were thinking about in the wilderness, preoccupied with the flesh pots of Egypt from which God had redeemed them, still preoccupied with the past instead of living in the plenitude of the future.

What were they saying in the wilderness? Numbers chapter 16, 16th chapter of the book of Numbers, and I trust that brief word of recapitulation may have refreshed your memory, those who were with us in the past, and may adequately put those who are in the picture, put those in the picture who are here with us this afternoon for the first time. Now what were they saying in the wilderness? In verse 1 of the 16th chapter of the book of Numbers, now Korah, and Dathan, and Abiram, and on, rose up before Moses. Verse 2, with certain of the children of Israel, 250 princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown.

In other words, under the leadership of these four individuals, there were a company of men who represented the elite in the congregation. 250 princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, and men of renown. These were the folk who sort of had influence around the town.

The moneyed people, those who could look back as it were to a distinguished pedigree, men of renown. Those whose names you'd want on your letterhead if you wanted to launch some new enterprise. The folk which you'd want to be numbered on your committee, you'd invite one of them to be chairman, men of renown.

And they, verse 3, gather themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and they said unto them, You take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them. Therefore, wherefore, then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the Lord. What did they say to Moses in the wilderness? Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy.

What was their proposition? That the demands that Moses was making upon them were totally exaggerated. They were a holy people in the wilderness. This people, who as Moses came down with the tables of stone, God's work, penned with his fingers on Mount Sinai, and spelling out loud and clear the minimal demands that a holy God might reasonably expect of a people created in his likeness, found them half naked, dancing around and worshipping in their idolatry a golden calf.

And said these distinguished people of the congregation, men of renown, were all holy. How holy? Holy enough. By whose standards? Their own.

For God's standards lay shattered at the feet of Moses. That's the carnal church. That has substituted its own standards by which it is holy enough.

For God's standards. This is the situation as some of us have seen it, that existed under Eli, that poor poverty-stricken bankrupt man who had led the priesthood into apostasy, and when the ark was captured by the Philistines, fell backwards and died of a broken neck before he had time to die of a broken heart. Those substituted standards by virtue of which out of family expediency he could ordain his own apostate, wicked, adulterous, lying, thieving sons into the ministry.

Holy enough. Holy enough. So holy, said they, that we have as much right to minister the things of God as those divinely appointed.

And when Moses heard it, verse 4 of chapter 16, he fell on his face. He spake unto Korah and unto all his company, saying, Even tomorrow the Lord will show who are his and who is holy, and he will cause him to come near unto him, even him whom he hath chosen. Even him whom he hath chosen will he cause to come near unto him.

Take you senses, Korah, and all his company, and put fire therein, and put incense in them before the Lord tomorrow, and it shall be that the man whom the Lord doth choose, he shall Moses was very wise. He said, I'm not going to adjudicate in this manner, in this matter. We'll let God be the judge.

And Moses said to Korah, verse 16, Be thou and all thy company before the Lord, thou and they, and e'er and tomorrow. And take every man his censer, and put incense in them, and bring ye before the Lord. Every man his censer, two hundred and fifty censers.

Thou also an Aaron, each of you his censer. The two hundred and fifty self-appointed, who considered that to be accredited by man was of infinitely more importance than to be approved of God. So long as you could get a few of your fellow human beings to ordain you into the ministry, that is adequate.

Then you can establish your own stance, whether or not God bestows upon you his divine approval. Sealed by the Holy Ghost, and sent by the Holy Ghost. And Korah gathered all the congregation against them unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, verse 19.

And the glory of the Lord appeared unto all the congregation, and the Lord spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment. And they fell upon their faces, and they said, O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and wilt thou be wroth with all the congregation? And in his amazing integrity, Moses pleaded yet again for this rebellious people. And God gave him his instruction.

He said, Depart, I pray you, from the tents of these wicked men, and touch nothing of theirs, lest ye be consumed in all their sins. How did God describe men who were holy enough by their own standards? These wicked men, who were prepared to usurp the ministry, and substitute their own standards for God's. And Moses said, verse 28, Hereby ye shall know that the Lord hath sent me to do all these works, for I have not done them of mine own mind.

This is the way in which God will confirm the fact that if I'm here at all, I'm sent. That if I adopt this responsibility, it's because I'm sent. That if I brought you out at all from the land of Egypt, and brought you into this place that you might go on and into the land that God has promised, it is for one reason only, I was sent.

