

# The Impossibility of the Christian Life, Part 2

by Paul Washer

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of abiding in Christ, the evidence of genuine conversion, and the necessity of church discipline in order to bear fruit and be beautiful.*

**Duration:** 1:29:13

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:33, John 15:1-2, John 15:13-14

**Topics:** "Christian Life"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of taking our relationship with Christ seriously. He uses examples like a person memorizing a manual for a job promotion and a violinist dedicating his life to his craft to illustrate the level of commitment required in our walk with God. The preacher encourages believers to not only be theologically correct but also to have a fragrance and life-giving virtue about them. He reminds us of Jesus' words that the greatest love is shown when one lays down their life for their friends. The sermon concludes with a prayer for the Holy Spirit to apply God's word to the hearts of the listeners, leading them to a deeper knowledge of God and exposing the need for salvation to those who do not yet know Christ.

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## Transcript

Let's open our Bibles to the book of John, chapter 15, again, let's stand and please follow along with me as I read John, chapter 15. If you were here last night, I would just iterate that the reading of the Scripture is commanded in the New Testament. I think it should be a central point in our services and that we read by faith, believing that if we will fight the good fight here in the next few minutes and focus our mind upon the Scriptures, that God will speak through his word.

Please do not be guilty of despising the reading of the Scriptures, but take it as God. You know, always there's this great opportunity that he will speak to you just through the word that is read. So listen, as I read John, chapter 15, verse one, I am the true vine and my father is the vine dresser, every branch in me that does not bear fruit, he takes away and every branch that bears fruit, he prunes it so that it may bear more fruit.

You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you abide in me and I and you as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine. So neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine.

You are the branches. He who abides in me and I in him, he bears much fruit for apart from me, you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up and they gather them and cast them into the fire and they are burned.

If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you. My father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. Just as the father has loved me, I have also loved you abide in my love.

If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be made full. This is my commandment, that you love one another just as I have loved you.

Greater love has no one than this, that he lays down his life for his friends. You are my friends. If you do what I command you, let's pray.

Father, Lord, you know all things. Do you know how tired our body and how tired our minds, Lord, but Lord, your strength is perfected in weakness and that it is not eloquence or the quickness of mind, but it is the power of the Holy Spirit, the power of your word that has been read. Father, we preach by faith, we have believed and therefore we speak.

Lord, I pray that you would take your word through the illuminating and renewing work of the spirit, that you would apply it to our hearts and that those who are Christian would leave here with a greater capacity to know you and to walk with you. And if there are those who do not know you, that their need would be exposed, that their sin would be made known to them, that Christ would appear to them glorious. Father, please help in this time.

Lord, Lord, you know, I just want these things to be a reality in my life and I just want them to be communicated to my brothers and sisters in Christ and that they be a reality in their lives. Lord, there's no hope here, but you. But you are not.

In Jesus name, amen. Jesus says in chapter one, I am the vine. We spoke about that last night, that he is the true source of all true spiritual life and power.

Now, I make a division between spiritual life and power that is not so much made in Scripture as it is necessary for me to do so because of the times in which I live. There's so many people who equate intimacy with Christ and the Holy Spirit with power for ministry, power to do great things, power to perform miracles, power to impress extravagant signs and wonders. Well, if there are any true signs and wonders, they are definitely the work of the Holy Spirit and cannot be contrived by men.

But I want you to understand something. A man can stand in a pulpit and at times the Holy Spirit will be of great help to him, empower him to preach and to say things, to communicate truth to God's people. And that is a power that's necessary not only for the preacher, but it's necessary for every believer as they minister in the body of Christ according to their gifts.

So we need power. But power is not just for carrying out our gifts or our ministry. Power is for living a godly life.

You see, my great concern is not, let me put it this way, I don't spend my time every day thinking about how I can be a more eloquent preacher or how I can even be a better expositor in the sense of using

different techniques to communicate truth. I would have to say the great burden of my day is drawn out of the great need of my day and my great need is to be more godly. It is so easy to preach in a sense.

I mean, I'm standing before you, you're listening to me, but you really don't know who I am. You don't really know if I'm godly. You don't really even know if I'm sincere.

But it's in watching me live that I will be vindicated or accused. And that's what I want you to see, is that we need the power that flows from Christ. But it's not just power to do ministry.

It's power to be conformed to his image. That is the priority. And if we are conformed to the image of Christ, then everything else seems to fall in place.

And let me put it even in a higher degree, if we are manifesting conformity to Christ around the people who know us best. You see, when we come into a place, even if we're not trying to be hypocrites, we will put on our best face. But it's around those people who are closest to us, our wives, our husbands, our children, our infant brothers and sisters in Christ.

They really know. And so that's my desire. When people will ask me, Brother Paul, you must have all kinds of needs.

What can we pray for you about? I always say this, pray that I will love my wife as Christ loves the church. Because the most difficult thing is to truly love and to truly be Christlike around the people who are closest to you. But if you can't do that, everything else is just a stage and a play.

And so we want to realize that all spiritual life flows out of Christ. But I don't want young men just thinking I need spiritual power so that I can do something with it, like build my own kingdom. It should be, I want this life, I want this power flowing from Christ, I want to be intimately connected to the vine so that I can look like the vine, so that I can bear fruit to the glory of the vine, because it is all about Christ.

I think it is safe to say that we live in a Christological universe, at least in God's mind, that everything He's ever done, He has done for His Son. And if you and I are to go out and produce fruit, it's not to build our own kingdom and it's not to somehow exalt ourselves, but it's to demonstrate how Christ has such power that He can work through such weakness. Well, having said that, let's look at verse 1. I am the vine and my Father is the vine dresser.

Every branch in me that does not bear fruit, He takes away, and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. Now, I want to read to you something that I've written here. God is intensely concerned about the beauty and fruitfulness of the branches.

God is intensely concerned about you as a branch individually, but He's intensely concerned about the branches collectively as a church and not just with this universal idea, but this local church that you can point to. He is intensely concerned that we be fruitful and beautiful. Now, why is that? Because God has done everything He has ever done for His Son.

He loves His Son. He desires the glory and good pleasure of His Son. And He wants His Son's reputation to be very high, to say the least.

And that reputation, at least for this moment in time, depends somewhat upon the behavior of those who consider themselves to be His disciples. We can read this in the Old Testament. We read it again in the

book of Romans, that because of the bad behavior of the people of God, the name of God was blasphemed among the Gentiles.

And so the Father, who sent His Son to die for us, who sent forth the Holy Spirit that we might be regenerated, is also intensely concerned, not only with our freedom from the condemnation of sin, but He's intensely concerned with our freedom from the power of sin. It is God's desire that you be a holy, pure, chaste, beautiful, fruitful people, unsoiled by the world. And, my dear friend, you need to take this as seriously as God does.

