

The Cross-Centered Life, Part 1

by Paul Washer

This sermon emphasizes the importance of living a cross-centered life, where Jesus is everything and his will is sought out and obeyed, and warns against the dangers of apostasy and false doctrine in modern evangelicalism.

Duration: 1:09:04

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, 2 Corinthians 2:2-3, Hebrews 1:1, Hebrews 10:26

Topics: "Cross of Christ"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of pursuing God and not giving up when faced with failure. He uses the analogy of a little boy who wants someone to follow him when he decides to go home because things aren't going his way. The preacher explains that when we do this with God, He allows us to go our own way. However, the preacher encourages listeners to understand that true conversion is just the beginning of a journey towards knowing and walking with God. He urges them to prioritize their relationship with Christ over worldly desires and to seek a deep, personal connection with Him. The preacher also briefly references the book of Hebrews, highlighting its significance in setting the stage for the rest of the book.

Transcript

Open up your Bibles to 2 Corinthians, chapter 2. At least some of what I do tonight will be an introduction to set, to communicate to you why I'm here. Before we get to that, I would like to say that I greatly appreciate the offering being taken up for the HeartCry Missionary Society, but please do not give unless you have prayed and the Lord lays it upon your heart to give. I wouldn't want to be the instrument of you giving what He has entrusted to you in an incorrect and frivolous manner.

Just because someone passed a hat doesn't mean you have to give to the ministry. God may lead you to give what you would give to HeartCry to maybe some camper who's struggling just to come here. It costs them money.

And don't worry about HeartCry. God has and always will meet all our needs according to His riches in glory. So please don't give unless you pray and the Lord specifically directs you to give.

In verse 15, Paul says this, chapter 2 of 2 Corinthians, For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to the one an aroma from death to death, to another an aroma from life to life. And who is adequate for these things? For we are not like many

peddling the word of God. But as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ and the sight of God.

There are several passages in the Bible where it seems that a wind is blowing through them. That seems to silence all our foolishness and all our stupidity. It seems to open up a door to another world.

This is one of those passages. So I want to use it for just a moment by way of introduction. When you come here, you see friends.

You see people that are your own age. You see things that are delightful. You have expectations of a good time.

And all of that is absolutely wonderful. It is correct. It's right.

You should sense and look forward to all those things. When I see you, I see you in your youth, your exuberance, your foolishness, and a lot of things that you are as a youth. I'm excited for you and I'm happy in the Lord.

Most of you could be my sons and daughters. But what do I really see when I stand up here? I see life and death. I see heaven and I see hell.

I know that some of you will die and go to hell. I know that I am looking at individuals, at least in part, who will not hear, who will reject Christianity outright or something even more dangerous. You will accept just enough of American Western evangelicalism to soothe your conscience and to make your life just moral enough to put you in a coma so that you cannot hear the Word of God.

You'll spend your life in Christian and Southern Baptist culture and you'll fit right in. But on the day of judgment, when you stand naked before God, you will hear, Depart from me, I never knew you. Paul says here in his text, We are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.

To one, an aroma from death to death. To other, an aroma from life to life. Do you realize that I stand up here knowing that for some of you, I am going to be a catalyst for your judgment? As a matter of fact, on the last day when you stand before God, you will be judged more severely because I am standing here today talking to you.

Did you know that? Did you realize that for some of you, the best thing you could probably do is leave? And what do I mean? If I stand before you tonight and I teach you something that is not true, it is not biblical, then you are free. You are not bound to my words. But I, because I have preached heresy to you, I will stand condemned on the day of judgment.

But on the other hand, if what I tell you and what these other men tell you is true, then you are bound to it as though it were the very word of God. And on the day of judgment, you will be held accountable for this evening and for tomorrow and for the next day and the next and for even Friday morning. This is a terrible burden for a man to bear.

That is why Paul called upon God that he might be strengthened with grace. What I want you to see is that, yes, here at this camp, I hope you have a wonderful time. I hope that you meet friends.

I hope you do wild things out in the yard. I hope you just have a wonderful time. But when you come in here, I want you to know we are talking about eternity.

I want you to know that it is a dangerous thing. Another thing that I must say, you live in a very dangerous place and time in history. Not because America is swamped with liberalism and is going down the tubes.

