

(Missions Conference Shoals) - Part 4

by Paul Washer

The sermon emphasizes the importance of true repentance and faith, warning against the dangers of spiritual blindness and deception, and calling listeners to test their faith and compare their lives to Scripture.

Duration: 1:14:20

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, 1 Corinthians 13:5, 2 Corinthians 13:5

Topics: "Assurance"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of listening to God's commandments and living a life of repentance. He compares the urgency of this message to a parent pleading with their child to avoid the same mistakes they made. The preacher highlights the discipline and breaking that he has experienced in his own walk with the Lord, and questions the authenticity of those who claim to know Christ but lack discipline and obedience. He warns that the world is passing away and urges listeners not to love the things of this world.

Transcript

Let's open up our Bibles to the book of Mark, chapter one. The book of Mark, chapter one. Again, it's a great privilege for me to be here with you.

It's a great privilege to participate in worship with you. And it is my prayer and my hope that God, our only hope. Will work among us this evening.

Before I read the text, let's go to the Lord in prayer. Father, every moment I live. I am more and more aware of my great need of your salvation.

My great need of Christ and father, here I am. I stand before you where angels fear to tread by the blood of your son, Jesus Christ. And I know that you hear me.

Father, the desire of my heart. And the desire of your servant, Jeff Knoblet, his heart. Is that you would do a work among us.

That would surpass us, that would go beyond everything we deserve. And everything of which we are capable. That you would do so, Lord.

For your own glory, for your own good pleasure. To vindicate your truth. And Lord, as I am here, I am aware.

That all men are dust. But Lord, we've said our hope in you and we have refused, Lord, using. Tools of manipulation.

Quaint stories, we have refused to romanticize the cross. We have refused to tickle ears. And with a great desire, we have desired to put forth your truth.

Lord, help us. Help us. Save lost and dying men and women and children this evening.

Save them from hell. Strengthen your people. And teach them, oh God.

In Jesus name, amen. Before I begin, let me put what I'm going to say in context. I want you to feel a little bit of the way I or any other preacher of scripture would feel before you tonight.

Here in this place, imagine yourself for a moment to be a medical doctor. And you know, through your training, you know, through the wisdom given you, that one of your dearest, most beloved patients has cancer, a deadly, deadly, deadly cancer that will consume his life in so short a period of time. Now, there is a cure.

But you also know in your heart. That he will not listen. You will use all your strength, all your planning, all your wisdom, all your intellect, you'll gather and amass together all the information, all the proof that you can so that when he comes into your office, you can put x-rays up to the light, you can show him tests, you can show him everything in your ability.

You work so hard to make him say, sir, if you do not at this moment have this operation required of the you will die. And yet he does not listen. Imagine a parent who has lived their life in the world and carry the scars from it, alcohol, drug abuse, all sorts of things.

But now they have children and they see their teenagers, who are far too wise in their own eyes and know nothing, begin to stray into the same dark world. And the parent pleads and pleads and begs the child. The parent does everything in their power to convince the child.

Listen to me, child. I have been there and I bear the scars of the very place you are going. And those scars will never be removed, not in this life.

And yet the child refuses to listen. So it is preaching in America, it is easier for me to preach in Europe, it is easier for me to preach in Africa, it is easier for me to preach in Asia, it is easier for me to preach in South America than it is for me to preach here. Because you have an inoculation that keeps me from you and keeps the gospel from you.

You have a deadly, deadly inoculation that has numbed you. So that you cannot feel the truth, you cannot sense the truth, you have been convinced that it is OK with you. You have cultural Christianity that deadens the heart and yet sends more men to hell than the most wicked brothel or tavern in this town.

And I beg you, I plead with you to listen, to listen to what is being said. You are the one, you are the one with the ailment, you are the one with the disease, you are the one with the sickness. You have just enough religion to damn you.

And you know it not, because as Paul warned the church in Corinth, you compare yourselves by yourselves and that is not wise. Most of the people sitting here tonight, at one time in your life, you repeated the sinner's prayer. You asked Jesus to come into your heart and then some preacher, who knew about as much of the Bible as you did, told you that was good enough.

And you've lived your life with no desire for God, no desire for holiness, no desire for serving him or anything of the sort. But you're OK. And if I were to knock on your door tomorrow and begin to witness to you, you would tell me, preacher, don't worry about me.

I'm OK. I already did that as though Jesus Christ were a flu shot. Some impersonal serum that you receive into your bloodstream that keeps you from hell.

And that is so wrong. Now, here in Mark chapter one, Jesus comes to Israel and in verse 15, he says, The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the gospel.

Repent and believe the gospel. Nowhere in the Scripture does it say, do you want to go to heaven? And if so, repeat this prayer after me. Nowhere, but all throughout Scripture, it says the way of salvation is through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, acknowledging our sin, acknowledging our need, acknowledging that there is absolutely nothing in us to merit heaven or reconciliation with God and throwing ourselves upon Christ.

You said, well, preacher, I did that. Well, if you only did that past tense, you didn't do it. This command here in the Greek is present tense imperative, and that's very, very important to a Greek scholar.

What Jesus is saying is this. The time is fulfilled. Look at some of you.

I see you. You're as nonchalant as though you were watching a movie and you don't know that your very destiny may be determined tonight and you may spend an eternity in hell while you sit back there in that comfortable pew and know not that God is reaching out to you. Be afraid.