You do. But let me say something here that's very important. There are places that you may feel the freedom to go that I can't go.

There are things that you may feel the freedom to watch and to listen to and to participate in that I cannot. Many, many years ago, Leonard Ravenhill, a friend of mine, told him, said, Paul is really kind of downcast. Leonard Ravenhill sent me a little track.

I still have it today. I don't agree with everything that's in the track, but the track puts forth a major truth. And it's this.

Others can, you cannot. That's the name of the track. And basically the whole idea here is this.

If you truly want to walk in the fullness of the Holy Spirit, if you truly want to be an instrument of God, then what others can do, you cannot. You have to guard this deposit that is within you. You have to be zealous about this relationship.

An illustration that I love to use is about an old man, a great violinist in Europe who played his last concert as an old man. And a young violinist came up to him and said this, sir, I would give my life to play like you. And the old man looked at him and said, son, I have given my life to play like me.

Do you want to see God's fruit in your life? Do you want to see God's beauty in your life? Do you want to be even more than someone who's theologically correct? Do you actually want to have a fragrance about you? A perfume about you, like life giving virtue flowing from you, is that what you desire? Then you're going to have to take this relationship with Christ extremely seriously. You're going to have to seek for greater and greater intimacy and you're going to have to avoid the things that would soil you, that would twist you. That would grieve him.

The Father desires such people because He cares about the branch, because He cares about the vine. Now, I want us to look at this text. Look what he says in verse two.

Every branch in me that does not bear fruit, He takes away. Now, the evidence of genuine conversion is the fruit that you bear. Make no mistake about it.

There is such horrible, indescribable heresy with regard to conversion in America today. The idea of the continuously carnal Christian. The idea that a person one time in their life made a decision, prayed the prayer, asked Jesus to come in, leave the promise of Revelation 20.

Now they're saved. They live the rest of their life like a devil and they're Christian. That is not true.

I have heard preachers say even this. A man can pray that prayer, ask Jesus Christ to come into his life and then become an atheist and still go to heaven. And it's because they do not understand the doctrine of

being born again.

They do not understand the doctrine of Revelation, the doctrine of regeneration. The Scripture is very, very clear. Salvation is through faith alone in Jesus Christ.

And that is it. It is faith alone. You add works to it and you are preaching another gospel.

Salvation is by faith. Believing in Jesus, you are justified. Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to the cross I cling.

That is salvation. But what you need to understand is the one who believes has been regenerated by the Spirit of the living God. And when Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5, 17, that if any man be in Christ, he's a new creature.

He is not reciting apostolic poetry. He's not speaking in metaphor or hyperbole. He means it.

It is a theological truth. It is a proposition. It is biblical.

You really do become a new creature. You really do. It works something like this, although it's very simplified.

Prior to your conversion, you had a God-hating, Adamic heart. At the moment of conversion, you became a new creature. And although there is an aspect of you referred to as the flesh, an unredeemed aspect of you that fights against this new heart, that fights against this new nature, you are a new creature.

And because you are a new creature, you have now new affections, new righteous affections. And those new righteous affections draw you to devotion to Christ and obedience. You see, when the Bible talks... Have you ever wondered why the Gospel of John actually begins in the beginning? Where do you hear that before? Where have you heard that before? You hear that in Genesis, don't you? In the creation story.

Why? John is talking about the new creation in Christ. This is big stuff. I like to put it this way, there is a greater manifestation of the power of God in the conversion of one sinner than in the very creation of the universe.

He created the universe ex nihilo out of nothing, but to make us saints. He takes a mass of corrupt humanity and makes it into a new creature. And so it is a theological truth that the evidence that you have truly been converted is that you bear fruit.

Not sinless perfection, not at all. Not that the true Christian doesn't struggle with sin, that's absolutely absurd. But I can tell you this, the true Christian will manifest a new way of life.

Newness of life. It is the result of the converting, regenerating work of the Spirit of God. It is the result of the indwelling presence of the Spirit in their life, the empowering of the Spirit.

And it is the result of the continuous, relentless providence of God who says, you will be my people and I will be your God. I who began a good work in you will finish it. And so because God the Father is so intensely concerned about the vine and the vine's good pleasure and the vine's reputation, He is going to govern over, He is going to oversee this vineyard.

The providence of God will be one of the greatest realities in the believer's life. It will be relentless. It will be inescapable.

Now, in Christianity, evangelicalism, even reformed, whatever you want to say, even in the purest body of people, the most biblical church, you're going to have those who are truly converted and those who appear to be branches and yet are not. And what does the Bible say is going to happen? It says every branch in me that does not bear fruit, he takes away, he removes them. Now, how does he do it? Well, I want you to look at a practical means in which he does it.

And I want you to look at a supernatural means in which he does it. First of all, the practical means. There are two reasons why evangelicalism in America, well, there are many, but I want to focus on two reasons why evangelicalism in America is so disgusting.

One of them is the men preaching the gospel do not understand the gospel and they're leading people into an empty creedalism and they're popishly declaring them to be converted when they are not. That's one of the problems. The other great problem is hardly anyone in this country, I know there are a few, but there are so few that the percentage would be in single digits.

Absolutely. Hardly any churches today practice biblical church discipline. And when a church decides it is not going to practice church discipline or it is going to ignore church discipline, it is basically looked at its master and said, I will not obey you.

And I have heard people say they've said it, they just didn't realize what they were saying when they say something, we don't discipline anybody here. We're going to love people as opposed to the Christ who commanded you to discipline people. So I suppose your love is greater than his.

And yet he says no greater love has anyone than this that he laid down his life for his friends. The same one who laid down his life for his friends commanded church discipline. And the reason why the church is in such a state, because it's no longer understood, it's no longer practiced.

Even the entire way congregations are set up now, the megachurch mentality, everything, it is absolutely impossible to do what Jesus said. How do you know when your church structure is not correct? How do you know when your church is too big, when you can't follow the commands of Christ within that body? That's how you know. And you'd preachers today say we can't do this because we're too big and your bigness ought to scare you.

We can't do this because we don't think it's loving. You have opposed Christ. Paul is very clear in his letter to Timothy in First Timothy that he says, Timothy, I'm not sure I'm going to make it to you.

So I'm writing to you these things that you'll know how to conduct yourself. And what that means is you don't have the right, nor does your pastor. Or if you are a pastor, you do not have the right to conduct yourself in church as seems right in your own eyes.

You have the strict command to follow the master with regard to his bride. If I had to leave my bride with you and go on a long journey, I would give you careful instructions and I would deal with you if they were not carried out. And he has given us instructions.

It is not a cruel, punitive church discipline. No, it is a loving, compassionate church discipline that God has given us in order to restore sinners and to protect the reputation of the church. And when you refuse to be

a part of that, you are disobeying Christ.