God sent me. And I have not done any of these things of mine own mind. They're divinely authored.

They have their origin in the heart of God. But if these men die, the common death of all men, verse 29, or if they be visited after the visitation of all men, then the Lord hath not sent me. I'll leave God to adjudicate, and place his approval where he may.

But if the Lord make a new thing, and the earth open her mouth, and swallow them up with all that appertain unto them, and they go down quick into the pit, then you will understand that these men have provoked the Lord. And though they may be holy enough by their own standards, they are not holy enough by God's standards. Well, that was reasonable enough.

He said, if these men die a normal death, if they live to a ripe old age, and finally, they're buried with the wife and family around, placing their wreaths on their graves, then whatever claim that I may make to have been sent by God to be your leader, you can forget it. But if, said Moses, on the other hand, suddenly the earth beneath them cleaves asunder, and by divine intervention, suddenly they're swallowed up and go down into the pit, and perish to a man. Something that we might reasonably suppose to be highly unlikely.

Then he said, you'll know that God sent me. I would say that would have been pretty convincing, wouldn't you? Came to pass, verse 31, as he had made an end of speaking all these words, that the ground cleave asunder that was under them, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that appertained under Korah, and all their goods, they and all that appertained to them, went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them, and they perished from among the congregation. Well, I would consider that to be pretty convincing, but to the children of Israel, not on your life.

Verse 41, on the morrow, after that amazing demonstration, by God, in response to Moses' plea, all the congregation of the children of Israel, murmured against Moses, murmured against Aaron, saying, you killed the people of the Lord! Who again and again, in spite of their wickedness, their rebellion, their sin, and their idolatry, as God would have judged them, pleaded again and again on their behalf, and interceded. You've killed the people of the Lord. Men of renown, who were holy enough, by their own sense.

And it came to pass, when the congregation was gathered against Moses, and against Aaron, that they looked toward the tabernacle of the congregation, and behold, the cloud covered it, and the glory of the Lord appeared, and Moses and Aaron came before the tabernacle of the congregation, and the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, get you up from among this congregation, that I may consume them, as in a moment. And once again, with that amazing integrity, that cannot help but stagger us, for its sheer consistency, Moses prayed, get you up, he said, from among this congregation, that I may consume them, in a moment, but they fell upon their faces, and Moses said to Aaron, take a censer, put fire therein, from off the altar, put on incense, go quickly unto the congregation, and make an atonement for them, there is wrath gone out from the Lord, the plague is begun, and Aaron took as Moses commanded, and he ran into the midst of the congregation, and behold, the plague was begun among the people, and he put on incense, and made an atonement for the people, and he stood between the dead and the living, and the plague was staged. They that died were fourteen thousand and seven hundred, beside them that died about the matter of course.

Then against that background, in the seventeenth chapter, the Lord spake to Moses, saying, speak unto the children of Israel, and take of every one of them a rod, according to the house of their fathers, of all their princes, according to the house of their fathers, twelve rods, and write thou every man's name upon his rod, and thou shalt write Aaron's name upon the rod of Levi. One rod shall be for the head of the house of their fathers. Says God, here are people who have usurped the ministry, they've said they don't have to be ordained of God, all they need to do is to be accredited by influential men, who will tell them that they are holy enough, and they have repudiated the necessity of being sent by God's divine spirit, and ordained of him alone.

How many thousands of men, God, of our seminaries today, as infidels, to deny the deity of Jesus Christ, to repudiate the atoning efficacy of God's work upon the cross in his incarnate Son, to undermine the authority of God's word, to deny the resurrection, and to treat with abuse and contempt the suggestion that one day our risen, triumphant, and glorified Lord Jesus will return to be vindicated in his deity, that day when every eye will see him, and every knee will bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Think how many go out into the ministry of our pulpits, only to fill them with their own spiritual bankruptcy, and leave those who hungrily go to the house of God to find salvation only into their own spiritual squalor. All right, God says, these folk who consider themselves adequate upon human estimation in repudiation of my requirements, take a rod, let their name be written on it, and let it represent their ministry.

Then take Aaron's rod, the one whom I have ordained, and put his name on it. Then with the name of each upon the rod, said God, detach the man from his ministry, and see what's left. Detach the man from his ministry, because only that ministry which remains after you have removed the man is of any divine authenticity.