Be very, very afraid. This is present tense imperative, what Jesus is saying, these commands, and this is what he is saying, he is saying this. The time is fulfilled.

The kingdom of God is at hand. Now spend the rest of your life repenting and believing the good news. You see so many people today in America, they say, well, I repented.

The question is, are you still repenting? Because if you are not still repenting, you didn't repent. Then because he who began a good work and you will finish it. Is your life marked by increasing knowledge of God's will and greater and greater brokenness over your disobedience? Are you growing daily in the knowledge of God, and is it leading you to a deeper spiritual life that humbles you more and more before God and causes you depend to depend more and more upon his grace? Because if not, be afraid.

And then I go and I visit houses and they say, I believed. Well, that's not really the question. The question is, are you still believing? Are you still hoping in Christ and Christ alone? So many people I talk to in America, the conversation will go something like this.

Do you believe in Jesus? Well, yes, I do. I believe in him. I trust in him.

If you died right now, would you go to heaven? Well, I believe so. Why? Well, I'm a good person and I try to do well and I go to church and I asked him to come into my life. Do you see? Do you not see that you've

contradicted yourself? You're either trusting in Christ and Christ alone or you're trusting in your own merit, your own goodness, your own religion.

But the true Christian, his life is marked by a continuous repentance and a growing repentance throughout all the days of his life. And his life is marked by increasing and increasing dependence upon the grace of God in Jesus Christ. So that when you reach that final day as an old man or old woman, you breathe your final breath.

You are more broken and more humble before God than when you began. And you are trusting more in Christ than you ever could have at the first. And that's what I want you to see before I go into our next part.

I have to cause you to see something. I served for many, many years in South America where so many people believed they were going to heaven, even though they were in the mafia, even though they were terrorists, even though they were prostitutes. They believed they were going to heaven because when they were infants, they were baptized.

And you say, well, I can't believe such a thing. Who would believe such a thing? And now I face the people in America who, although they be full of sin, full of worldliness, no passion for Christ, no desire for the things of God, they believe they're going to heaven. And why? Because one time in their life, probably when they were around eight or nine, they prayed a prayer that they repeated after somebody else.

And because the preacher wanted a big church, because the preacher wanted to report about how many people supposedly got saved and because the evangelist wanted bragging rights, the truth was not told. And the truth is this. I am a Southern Baptist and the great majority of Southern Baptists are lost.

And not only do I say that, but I could line up so many leaders behind me right now that would tell you lost, lost, lost. Lost, but not only lost, hardened, hardened, hardened. That they could sit under preaching such as this and not hear, that they could look at their own daily lives in the mirror and not see a Christian is not so.

I must not be Christian. And that's what we're going to talk about tonight. Now, I want us to go to Second Corinthians, chapter 13.

Second Corinthians, chapter 13. Now, before I read the verse, let me put forth another common occurrence in America today. Well, let me start by saying this.

How do you know that you're saved? You ever thought about that question? How do you know that you are a Christian? You say, well, in my heart of hearts, I know. Well, the Bible says that the heart is desperately, even deceitfully wicked. Do you really want to trust in your heart? You say, well, I know that I know that I know that I know I was there when it happened, I know.

The Bible says that the knowledge of man can be, well, quite bad, that there is a way that seems right unto men and it leads to death. How do you know that you're saved? Well, the answer is often given this way. Well, I know that I'm saved because I believe and everyone who truly believes has eternal life.

I know that I'm saved because I believe. OK, now let's take the question one step further. How do you know you believe? Because if I were to go into every bar right now in this city, in this county, in this state, I would dare say that over 95 percent of the people right there, right now, drinking, drunk and looking for sexually immoral relationships would tell me that they believe too.

So what makes you any different from them? What makes me any different from them? You see, this is the logic and that's the problem. They don't teach logic anymore. You see, this is the logic.

How do you know you're saved? Well, because I believe. But how do you know that you believe? I mean, after all, if so many people in this country today are saying they believe and we know that this is no longer a Christian country. Then somebody is deceived.

Now, that's not such a bad thing when it's somebody. But what if it's you? And even worse, as a father, I say this, what if it's your children? How do you know that you have saving faith? How do you know that it's just not a delusion and a lie? Well, usually when someone comes to a pastor in America and says, Pastor, I don't know whether or not I'm saved. You know what the pastor usually does? And you'll know this because it's probably happened to you sometime in your life.

The pastor will say, well, was there a point in time in your life when you prayed and asked Jesus to come into your heart? And the person will say, well, yes. Well, were you sincere when you did that? Well, I think so. Well, then you're saved and you need to stop worrying about it.

This is just the devil bothering you. Is that not the usual counsel in the Southern Baptist Convention in these modern times? Yes, it is. Yes, it is.

So now comes the question, is this biblical? No, not at all. It's not biblical. It is so hard.

It is so easy for us as Southern Baptists to look at the Pentecostals and say they're not biblical. It's so easy to point out the Lutherans and the Catholics and everyone else. But we cannot hear the words of our Lord when he says, Physician, heal thyself.

We have done a great injustice in our evangelism. Evangelism is not the key. Good evangelism is the key.

Biblical evangelism is the key. We're like machines. These churches today, just machines pump those little children into children's church.

