

# (Keswick) 1959, Ministry From 2 Timothy - Part 3

by Paul S. Rees

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*Paul S. Rees emphasizes the central role of Jesus Christ in the believer's identity, sanctity, and effectiveness in ministry.*

**Duration:** 34:20

**Scripture:** Isaiah 54:2-3, Matthew 6:33, John 20:29, Romans 8:1, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Revelation 1:9

**Topics:** "Keswick Convention"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on the impact of William Carey, a shoe cobbler in England who became a missionary in India. Carey was deeply moved by the lack of foreign missionary societies in England and preached a sermon urging Christians to do great things for God. The speaker emphasizes the importance of Jesus Christ at the center of our energy, testimony, militancy, and identity. He encourages believers to live in the realization that Christ lives in them and to present themselves to Him moment by moment.

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## Transcript

Again, by way of review, running through the chapter with more or less thoroughness, we found, first of all, that at the center of all of our energy is Jesus Christ. We are to be strong in Him and in His grace, and aside from Him we are utterly weak and feeble. At the center of all our testimony is Jesus Christ, the witness that we bear to the world and which we are constantly to be sharing with our fellow Christians that they may be effective witnesses, even to the point of training them for witness.

The center of all this is Jesus Christ. Then we discovered that at the center of all of our militancy is Jesus Christ, that we are to be good soldiers in His army and under His captaincy, not shunning whatever cost there may be in fighting this good fight of faith. Then at the center of all of our identity is Jesus Christ, and there is where the hour closed in on us yesterday afternoon.

Now let me return to that for just a moment, because I barely had time to touch upon it. In verse 11, the Holy Spirit through Paul says, If we have died with Him, we believers, if we have died with Christ, we shall also live with Him. If we endure, or if we suffer as the authorizer says it, if we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him.

Language that recalls to any student of the New Testament the words of Saint Paul in his letter to the Colossians in the third chapter, where you remember he says, If ye then be risen with Christ, that is, in union with Christ, in identification with Christ, if ye be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and, and here comes the paradox of it, ye are dead and your life, the life which springs from death.

As you are identified with Christ in crucifixion, in death, so you are identified with Christ in resurrection power and vitality and victory, and your life is hid with Christ in God. And then, Paul adds, you remember, when Christ, who is our life, not who shall be our life, but who is our life here and now, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him. And when He appears, we shall also appear with Him in glory.

Now, here is something that is not what we might call a side issue with Paul in his teaching. One of our great writing preachers of the day is Professor James Stewart of Scotland, who has an earlier book, by no means as well known in this country as it deserves to be, not as well known among our American ministers as his later books, such as Heralds of God, or the Gates of New Life, or A Faith to Proclaim. But in an earlier book of his, he wrote under the title, A Man in Christ.

Now, it's a study in the life and teaching of St. Paul, and it is based upon the fact, the thesis, shall we say, as Professor Stewart views it, that the most distinctive thing in the whole ministry of Paul was his teaching concerning identification with Christ. One hundred and sixty-eight times Paul speaks about our being in Christ. Now, that is not a mere figure of speech.

That is not simply a verbal phrase. This is something that is to become utterly meaningful. So meaningful that the power of it, the vitality of it, the relevance of it, the reality of it, become part of us.

And we live, as Paul did, in the realization that it is Christ in us, living his life through us, as we present ourselves moment by moment unto him. Now, this matter of Christ being at the center of our identity, I think deserves the kind of illumination that an illustration may give to it. Some five years ago, when the Haringey meetings were on in London, it was my very great privilege and responsibility to be speaking time after time in one of the subsidiary services of the crusade, namely the afternoon Bible study that we have in Westminster Chapel down in the heart of London, where Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones is the beloved and distinguished minister.

And one afternoon, at the close of the Bible study, Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones and I were walking from the worship room back to his vestry, and as we moved slowly along, he said, my dear brother, you may be interested to know that you had a leader in America some years ago whose writings have had a profound influence upon my thinking and upon my life. He said his name was A. B. Simpson. And instantly I said, well, that is more than a little interesting to me, because my father knew Dr. Simpson, and for a period of years was associated with him in work in New England and in New York City.