Not because of politicians you may disagree with in the decisions that they make. Absolutely not. I'm not worried about them at all.

You're in a dangerous time because here in America, evangelicalism is flooded with apostasy. False doctrine. We have taken the truths of Scripture and we've thrown them away.

And now we build churches with entertainment. We find out what you want. We find out the desires of your heart and the lusts of your flesh.

And then we build churches around all of that that are designed to bring you in. That is heresy. That's apostasy.

That's false. You live in an age when you can be born into a Christian culture. Like most of you have been.

And you can go to Sunday school and you can hear about Jesus. And then you can have somebody say to you, would you like to go to heaven? And of course, you're a reasonable person. You respond, yes, I would love to go to heaven.

Okay, then you need to ask Jesus to come into your heart. Pray this little prayer. And you pray that little prayer and then they ask you, did He come in? And you say, I don't know.

And they say, of course He did. He promised He would. And so some ecclesiastical authority, some well-meaning pastor, some well-meaning Sunday school teacher pronounces you born again because you prayed a prayer.

Because you made some sort of a confession. But then you go on with your entire life and here's the great problem. If we were in a culture where there was persecution, where it would cost you to be a Christian, then if that profession you made was false, you would immediately abandon it and return to the world.

The problem is, you live in a culture of evangelicalism. You live in a culture of Christianity that is lukewarm and dead and false and worldly and carnal and luxurious. And so you can live in that so-called Christian culture with all your other friends and you compare yourself with yourselves and you think you're all okay, when in fact, you're all headed to hell. And Jesus is just a little cherry on the top of your already perfect life.

But you're headed to hell. You're in a dangerous place. You need to hear a real gospel.

You need to hear real gospel demands. You need to understand and understand very clearly that if the gospel has not and does not continue to impact your life, so that as you grow older, you grow in sanctification and you become more holy and more given over to the things of God. Not given over to the things of your church, but given over to the things of God.

Unless that happens, it is the greatest evidence to demonstrate that He does not know you and you do not know Him. We are going to plow. We are going to study.

I am going to challenge you and rip you and do everything I have to do, humanly speaking, to shake your world. But here's something you should understand. That's not something unusual.

That's just biblical gospel preaching. The Bible says that Jesus, when He comes into His temple, it says that He will be like a refiner's fire and a fuller's soap. He is a life giver, but you need to understand He is a devastator.

I hope you meet Him and I hope that He changes your life. That He changes your life. Now, by way of introduction, I want to look at a few more passages just briefly.

Turn over to the book of Hebrews. In a way, I wish we could do just a book study tonight in Hebrews, but I just want you to see a few things by way of introduction. Chapter one of the book of Hebrews is very, very important because it sets the stage for the rest of the book.

And what is it doing? It is doing what it's supposed to do. It is exalting Jesus Christ. It is saying, look, Jesus Christ isn't one among a number of prophets or one among a number of extraterrestrial beings or one among a number of messiahs or saviors.

He is everything in Christianity. And He is everything in Christianity because He is everything to God. And because Christ is everything to God, He is to be everything to you.

Not number one in your life. No, no, no, no, no. You've got it all wrong.

Not number one. Number one, number two, number three, number four, number five, number six, number seven. He is your life.

It's not Jesus and then something else. That something else has to find its place in the will of Jesus or it gets thrown out. He's saying here in the first chapter of Hebrews that Jesus Christ is superior.

That Jesus Christ is the most important person to God. Let me put it this way. God, there's a song that came out several years ago that says, God loves people more than anything.

It's not true. I hate to tell you you're not the center of the universe, but it is not true. God loves His Son more than anything.

And everything that God has ever done, everything that God has ever done, He has done for His Son. If you're saved here tonight, the only reason you're saved is God did it for His Son. Everything for the Son.

He is the center. We can say this without blasphemy. He is the center of God's universe.

God delights in Him, seeks to exalt Him, marvels in Him, loves Him. And every move of the omnipotent hand of God has always been for Him, for the Son. And the fact that He would give such a Son to die, that you might be saved.

The fact that He would crush, slaughter His own Son, that you might be saved. It doesn't just mean God loves you. It means you better pay attention.

Look what He says after we get through with chapter 1. We come into chapter 2 and He says this. For this reason. For what reason? Because the Son is superior.