There's just no other way to say it. I'm sorry, there's not. There have been scholars down through the ages who have said, actually, that the moment a church ceases to practice church discipline, it ceases to be a church.

This is so, brothers, it is so very, very important church discipline. Now, let me just go with you real quick what that means, because some of you probably never even heard of this. It comes about that within the congregation, it is discovered there is a brother in a sin, in a continuous, ongoing sin, usually public, usually scandalous.

But it doesn't have to be public necessarily. It doesn't have to be scandalous. A brother is in sin.

Another brother goes to him and says, brother, according to Matthew 18, brother, you're in sin. And if the person says, oh, I recognize it, I repent, thank you, then he's won his brother. There's nothing left to do unless it be something greatly public and scandalous that must be taken care of in a public manner.

But he's won his brother. But if the brother says, I don't care, I'll continue in my sin, then the brother who has rebuked him goes and gets wiser men than himself to judge, usually the elders. And they come together and they deal with the brother.

Brother, you must turn away from this adultery. You must turn away from the sin you're committing. You must turn away from your idolatry.

And he tells the pastor, no, I don't care. Then after much admonition and prayer and heart wrenching intercession by those involved, finally, after pleading and pleading, they bring it before the congregation. And the congregation begs this brother with tears in their eyes.

Please turn from your sin. And he says, no, I will not. Then they put him out.

They do not put him out for punitive reasons. They put him out for redemptive reasons so that if he is a believer, God in his providence will deal with him even to the point of unleashing Satan himself until that brother is brought back into the fold. And the moment he walks in those doors, repentant and broken, the church envelops him in such love, works for his restoration, lays down their life for him.

But in many cases, what happens is the man is turned out. He continues in his sin. The providence of God never becomes evident.

Satan is never unleashed. And it is proven that that man has been a false convert from the start. Brothers, we're not given options.

I mean, I know what's taught in seminary. I deal with seminaries. Not in all seminaries, but in most of these seminaries today, it's like, well, if you want to start a church like this plan over here, plan A, and then there's plan B for this certain demographic.

And then there's plan C. And this is a new way of doing it. And this is a night who gave you the right? Who do you think you are? One of the most fearful things is going to be on the day of judgment is to have been an evangelical pastor in the United States of America will be terrifying when many of them are cast into hell and others of them see their entire ministry burned up. It's kind of a side note, but let me just share with you, because if you're a pastor here, I want you to realize this.

Most churches today. You go to even some of the most carnal and you will find within that church a group of people who all they want is Jesus. I mean, it's unbelievable.

All they want is to hear the word preached. They just want to worship. They want to ministry.

They just they just want Jesus. It's all they want. But it's a tiny segment of people in this huge carnal company.

And the pastors, what do they do? I think about this. They spend all their time, all their energy and direct everything in the service and everything in their in their ministries in order to cater to the carnal wicked in their church. And in doing so, the bride of Christ is over there starving to death.

When can't you see it? It's all over America. It's one little group in the church. All it wants is Jesus.

It is the bride of Christ. And this minister spends his entire life giving smoke up on the stage and dry ice and entertainment and all kinds of worldly carnal promises, feeding the carnal while the bride of Christ starves to death. And they will be judged for what they have done to his bunch of little boys.

Most of the lot unconverted, no sense of God about them and no sense of the stewardship and the seriousness of that stewardship. It would all do well to be converted and then to read Richard Baxter's reform pastor, it would help Spurgeon's lectures to my students. Portraits of Paul, we live in.

Don't think that I'm just some wild man up here. Open your eyes and look what's actually being done. If my wife had to go shopping late at night, she's coming out of the Wal-Mart store and going to her car.

She's attacked by three men who begin to beat her and abuse her severely. And you, knowing my wife, you walk by her, sir. And out of fear for your own skin, self-preservation, you act like you do not know what's going on and you let her be abused by such men.

I'll find those men. I will. And I'll deal with them.

But then I'll come for you. And that all the evangelical pastors should hear what I'm saying. You cater to the carnal to keep your big church and your big buildings and everything else, while the bride of Christ wilts away in a corner, pining only for Christ.

That's what's going on in America. It's what's going on in America. And there are certain things for which we should have no patience.

And that's one of them. Just remember this. If you use carnal means to gather carnal men into your church, you will have to increasingly give them more carnal things in order to keep them.

But if you're looking for the bride of Christ and you're doing all things, suffering all things for the sake of the elect, all you're going to have to do is preach Jesus and they'll come around. Let's go back to our message. So there is a practical means of God's removal, and that is through church discipline.

I want you to know something. The pastor who comes to you and lovingly and fearfully rebukes you in your sin, don't you realize he's the man for you? Don't you know, he knows he's putting his job on the line, his reputation on the line, his own skin on the line. So if he comes to you, he's got to be motivated by love.

It's the flatterer who's a son of perdition and the devil, not the pastor who cares for your soul. So God uses practical means to remove these branches, but then there are supernatural means. Ananias and Sapphira, that's a supernatural means.

Also, in 1 Corinthians 11, those who ate and drank judgment upon themselves in Corinth, another supernatural means. I'm going to share with you another that very few people speak of. I just want to read you a text, 1 Corinthians 11, 19.

For there must also be factions among you so that those who are approved may become evident among you. Now, I want to share with you something. I want to come out there because I want to make this very, very clear.

Why are there so many false teachers in America today? Well, there are several reasons. You say, well, it's the work of the devil. Yes, but I want to show you how it is uniquely a work of God's providence.

These false teachers, by and large, what are they prospering? What are they what are they proclaiming? They are men whose God is their belly and they prove it by the way they live. Their God is their belly. They are sensual, carnal men.

They are materialistic and that's all they think about. Now, those who go out to them, those who leave a local church, those who leave maybe a church where the gospel is being preached and leave that church and go out to these men. Why do they go out to them? Are they deceived? Well, some of them could be.

But why are they being drawn out? They're being drawn out by carnal, materialistic, sensual promises. And the fact that they're following after those promises prove that they have the same heart. These carnal, wicked men gather around them, carnal, wicked people whose God is their belly.

They want prosperity more than Christ. They want healing more than Christ. They want Mercedes more than Christ.

They want all these things. They want the American dream in Jesus name. Now, imagine this.

If all those people were left in a true body, a true local church, do you realize what a corrupting influence they would have? And so God raises up false prophets in order to draw this poison out of his church and away from his people and gather it all in one spot. Before there was medicine, if there was infection on an arm, they would put a bomb. They would put a mass of something, whether it be figs or some sort of cloth over the top of it in hope of drawing the poison out of the body.

These false prophets like Benny Hinn and the rest of them, they have that purpose. Those who would identify themselves with Christ but are carnal and fleshly people, if they remained in the church, they would destroy it. They would infect it.