If a man's ministry depends purely on a humanistic basis upon his scholarship, his personality, his theatrical gift, his business acumen, his promotional skills, if a man's ministry is simply built upon his own self-achievement, then you may be absolutely certain that just so soon as you've removed the man from his ministry, in the absence of a man, there'll be no ministry. So God said to Moses, put their ministry to this test. Detach the man from his ministry.

Thou shalt lay them up in the tabernacle of the congregation before the testimony where I will meet with you, verse four, and it shall come to pass that the man's rod whom I shall choose, though you have detached the man from his ministry, that rod shall blossom, and I will make to cease from all from me the murmurings of the children of Israel whereby they murmur against you. Now do you see what God told Moses to do? Take the rods, put them all together, detach the man from the ministry, and that man's ministry which detached from the man continues to blossom. He's the man who is divinely ordained, because his ministry will not be buried with the man.

Moses laid up the rods before the Lord in the tabernacle of witness, and it came to pass, verse eight, on the morrow Moses went into the tabernacle of witness, and behold the rod of Aaron for the house of Levi was budded, and brought forth buds, and bloomed blossoms, and yielded on. Detached from the man it had the stamp of divine authorship. I don't know how many of you are engaged in Christian ministry.

I don't know how many of you perhaps teach a Bible class. I don't know how many of you are Christian moms and dads with children whom you've reared beneath your own roof. But whatever the nature of your ministry may be, whether from the pulpit or the platform, or around your breakfast table, or teaching in a Bible class, or Sunday school in your church constituency, tell me this, when you're dead and buried, and the man has been detached from his ministry, how much will remain of what you have claimed to do in the name of Christ? Will it in your absence, when long since may be you're dead and buried, bear the stamp of divine authorship? I remember participating as a member of the faculty of the Torrey Memorial Bible Conference.

It takes place every year in Southern California, and they usually invite about a dozen men from all parts of the country and other parts of the world. And over a period of week, not only on the campus of that particular college, but in pulpits of many denominational groups as far away as San Francisco down to San Diego. Members of the faculty have the privilege of proclaiming Christ.

And one of those who shared with me in that particular ministry on that particular occasion was Dr. Walter Wilson. He was a medical man, but long since in Christian ministry. He occupied a pulpit before he went to be with Christ in Kansas City.

And he was the president of a college that he himself was the founder. A man of unusual rich and wealthy ministry. And I remember him speaking at a luncheon for pastors, and emphasizing that nothing can ever be accomplished in your life or mine if it doesn't have its origin in God himself.

That only that is legitimate that has its authorship in Christ. We're simply the flesh and blood with which he clothes his divine activity. As he died for us then, so he now lives in us by his Holy Spirit.

And the office of the Holy Spirit in co-equality with the Father and the Son is to be that member of the triune Godhead through whom a man may offer his humanity to God, and through whom God, wonder of all wonders, is prepared actually to share his deity with a man, and let it loose in what he does, and says, and is. That's the gospel. So there's only one missionary, that's Jesus Christ, clothed with the humanity of some man or woman whom he has been pleased to send by the Holy Ghost.

Maybe to the jungles of Ecuador, or way across to Taiwan, or the heart of Africa, or to the concrete jungles of some sophisticated city. There's only one pastor, that's Jesus Christ, clothed with the humanity of a man divinely ordered for that particular office. There's only one evangelist, Jesus Christ.

He's the one who came to seek and to save that which is lost. And to you, or to me, or somebody else, he's given the fantastic privilege of being the flesh and blood with which he continues to do and to teach the things he began once to do and to teach when he walked this earth, seeking and saving that which is lost. There's only one Christian, that's Jesus Christ.

You and I, the humanity with which, as members in particular of his new body corporate, he uses, through whom he may today still walk the streets of this city. Dr. Walter Wilson was emphasizing that any ministry to be valid, to be timeless, to be of ultimate spiritual worth, must find its origin in the person of the Lord Jesus, honored as Lord, in the heart of some man or woman who recognizes that indwelt by the Holy Spirit within the human spirit, their privilege is to allow him to invade their personalities, teach their minds, control their emotions, direct their wills and govern their behavior. He said years ago, I invited a very distinguished preacher to occupy my pulpit.

A man who was pastor of an enormous church. His reply was that he couldn't come, dearly as he might so love to do, because he had no body to occupy his pulpit in his absence. And in addressing us at that particular banquet for pastors, Dr. Walter Wilson said, I asked him how many years he'd been ministering in that church.