Get them to say, you know, when I asked the ministers this one time, I said, you know, how do you deal with your children? They say, well, we ask, you know, I watch them. This is what they did. How many of you children want to go to heaven? Have you ever seen a little child raise their hand and say, no, I'd rather go to hell? How many of you little children want to go to heaven? Vacation Bible school, it's the same.

How many little children want to go to heaven? Oh, I do. I do. How many of you love Jesus? Oh, I do.

I do. Pray this prayer. If that is not heresy, nothing is.

And then what happens to all those little children when they hit about 15? They start rebelling against their parents. They start living in immorality. They could care less about the things of God.

They live in drunkenness and they do so much more than what their parents could ever believe of them because their parents are blind. And then hopefully sometime after a life of just absolute ungodliness, maybe when they're around 30, they rededicate their life because they realize they need a little religion. My dear friend, if I could bring the leaders, theologians and leaders and pastors and churchmen to stand behind me, I could fill this entire place with men who would say, Amen, this is what is happening.

And we have to be warned. How can we know that we are truly Christians? How can we know that we truly believe? Well, you have the church in Corinth, don't you? Many of them were living as Christians ought not live. So what did Paul, the apostle, do? Did he go to them and say, well, let me ask you a question.

Let's nail this down. Was there a point in time in your life when you prayed and received Jesus to come into your heart? No, he didn't do that, did he? Look what he did do in 1 Corinthians chapter 13, verse 5. 2 Corinthians chapter 13, verse 5, he says this, test yourselves. Now, notice present tense, test yourselves to see if you are in the faith, examine yourselves.

Or do you not recognize this about yourself that Jesus Christ is in you unless indeed you fail the test? He is warned by some of the behavior of some of the people professing Christ, identifying themselves with the church in Corinth. And he goes to them and says, you're not living like Christians. You need to test your lives, examine your lives in the light of Scripture to determine whether or not you truly are believers, because there are many of you here who are not.

We need to open up the Bible and find out what does the Bible say about what a Christian is, and we need to compare our lives to it. You know what a Christian is in America? Someone who prayed a prayer and asked Jesus to come to their heart. We have reduced the gospel of Jesus Christ down to a superstitious, popish prayer.

How can we examine our lives? My dear friend, that is what we are going to do tonight. I am not going to rant and rave. I am not going to entertain you.

I'm going to teach you. We are going to open up a book of the Bible that was specifically written so that you could compare your life to it and determine whether or not you're truly a Christian. And I pray that God will make you sensitive.

I pray that God will open up your eyes. There are some of you here who are genuine Christians. And when we go through this, the Word of God is going to testify to you that you truly are a believer and you're going to rejoice.

There are some of you here who are genuine Christians, but you struggle with assurance. You struggle with sin. You struggle with doubt and so many things.

I assure you, by the grace of God, if you will hearken unto these words that are going to be preached, you will walk out of here tonight so full of confidence in your salvation that you will be exploding with joy. And then there are some of you inoculated, fine people, but in your present state, you're nothing more than fodder for hell because you have enough religion maybe to make you reputable. You have enough church to console your conscience or maybe to sear it.

But you know not God. Now, before we begin on this journey, why am I saying these things so hard? Why do we build tombs for the prophets and yet we hate those who preach to us? I'm coming to you from a long line of preachers that used to be quite common 100 years ago. But not many of them are around today because we build churches on programs and slick presentations instead of the preaching of God's word, because we care more about our visions and our building programs than we do people here tonight.

I am not here to win you. I am here to preach to you that you might be one to Christ, that you might see your need for salvation, that you might repent and be saved. Enough of this foolishness, enough of playing games.

This is heaven and hell. This is eternity. This is the difference between being saved and being damned.

Let's turn to the Bible, to first John, first John, chapter five, first John, chapter five. John tells us why he is writing this book. He says, these things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.

John has written this letter to us so that by studying this letter, by reading this letter and comparing our lives to what this letter says, we will know with biblical assurance whether or not we're truly born again. That's the purpose of this letter. This letter was the cornerstone of counseling in the old days.

So what I plead with you now is that you will go with me through each test and pray, be in an attitude of prayer, even if you hate me, even if you're angry with me because of my words. Pray to God and say, oh, God, show me through these tests whether I truly know you or not. Chapter one, verse five, this is the message that we have heard from him and announced to you that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all.

Now, when it says God is light, it means two things. One of them is preached prominently today, but there are two very prominent truths here. First of all, God is light.

There is no immorality or sin, moral darkness or decadence in God. God is holy, holy, holy. God is just, just, just in him.

There is no deception. There is no sin. There is no lie.

But John also has another meaning here, a very important meaning in this verse he's given us. There was a group of false teachers, the beginnings of Gnosticism that entered into this church, and they were teaching that God was this dark, esoteric figure that you could not really know. You couldn't really know who God is and you couldn't really know what his will is.

Sounds like postmodernism today, doesn't it? Oh, there is a God. We just don't know who he is. And I'm sure he said something.

It's just no one's heard it. You know why that's so convenient? You know why it is so convenient to have a God out there that no one can understand and a will of God that no one has heard? You know why that is so convenient? Because then you can be your own God. Then you can do what you want and think you have an excuse, as long as media, as long as government can say there is a God, but you can't know him and say there is a right and wrong, but it can't be discerned.