Because the Son is supreme. Because the Son is everything in the economy of God. He says for this reason, we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard.

When Psalms 22 was read just a minute ago, what do you remember from it? Tell me the truth that you gained when that was being read. Oh, you didn't listen that close. You were told of how the sins of God's people were imputed upon His Son.

You were told of how the Son became a worm and not a man. And because God is the Holy One of Israel, He turned His face away from His Son because His eyes are too pure to behold evil. For your sake, He was made sin and the Father crushed Him.

And now listen to this. You didn't listen. You didn't listen.

But the writer of Hebrews says, because the Son is everything to the Father, we must pay much closer attention to what we've heard. Sometimes I would take young men who wanted to be missionaries into the jungle. Or I would allow them to come to Peru to visit me, even during the war.

And when they would get off that plane, I would say, now these are the rules. You're not going on some Christian vacation here. You're not some mission trip.

You're in a place where you could die at any turn. I remember one young man who decided that he knew all that was to be known. I grabbed him by the collar and I said, you are going to die when we go into this jungle if you do not listen to me.

And when we get pulled over by some corrupt military policeman, you do what I tell you to do. You listen carefully to me, because this is not about anything but saving your life. Christianity is not about your best life now.

Christianity is not about you being moral enough to have a wonderful life. Christianity is life and death and you better listen closely, especially. Because if you don't, God will be terribly angry.

Why? I gave my son and you did not listen. I gave my son and he was just number one in your life. I gave my son and he was just the cherry on top of your already perfect life that you built for yourself.

No, no, no, no, no. I gave my son that you might give your life to him, lock, stock and barrel. Every beat of your heart, every thought of your mind, every energy manifested in the movement of your physical body is to be for him.

He is everything, young people. I have walked with him for almost 30 years. I have suffered for his cause and in his name.

And my only regret as I stand before you right now tonight is that I did not give more. This life that has been given, this death, it requires everything. Don't you see that? It's not just to fix you.

It's not just to give you a happy family or a job or health or wealth or any other thing. It's so much bigger than that. Oh, that you would give everything to him.

That you would listen closely at what he's telling you to do and that you would do it. Listen closely to him. Because the Christianity in America is so apostate and lukewarm.

If you listen to them, you'll lose your life. Because they will tell you, follow Jesus and he'll make everything all right. Follow Jesus, he's for you.

God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life. That's not Christianity. Christianity is, we know that he has died for all and therefore all die for him.

That whether if we live, we live for him. And if we die, we die for him. If we breathe, we breathe for him.

We no longer make decisions about our future, about college, about jobs, about marriage, about anything. We turn it all over to him. We just want him.

And it's more than something on the back of a Christian t-shirt. It's more than a cliché in a song. We want him and his will.

He says, for this reason, because Christ is superior, we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard so that we do not drift away from it. Some of you have been raised under good theology. You know, historical Christian reform doctrine.

Some of you have been catechized. Some of you understand words like propitiation, atonement, expiation, imputation, justification, sanctification. But just knowing the truth does not mean that you're listening closely to Christ.

Has he changed your life? Has he become your Lord? Does he determine how you speak? What you watch? What you listen to? How you dress? Everything about you? Relationships? Are you being conformed to the image of the will of God? Or are you, like most Christians, mouthing Christ and being conformed to their culture? Because remember, you live in a day when you are taught that the best way to be an effective Christian is to look like the world. To act like the world. To talk like the world.

To do everything the world does, but throw Jesus' name in it. That stands against everything we know about true Christianity. Young person, listen to me.

If you learn nothing else this week, listen to me. I believe all these people that try to look like the world, it's because in their heart they're worldly. Because I know the New Testament and the Old Testament alike teaches that the greatest way to have an impact upon this world is not to look like it.

And not to act like it. And not to talk like it. And not to think like it.

To be a genuine alternative. Look at verse 3. Well, let's go on to verse 2. For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, unchangeable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty. How will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? What he's saying is the same thing that he's going to return to saying in Hebrews chapter 10.

And it is this. The Son has come. The Son has spoken.

The Son has died. Now, if when the prophet spoke and when the law was given, the people did not obey, they were severely punished. But how much greater punishment, how much greater wrath, how much greater displeasure from the throne of God will be seen among those who have heard from the Son.