But they're drawn out. By these heretics, you see, my dear friend, this this Christianity thing is very prophetic, very apocalyptic. These are serious things.

These are just life and death, heaven, hell, works of God. Now, here's something that I want you to say. That is very, very important, God's removal of a person.

Can be redemptive. There are Christians. We are all capable of this, of going astray.

And so God will use church discipline to bring us back to the fold. That's the purpose of church discipline. It's for His people.

God will also use extraordinary events of providence in our life, extraordinary things, even to the point of striking us physically. In order to bring His people back to Him, in order to bring an individual back to Him, so it is redemptive. But you need to understand the removal of branches also, as indicated here in John and also in Matthew 7. Those branches are removed because they never were a part of Christ.

And when they are removed, my dear friend, they are cast into hell. I know this is not very popular today, but hell is just as much a reality today as it was 2000 years ago. You know, I hear these creatures today.

I actually hear them on CNN and other things like that. When they're asked about hell, they say things like this. They say, well, you know, we just want to teach the words of Jesus in our church.

And I'm sitting there and go, this guy has just disqualified himself for the ministry based either on ignorance or immorality. I say, well, what do you mean? Here's what you need to understand. I challenge you to read the Bible, read the entire Old Testament, and you will find very few references about hell.

Read the epistles and you will find very few references about hell. We would know nothing about hell if it wasn't for the words of Jesus. Jesus talked more about hell than absolutely everybody else in the Bible.

So when a man says we don't teach on hell, we just want to teach on the words of Jesus, either he doesn't know the words of Jesus or he is a deceiver because Jesus is the one who talked about it. But since church discipline isn't practiced and the gospel isn't preached correctly, what happens? We have so many people in evangelicalism today that go to church every Sunday and they are asleep in the pew and they are on the road to hell. They're on the road to hell.

One of the men I admire mostly in the present day and is a friend of mine is Ray Comfort. He goes out into the highways and the hedges and he preaches the gospel to the lost that will never enter into a church. I go into the church to reach the lost that are there, and there's just as many inside the church as there is outside of the church.

But the ones in the church are even in greater danger because every Sunday that they hear a message that has any truth on it, it is heaping up more judgment upon them. And they are asleep. They are convinced even by their own ministers, they are convinced that it is right with them.

When it is not, evangelicalism is filled with these false prophets and preachers who say, peace, peace, when there is no peace. And they'll be responsible for damning countless, countless souls to hell. So it is a serious thing.

Now, I want to make one more statement about the father removing branches. There's a possibility here of an immediate reference to Judas. He was the one that joined the lot, was called into the lot, and yet was the son of perdition from the very beginning, from the outset, was a son of the devil.

He had to be removed from this apostolic band in order that it might function correctly. If you realize there, before the crucifixion of Christ and even during it, a lot of things were being done for that apostolic band. One is this wild branch is being removed, Judas, son of perdition, which would have, without the presence of Christ being among them physically, he would have contaminated the whole lot.

He's being pulled out. The one who's going to be designated as one of the chief columns among them, Peter, he's having to be dealt with. In what way? It was necessary that Peter deny Christ.

You say necessary? Jesus said, Satan has asked the Sith Jew. And he doesn't say, and I've stopped him. He doesn't say that.

But he says he's prayed for him. Now, what's going on? When Jesus told everyone, you will deny me, you will deny me, even you will scatter, Peter said, not me, I won't. If Peter had been left in that state of pride, self-sufficiency, he could have never been of use to that apostolic band.

He had to be crushed. The amazing thing, my brothers, and this is always the case, this is from Samuel Chadwick. He was wondering what he should preach one day.

And that happens to preachers. So he decided to take a walk in the village. And he's walking along there.

He comes to the blacksmith shop and there's this gigantic man in this leather vest and he's got this hammer and he's beating this piece of metal on an anvil like crazy. And there's another man standing beside him like this, finely dressed. And so Samuel Chadwick walked over there and tried to talk to the man swinging the hammer as though he were the blacksmith.

And the man that was finely dressed said, sir, he's not the blacksmith, I'm the blacksmith. And Samuel Chadwick said, well, you know, you're just standing here. This man's doing all the work.

He said, yes, he is. And in the old English, he said, this man's nothing more than an idiot, sir. He's an imbecile.

He doesn't even know what he's doing. And then Samuel Chadwick began to investigate, well, what's going on? And the blacksmith said this, this man has no clue what he's doing. He's beating a piece of metal.

I'm telling him where to hit exactly. I'm telling him how many times to hit exactly. I'm telling him where to hit exactly.

And this imbecile believes that he's destroying a piece of metal, but I am using him to create a work of art. And Samuel Chadwick had a sermon. That's exactly the way God uses the devil.

The devil said, I'm going to beat this saint to death. And God in His providence said, and you will hit only where I tell you, and you will hit only as many times as I tell you. And you'll hit as hard as I tell you.

And you thinking you're destroying my child, I'm turning him into the image of Christ. That's what he had to do with Peter. So he removes this one branch and then he takes this other branch and fashions it into a useful instrument.

Then we can go back to the Puritan idea of a bruised reed, can't we? But because this is Peter, this is his elect, this is one of his. He doesn't cast him out, doesn't snuff him out, doesn't throw him away, but he creates something spectacular out of him. Now, in Malachi chapter three, verse two, I want to make one final point about the father and removal.

When the Messiah comes among his people, he will be like a refiner's fire and a fuller soap. Notice that in many of the rebukes in the seven churches of Asia, what do you say? He says, basically, I love you. He

said, that's why I'm doing this.

I love you. I'm coming to discipline you because I love you. The evidence that the Messiah is among his people is that he's among his people as a refiner's fire and a fuller soap.

And that means the more you see God's providence functioning in the cleansing and the pruning and the disciplining and the refining fires, the more you see that in a church, the more that church is right with God. But when you see a congregation filled with mass of carnal people, lying, adultery, greed, idolatry, everything, a typical evangelical church and you see that and no one's dying. Oh, don't think it's the mercy of God.

It's the judgment of God, the judgment of God, in that he has removed the candlestick. It is his absence that proves his judgment. Do you see that? Have you ever wondered? And I recommend a book to you, and that's Jowett's School of Calvary, in which he demonstrates throughout the scriptures and church history what? That the more a man or woman is used as an instrument of God, to the degree that they're used, so is to the degree they're suffering.

This Messiah is constantly refining, constantly cleaning. And so, Saint, look at this. The very thing that we need the most is the very things we pray not to have.

Typical prayer meeting, if there is one at all in an evangelical church, is, Lord, save me from suffering. Save me from discomfort. It should be, Lord, like Christ at all costs.