Then every man is a God unto himself. Now, if you really want to play the game smartly, what you do is you say enough about God, but not too much, enough about his will, but not too much. That way you can go to church, but your life is never changed.

This God that no one really knows. This will that no one really has the right to preach. But John says, no, God is light.

And what he means by that is this. God has shown you who he is and God has shown you his will. And you are without excuse.

Now, when he says God is light, he's saying this, that God has revealed to you who he is and God has revealed to you his will. That's very important as we go on. Verse six, if we say that we have fellowship

with him.

Bypass the new commentaries, study the word, go to the old man. What does this mean? If we say we have fellowship with him, if we say we are Christians. If we say that we are born again, if we say that we are the people of God, if we say that we have eternal life, if we say that we are going to heaven, but we walk in darkness.

We live a style of life that contradicts everything God has told us about himself and contradicts everything he has revealed to us about his will. If we say we are Christians, but we live a style of life that contradicts what God has told us about who he is and what he desires, we lie. That's exactly what it says.

He says, and yet walks in the darkness. We lie and do not practice the truth. The phrase practice the truth is very big with John.

Why? Because he doesn't care about you feeling the truth and he doesn't care about you believing the truth, because the evidence of whether that's true or not, do you practice the truth? Because if you don't, your confession is a lie. Do you see that? That God's word would break through the wall of religion that may hold you captive, that inoculating shot that keeps you from God's spirit, that he would break through and show you what he's talking about here. When he uses the word walk, peripateo means to walk around, talking about a style of life, it's not teaching perfection here.

He's not saying that the only true Christians are those who are perfect, because none of us are perfect. What he's talking about is not sinless perfection, but a style of life. If I were to look at the life of a true Christian, would I find sin? Yes, I would find sin.

I'd find struggling with sin. I'd find brokenness. But if I compared their style of life with an unbeliever, I would see a tremendous difference.

And that's very difficult to say here in the South. Why? Why? Because there hardly are any unbelievers. Everybody's a believer.

So when you compare yourself to another person who calls themselves a believer, you're comparing yourself with yourself. And that is not wise. What the Bible says is a believer.

That is the example that you should hold up before yourself to determine, am I a Christian? Do does your style of life reflect that you know who God is? You know that he's holy. You know that he's just. You know that he hates wickedness and loves righteousness.

Does your style of life reflect that you know the true God of the Bible? And does your style of life reflect are you walking in what God has revealed to men through his word about his will? Are you walking in his will? Are you walking in a path of light? Could you take your life right now, sit down with me or some other counselor and say, I'm walking in the light and it means this. I'm following these commands. I'm seeking him in this way.

I'm seeking to conform my life to him in this way, this way, this way and this way. Or the only thing you can raise up for your defense is that you prayed a prayer one time and you go to church every once in a while on Sunday. Bubba tailgate Christianity that will send you straight to hell.

Now, he says, but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus. His son cleanses us from all sin who is cleansed from their sin by the blood of Jesus, the one who walks in the light. That doesn't mean they are saved because of the way they are walking, they are saved by faith, but the way they are walking demonstrates that they truly have faith.

Does your life demonstrate your faith or contradict it? It's a very important question. Now we go on the next test, verse eight, if we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. Now, what does that mean? The greatest evidence is gone.

Verse nine, if we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar and his word is not in us. What does it mean? It means this.

One of the greatest evidences of true conversion, one of the greatest evidences of Christianity, listen to me. One of the greatest evidences of Christianity is that when a true Christian sins, the Holy Spirit convicts them of their sin. God the Father may even discipline them for their sin.

He will bring them to repentance and he will bring them to confession because a true believer cannot hold on to his sin. And one of the greatest evidences that you are not born again, that you are not going to heaven and that hell will be your eternal abode is that you really don't have a problem with sin. It's your friend.

I ask believers this sometimes and the sad thing about it doesn't terrify them. They don't even know what I'm talking about. I ask them this question.

When was the last time you wept over your sin? When was the last time you were broken over your lack of conformity to Jesus Christ? Another question. If a brother or sister in Christ came up to you and rebuked you or the pastor came up to you and lovingly rebuked you about something in your life that was not in conformity to the will of God, would you get mad and leave the church? Because that's what most Christians would do. Or would you say, give me a time, pastor, give me a time, brother, sister, that I may meditate on these things.

Because if what you say is true, I want to let go of it. I want to repent. I want to be conformed to the image of Christ.

My wife is from Spain. When she came to America, the first thing she said to me, you know, is the first thing I noticed about Christians in America. I said, what? She goes, they are so thin skinned that no one can walk up to them and rebuke them.

And yet we consider that to be one of the principal ministries of our pastors and our elders. To walk up and personally rebuke us when we were not living right. But if a man does it here in America, he'll be fired.

Why is that? From the very beginning, have I not said the great majority of the church is lost? The great majority of people call themselves Christians are lost. You begin to approach them about their sin, and the first thing that's going to come out of their mouth is judge not lest you be judged. And they do not know that they're twisting that scripture all to pieces to make it say something Jesus never intended it to say.

My dear friend, a genuine Christian. Do you want to know? Perfect. Let me just give this to you.