And who know of the Son's death and yet neglect so great a salvation. The word neglect doesn't mean that you simply reject Christ. The word neglect, well, let me put it this way.

A young man finds a young woman that he's interested in. He's head over heels in love with her and all these things. He pays the greatest attention to her.

He thinks about her. He talks about her. He longs to see her.

He can hardly be pulled away from her. His whole life is now revolving around her. And then he marries.

And it is the common malady in many marriages, not all, that after that honeymoon, neglect sets in. It's not that he's divorced her. It's not that he's turned her out.

He will still even say the same things in public. Oh, you know, she's everything to me. She completes me.

I love her so much. But she knows the neglect. She knows the ice and the cold that has grown over the relationship.

There is a sense in which every one of us in this room neglect the great salvation that has been given to us. The most mature man in Christ is still neglectful because no one can respond as he ought to respond to this great gift of Christ. But we need to be more careful today because there are voices all over bombarding us from every angle, telling us that Christianity is really not all that radical.

Christianity really doesn't demand that much. You can have Jesus go to church. You can even teach a Sunday school and you don't really have to make the hard decisions.

That is a lie. It is a lie. Jesus is to be everything and his will is to be sought out by you and listened to very closely and obeyed.

Well, let's let's just look at that for a moment. Some of you are in relationships. How many of you have studied the scriptures in prayer? Consulting good old books, consulting wise saints, and there's not many.

How many of you have gone into scripture to determine what Jesus says about what you're supposed to do in that relationship? Probably almost none of you. Let me just use a blatant thing. How many of you have ever gone to scripture to ask the Lord Jesus Christ from his inerrant word how you're supposed to dress? How many of you? You say that's legalism.

No, no, hold it. I think I'm I'm go come visit me in Virginia. You see, I'm not a legalist.

My point is not that you need to dress like a Puritan. My point is not even about your dress. My point is you just assumed that you can do whatever you want in every area of your life and believe in Jesus.

Do you see the problem? Jesus is everything. He's my Lord. When was the last time you consulted him with regard to his will? When was the last time you listened to him? And isn't it amazing that you seem to draw your fashion more from the world than anything I've seen in scripture? My point is this.

You say you believe in Jesus. Are you listening closely to him? Are you trying to discern his will? Have you asked questions? Lord, what do you want? And then actually studied the scripture to find an answer. Because as you grow up, this is going to get even greater.

Lord, who should I marry? Lord, what do you say in scripture? Young men, who should you marry? What passage would you go to to find out? Proverbs 31. You say, well, no, that was written for women. No, it wasn't.

It was written for young men, actually. You see, you can say, I follow Jesus. I'm radical for Jesus.

I love Jesus. But are you consulting Jesus? Are you listening to Jesus? Are you going to his word to find out what he wants? If he is Lord and he has a will, what is it? Or does Jesus just save you and then just throw you to the wind? And I'll say, go live like the world and I'll see you in heaven. Now, let me step back.

I'm not saying that you're displeasing to me or that I look out over the crowd. And I see something or see one or two of you that I really want to get. That's not my point.

My point is this. I use the clothing because it would get your attention and because it is true, isn't it? Do you go to God's word to find out his will in every area of your life? Are you listening? Not just to the part about you get eternal life and go to heaven, but every part of Scripture. Are you listening? The Puritan genius was this.

They believed that God's will applied to every aspect of their life. We say that. But do we go into Scripture to find out its answers for every aspect of our life? The Lord has spoken to us.

The Lord has come. The Lord has died. How much will we appreciate this? Will it become everything to us as it has become and always has been everything to God? Answer me.

I want you to repent of being careless, of being neglectful, of a Psalms 22 being read. And I would not doubt that when it was being read, every angel in this auditorium was in tears, marveling at what the Son had done. But we, we don't even listen.

I don't want you to do that anymore. But to start, you've got to recognize that you are doing it. You see, we can do nothing here this week if you do not recognize that all of us are very neglectful of the Gospel and all of us are very neglectful with regard to the will of God.

We do not ask the question, Lord, how then shall I live? What do you want from me? But if you will recognize tonight, I've been careless with the Gospel. I've been neglectful of the Savior. I never go into Scripture to determine, Lord, what's your will in this area? What's your will in this area? Lord, how do you want me to respond to this? If you'll simply recognize that you haven't done that, then we can start rebuilding.