He said for over 20. I asked him how many men he imagined on average he had under his ministry, say during the past 10 years consistently. He said as a conservative estimate within the last 10 years, I've probably had at least 700 men who have been consistently under my ministry during those 10 years.

And Dr. Wilson went on to say, I asked him, having ministered in that particular church for over 20 years, within the last 10 years, having had at least 700 men under that ministry, you want to tell me that there's not one single man competent today to occupy your pulpit in your absence? Said Dr. Walter Wilson, if I were you, I would resign, for your ministry is a failure. And three weeks later, he did. Of course, what worth is that man's ministry who for 20 years can be pastor of a congregation, and for 10 years minister to 700 men, none of whom are capable of taking his place.

In other words, his ministry will be buried with the man. That isn't a divinely authored ministry, but there was a man sent from God, and his name was John. Do you remember? In the first chapter of John's gospel, there was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

The same came for a witness to bear witness of the light that all men through him might believe. He was not that light, and he never pretended that he was. But he was sent to bear witness of that light.

The characteristic of this man's ministry that at all times he bowed himself out and bowed his Lord in. I must decrease, he said. He must increase.

My humanity is mine simply to magnify my Lord, to reflect his glory. Do you remember? How we're told in the first chapter of John's gospel that this is the record, verse 19, of that first of John. This is the record of John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, who art thou? He confessed and denied not, but confessed, I am not the Christ.

They asked him, what then? Art thou Elias? Elijah? He said, I am not. Art thou that prophet, they said? He answered, no. That was pretty frustrating, wasn't it? They were sent to get some copy for a big write-up.

And insisting upon knowing who he was, he insisted on telling them only who he wasn't. And finally, in sheer frustration, they said to him, who art thou, that we may give an answer to them that sent us? What sayest thou of thyself? And John the Baptist said this, I am a voice. That's all.

Sent from God. I am a voice. The voice of one crying in the wilderness.

Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Isaiah. Behold, the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. And having introduced his Lord, he bowed himself out, having bowed him in.

Again the next day, after John stood, verse 35, tells us, and two of his disciples, and looking upon Jesus as he walked. For that was the direction of his gaze at all times. As he walked, he looked on Jesus.

And those who followed him because they could not help but respect the quality of the life that he lived, and longed to know the secret, the authorship of that quality of living, they followed his gaze. Looking upon Jesus as he walked, he said, behold, the Lamb of God. And the two disciples, verse 37, were told, heard him speak, and followed Jesus.

That's the stamp of divine authorship in a man's ministry. They heard him speak, but they followed Jesus. And when John looked round, he'd lost his congregation.

And nothing delighted him more. And as they left John and followed Jesus, Jesus turned and spoke himself, and confirmed the word. And we are told they abode with him that day.

What a wonderful thing. What happened to John's ministry? When at the behest of an evil adulterous woman with whom King Herod was living in sin, and at the request of her daughter when half drunken, in utter irresponsibility, he ordered the execution of John the Baptist that his head might be brought in on a platter. What happened to John's ministry? Do you know what it says? In the tenth chapter of John's gospel, therefore, verse 39, they sought again to take the Lord Jesus, but he escaped out of their hand.

And he went away again beyond Jordan into the place where John, John the Baptist, at first baptized, and there the Lord Jesus abode. And listen, verse 41, and many resorted unto him and said, John did no miracle. Nothing miraculous about John, nothing particularly sensational about John, but all things that John spake of this man were true.

And many believed on him there. And long after his head had been cut off and brought before the king on a platter, his ministry blossomed. Everything he said of Jesus was true.

A man sent from God, divinely sent. Quickly glance. In the thirteenth chapter of the book of the Acts, there were in the church that was at Antioch, chapter 13 and verse 1, certain prophets and teachers as Barnabas and Simeon was called Niger.

He was called Niger because he was a colored man. And Lucius of Cyrene and Menaen, which had been brought up with Herod the Tetrarch and Saul. And as they ministered to the Lord, a word that actually more strictly translated simply means they worshipped.

They gathered around the Lord Jesus and recognized his absolute right to exercise total lordship as head of the body. They worshipped him. They said, Lord Jesus, we thank you for the fantastic privilege of making ourselves available to you, our flesh and blood to clothe your divine activity.

We know that we're not called upon to go into committee and promote on your behalf and do what we think is best in our eyes, in your interests. We recognize that we've been given the privilege of being that humanity with which you're going to clothe your divine activity. They worshipped and they fasted.