And I said I inherited practically everything that Dr. Simpson ever wrote from my father in his passing on to be with the Lord. Now, Dr. Simpson, as many of you will know, Dr. Simpson never came to the place in his life as a Christian and as a minister where he had this distinctive message concerning identification with Christ until he had passed through a profound crisis in his own life. And that didn't come, as is the case with many of us, in the last years, a very futile and frustrating struggle.

He was a Presbyterian minister, he was a pastor, he was working with might and name to make the Church go, as we so often say, and it wasn't going. And it wasn't going, as he discovered, partly because he wasn't going, which is a discovery however painful that many ministers ought to make. And he said one day in a period of very great spiritual frustration and disheartenment, he was sitting in his study, and he glanced up at a shelf of books, and suddenly his eye lighted on a volume that he'd had for some time, but had never read.

The title of it was *The Higher Christian Life*. And instantly there came to him the impulse to take down that book and read it, which he did. And he began to read, and he read, and he read.

And as he did so, great shafts of light from God's Word and God's Spirit came into his own soul. Life concerning his problem, his real problem, which so often is not what we think it is. Sometimes we think our problems as ministers are with our elders or our deacons, and they're not at all, they're with ourselves.

And we'd be quite amazed at how the problem with the Church board would clear up if we got right. If we ourselves knew the secret of Christlikeness and of getting on with other people, even though they may sometimes be rather awkward. And shafts of light came also upon what Jesus Christ proposes to be to those who put their trust in him.

And he said, I read until I could read no longer. And he fell on his knees. And in that hour of discovery, this was what happened.

He said, there came across the threshold of my being, the person who was just as real as the one who appeared to John on the Isle of Patmos. And I saw that he who had justified me freely was waiting to sanctify me wholly and to substitute his power for my weakness, his holiness for my sin. And afterward, said Dr. Simpson, and this testimony was recorded and is a matter of record, long years afterwards, he said, whatever God has allowed me to be in forty years of private, witness, and public ministry, I owe it to the fact that there came this day when, defeated in many things and mistaken in much, I saw that all is in Jesus Christ.

Now this is the point to which God is seeking to bring some of us, not where we go off after some strange experience and tag it, label it, in this way or that or the other, but where we discover that it's already there in our Savior for us. And as I said yesterday afternoon, when he died, he identified himself with us. He took love's initiative.

He took not only my guilt, but he took my self, my failure, my corruption, my futility. He took every bit of it in order that I, identifying myself in all my unworthiness with him, might have his righteousness and his holiness and his love and his patience and his power released in this unworthy life of mine. Now when this comes to us, as it did to Dr. Simpson, as it has done to countless others, in every communion of the Church of Jesus Christ, and I thank God for that fact because that's the thing that ought to save us from fancying that this is the particular preoccupation of some denomination or the fad of some eccentrics.

God save us from that. This is part of the heritage of the Church of Jesus Christ, and this is what we ought to recognize as belonging to the total revelation that we have in our Lord in the New Testament. Now do you, this afternoon, I ask my dear friends here in the congregation and my friends whom I cannot see but may be listening out there somewhere, I ask you, have you come to the realization in terms of your own experience, your own relief from fear and failure and defeat and bitterness, have you come to the realization that you are to give up your very right to that old self which is bitter and jealous and fearful and

unforgiving? That's to go.

And the new identity is to be that which Paul confesses in Galatians 2.20, not I but Christ who liveth in me. Now that brings us to the final consideration in this study here in the second chapter, and that is that the center of all our sanctity is Jesus Christ. You notice that in our lesson this afternoon we have a bit of teaching that I think is full of profit for those of us who will receive it.

I refer to what Paul says concerning the great house. In verse 20, in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and earthenware, and some for noble use and some for ignoble. If anyone purifies himself from what is ignoble, then he will be a vessel for noble use, consecrated and useful to the master of the house, ready for any good work.

Now, there are two or three things that I should like to try to establish here, one of which I may not succeed in doing because admittedly there is a problem in interpretation. And if the suggested interpretation is not approved by you, very well, you've got a right to your view of the matter. But quite frankly, what Paul means by these vessels in the great house will depend a little bit on what you regard as the antecedent of the word these, if a man purifies himself from these, as the authorized version has it.