But if you sit there and go, then there's nothing that can be done. What kind of life do you truly desire, young person? What kind of life? Years and years ago, I was told that a famous violinist was giving a concert. He gave his last concert.

Old man, a master in Europe. And when he finished, a young man, a young violinist came up to him and said this, Sir, I would give my life to play like you. And the old violinist looked at him and said, Young man, I have given my life to play like me.

Now, how much of this Christianity do you really want? Do you want the kind that cares more about fashion? New cars? Retirement? Looking at your own reflection in the face and looking at your own reflection in the mirror and wondering how long you can keep yourself young? Do you want to grow old for nothing? Or do you want to be a disciple of Jesus Christ? Who walks with Him. Who knows Him. So that you can say that the presence of Christ is more real to you at this moment than the presence of anyone in this auditorium.

So that you can walk with Him and see Him do magnificent things throughout the full course of your life, both in you and through you, blessing others. Young people, listen to me. You're going to have to break

away from the normal.

You're going to have to break away from the apathetic. You're going to have to break away from the majority. You're going to have to listen and follow.

Listen and follow. And it will cost you. It will cost you.

But in the end of your days, you will raise your withered hands to heaven and you'll bless God for the day He gave you the grace to do that very thing. Tonight is an opportunity to say, God, I don't want to turn my Christianity into an American Jesus thing. I don't just want to go to Christian concerts, wear t-shirts, tattoo a cross on my forehead.

That's not what I want, Lord. It proves nothing. Lord, I want to have a passionate desire for You, and I admit that I do not.

But I want to listen. I want to grow close. Please help me.

He will. He will help you. If you passionately seek Him, He will passionately give you the power to chase Him.

And one day, He will stop and let you catch Him. Lord, I want to know You. I want to know the cross.

I want to know the power, the suffering. I want to know a life. I want my life to be supernatural.

I want my life to be holy. I want the dead to be raised around me, Lord. I want the orphans to be cared for.

I want children to be fed. I want souls to be delivered. I want to be a fragrance of You throughout the earth.

Then here's what you're going to have to do. Forsake it all. Listen to Him and follow.

Or just, you know, go back to your gated neighborhood. What do you want to be? You are being offered in Christ life. Eternal life.

That's not just a ticket to heaven. Do you understand? Eternal life is this, that you may know God. That's why eternal life begins the moment you're regenerated and you believe.

You come to know God. Let me tell you about the journey that you're on. If you are on that journey.

It is a mad chase after a divine prey. If you have truly been converted, then what happened to you was this. God regenerated your heart.

The Holy Spirit came in, took out your heart of stone, replaced it with a heart of flesh that would respond to divine stimuli. He opened up your eyes so that you could catch just a glimpse. Enough.

But just a glimpse of who God is, who you are, what God has done for you in Christ. And you believed. But I want you to know that that is just a glimpse.

That is the beginning, the smallest part of eternal life. Now, it has been granted unto you to run. To run into ministry? No.

To run into doing this and that? No. To run to Him. He calls.

Listen. Follow. To seek Him out.

To want to know Him. One glimpse of Christ. One greater glimpse of Christ.

Will cause you to want more and more and more and more. If you have been born again, here's what I want you to understand. If you truly are a Christian, then you have become something of a higher creature.

So that if someone packaged up the entire world and gave it to you, it could not satisfy you. Because you are no longer a base, earthly creature. But you have been remade for heaven.

So if they give you the world, it will not satisfy you. And if they take the world away from you, it will cause no complaints. Because the world has nothing to do with you now.

You're after another prey, another chase. To know God in the face. Have you ever heard a sermon on the beauty of Christ? On the beauty of God? It's kind of a neglected topic.

But let me put it this way. Scriptures tell us that God is so beautiful. That He has to humble Himself.

To turn His eyes away from His glory and look at any other thing. He is so beautiful. That if you were to catch a glimpse of Him.

Without being strengthened sufficiently by His own power. It would kill you. How would it kill you? It would drive you mad.

Have you ever experienced a joy? An ecstasy? Or seen something that literally just took your breath away? You're like, it's too much. It's just an emotional overload. One glimpse of God would make you mad unto death.