I'll read it to you so you'll believe it's there. Let me give you what I consider one of the greatest descriptions of a Christian. But to this one I will look.

To him who is humble and contrite of spirit and who trembles at my word. Does that describe you? Do you tremble at God's word? When God's word speaks to you, are you contrite and humbled before it? Do you desire to repent? Do you desire to confess? Do you desire to be in the right way? Or do you just get angry? As I've said, I said last night I believe I did. That whenever there's a move of God in a church.

I've seen sometimes a move of God sweep through a church and people broken over their sins. It is always the same. The most godly, the most devoted, the most Christ-like people in the church are the ones who come forward weeping over their sins.

And the most ungodly, worldly, carnal people in the church are the ones that sit back there cold as a stone. They have felt nothing. And why have they felt nothing? Because they are not spiritually alive.

What is your relationship with sin? An unbeliever, he does not care about sin. He does not hope to discern sin in his life. If he sees sin in his life, it doesn't bother him.

It does not bring him to confession. He does not repent. But a true Christian is just the opposite.

When he hears of sin in his life, he's moved to contrition, to humility, to brokenness, to tears, to confession. People sometimes will tell me, I've got a new relationship with God. And I ask them, do you have a new relationship with sin? Because if you don't have a new relationship with sin, you don't have a new relationship with God.

If your relationship with sin has not changed, your relationship with God has not changed. As I read from Ezekiel last night, I think that most Christians here totally identifies with it. It says in Ezekiel that God will spend all the days of our lives cleansing us from our filthiness and destroying the idols in our lives.

I have walked with the Lord for almost 22 years. And I can testify that those 22 years have been 22 years of Him disciplining me and breaking me over my sin. And when I want to walk away, I can't.

And yet I see so many people claim to know Christ, and yet they're running around like a dog cut free from the rope, running in the yard wild. With no control, no discipline. Now, let's go on to the next test, the third one.

By this we know that we have come to know Him if we keep His commandments. My goodness. How simple.

How straightforward. The only way to take the blade off of this is to twist it. Just look at what He says.

By this we know that we have come to know Him if we keep His commandments. The logical opposite of that? If we do not keep His commandments, we can have no assurance that we ever came to know Him. And look, He goes further in verse 4. The one who says, I have come to know Him.

The one who says, Oh, oh, look at me. I've come to know Him. He's Lord.

He's my Savior. I asked Jesus to come into my heart. The one who says, I have come to know Him, but does not keep His commandments, is a liar.

So much for, well, you can't look inside my heart, you can't judge me. No one has to look inside your heart. Do you keep the commandments? Now, are we talking about absolute perfection here? Absolutely not.

We've already talked about that. That one of the greatest evidences that a person is a Christian is that they will acknowledge the sin in their life and struggle against it, repent and confess. Then what is He saying? He's going back to talking about a style of life.

Remember what I said last night? That last passage? Depart from me. I never knew you. You who claim to be my disciples and lived as though I never gave you a command to obey.

That's exactly what He's saying here. People who profess faith in Jesus Christ and yet live as though God never gave them a command about anything. As a matter of fact, not only do they not obey, they don't even know what the commands are.

American Christianity, the knowledge of it can be summed up in this. I know that I prayed a prayer. The Bible says that anyone that is truly born again, there is no need to teach them of God, for they will all be taught of God, by God.

And that they will be given to the commands of God. Are you given to His commands? An unbeliever prior to being converted, myself at the University of Texas, prior to being converted. What? I didn't care about the Bible.

I didn't care what it said. I didn't seek to know God's will from the Holy Writ. If I broke God's law, it was no big deal.

There was no feelings of a need for restoration or repentance or anything. I lived as a man who was without law. How many people today profess faith in Jesus Christ, and yet the Bible has nothing to do with their life? I mean, absolutely nothing.

I'm not talking about someone who has a quiet time, you know, four hours a day, every day of the week. No, I'm talking about people who come to church, Southern Baptists who come to church day in and day out, day in and day out, every Sunday, and yet the Bible throughout their daily lives has absolutely nothing to do with them. They do not know and they do not care to know what God has said, what He has commanded.

Do you see that? Am I talking about you? Are you a person who has a form of religion, but you deny the power thereof? You have a form of religion, but the commandments of God mean nothing to you. You've never looked in Scripture to figure out, to discern or know how God wants you to talk, what He said about your tongue. You've never looked in Scripture to know what He said about your heart.

You've never looked in Scripture to find out what He says you can look at and not look at. That's obvious by all the TV you watch. You've never looked in Scripture to understand how you're supposed to submit to His Lordship in your marriage.

You've never looked in Scripture to find out what He said about raising children. You've never looked in Scripture to find out what He said about how a church is supposed to be run. Isn't it amazing that throughout the entire New Testament, one of the foundational bedrock truths of the New Testament with regard to the church is the need to practice church discipline? And yet the moment that a man gets bold enough and brave enough to follow God in this area, a great majority of the people in the church leave.

Now isn't that amazing? It's just fulfilling God's Word. They went out from us because they were not of us. You say, how can you talk this way? Don't you see, somebody has to talk this way! I should preach like a dying man to dying men and preach as though I'll never preach again.

If this is not heaven and hell, if this is not judgment day or salvation, then I'm just going to quit and go back to the farm and be with my family. I can find a lot better ways of making a living than this. And I'm not going to preach just to hear myself speak or to tickle somebody's ears.