Like Christ at all costs. Oh, my dear friend, listen, the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of evangelicalism today. And when everyone is saying, missions, missions, missions, and you know, I work in a mission organization.

My whole life is missions. But I hear everybody in evangelicalism saying, no, we need more missions. We need more missions.

And I'm going, no, we need to quarantine this whole thing. Don't spread it any further. Leave it here to die.

I can go every place in the world and show you where indigenous leaders come to me. Now, there are some good missionaries, please, not throwing the baby out with the bathwater. But do you actually want to export American evangelicalism? A refiner's fire, a fuller soap.

And if he is not working among the church in that way, it's because the candlestick has been removed. You know, a good question would be this. And I wouldn't care who did it, Calvinist or Arminian, the good question would be this.

When is a church no longer a church? Now, so we see that he is he's pruning. Now, I want you to see something. If you if we read in verse two and three, he says in the last part of verse two, he says he prunes it so that it may bear much more fruit.

Then he says in verse three, you are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. The word prune there in verse two and the word clean in verse three of the same root. The idea is cleaning.

And Jesus says you are clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Now, what does this mean? I've written here, Christ is declaring that the disciples are clean because of the teaching they have received from him, because of his teaching, the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, they are now

prepared to bear even greater fruit. They are prepared to be fruitful.

Now, I want to talk about God's means of cleansing his people and his church, God's means of pruning. Now, I'm going to show three different things. Just bear with me.

First of all, in the believer's life, the first means that Christ points out here in verse three to make us clean is his teaching. Now, I said this among the pastors this morning, I'm going to say it again. I don't think that we do this intentionally, but especially among reformed guys or guys who read the old Puritans and the early Baptists and Presbyterians and take church history seriously.

It seems like the moment we start growing in these areas, our chief course of study is the epistles. We're studying Romans. We're studying Galatians, studying all these things, Ephesians.

And I see something of a neglect of Christ's teachings. Now, all of it is Christ's teaching. We do recognize that.

But the Gospels are not to be neglected. But I think sometimes it is easier to go to the epistles because there we only have to wrangle with theology. Not really, but that's the way we treat them.

But when we go to the words of Christ, there's not a whole lot to wrangle with. There are demands. There are radical, radical, life changing demands.

The entirety of the Christian life, according to Christ, is that your righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the most exquisite keepers of the law. Oh, yes, Christ teaches justification by faith. It is not just a Pauline doctrine.

That we must believe in the Son. For God so loved the world, He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life. We know that.

That is the teachings of Christ. But then it's this teaching of this, Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done.

That is one of the most radical declarations anyone has ever made. You've never seen it that way possibly, but it is. The whole intent of the heart of Christ is revealed in that prayer.

He says in His incarnate state as a man, He says, I exist for one purpose. There is one flame burning in my heart that Your name be separated as holy from all other names, that Your kingdom come, that Your will be done. My entire life is given to that.

He says my entire purpose. Seek ye first the kingdom of heaven and His righteousness and all these things will be gathered unto you. What does it matter if a man gains the whole world and loses his soul? If you do not hate your father and your mother, you're not worthy of me.

Take up your cross. Follow me. The words of Christ.

The teachings of Christ are the means in which. And I'm speaking about the Gospels, I'm speaking about the officials, I'm speaking about the full counsel of God's word. It is all the teachings of Christ.

One part interprets the other. But I want you to know that it is the word of God that is the primary means of pruning us and cleaning us. And to the degree that we submit our life to God's word, we are made bearers

of fruit.

There is such a neglect of God's word among us. How much time do you honestly spend in the word of God every day? Think about it. You know, people say, well, I'm just not that way, I'm just not a reader, I'm just not this.

Listen, dear sir, if your factory where you work came to you and promised you a job making four times what you're making, the only thing you have to do is memorize a 600 page manual. I guarantee you'd be up all night memorizing that manual, wouldn't you? You'd do anything for worldly gain. If we're talking about life, eternal life and eternal death.

Look, I was walking through Peru one time. I was walking down the streets of Miraflores and I saw this thing on the ground. It caught my attention.

I realized it was written by the Catholic Church. It was a track and it said something about Baptist on it. So I knew it would be, you know, some kind of attack.

And so I picked it up and I read it and I said, oh, Lord, if only this were true. You know what they were saying? That Baptist ought to be avoided at all costs because they were fanatical people of the book who believed that every word of the Bible was totally inspired, that it was to be every bit of it taken seriously and applied to life and that they're just fanatical about the study and application of the Bible. And I said, oh, Lord, if only this were true.

It is not. If only it were true, if only it were true. You cannot do this Christian life through listening to John Piper or John MacArthur or anybody else, even though I love those men.

You cannot do it. You can only do it through the living Word of God. You must take this seriously.

Fathers, you must take this seriously with your children, with your wives, with everyone. Look, there's no other way. OK, I'm just telling you, there's no plan B. The cleanliness of your life and the ability to bear fruit is directly related to you reading, listening, submitting to, obeying the Word of Christ.

Because it's not just enough to know it. Judas knew it. It's not just enough to hear it.

Those who build their lives on the sand, they hear it. But to hear it and to do it will not generations rise up against us one day. Those who lived before Gutenberg, the Gutenberg press, who would have longed to have one page from your Bible.

Those who exist now who have no correct translation. Will they not rise up against you on the day of judgment for your apathy towards such a treasure? My dear friend, I know you may be angry with me. You may think that I'm just too straightforward, but it's better to hear this now than to hear it then.

While there's still time to correct your way, the Word of God, the teachings of Christ are a way in which we're clean. Now, here's one of the parts that I believe that's so beautiful and it just shows how, gosh, the Bible is so inspired and God is so wise. You need the Son's teaching.

You need to spend hours in the Word. You need to memorize Scripture. You need to saturate your life.

You need to be like John Bunyan. You know, they said if you cut him, his veins would bleed the Bible. You need the Son's teaching, but then you need the Father's application.

And this is something that people simply do not understand. If you just had the teaching alone, it would not be sufficient. But the Father comes in his providence and he applies the teaching.

I've written here, the Father applies Christ's teaching to our lives through his works of providence, testing and discipline. The continuing, inescapable, relentless work of God leading to greater and greater sanctification and thus greater and greater fruit bearing. Listen to this, Romans 8, 28, 29.

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son so that he would be the firstborn among many brothers. The summum bonum, the greatest good of God in your life is to conform you to the image of Christ.

That happens as you submit to the teachings of Christ and in the providence of God works to take that teaching and mold you. To mold you into the image of Christ. And look at Romans 5, 3 through 5. And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance and perseverance, proven character and proven character.