Because you would have to be strengthened. By God's hand to be able to bear such beauty. Have you ever seen, well they didn't come out really in the Voyage of the Dawn Treader.

You need to read the book. But in the Voyage of the Dawn Treader they began to notice something. The sun keeps getting bigger and brighter.

Do you remember that? And then they conclude that the sun we're looking at now is much larger than the one we saw the week before. And we're able to look intently into that sun. But a week before it would have blinded us.

They were headed towards the land of the emperor beyond the sea. They were headed towards heaven. And they were being supernaturally strengthened.

Just so that they would behold the beauty. Just so that they could behold the beauty. Now that is the Christian life.

When I tell you to listen more intently. This is why I want you to see that beauty. And I want you to go from strength to strength.

I want you to see more and more and more and more of Him. I want you to be strengthened and strengthened and strengthened by Him. One glimpse of the beauty of God in Christ is enough to propel you to godliness for an eternity of eternities.

You don't need to be psyched up. You don't need to acquire some fire. You don't need me to get you all excited.

You need to see God. You need to hear from God. But you need to respond.

And when you can't respond, you need to cry out to God that you can't respond. And in this camp, I do not want to waste my time. I am so sick and tired of words.

I am so tired of hearing myself and other men speak. And yes, I am even tired of all our great knowledge. I want to see you changed.

I want to see you passionate for Christ. But you must realize you haven't listened as you should have listened. You haven't sought Him as you should seek Him.

You haven't appreciated the cross as you ought to appreciate the cross. I want you to see that. Let's begin there.

Let's begin tonight with the great acknowledgement of failure. But let's not despair. Because what is failure? Failure, even our greatest failures, in light of the victory of the cross.

Children, listen to me. Almost every day of my life, I have to acknowledge my neglect of Him. Almost every day of my life, I come face to face with failure.

But this one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind, pursue Him. Do you know the story? It happens all the time. You see it in all kinds of genres.

Where a little boy kind of gets mad or falls into self-pity and grabs his ball and says, I'm going home. I'm taking my ball and I'm just going home. Because things aren't working out like I want it to.

And the real reason he's doing that is because he wants somebody to follow him. He wants someone to tell him not to go home. He wants things to go his way.

Here's what you need to understand about God. When you do that with Him, He lets you go. The point I'm trying to make is this.

There's only one game in town. There's only one Savior. There's only one path to life.

And if you give up, if you get neglectful, if you get out of that stream and just go into that stream of what's called normal evangelical Christianity, you are going to miss the one opportunity to have your life filled with God and useful to God. You may miss your one opportunity to be saved. I want us to look quickly.

Look at verse 12 of chapter 2. Look at what he's saying again. Take care, brethren, that there not be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. First of all, I want you to recognize something.

He puts evil and unbelieving together. He considers an unbelieving heart to be an evil heart. Now, let me ask you a question.

Do you have an unbelieving heart? Do you? I mean, do you really believe all this stuff? That there is one God? Do you really believe all the stuff that Paul wrote about your sin? Do you really believe that Jesus Christ is the only way, the only truth, the only life? Do you really believe that a life lived totally and

completely submitted to Him is the best life possible? Do you really believe it? Do you really show that you believe it? Either by following hard after Christ or being broken by the fact that you do not follow hard after Christ. A young lady one time, this was years ago. We were in the city of Lima.

And I was sitting in a cafe. She started talking to me. There was another guy there that was her friend.

We started talking. And I told them that I was a Christian. And I began to investigate, to talk to them, to explore, to find out what they knew about Christ.

If they believed in Christ, if they had anything to do with the Christian faith. And it was obvious from the start that no, the girl really did not have a genuine faith in Christ at all. She did not understand the gospel.

She was a very worldly person. But automatically, when she saw that I was beginning to get too close, she said, Well, I believe in God, but my brother, he's an atheist. He doesn't believe in God at all.

And I looked at her and I said, That is why I can logically have more respect for your brother than I can for you. She said, What do you mean? She got kind of angry. What do you mean? He doesn't even believe in God.

I say I believe in God. And I said, Therein lies the problem. He says he does not believe in God and he does not believe in Christ and he does not believe in the gospel.

And he lives like a person who does not believe in God and does not believe in the gospel and does not believe in Christ. But you say that you believe in this Christ who is everything in the universe. He's everything.