And the Holy Ghost said, separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I, the Holy Ghost, not the candidates committee, not the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I, God the Holy Ghost, have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

So they, verse four, being sent. By whom? They being sent forth by the Holy Ghost. Departed in the Seleucian, from thence they sailed to Cyprus.

And the story tells us of the fantastic things that were accomplished by the Lord Jesus as God by them. As once the Father had accomplished so much as God by Him, who is our Savior and our Lord. Sealed by the Holy Ghost, the daily manner sent by the Holy Ghost.

And God said to Moses, in the 17th chapter of the book of Numbers, where we were just now, Numbers 17 and verse 10, the Lord said to Moses, bring Aaron's rod again before the testimony to be kept for a token against rebels. Put it in the ark. Let any man dare henceforth embark upon some Christian ministry without being sent by the Holy Spirit.

Trying to be man-sized for God. Hopelessly too small. Instead of letting God be God-sized in a man.

The only one who's big enough. God Himself for the job. Well, we've taken the lid off, we've looked in the ark, and there's the manna in the golden pot, sealed by the Holy Spirit.

There's Aaron's rod that budded, sent by the Holy Spirit. A ministry from which you can detach the man, and it will go on blossoming and bearing fruit long after he's dead and buried. What was the last thing in the ark? Deuteronomy chapter 10.

10th chapter of the book of Deuteronomy. And I'm watching the time, you'll be back for the evening service, and you might get a meal in between. Deuteronomy in chapter 10.

At that time, verse 1, Deuteronomy 10 verse 1, at that time the Lord said to me, hew thee two tables of stone like unto the first, and come up unto me into the mountain, make thee an ark of wood, and I will write on the tables the words that were in the first tables which thou breakest, and thou shalt put them in the ark. For the first tables of stone as we have seen in the hands of Moses were cast at his feet to be shattered into fragments, as this rebellious people who were holy enough by their own standards, danced around their golden car, and sought a captain who would lead them not on and in to the land of Canaan, but back and out of God's plan into Egypt. God said, take two more tables of stone, and I will rewrite what there was shattered.

And he wrote on the tables according to the first writing, verse 4, the 10 commandment, which the Lord spake unto you in the mount out of the midst of the fire in the day of the assembly, and the Lord gave them unto me, said Moses, for the commandments that men break are commandments that are as immutable and timeless and unchangeable as God himself. Because God never changes, and sin is still sin. The transgression of his law, and holiness, righteousness, is still that which is the characteristic of a timeless God.

And I turned myself, and I came down from the mount, says Moses, verse 5, and I put the tables in the ark which I had made, and there they be as the Lord commanded me. Tables of stone rewritten with the finger of God. What does that tell us? Well it tells us, if you very quickly turn to the 8th chapter of Romans, that the redemptive work of Jesus Christ was designed not simply to change your destination, it was calculated to change your character.

For the whole purpose that we've seen, the whole purpose which Jesus died and shed his blood, was not just to get you out of hell and into heaven, but supremely to get God out of heaven into men, that you might become the recipient of the Holy Spirit, that he, from within the human spirit, might have the right with your consent to invade your soul, put the old Adamic nature where it belongs on the cross, and recapture your mind, recapture your emotions, recapture your will, that by your will once more God, by the Holy Spirit, might govern your behavior. The restoration of the life of God to the soul of man that is absolutely inseparable from the likeness of God in the character of man. And whom he did foreknow, then he did predestinate that they might be conformed to the image of God's Son.

God's purpose in redemption is not to make sure that you escape the punitive consequence of your guilt. Jesus Christ is not just a doormat on whom you can walk, wipe your feet, and walk into heaven. Jesus Christ is the one who is the unblemished lamb, through his death paid the price of your redemption, that being reconciled to a holy God, your humanity might once more become available to the God creator who made you man, his creature, to be inhabited by that God, so that all that he is might be demonstrated in terms of what you do and say and are, and what that law could not do.