And why is it? Because I love you too much. I have little boys. When I saw those little children come up here, the only thing I could think of was my little boys.

And the only thing I could pray about was, oh God, that they might know the truth. It's the false prophet who uses you, tickles your ears, tells you stories and a joke, and then gives a punchline at the end. And since all the Southern Baptists had been trained very well, they all come forward and they accounted a great move of God.

But here we're talking about you. Dear lady, dear sir, dear young person, answer me, answer me, is it well with your soul? Is it well with your soul? I'd be careful not to laugh. Let's go on.

Verse 6 of chapter 2, another test. The one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked. Now you say, oh my goodness, if we take this literally, all of us are going to hell.

No! Begin to think again about a style of life. A style of life. The best way I can teach this verse is to give you an illustration from my childhood.

I was raised on a farm, horse ranch. And my father was from the old school. Every morning between 5 and 5.30 my father would come into my room, even as a tiny boy, and say, Paul boy, get up, no rest for the wicked.

It's the first verse I ever memorized. No rest for the wicked. And it was back in the days when it was still legal for parents to kill children.

So the moment he said, get up, they ought to bring that law back. The moment he said, get, you were up. And now my dad, I was afraid of him.

He was a big man. He was a strong man. He was smart.

He was all the things I wanted to be. I respected him, but I was afraid. But at the same time, I did respect him, and I wanted so much to be like him.

And when we would walk out in the morning to feed the horses, many times there was snow on the ground. My dad would put on his big boots, and I'd put on my little boots. And he'd take off walking across that snow.

Now the one thing that I desired more than anything else as a little boy was to be like my dad. And so I would stretch out as far as my stride would permit, and where he left a footprint in the snow, I would try to reach that footprint. And I'd walk across that barnyard in that way, stretched out, walking, stretching as far as I could.

Sometimes I would fall down. Someone from the outside looking in on me would have thought it rather ridiculous. I'm stretching out farther than I can go.

I'm trying to do something totally impossible. But, if they would have had a discerning heart, they would have known that the greatest desire of that little boy's heart was to put his foot where his father's foot had been, to walk in the footsteps of his father. If I look at your life, if anyone looks at your life, will they see that desire in you? Will they be able to see, yes, someone who is attempting the impossible, someone who looks foolish in their attempt, someone who falls down quite a bit, but do they see the greatest desire that this man has is to walk in the same manner as he walked? Young person, can the students around you, do they just see that sickening, syrupy, cultural Christianity? Or can they honestly look at you and say, man, I mean, that guy's not perfect, and sometimes he should think before he speaks, and all sorts of other things, and sometimes, well, he's, you know, not perfect, definitely.

But there's one thing about that boy, more than anything else you can tell, he desires to be like Jesus. Whom do you desire to be like, sir? The richest man in Alabama? The most respected in a country club? The most admired in the Rotary Club? Young person. The greatest athlete? The prettiest girl? Your beauty will fade.

The most popular? The this, the that? Even my own self, I have to look in the mirror and say, preacher, heal yourself. What do you desire most? To be a well-known preacher? Or to be like Jesus? Because that's a test of whether you've even come to know Him. Do you desire to be like Jesus? Now, another test.

Verse 9. The one who says he is in the light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now. The one who loves his brother abides in the light and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

One of the greatest evidences that a person has truly become a child of God is that they will love the children of God. Now, this word brother here is not referring to someone from another race. I always thought that quite amusing.

There's only one race and it's human. We should love people of all colors, all sizes, all shapes. Yes, most certainly, but that's not what it's teaching here.

It's also not talking about loving the poor. We should love the poor, but that's not what this is talking about. It is also not talking about so many of the things that people think that it's talking about.

When it says brother, it's talking about another person who has been born again by the power of God and in the family of God. Do you love the people of God? Young people, let me ask you a question. When you can have some free time on your hands, who do you fellowship with? The clique in your grade school? The clique in your high school? The beautiful people? And what do you talk about when you get together? That ought to terrify you because most of you know that you do want to associate with the clique and the beautiful people and when you get together, you do not talk much about Jesus.

You know that I'm speaking the truth. And don't think I've singled them out. What about you, sir, ma'am? Do you desire to be with the people of God no matter who they are? No matter where they are? And no matter how they treat you? Because you're family and you're bound together with the bond of the Spirit.

Remember what Jesus said. I was naked and you clothed me. I was hungry and you fed me.

I was in prison and you came to visit me. You know what's amazing? So many people who have prison ministries use that verse as the biblical basis of their ministry. That's not what that verse means at all.

I learned what that verse meant when I left this country and went to other places and saw the prison systems. You see, you go to prison in Peru and if someone doesn't come every day and bring you food, you're going to starve to death. If someone doesn't come and provide clothing for you, you're going to go naked.

And what Jesus is talking about when He says that, He's talking about this. He's talking about people whose testimony of their faith in Jesus Christ was so solid, so sure, they were arrested for their faith. They lost their homes, they lost everything because of their following Jesus Christ and they were thrown in prison.

Now, don't you think those prison authorities are sitting there going, okay, let's see who brings food to these guys. Because whoever brings food to these guys is going in prison too. Let's see who brings clothes.