You say you believe in him. But you do not listen to him. And in reality, he has very little to do with your life.

She called herself a believer. But she had an unbelieving and evil heart. Now you call yourself a believer.

I call myself a believer. Even in the most mature and godly believer, there will be some contradiction in that confession. I mean, I know that there are many here tonight, including myself, who want to give it all to Christ.

And yet we find within ourselves a great struggle, don't we? So there's a measure of hypocrisy in everyone. But there is a difference between a person who sincerely desires to follow hard after Christ. He sincerely does.

And you can tell that he sincerely does, even when he doesn't, because when he doesn't, he's broken about it. He recognizes he's wrong. He wants to be better.

And that's why Jesus said, blessed are those who mourn. And Isaiah said, a contrite heart Yahweh would not despise. But then there are others who they're just content.

They're content with Christian conferences. They're content with Christian music. They're content with their Christian friends and their Christian church and all these different things.

And the radical demands of discipleship never really enter into their mind. And the moment you begin to press upon them the need to listen to Christ, they go, well, that's just legalism. And well, well, we're saved

by grace.

And well, Jesus loves you no matter what you do. And all these other things which can be true in their context, but she's taking them totally out of context. My question to you is, do you have a believing heart or an unbelieving heart? And if you say I have a believing heart, then I would say to you.

Prove it, look into your life. And show me. Show yourself.

Well, here's the first evidence. Show it. I submit to the sovereignty of God in this and I submit to the sovereignty of God in this.

And I want to know God's will here. And I want to do what he says. I believe he is Lord.

When I fail him, I'm broken. And can you say that about yourself or do you just have a typical evangelical Christian that confesses to know Christ? But in reality. Has an unbelieving heart, one final place they were going to go to, and I guess the introduction was supposed to be five minutes on us, but I want you to go to Hebrews chapter 10.

I want everyone to think about this text. Verse 26, the writer of Hebrews is giving a clarion call. He has given warning after warning after warning.

And this is what he is saying. He's got a group of probably Jewish people who have now listened to my language carefully, who have identified themselves with Christ. OK, now notice I didn't say that they were all believers.

He had a group of Jewish people. Descendants of Abraham. Who had identified themselves with Christ.

Now we can say that here also. Right. We can say we have a group of people here who have identified themselves with Christ.

That doesn't mean that all are Christian. It doesn't mean that everyone is saved. When we have a church out here, whether it's a Baptist church, Presbyterian church, we have a group of people in that church who have identified themselves with Christ.

But that doesn't mean that all of them are truly Christian. And he comes to them. Why? Because there's a problem going on.

There is great persecution. So these people have identified themselves with Christ and thought it was really, really wonderful. And they had tasted of many of the good things of Christianity and the word of God and the beauty of the gospel and the power of the gospel.

They had tasted some of these things, but it doesn't necessarily mean they had gone all the way and truly been converted. They had just had an encounter of such with Christianity, with Christ, with the gospel. And it had been good to them.

But now persecution comes. And they start falling away. Now, does that mean that they were true Christians who fell away and were lost forever? No, I do not believe that it contradicts other aspects of Scripture.

I believe what you're seeing is this. You had a group of people who were identifying themselves with Christ. When persecution came, many began to fall away and the ones that fell away were proving that they truly had never come to know Christ.

Now, let's put us in that setting for a moment. We're a group of people and we've all identified ourselves with Christ. But Brother Paul, there's no persecution.

No one's going to kill us or drag us away. Well, let's look at it. You identify with Christ.

But wow, Hollywood's pretty cool. Identify with Christ. But man, there's a lot of desires out there in the world.

They kind of draw and pull at you. You identify with Christ. But right now, some of you are still under the tutelage and protection of your parents.

But when you're 18, 19, go off to college like most do. Fall away. Where will you be when the test comes? Where will you be when the persecution comes? Where will you be when the temptation comes? But now we've gone full circle and I have to point out a problem.

Christianity today in America, the churches by and large in America, are so fallen and so low that you can claim Christ, live totally and completely in the world, enjoy all the pleasures of sin, and still be a member in good standing in your church. Teach Sunday school and all sorts of things. And therein lies the danger.

The reason why there are so many people that have identified themselves with Christ in America and yet live totally ungodly lives is because they can. Because we've built churches that suit them just perfectly. Because church discipline is no longer practiced.