Through the weakness of the flesh, because you and I are born as the fallen seed of a fallen Adam, spiritually destitute, dead in trespasses and sins, with our souls invaded by a sin principle of satanic origin that can only prostitute and abuse and misuse our humanity, what the law could not do, through the weakness of the flesh, God sending his own Son, and in the likeness of sinful flesh, enforcing, condemning sin in his flesh, that, that what, verse 4, Romans 8, that, that, the righteousness of the law, the same righteousness, God's righteousness, that law first shattered at the feet of Moses, but rewritten, rewritten, exactly as it was first written by the finger of God, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, holy enough by our own standards, but who walk now, how? After the Spirit, allowing the Holy Spirit to reestablish the sovereignty of Jesus Christ and credit us with his resurrection life, that the righteousness demanded by the law, the minimal requirement of a holy God of man, made in his likeness, might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, that can't, but who've learned to admit our own bankruptcy and appropriate his adequacy, to walk after the Spirit, who can, sealed, sent, and sanctified. Sanctification simply means that you're willing, as a forgiven sinner, to present your body now, once more, a living sacrifice, wholly acceptable unto God, it's your reasonable service, so that the Lord Jesus, by his Holy Spirit as your creator, might occupy that humanity and reveal his character by the things that you do and you say and you are, and that will demand of you repentance and faith, repentance that says, I can't, you never said I could, for the flesh profiteth nothing, but you can, and you always said you would. Thanks for the Holy Spirit, Lord Jesus, through whom I'm going to share

your life, your peace, your joy, your purity, your wisdom, your likeness, sealed, sent, and sanctified.

That's what you find when you take the lid off and look inside, of the ark of that covenant, made real in your experience, by the Holy Spirit of promise, whom we receive on God's terms of reference, redemption, the mercy seed, sprinkled with blood. All right, we're nearly through, but not quite, where was the ark? In the house of Abinadab, for Israel in their apostasy had taken it out of context. It was no longer in the holiest of all, it was no longer related to the one from whom all its content must derive.

They had brought it into the camp in their discomfort and said, let it save us, and God refused to honor it, which they had substituted for him. And holy as it may have been, divinely authored as it was, legitimate in its context. The moment it took the place of him, it became the object of their idolatry.

Just as the moment any blessing in your life takes the place of the blesser, any one of the spiritual gifts takes the place of the giver, your ministry takes the place of the one who sent you into that ministry, the moment your church takes the place of Christ, it becomes the object of your idolatry. In the house of Abinadab. But God laid it upon the heart of a man, King David, to get the ark back where it belonged.

And this is the exciting conclusion of the story. Would you turn back to where we began on Friday night? 1 Chronicles 13, 1 Chronicles 13, David consulted with the captains of thousands and hundreds and with every leader, and David said unto all the congregation of Israel, if it seem good unto you and that it be of the Lord our God, let us send abroad unto our brethren everywhere that they are left in the land of Israel, and with them also to the priests and the Levites, which are in their cities and suburbs, that they may gather themselves unto us. And when we've got all the people mobilized, let us bring back, verse 3, let us bring back again the ark of our God to us, for it's out of context.

Let us get it back where it belongs, and let us get back to where we belong. To him, our God. And all the congregation said that they would do so, for the thing was right in the eyes of the Lord.

And verse 7 tells us they carried the ark of God in a new cart out of the house of Abinadab. And Uzzah and Ahio drove the cart. And David and all Israel played before God with all their might, with singing, with harps, with psalteries, and with timbrels, and with cymbals, and with trumpets.

There was a great festival of light. And everybody played their instruments, and everybody sang, and everybody was on the crest of the wave. Everybody was highly excited.

Everybody was totally dedicated to the cause. Everybody was on the bandwagon as they led the ark of God on a brand new cart. So where did they get that idea from? A brand new cart.

We don't have time to turn back, but if you care later, to turn back to the fourth chapter of the first book of Samuel, where the ark was captured by the Philistines, and it being honored by God, because they identified it, the Philistines, with him, God, and their God Dagon had a bad time, and they were smitten with emeralds. They said, we've got to get rid of this thing, this is hot booty. Let's get it off our hands.

And they called their wise men, and the fifth chapter of 1 Samuel says, they said, get brand new carts, take a couple of cows, separate them from their new calves, and harness the two cows separated from their new calves to the cart, and though it be by natural instinct that the cow would go back to its young in the stall, if those cows separated from their young take this cart back to the Israelites, then we know it's their God that's done this thing. And two cows separated from their young, contrary to all normal instinctive thrust, took that brand new cart, with the ark of God upon it, back into the camp of the Israelites. And it

was kept in the house of Abinadab for all those twenty years.

Where did they get the idea of a brand new cart? The Philistines. In all their enthusiasm, they said, if the Philistines can produce a brand new cart, we can produce a brand new cart. For in times of spiritual decline, what happens? The church copies the world.