Let's see who visits them. Because whoever does, well, they're a Christian too. Only a Christian would visit this guy.

Because anyone who comes here is going to be identified as a Christian and thrown in prison. And that's exactly what He's teaching. That a true Christian is known because they will lay down their life for their brother and sister in Christ.

And they will be willing to be scarred, misunderstood, and even hurt by other brothers and sisters in Christ. And when other brothers and sisters in Christ fail them, they will be merciful to them. Not run out because they've been offended.

Birds of the feather flock together, my grandmother told me. It seems that she was rather biblical in saying that, wasn't she? Do you love the people of God? Do you desire to be with other believers? Do you know one of the reasons why the pastor extended the meetings? Because he heard that people were getting together during the day just to talk about the condition of their souls. In America, that's unusual.

Most people get together for fellowship to talk about football. Talk about things. But it must be a work of God when people get together just to pray.

When people get together just to talk about how wonderful Jesus is. When people get together and say, show me, is there anything? Brothers, look at my life. Is there anything in my life that you can see that I need to repent of? Please help me.

Tell me. I'm open. That's a work of God in America.

Is that you? Do you desire to be with the people of God? I hear so many people say, well, I can worship God in my bass boat. Or I can worship God out here, you know, in a tree stand. Or I can worship God there.

But that's not what God said. Because it's not just about you worshiping God. It's about you serving brothers and sisters in Christ.

Have you ever found yourself outside the people of God mocking them, laughing at them, calling them a bunch of hypocrites and everything else? Guess what? The word Satan in Hebrew means slanderer. You're doing the works of your father, the devil. Verse 15.

The final test. Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away and also its lusts. But the one who does the will of God lives forever.

I am 42 years old, but in 42 years, I have seen too many people die. My brother died. My father died in my arms out in the middle of a field.

I preached my sister's funeral. I lived for years in a war zone, stepped over dead people just to get my mail. I became very wise on the day my dad died in my arms.

Oh, I was unconverted. I became a drunk, but at the same time, I became very wise. I realized something.

Strong men grow old and feeble. Beauty fades. Leaves fall from trees, turn into dust and are blown away by the wind.

Empires are built and they crumble just as fast. If there is one thing that I would like to stamp upon your heart is that this world is passing away and you with it. And the word here can also be translated not simply that the world is passing away, but the world is being pushed out.

If this is your place, this place of yours will not last forever. It is being pushed out. It is passing away.

The mass of humanity are like a bunch of foolish men dressed up in clown suits, banging drums and walking right off a cliff into the eternal abyss. Are you one of them? Do not love the things of this world because if you do, God says... Have you ever heard someone say, there's not room in this town for the two of us? Well, God looks at the world and looks at your heart and says, there's not room in this heart for the two of us. If you love the world, you do not love God.

If your hopes are in this world, you do not love God. Yesterday, I was nine. Today, I'm 42.

Tomorrow, I will be 85. And the day after that, I will be dead. Don't you see that? It passes so quickly.

You say, I'm young. I was young. I'm strong.

I was stronger. But it passes away. It passes away.

It passes away. You're after wealth. Your wealth will rot.

You take great pride in your beauty. Your beauty will fade. There are many women in this building right now, possibly in their 80s, that were much more beautiful than you are now, teenager.

You want to be the man. There are old men here that could whoop five of you boys. They will soon pass away.

What I want you to see is that it's coming, it's coming, it's coming, it's coming. Someone came to me one time and they said, I don't believe Jesus Christ is coming back for a thousand years. And I said, it really doesn't matter.

You're going to see Him inside a 70. Because whether He comes here or you go there, there's going to be a meeting. There is going to be a meeting and prepare to meet your God.

You say, well, I'll meet that God. No, you won't. You'll melt before Him like a tiny wax figurine before a blast furnace.

But He has offered reconciliation through His Son. I will close with one last thing. We'll skip over several chapters.

Go to chapter 5. He who has the Son has the life. He who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. Someone said to me one time, Jesus is all you need, Brother Paul.

I said, no. Jesus is all you have. Outside of Him, there's nothing.

Absolutely nothing. Nothing. And one of the greatest signs of being a Christian is not just that you love your brother.

You love Him. You love Him. Not the benefits you receive from Him.

Not streets of gold or gates of pearl. Not simply escaping hell. But you love Him.

I have read the prayers of old, old men that have said things like this. Oh God, I love You so much that if You can get glory out of condemning me to hell, let me be condemned to hell if You'll just be glorified. We live in a consumer Christianity.

You look for a church that won't rile your conscience. You look for a church that has activities for you, sort of like a Six Flags over Jesus. But do you look for Him? I heard one great church growth expert saying one time, they asked him, how did you get your church to be 10,000? He goes, we just meet people's needs.

Everyone applauded and I began to think about what he was saying. So then, all the people come to your church because you meet their needs. You meet their selfish needs.

What about Jesus? I'd rather have a church built on Jesus where three people came and all of them being in my family than to have a mega church that was built upon the bones of unconverted church people to whom I would not tell the truth because I did not want to lose them. I don't flatter people, but that's one of the reasons why I have such respect for the man who stands in this pulpit and the men and the women who have stood with him. And I don't flatter people.

Do you want a church? You say, we want to be seeker friendly. Fine. Just realize this, there's only one seeker and it's God.