Hope and hope does not disappoint because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has who was given to us. What is he saying? He says we're rejoicing in all these things by the power of the Holy Spirit, because we know that God is working all these things, trials, tribulations, sicknesses, death, everything to do what? To give us the character and virtue of Christ. James says, consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance and let endurance have its perfect results so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

First Peter 1, 6 through 7. In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials. But then he says, so that the proof of your faith being more precious than gold, which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in his praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. You see, so what do you have? You have this thing in which you have the teachings of Christ there in your very hands to read, to pray over, to cry out to God for the Spirit to apply it to your heart.

And then you have the providence of God working relentlessly, filling every aspect of your life with meaning. In his economy, he makes no move that produces no good. I mean, what I'm saying is God doesn't work at a loss.

Everything in your life he is using to conform you to the image of Christ, and he knows exactly what you need. And instead of praying all the time to avoid the very fires, you should pray that he would sustain you through them. A dear professor at Southern was telling me one time of a man he knew there was a student and the woman, it was a young couple and the young lady, her husband was a student.

And she so longed to have children and she had miscarriage after miscarriage. And one day he brings his wife home. She just had a miscarriage.

He has to go to the pharmacy. He gets in his car. He turns on the car.

The radio comes on. And the news broadcaster just mentioned some woman who is infamous for her immoralities, a very famous musician, and said she had just given birth to her second or third child from a guy she chose or something to have this baby with. And he said when he heard that he was furious with

God.

He said, God, that's my wife crying right now in that apartment. She loves you. She longs to raise children for your glory.

And it's miscarriage after miscarriage. And this woman here who acts like a beast is giving birth to another child and another child. Why? He goes to the pharmacy.

He comes back and when he comes to his parking place, there's a young man standing there in the parking place waiting on him. And I mean, this is, you know, reformed guys, so they don't really do this very often. Guy standing there and he says, I need to talk to you.

What? I just I got to tell you something. I know God sent me here to tell you something. What? When? You need to understand something.

God knows exactly what you and your wife must pass through in order to be conformed to the image of Christ. Now, will you fight against it or will you submit to it? He knows what you need. And I want to tell this love, I wrote a while back something I was writing on the love of God, and I put his love is as violent as his wrath.

He knows what you need. But most people, they really don't want what God wants for their life. Most ministers do not want what God wants for their life.

I remember one time I had both my hips replaced, I got metal, my wrist is made out of metal, I got more metal in me than a Tonka truck. And prior to the operations and different things that the Lord has done, I lived in just chronic pain. It was horrible.

I remember going out in Peru. The church had been just basically wiped out by this kind of marginal charismatic group that had come in. I was struggling with that.

I was in so much pain. I couldn't hardly stand up. The doctors used to say, we don't even know how you stand.

Every part of my body was hurting. I remember walking out on the roof of the house, because in Latin America and Peru, you do a lot on the roof. And I'm walking out and there's tears in my eyes.

And I said, God, why? Why? I'm hurting so bad. And now this, everything coming down on my head. And no, God did not speak to me.

But I begin to have, I begin to remember all those times in the university, all those times in seminary. We'd have those all night prayer meetings, me and another guy. And we'd cry out, Lord, I don't care what it takes.

Make me like Jesus. Destroy everything. Ruin my ministry.

Grind me to powder. But conform me to the image of Christ. And it was like the Lord was saying, I'm answering your prayer are your desires.

What do you want? There's a sense in which all those heretical prosperity preachers are right. God will give you what you want. That's terrifying.

The Pharisees wanted the glory of men. God gave them their reward in full and then they went to hell. Do you want what God wants? Which is conformity to the image of Christ.

Talk about a militant Christianity that changes the world. Christianity doesn't change the world through militant activity. We change the world by being conformed to the image of Christ's character.

And that's costly. Any wild donkey can preach. To be conformed to the image of Christ.

It's a lifetime. Now, dear saint, those of you, there are a few of you here today and you've suffered some horrible things. And a lot of times in your suffering, you thought it was without purpose.

Well, now, you know, the lid of the tomb's been ripped off and Christ has filled your day with light. There was reason for that. He knows what you need to be conformed to the image of Christ.

Now, don't rebel. So there's these acts of providence. But other than acts of providence, there's also what we call in the book of Hebrews chapter 12.

We don't have time to read it. There is God's discipline. He says, now, I just want you to see something here for just a moment.

Just listen to this language. Because you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood and you're striving against sin and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons. My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reprov'd by him.

For those whom the Lord loves, he disciplines and he scourges every son whom he receives. Scourges. Brother, sometimes we read the Bible and we don't realize what we're reading.

It's just like R.C. Scroll points out in Isaiah six. You know, here's this angel takes this hot coal and with tongs. And he puts it on Isaiah's lips.

And we think, oh, what beautiful imagery, what beautiful imagery. This coal is so hot, an angel won't touch it. And he puts it to the most sensitive part of Isaiah's body.

His face exploded in pain. And therein you have the suffering of a prophet. Scourges.

The idea here is someone being tied up between two poles and whipped with a whip until their back is bloody. I know what culture you were raised in. A feminine, hypocritical, stupid, a culture that would say, oh, my God would never do anything like that.

Yeah, your God wouldn't do anything that the God in the Bible does. You have no idea how intense his desire is for our holiness. And you have no idea how rough this pilgrimage can be.

I mean, when it's really a pilgrimage. What do you think? It was joy? John Bunyan thought 12 years of prison time was just a wonderful retreat to write a book. He suffered there with the rats and the mold and the filth and the excrement.

And out of it came a book second only to the Scriptures in its usefulness among the people of God in church history. Didn't put him in an ivory tower to write it. You can't write books like that in an ivory tower.

What do you want? My dear friend, because of all this Internet and YouTube celebrityism and all this vomitous appreciation of men. And I know I'm part of it. It even makes it more ludicrous in my mind.

Everyone thinks and young ministers and other ministers, Satan works through this to make people think you're not a successful minister unless you have a blog. Everybody's reading unless a hundred thousand people are reading your tweets or whatever they're called, or unless, you know, you're preaching in all the conferences. That's that's a lie.

I would submit to you the philosophical. Truth. Or at least it's a beautiful picture of the question when the young when the old theologian says to his young class.

Would God take the most beautiful rose he ever made and plant it deep in a forest in which no thinking creature walks, would he do so? And if he did so, how would he be glorified by that rose? Students go, he'd never he'd take his most beautiful rose and put it for everyone to see. He couldn't be glorified if no one saw it. Yes, he could, because he would see it every day and revel in what he has made.

I submit to you that the best of preachers and the best of men are unknown to you. They asked J.I. Packard one time, who's the greatest preacher in the world? J.I. Packard said, you don't know him. Conrad Merle said one time, the best sermons that have ever been preached have been preached to six people.

I can remember one time preaching in Texas and a whole bunch of people came out for the meetings. I was going to teach through the new covenant as it is brought forth in the old covenant. The beauty of the prophets and everything about the coming of the Messiah.