Only in times of spiritual ascension, when the winds of God are blowing, does the world begin to copy the church. You know now which way the wind is blowing. And when they came to the threshing floor of Chidon, Uzzah put forth his hand to hold the ark, for the oxen stumbled, and the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah, and he smote him because he put his hand to the ark, and there he died before God.

And their singing was frozen on their lips, and all their musical instruments were silenced, and there was a solemn hush came upon that great mass of people, mobilized for God. God had answered them with death. Death.

When they dedicated, when they were enthusiastic, didn't they want to do the right thing? Oh yes. And God answered them with death. And David was afraid, verse 12.

David was afraid of God that day. What does the Bible say about the fear of God? It is the beginning of wisdom. One of the tragedies today, when there are so many young folk highly enthusiastic about the Lord Jesus, is that there is very little fear of God.

Jesus has been turned into a sort of pop festival artist. He's a playboy. The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom.

And David said, how shall I bring the ark of God home to me? I've done my best. I've mobilized these people. They're on my side.

They're on God's side. They stand with me, shoulder to shoulder, and I've done my best. That was his problem.

He did his best. And God answered him with death. And for three months, we're told, for three months, he left the ark of God in the house of Obed-Edom.

But in the 15th chapter you read, David made him houses in the city of David, verse 1, and prepared a place for the ark of God and pitched for it a tent. And David said, none ought to carry the ark of God but the Levites. For them hath the Lord chosen to carry the ark of God and to minister unto him forever.

And David gathered all Israel together to Jerusalem to bring up the ark of the Lord unto his place which he had prepared for it. Three months later, he was prepared to try again to do what he had failed to do three months before. Why? What's David been doing in the fear of God for the past three months? You know what he's been doing? Reading his Bible.

Reading his Bible. Because the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. And revelation comes from the word of God.

He didn't pick little titbits out of the New Testament. He didn't have one. He read the Old Testament.

And calling for the priests, he said in verse 12, you are the chief of the fathers of the Levites. Sanctify yourselves, verse 12, both you and your brethren, that you may bring up the ark of the Lord God of Israel unto the place that I have prepared for it. Because, he says for, because, verse 13, because you did it not at the first, the Lord our God made a breach upon us, for that we sought him.

No doubt about that. We sought him. We were highly enthusiastic.

We were singing and shouting. We were all high. Which is uninspired of divine revelations.

Be in a hurry for God and you'll do everything in ignorance. Moses found that out when he murdered the Egyptian and went into oblivion for 40 years. Abraham found that out when he produced Ishmael.

And a hundred million Arabs, that's why there's an oil shortage. Right now. In your enthusiasm, be in a hurry for God and you'll burn your fingers.

Because you did it not at the first, verse 13, the Lord our God made a breach upon us, for that we sought him not after the due order. How did he find that out? He read his Bible. So the priests and the Levites sanctified themselves to bring up the ark of the Lord God of Israel.

And the children of the Levites bear the ark of God upon their shoulders, not a brand new cart they copied from the world, but they bear the ark of God upon their shoulders with the staves they're on, as Moses commanded according to the word of the Lord. He'd been reading his Bible and he discovered not what he should do as his bed for God, he discovered what God demanded in obedience to his word. They bear the ark of God upon their shoulders with the staves they're on as Moses commanded.

Very quickly, Numbers chapter 7. Number 7. And follow me quickly, this is quite exciting. It is another stamp of the divine authorship of this book. After at God's instructions Moses had completed the tabernacle they celebrated.

And the princes of Israel, verse 3 of chapter 7 in the book of Numbers, chapter 7 verse 3, brought their offering before the Lord, six covered wagons, twelve oxen, a wagon for two of the princes and each one an ox. In other words, they went halves on the wagons, two princes, one wagon, but they each brought an ox. So there were twelve oxen and six brand new carts.

And they brought them to celebrate the completion of the tabernacle. And the Lord spake to Moses saying, verse 5, take it of them that they may be to do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation and thou shalt give unto them the Levites to every man according to his service. So Moses took the wagons and the oxen and gave them to the Levites.

Now Levi had three sons. The name of the one was Gershon, the name of the other was Merari, and the name of the other was Kohath. Gershon, Merari, and Kohath.

And each of those three sons of Levi had certain responsibilities. So Moses says we'll divide the wagons and the oxen amongst the three sons of Levi. Well are you good at mental arithmetic? Twelve oxen, six carts, and three sons.