Because. Even among mean guys like me. We're affected by the culture.

Do you realize that many of you think Charles Spurgeon was probably one of the greatest preachers who ever lived? Do you realize that he would be appalled by most of us? We say, man, I read the Puritans. I love the Puritans. Well, you better not invite one to your house because he probably won't stay very long.

You see, the point that I'm making is we're living in a very dangerous world. And since we know so little about history. And we know so little about what Christianity looked like even a hundred years ago.

And we study the Bible so little with regard to what should a Christian look like, act like, talk like, smell like. We just assume we're OK. And when you add on to that, that most of us are in churches that will affirm whatever we do.

And undiscerning parents who will affirm anything we do. We're in danger. And how do we get out of this? Will you listen? Will you begin to follow Christ? Because if you go on neglecting, you go on willingly following your own way.

Pretending like Christ really doesn't have a specific will for anything. He just wants you to believe and go to heaven. If you go on in that direction, you are in great danger.

Look what he says in verse 26. For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth. There no longer remains a sacrifice for sins.

Now, in the context, what he's talking about is this. He's telling these Jews, look, persecution has gotten really bad. And therefore, many of you are probably thinking about going back to Judaism.

Or even worse, you're thinking about believing in Jesus and going back to Judaism at the same time. Because, see, Paul had this problem. There were a group of men who were trying to remove the scandal of the cross by saying, listen, you need to believe in Jesus, but you also need to do this Judaism thing.

You see, there's always this offer, you see. Follow Christ completely and be radical and be estranged from the rest of culture and community. Or do something better.

Hold on to Christ. Have your belief in him. But look like culture.

Act like culture. Do what culture tells you to do so that there's no affliction from culture. These believers had to make a decision.

You and I have to make a decision. Will we follow? Yes, we are saved by faith and faith alone. But the evidence that we are truly saved is that as we begin to live the Christian life, we will become more and more discerning about what he has to say.

And we will give ourselves more and more to following him. Are you ready to do that? Do you want to follow him? Will you listen no matter what he tells you to do? Not what I tell you to do. Not what some other man tells you to do.

If I were to end this tonight and I were to say, Okay, I'm not preaching anymore. Will you listen to what I have said tonight? Many of you know that you go through the entire week without being in the word of God. Is that not true? Then how can you know what his will is? Will you stop doing that? Will you recommit your life to following hard after God? Following hard after Christ and listening to him in his word? If I say no more the rest of the week.

Tonight, please, I beg you. If you recognize Jesus, I have not really listened to you. I've just kind of followed the crowd and done this American Christianity thing.

Then go to him and say, Lord, I want to listen. I don't know how to listen. I don't even know if I have the strength to listen.

Give me the strength to listen. Do that and then begin to follow him. And I pray that the seriousness of this matter, the fact that it is life and death will spur you on.

You see, you fail a test at school or homeschooling or wherever, college. It's just failing a test. It's not life or death.

But this is life or death. That's our introduction. A pitiful one, but that's our introduction.

I hope some of you are happy. I hope some of you are encouraged. I even hope some of you are mad.

What I don't desire is that you leave here the way you came in. What I don't desire is that you are not moved, that you are not thinking, that you are not wondering whether these things I am saying are true. Let's pray.

Father, I come before you in the name of your Son. I would ask you, Lord, that you would help these young people. I pray that they would see the supremacy of Christ, that He is the most important person, the most important thing to you, and that you have given Him to us, that He might be the most important thing to us.

Father, I pray for myself and I pray for them, Lord, and I hope that they're praying. Lord, I confess how, throughout my years, how neglectful I have been to appreciate. How neglectful I have been, Lord, to try to find your will in the Word.

How neglectful I have been in following you. How often times I've just assumed that the flow was going in the right direction. It's doing what others are doing.

Father, I don't want to do that. I want to do what you want me to do. I want to obey your Word.

I want to discover what it says. Lord, learn in a greater way to apply it to every aspect of my life. What is your will for my speech? What is your will for my relationships? What is your will for me as a husband, as a father? What is your will for the way I talk and walk and act and attitudes and everything about me, Lord? Lord, I pray for these young people that they would have a similar desire to hear you, to follow you, to know that it is a life and death matter.

Ask all these things in Jesus' name.

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