And as I got up in the pulpit, there was a professor seated there to my right. And I looked over and I thought, oh, it was a brother, family from India, Dr. Mugliar. He has forgotten more about what I was going to preach on than I have ever known in my life.

And I said, behold the wisdom of God. The scholar and the godly man is seated and no one knows his name. And a wild donkey of a man gets up and can only preach a fragment of what he sees every day in his daily devotions.

You see, young men, it's not about this. It's about being, let me put it this way. It's not about the most famous preacher wins.

It's the one most conformed to the image of Christ. If you are without discipline, you are an illegitimate child. If you are without these workings of God's providence in your life, it's because you do not belong to him.

One of the greatest evidences of you being a child of God is the evidence of the paternal providence of God in your life. And if it's not there, you ought to tremble. You ought to ask yourself, do I truly belong to him? Make your calling and election sure.

Test yourself, examine yourself to see if you are in the faith. Now, I want to get to the goal of pruning and then we'll have to call it a day. The goal of pruning.

Look at verses 2. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit, he takes away and every branch that bear fruit, he prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. He's constantly working to make us more fruitful. Now, if you look at verse 8, my father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

Two things we learn here. One, the Father is glorified by our fruit. The other thing is, fruit is evidence of salvation.

Fruit is evidence of true conversion. Fruit is an outflow of regeneration. Let me say this.

It's very, very important. There's a big deal today, and sometimes I'm accused of it, John MacArthur's accused of it, others, of what's called lordship salvation. That these people are teaching that, you know, me, that I'm teaching that in order to be saved, you must believe in Jesus and fully and completely submit to His lordship and that's works.

The people who talk about lordship salvation on both sides, both of them are wrong. They don't understand the issue. The true Gospel does not say that in order to be saved, you must repent, believe, and live as though Christ were Lord doing all these things submitted to His will.

That's not what the Bible says. The Bible teaches this, in order to be saved, you must repent and believe the Gospel. Now, but as I said, those who believe, those who repent and believe, what has happened to them? They've been regenerated, haven't they? They've become new creatures.

Does it mean that as new creatures, the moment that they are converted, they now fully submit to the lordship of Jesus Christ and we're without sin? Absolutely not. None of us fully understand the idea of the lordship of Christ. None of us even come close to fully submitting to His lordship.

What does it mean? It means the moment we are regenerated, we recognize Him as Lord. We do do that. And we desire to submit to His law.

We desire to submit to His Word. We desire to submit to His sovereignty. And as we go on in life, we are seeking to submit to His law, to His sovereignty, to His Word.

And when we fail and we all do, what happens? We repent and we start again. And little by little, we are growing in our submission to the lordship of Jesus Christ. Folks, that's just Christianity.

That's just Christianity. It's not salvation is by faith and works. It is salvation is by faith, but the same supernatural work of God that produces faith also produces fruit.

And as we go on growing in sanctification, which is ensured by the indwelling spirit and the providence of God, we go on bearing more fruit. We go on living in greater and greater submission. And when we step out of that, what happens? The Father comes and He lovingly disciplines us.

Now, I want you to look at verse 16. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit and that your fruit would remain so that whatever you ask of the Father in my name, He may give to you. Now, the point that I want you to see here is this.

First of all, God has chosen us. One of the purposes of conversion is that you might bear fruit. Now, we see that in another place.

If you just look over really quick at Ephesians 2, verse 10. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. See, he's saying the same thing as we see over here.

God has chosen us before the foundation of the world that we might bear fruit and fruit according to the design that He has laid out. Because never forget, God not only gives life to the vine through His Son, God's providence directs the shape and form of the vine. His providence determines how you should grow, where you should bear fruit, what quantity of fruit you should bear, exactly what it should look like.

But make no mistake about it, if you are truly converted, you will bear fruit. There will be times when it seems that you're fruitless because He will be pruning you back. But if you look at the full course of your life, you will see fruitfulness.

Now, people say, what is that fruit? Well, here you need to be very careful because if you just do a word study, you can kind of get messed up. Fruit here has to do with just all the things that are accompanying evidences of the Christian life. They have to do with character.

They have to do with ministry. They have to do with the fruit of the Spirit. They just have to do with all the things that accompany Christian life.

But if you look in verse 16, trying to go kind of fast, if you look in verse 16, you will see something that I think that a lot of people miss. He said, you did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you would... Now, look at this. Go and bear fruit.

I think that's very interesting. I don't think that's just there by accident. We have a go somewhere else, don't we? In Matthew.

Go and make disciples. And I think that this passage right here could be added to all the other passages that we call Great Commission passages. Because the idea is that a vine doesn't stay put.

It is going out into all the world. And we go back to those metaphors of Israel in the book of Isaiah, in the book of Psalms. This idea of spreading out into all the world and bearing fruit.

Your great passion should be to bear fruit for the glory of God and for the need of the world. You are a fruitful vine. You have been appointed.

Don't come around me going, well, you know, I'm just a humble little saint and I really can't do anything. Listen, everybody's that way. Everybody's a humble little saint who can't do anything.

Apart from me, you can do nothing. But we have all been appointed to bear fruit, not in our own power and wisdom, our own direction, but under the direction and power and wisdom of God. Not only can you bear fruit, you will bear fruit.

He will see to it that you bear fruit. So go, he says, and be fruitful. And you say, well, Brother Paul, I haven't bore that much fruit.

That's possible. That's possible. But it also could be that you've never seen the reality of the need to be connected to Christ and abiding relationship with Him.

You say, well, Brother Paul, the moment I was converted, the moment I believed, I was justified. He became my head. I became part of the body.

And yes, that's true. But it's talking about more than just a position. It's talking about an experience.

It's talking about a way of life. It's talking about daily feeding off of Christ. He didn't use the metaphor that you must drink My blood and eat My body.

He wasn't teaching on cannibalism, nor was He teaching on something of a sacrament. He was talking about feeding off of Him. To the church in Laodicea, He said, you will dine with Me and I will dine with you.

It's the only supper where we are dining from Christ. We are feeding from Christ. It is Him.

It is His life. And there's the word. I've been looking for it.

All day I'm tired. There is the word. Cultivation.

The cultivation of a relationship with Christ. An experiential relationship with Christ. I look at His Word and every directive comes from there.

Any other wind that blows by, it is all tested. Any feeling, any emotion, it's all tested by the Word. Any so-called prompting or leading of the Holy Spirit tested by the Word.

So I cultivate with the Word. And the Word, as I read it, cultivates me. It plows me.

It cuts me. It fillets me. It lays me open.

It has power to speak into my life, to recreate, to renew in all these things. And then I cultivate. How? Other things.