How many carts would you give to each son? And how many oxen? Twelve oxen, six carts, to be divided amongst three men. Well we'll see how good Moses was at mental arithmetic. Maybe he worked it out in a piece of paper.

Verse 7, two wagons and four oxen he gave to the sons of Gershon according to their service. Right or wrong? Ten out of ten. Four oxen, one third of the twelve, and two carts.

And four wagons, verse 8, and eight oxen he gave to Merari. But nine to the sons of Kohath he gave? None. No carts for Kohath.

Because the service of the sanctuary belonging to them was that they should bear upon their shoulders. Numbers chapter 4, the Lord spake to Moses and to Aaron, verse 1 of chapter 4, take the sum of the sons of Kohath from among the sons of Levi after their families by the house of their fathers. This, verse 4, shall be the service of the sons of Kohath in the tabernacle of the congregation about the most holy things.

Read of it further in the 15th verse when Aaron and his sons have made an end of covering the sanctuary and all the vessels of the sanctuary as the camp is to set forward when you're about to holy place. They shall not touch any holy thing lest they die. These things are the burden of the sons of Kohath and they are to be borne upon their shoulders.

Verse 3, which I deliberately omitted. From thirty years old and upward even until fifty years old. Not less than thirty.

Not more than fifty. Does that remind you of anything? Who began his public ministry at the age of thirty? Jesus Christ. When he said to the scribes and the Pharisees before Abraham was, I am.

They said, you say you've seen Abraham? And you're not yet, 8th chapter of John, not yet fifty. Not less than thirty, not more than fifty. Of the sons of Kohath to bear the ark upon their shoulders.

That which represents God's provision to a guilty people beneath the mercy seat sprinkled with blood. Last reference then we're through. Exodus 25.

Exodus 25. They shall make an ark of shittim wood, verse 10. Thou shalt cast, verse 4, four rings of gold for it.

Thou shalt put them in the four corners thereof. Two rings shall be in the one side of it and two rings in the other side of it. So there's the ark of shittim wood, a ring of gold here and a ring of gold here.

Two on this side, two on that side. And thou shalt put the staves, verse 14, two pieces of wood into the rings by the sides of the ark, that the ark may be born within. The staves shall be in the rings of the ark and they shall not be taken from it.

And thou shalt put into the ark the testimony which I will give you. Manna in a golden pot, errands robbed at body, and the tables of stone rewritten. And all that is to be carried, supported by two pieces of wood, threaded through two rings on either side.

These two pieces would never ever to be detached from the ark and born on the shoulders of men, not less than thirty, not more than fifty. And nearly two thousand years ago, a man, God's incarnate son, bore on his shoulders two pieces of wood and was led to the hill called Calvary. And there on those two pieces of wood that he bore upon his own two shoulders, he was a great man, whose blood sprinkles the mercy seeds, that he might bring to you that covenant of God to a rebellious people that provides redemption through his atoning death and the restoration by the gift of God the Holy Spirit of that life that was lost in Adam, that you and I might be sealed and sanctified.

That sealed and sanctified at his behest we might be sent. No cart for Kohath, neither men nor means nor money, no matter how mobilized, can ever take the place. In God's estimation of that man, not less than thirty, not more than fifty, who bore two pieces of wood upon his shoulders.

That's how David got the ark back where it belonged and a people back to their God. Jesus Christ, once crucified, whose cross can never ever be detached from our salvation, but who risen from the dead, shares his life with us by his Holy Spirit. Simple isn't it? Could I ask you in conclusion a very simple question? If the ark represents God's covenant and its content that divine substance of your faith, Jesus, alive, sharing by his Spirit that life with you, is the ark in your life, in its true context, is that man not less than thirty, not more than fifty? In the place of preeminence, is it to him or to it that you look? Let's pray.

If you've never claimed redemption through the shed blood of God's dear Son, all history is against you. The whole testimony of God's word from beginning to end is against you. All deity is against you.

God has spoken and the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. Because it's only then that we give him time enough to talk to us long enough, so that at last we know enough. Why not capitulate to the claims of Jesus Christ and say, thanks, I'm one of the sinners, you died to save.

And then settle for nothing less than to live in the land of that fantastic plenitude, the fullness of his Spirit. The land where God has laid his table for a people sealed, sent and sanctified.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/32/SID32257.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/major-ian-thomas/substituted-standards/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net