And if you want to be friendly to somebody, be friendly to Him. Do what He wants. It's His church.

It's not yours because you're His. Do you come for Jesus? Do you want Jesus? Do you, my dear friend, do you wake up in the middle of the night sometimes with your heart warm, tears running down your face, desiring Jesus? Do you wake up sometimes lifting your hands to heaven because you desire Jesus? Do

you want to be with other brothers and sisters in Christ because they're talking much about Jesus? Do you want to hear people sing because they're talking about Jesus? Do you want to hear a preacher preach not because he tells stories, but because he speaks about Jesus? He speaks about Jesus. Just want Jesus.

Just want Jesus. I'm going to finish with a story that's probably been changed a million times and I do not know the true root of this illustration. But it's a fine one.

It proves the point of this text. There was a famous artist in Europe who drew his inspiration from his son. Oh, he loved his son.

His son and he would paint together all the time. And then one day, his son was taken off to war and he befriended another person there in war, another soldier in the foxhole. And the soldier always wanted to know how to paint, so the boy began to teach him how to paint and they became very, very close.

And then one day, coming out of the foxhole, the painter's son saw the rifle. The other boy didn't. So the painter's son took the bullet and died.

The old man, the old painter, was crushed. He sat there in his huge home surrounded by priceless works of art and they meant nothing to him because his son was no longer there. Then one day, he got a knock at the door.

The boy was standing there, the soldier, and said, Sir, you don't know me, but I'm the reason your son is dead. He took what should have been mine and his blood spilt on a foreign field and now I stand here before you. He said, Sir, he had sort of an old bag in his hand, a brown paper sack, and he pulled a picture out of it and he said, Sir, before your son died, we just, well, we painted together when we could and I'm a miserable sort of a talent, but, Sir, this is a picture that I painted of your son because I love him.

I love him still. It means more to me than anything and I just didn't know what to do. I can't replace him.

I just, here, Sir, I know, you know, you're one of the greatest talents in the world and I have no talent at all, but here, take my offering. The father took it, considered it a prize. He went into his gallery, pushed back all the priceless paintings he had painted and put that one right front and center.

A few weeks or months went by and the old man died. A great auction was to be held. Sotheby, everyone was going to be there.

They sent out wires all around to every nation, every continent, that these paintings were up for sale and on the day of the auction, the room was filled with the greatest buyers throughout the world. The auctioneer slammed down the mallet. He said, this auction will begin.

The first piece to be auctioned off is this. And he pulled back the cape and there was the picture that the soldier had painted. The room filled with laughter and then disgust and then anger and impatience.

Someone said, we have come here to buy paintings, not this drawing. And the auctioneer said, no, this is to be auctioned off. Who will give me a thousand dollars? They laughed.

Who will give me five hundred? They scoffed and were angry. We don't have time for this. And all of a sudden in the back, that soldier stood up.

He couldn't handle it anymore. He was filled with rage. He was filled with pity.

He was filled with sadness. He stood up and he said, sir, sir, I have in my possession six pounds. Sir, that painting means more to me than anything else in the world because that painting is of the very son who died to give me life.

Sir, I have six pounds and it is all I have. I'll sell myself into slavery. I don't care what you ask of me.

I will give it. Just give me that portrait. And the auctioneer slammed down the mallet.

He said, sold. People let out a sigh of relief. Well, finally we're going to get on with the auction.

And then all of a sudden the auctioneer slammed the mallet down again and said, the auction is over. You can imagine the anger, the yelling. What do you mean the auction is over? We have come from afar to buy all these paintings.

He said, the auction is over. And he read the will of the old man. The one who takes my son gets it all.

To the wind with your religion. To the wind with your petty morality. To the wind with Southern Baptist church life.

I'm not about any of that. I want the son. I want him.

I want the one who died, yea, rose again on my behalf. I want him. I want him to consume my life.

I want him to be everything. My greatest sadness is that there is so much of me left that has not been given to him. The true Christian will love the son.

This is not about escaping hell. This is about loving the one to whom love is due. Are you in love with Jesus or do you have just some puny, impotent religion that carries you to church once a week but does not change your life and does not warm your heart? Is your heart warm? Is your heart warm? An old brother came up to me the other night.

You know who you are. His earphone is falling out of his ear. He can barely hear.

And he said, Brother Paul, when you spoke about Jesus, my heart was strangely warmed. And you know what? I bet that dear old saint will come up to me tonight and say the same thing while other people will walk out of here in anger hating every word I said. But don't walk away in anger.

Come here. Fist a cuff. Stone me.

Beat me. But do not leave this building without Christ. And do not leave this building with a cold, cold religious heart.

Do not. Let's pray. Father, we come before you.

And oh God, I feel so weak. God, I desire much. I desire much for the salvation of people here tonight.

I desire much for the Spirit of God to revive our hearts. I desire for Christians to be strengthened, for the doubting to cease, for them to be swallowed up in the confidence of Christ's grace. And I desire, Lord, religious people who knows not God, to at least say, I don't know now.

I don't know. I don't know. And bring them, Lord.

Lord, you know our hearts. You know the heart of the pastor and the elders that we will stay here all night if necessary. Just, Lord, put a seal upon their hearts and do not allow them to leave.

Oh God, in Jesus' name, Amen.

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