Books from men that had great fires. From women who bore much fruit. Reading of their life.

Reading their memoirs. Reading teachings that they give. Cultivating, realizing, no, I'm not going to go to the mall.

Why? Because of the horrible things that are presented there. I'm not going to go. I'll order out of an L&L Bean catalog, but I'm not going there.

No, I'm not going to go see that movie. No, I'm not going to listen to this. I am not going to offend the Holy Spirit.

There's a great deposit given unto me. I am going to be holy. Now, I am a wild man and my house is a circus of joy.

Don't think we walk around moaning all the time. We do all kinds of things. But there are certain things we do not do.

There are certain things we do not watch. There are certain things that are not a part of our life. Why? Guarding, cultivating this thing.

Certain things I'm not going to allow into my garden because it will ruin. Tiny foxes. And it's usually tiny foxes that spoil the vineyard.

Most of you wouldn't go see a horrible X-rated movie, but you will allow enough of other stuff to come in. Tiny foxes to spoil the vineyard. Cultivating this relationship with Christ in order to be fruitful.

Oh, and here's something for the prosperity preachers. They would agree with me. You know, we ought to bear fruit.

We ought to be fruitful. We ought to be a fruitful vine. Yes, that's true.

But you need to remember something. Trees do not eat their own fruit. That's a good thing to remember.

The fruit is always for someone else. And like the old preachers used to say, you shovel it out, God shovels it in. God's got a bigger shovel than you do.

So just keep shoveling. It's to lay our lives down to bear fruit for others. Let me just give you some verses in closing.

Now, these are verses. I'm 50 years old and I'm like wanting to live to like... I'm asking for 91. Really, ma'am.

If it goes beyond that, if God is exceedingly abundant beyond all I ask or think, I may live longer. But I'm really counting on 91. But I have seen old, old men in their 90s.

There's a picture of George Mueller in his last days. He's sitting there in a chair. He's in, I think, his early 90s maybe.

The man's face glows. You know you're looking at an old man, but at the same time, it looks like a little boy sitting there. I see my brother that I was talking about, Richard Owen Roberts, who came to preach for us.

He's in his 80s. Walk up to the pulpit and his hand's like this, shaken to put the microphone on. And then he turns towards the crowd, reads the passage, and all of a sudden that back straightens out and that chest comes out.

And he preaches for two and a half hours. And I'm telling you, he is skinning some rabbits when he preaches. So in old age, I'm not looking for less fruit.

I'm looking for more. More of the strength of the flesh is whittled away, so more of the strength of the spirit might appear. He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water which yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither, and whatever he does, he prospers.

See, I'm not going to give that to the prosperity teachers. That's mine. It's going to be prospering unto the glory of God and prospering in the healings of lives, in the saving of souls.

What do we care about money? What do we care about things that shine and that will rot and rust? It's bearing fruit. Life given to nations that know no gospel. Psalms 52.8 But as for me, I am like a green olive tree in the house of God.

I trust in the loving kindness of God forever and ever. That's for me. It'll be for me when I'm rotting on my deathbed.

I'll still be a green tree. Because this outward man is perishing, but the inward man, the man I really am, is being renewed daily. Psalms 92.12 The righteous man will flourish like the palm tree.

He will grow like a cedar in Lebanon, planted in the house of the Lord. They will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still yield fruit in old age.

They shall be full of sap and very green. My wife says, you're getting gray-headed. And I say, yeah, honey, but I'm still full of sap and very green.

Oh, my dear friend. What did he say? Life bubbling up. Matthew 13.23 And the one on whom the seed was sown on the good soil, this is the man who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and brings forth some a hundredfold, some thirty, some sixty, and some thirty.

Now I want you to look at this. The least of the saints are bringing forth thirtyfold fruit. The least of them.

John 14.12 Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also. And greater works than these he will do, because I go to the Father and sends the paraclete. One of the things, and I want to admonish especially the pastors here that have really good theology.

How come these types of verses now are only read by TV creatures who read them and then misinterpret them totally? Why aren't they read by you to your people? This confidence of even though our body is breaking, even though hell is unleashed against us, we're a fruitful vine. The angel of the Lord encamps around us. I was listening to a very famous preacher, I was listening to a very famous preacher several months ago.

And he's a heretic. And I was just sitting there and thought, well, he came on and I just thought, I'll listen to this guy. You know what I realized? It was a real rebuke from God.

He was quoting some of the most beautiful, powerful promises regarding what I call biblical prosperity. Which biblical prosperity has oftentimes nothing to do with finances. I'm talking about life.

And he's quoting all these things. And I'm sitting there listening to it. And not out of him, but just out of the verses that are being quoted.

I am so edified. And I'm so full of believing what God can do in my life. And then all of a sudden, he takes all of that, that teacher, and turns it into materialism and focuses it all on your best life now.

Now, here's the problem. It's not him that I saw. It was me.

I ought to be giving these types of things to the people of God, but interpreting them correctly. I ought to be telling them, He can do exceedingly abundantly above all you can ask or think. Let's believe Him for that.

I ought to be telling them, you can be a green tree. I ought to tell them, look, rivers of living water coming up inside you. All these things are for the people of God, but the heretics have taken them away from us and we're almost embarrassed to talk about them.

Just reading those verses, didn't it fill you with hope? It does me and I've read them a gazillion times. Every time I read them, it's like, whoa. It's about as all you're going to get out of a Reform Baptist right now.

Anything louder than that, you better call an ambulance. But do you see that, brothers? And I know if my desire is, if I desire, like as a man and as a minister, to see you just go grow and bear fruit and be beautiful, even though in the midst of that, you may suffer with the beauty and the brokenness and all that

for you, and then stand up one day before your God as a fruitful branch. Man, these promises are for you.

They're for you. Don't let anybody steal these things from you. And if you're a minister, remember how, I hate to say it this way, but how positive and uplifting our faith is.

You know, in some churches, it's like I walk in and it's like, man, start singing hymns, you know. You are God and I am a worm. Step on me and watch me squirm.

Or I go into a church and you know I preach a lot on conversion, the wrath of God and everything. But the whole prayer meeting is, God, thank You for not crushing us under Your wrath. And I'm going, okay, we got that down.

Now can we move on to something? Okay, He's not going to kill us all. And we're justified. Let's look into what this means to be a child of the living God and to be happy in all these things that are promised.

All right, well, I'll pray before I think of something else to say. Father, please bless Your people with abundance of grace to be holy, with abundant outpourings of the Spirit of the living God, that it would produce graces and virtues in them, not eating or drinking, but righteousness and joy in the Holy Spirit. That their homes be marked by salvation and that salvation would produce joy.

Oh, dear God, as they laughed over Isaac, let us laugh over one greater than Isaac with great joy rejoicing in all that You have done. In Jesus' name, amen.

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