Now, the most obvious interpretation is that the antecedent of these will be the vessels that seem to be inferior, wood and earthenware, as distinguished from those that are gold and silver. Now, that is obviously the view of the translators of the authorized version. It is at the same time the view that I should like to reject.

I prefer, rather, the view of those expositors who believe that the real antecedent of these is the reference that he has made earlier, specifically in verse 17, to Hymenaeus and Philetus, who were guilty of error and the spreading of error concerning the resurrection, teaching that the resurrection is past already. They represent false teachings within the Church of Jesus Christ. And that what Paul is referring to is separation from anything that contaminates, no matter what may be its form, whether it's primarily theological or primarily ethical and practical, that there must be, if Christ is to be the center of everything in our lives, and if we are to be identified with him who is made unto us wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, there must be this separation from every soiling thing.

Now, if that is a correct interpretation, then we are left with the problem of determining what Paul means by this breakdown of vessels in the category such as gold and silver and wood and earthenware, concerning which vessels he says some are for noble and some are for ignoble use. Now, the word that is translated ignoble, here in the Revised Standard Version, may be given that term in translation, a word that carries that overtone, or it may not be. The original word may be translated less harshly than that, some for lofty and some for lowly use.

It is a legitimate rendering of the Greek. That is to say, as I view it, what Paul is talking about here in this separation of vessels in the way in which he does classify them, what he is talking about here is a fact we ought to recognize in the Church, namely, that there are those that are endowed with very extraordinary gifts. Now, if I'm correct so far in this suggested interpretation, what I want you to see carries with it, my dear friends, a very solemn application.

Listen. For all you and I know, Hymenaeus and Philetus may have been brilliantly endowed. I should think it would be a very fair inference to say that they were.

They were designed, had they followed the purpose and pleasure of God, to be vessels unto honor, that is, to high influential use. But they took their brilliant gifts scintillating like a diamond and handed them over to the service of error, and became a corrupting and a contaminating influence in the Church. Now, says Paul, no matter what place God has given you, what kind of vessel you are, whether occupying a very lowly place or a very lofty place, the thing that God is concerned about is the cleanliness of the vessel.

A few weeks ago I was in the south of England, Brighton, and our friends took Mrs. Reese and me through a palace they have down there, which was once, generations ago, used by the Georges, back in the days when our colonies broke away from the mother country. A fascinating place to Mrs. Reese, I think, even more than me, because of all of the infinite variety of household effects that were there in this palace. This colossal dining room, gold and silver and crystal, everything just scintillating.

And then we were permitted to walk back in the kitchen, and here were vessels of wood and pewter and iron. Nobody saw them when the king would throw a party, have a big banquet. What the people saw were the crystal and the gold and the silver vessels.

But they couldn't have had this out here if it hadn't been for the pewter and the iron back in the kitchen. This was for very lofty use. Out here in the kitchen the vessels were for very humble and unnoticed use, but very necessary, indispensable.

Again, I say the thing that Paul is really precious is the cleanliness of the vessel. Now, I like Phillips here because Phillips evidently has realized the problem in the Greek, and while one doesn't quote Phillips for the purpose of establishing the accuracy or necessarily the complete integrity of the Greek, nevertheless it is suggestive that Phillips does what he does with this passage when he says, in any big household there are naturally not only gold and silver vessels, but wooden and earthenware ones as well. I like that rendering of it.

Some are used for the highest purposes, some for the lowest. If a man keeps himself clean from the contaminations of evil, he will be a vessel used for honorable purposes, clean and serviceable for the use of the master. I don't see how you and I can escape, if we're really going to face up to the truth of the New Testament, how we can escape this connection in the Christian order of realities between the believer's purity and the believer's utility.

Do I want to be of maximum use to my master? If I do, and God forgive me if I don't, if I want to be of maximum use for my master, then I must say the dearest idol I know, whate'er that idol be, help me to tear it from thy throne and worship only thee. That idol of pride, that idol of resentment, for some people nurse their resentment. They make a fancy that somehow they're getting it back at the persons who have injured them in reality or in imagination.

Sometimes it's the one and sometimes it's the other. The idol of my resentment, the idol of my fears, the idol of my jealousy, the idol of my inferiority. Inferiority is a very different thing from humility.

Humility is never an idol, that's a Christian virtue and grace. But inferiority may be an idol. God had to deal with it in Jeremiah.

When God called Jeremiah, he said, Jeremiah, I've called you. I've raised you up to be my prophet. And Jeremiah said, O Lord, I am but a child, ask me.

Remember what God said? He said, Say not I am a child, for to all whom thou shalt send I shall send thee, thou shalt go. Inferiority is this combination of fear and pride that prevents us from assuming responsibility. Inferiority says, Lord, excuse me, I can't, I can't, I can't.

Humility says, I can't, Lord, you know that, but if you say so, in your strength I'll do it. That's humility. We've made an idol of some of us out of our inferiority, and therefore our lives are barren.

A lacking in that sense of responsibility and the follow-through that belongs to responsibility which would contribute so richly to the Church of Jesus Christ and the evangelizing of the world for which he died, and adaptability as well as purity and utility. Not only do we read that he shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified and made meat for the master's use, but there is added the clause, and prepared unto every good work. You know, it's a beautiful thing that our Lord does when we make him the center of our sanctity, when it's not something put on, it's not simply sanctimoniousness, it's not an assumed piety, it's not a parasitical superiority over other Christians, it's just a losing of ourselves in him who is our holiness and our righteousness.

The beautiful thing that he does for us then, no matter what may be our primary vocation and function in the Church or in the world, this Savior, now known as my sanctifying Lord, has a way of making me fit in to any situation in which his providence may place me. Now, I don't mean by that that I will be necessarily as skillful in every situation as in another situation, but I mean by that that wherever he places us, there will be a reflection of his own likeness, his own loveliness, prepared unto every good work. And everything to which you and I set our hands in God's will is a good work.

I was in India the first two weeks of this year and was speaking in Cary Memorial Church, and was reminded again, as I am every time I go to India, of the absolutely astonishing thing that God did through that man, William Cary. Here he was, a shoe cobbler in England, just mending shoes and studying maps, listening to the Great Commission thundering through his soul, and all the while wondering why there wasn't a single foreign missionary society in England in his day. Not once getting so stirred up about it that he preached that now-famous sermon, Enlarge the place of thy tent, and stretch forth the curtains of thy habitation, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy state.

It was a two-point sermon. There was one man that didn't have a three-point sermon. His two-point sermon, Attempt great things for God, expect great things from God, poured out his soul in behalf of the pagan world without Christ.

Finished his sermon, pronounced the benediction, the people started out, just as they always do. If you're a member of a congregation and not a minister, I wonder if you know sometimes the ache in the heart of your pastor as he sees a congregation perhaps saying, well, he was stirred up today, wasn't he? Or perhaps saying, well, that was a good word today. Little Andrew Fuller, his friend, was down in the congregation.

Seeing the people piling out, Cary cried down, but Andrew, aren't we going to do something about it? As a result, they organized the first missionary society, and William Cary became the first missionary. Now, I've been to Serampore, just outside of Calcutta, as some of you have been, and I've seen with my own eyes the incredible results of his linguistic work. That shoe-cobbler learned twelve languages and dialects and could do something with more than a dozen more, and produced or helped to produce translation after translation.

Turned out to be a brilliant linguist. But on the other hand, I heard about a ninety-four-year-old lady who one day received a call from a seventy-two-year-old lady, and the seventy-two-year-old lady said, do you know me? And the ninety-four-year-old lady said, no, I don't. Who are you? And then she told her, she said, I was in your Sunday school class when you were a young lady, and one Christmas time you gave me a doll.

And I was a poor girl, and nobody cared anything about me, and the giving of that doll led me to Jesus, because I saw the love of Christ in the gift of that doll. And God gave me a family, and I led my children to Christ, and there in his service. The ninety-four-year-old lady couldn't have translated the Bible into one language, but she could give a doll prepared unto every good work, clean, uncontaminated, and utterly at the command of Jesus Christ, at the center of everything, Jesus Christ.

O God, our Father, command thy blessing upon these words, and thoughts, and meditations, and may we rise to the call and the claim of our wonderful Lord, in his name, amen.

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