

# The Impossibility of the Christian Life

by Paul Washer

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*Paul Washer emphasizes the necessity of abiding in Christ as the source of true spiritual life and the importance of obedience in bearing fruit for God's glory.*

**Duration:** 1:43:07

**Scripture:** Psalm 80:8, Matthew 6:33

**Topics:** "Christian Life"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of running to Christ through the word of God for every problem and thirst we have. He highlights the superficiality of our faith and encourages a deeper commitment to studying the scriptures and looking at church history. The speaker acknowledges the struggle of trying to live like Christ and the failure and lack of power we often see in ourselves. He then turns to the book of Isaiah, specifically chapter 5, to discuss the metaphor of Israel as a vineyard and the consequences of not bearing fruit.

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## Transcript

Let's open up our Bibles to John chapter 15. In a moment, we're going to stand and read from the text. But before I do, let me explain a few things about the reading of Scripture in church.

Maybe some of you are from churches where not a great deal of priority is given to the reading of Scripture. And yet, it is commanded in 1 Timothy chapter 4. Paul tells young Timothy to not neglect this important aspect. And I think that the Word of God is no longer read because it's simply reflecting modern attitudes and evangelicalism with regard to the Word of God.

Now, I know that sometimes you may be called upon to stand and to look at the Scripture while a pastor is reading. And you may say, you know, I've done that and I don't get a lot out of it. What does that mean? What is that saying about you and about me? But let me encourage you, as pastors, sometimes we stand and we read the Word.

And maybe we've had to read the same passage several times in order to read it correctly for the congregation. I want you to see two very important things. One is that we read the Word and we listen to the Word as an act of worship.

You know, it's not really biblical to say that we're going to do worship and after worship we're going to have the reading of the Word and preaching. Because everything is supposed to be worship. Another thing that you need to understand is that when you and I listen, even if we're not comprehending and even if there's a battle raging in our minds in the sense that we're being distracted, but every time we're distracted we pull ourselves back to the text and we try to listen that much harder.

Do you realize what you're doing? You're loving God with your mind. You are declaring that yes, there is still an aspect of me that's very fallen. Yes, I struggle through this Christian life.

But yes, because the Holy Spirit has regenerated me, I understand these are the words of life. And by faith, I am going to fight to keep my mind centered upon this text that's being read. Another thing that I would like to point out is the idea of faith.

God has set up in this economy in which we live that everything we do practically is by faith. For me to come here to preach, I want you to know it's by faith. Because it's so often that we preach and we don't see anything.

We don't see a changing. We don't see the revival that we're looking for. So do we simply curl up in a ball? Do we give way to these types of things? No, our ministry is a ministry of faith.

You see, so we come and we preach the Word of God by faith, believing that even if we see nothing, something has happened. And when we stand and we read the Word of God, we don't allow our minds just to stray unhindered. We pull it back and we say, no, I will bring you into subjection.

I will bring every thought into subjection to Christ. So when we stand and we read, this is not some reformed ritual. This is biblical and it offers you a greater opportunity right now to worship God than the song that we sang.

You see, you were helped in that song by the rhyme and the rhythm and even the accompanying music. You were helped. But now you have no help when we read this text, except the only one true helper, the paraclete, the Holy Spirit.

So having said that, let's stand up and let's read John chapter 15. In 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 in 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 in 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. No longer do I call you slaves for the slave does not know what his master is doing. But I have called you friends.

For all things that I have heard from my father, I have made known to you. 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. This command I give you, that you love one.

Father, I come before you. Lord, in the name of your son. Father, it's his character.

It's his righteousness. It's his faithfulness that gives me confidence to pray. He is my mediator, Father.

And I come before you in no other name but his. Lord, all my righteousness is like filthy rags. Lord, please, for his sake, for the building up of your people.

Lord, use the weak. Use the powerful. Use the pitiful.

Lord, make your word known to your people, that they might live with a new sense of life and a new sense of power and a new sense of purpose, that they might have hope that they can overcome sin, that they can be more like Christ, that you who began a good work in them will finish it. Lord, that there is a source of life and power in this Christian life much greater than what they've known. Father, please help us.

Lord, everything is rot. Everything is useless. Everything is weak apart from your Spirit.

Lord, even our sacrifice of preaching, Lord, is nothing unless you sanctify what's laid on the altar. Father, please, for the reputation of Christ and for the good of these people. Out of my own need, Father, I cry that you would speak to us, that you would teach us.

In Jesus' name, Amen. Lord, you may be seated. I want so much for your joy to be increased.

I want so much for your joy to be increased. If you are a Christian, I want that the life of Christ be a greater reality in your life than you've ever known. I know you because I'm just like you.

I look in the mirror. I know what I see. I see the spots and the blemishes and the deformities.

I know that many of you, because you have been born again, you have a heart to be more like Christ. You have a heart to look like Him, act like Him, talk like Him. But then you look in the mirror and you see so much failure and oftentimes you see so little power.

And you wonder sometimes, will this just keep grinding on and grinding on and grinding on? And then I know you turn on the television in desperation and you hear all sorts of wild promises from wild and undisciplined men who do not know the Scripture. And the Scripture they do know, they twist. And they promise you all sorts of things.

But it all turns into nothing. I know what it's like to preach in the pulpit in front of thousands of people. And I know what it's like to see many, many people converted.

And I know what it's like to be impatient with my children and not to love my wife as Christ loves the church. I see the contradiction inside me all the time. But I want you to know that even though the Christian life is a work of sanctification and the progress is sometimes three steps forward and four steps back and sometimes ten steps forward and one step back, I want you to know that there is great hope that you will become more like Christ.

And there is a source of life and power. There truly is. It is an abiding, ongoing relationship with Jesus Christ.

And it's laid out for us here in this chapter. I want to understand this chapter, not simply so that I can teach it to you. I must understand this chapter so that I can live.

Because just like you, I grow tired sometimes of so many words and so little power. So much knowledge. And yet, finding it difficult to do the most simple things.

I know that until Christ comes and I experience my final glorification with you, I know that the Christian life is going to be a struggle. Yes, I will acknowledge that. A struggle, yes, but not a defeat.

We can go from glory to glory. But it is somehow all uniquely intimate related to Christ. It is not related to a gimmick.

It is not related to a teaching. It's not related to a certain blessing. It is related to a person.

And that's what this text is about. That person. And how do we abide in Him? I was looking through my notes yesterday and today, and I just don't know if I'm going to get through this in one sermon.

And if I don't, I might have to carry on. The next time. But we need to understand this.

You need to. There is so much more out there. And it's ours.

It's ours. The promises are ours. Christ is yes and amen for us.

We are the ones living in the end, in the last days, in the fullness of time. The Messiah has come. The Messiah is reigning.

Now, as we live here on this earth, we will always be the church in the wilderness. We will always be a people battered and belittled. We will always struggle against this flesh.

Don't let anyone kid you. But at the same time, these are the days of Messiah. These are the days of Christ.

The work has been done. But that finished work is not a call to apathy. These things must be fought for and applied.

I want us to look. We begin in verse 1. Jesus says, I am the true vine. Now, in a nutshell, what does that mean? Now, I know this is going to sound cliché, but it could take you a lifetime to actually understand it.

Jesus is the source of all true spiritual life. There is one mediator. And it is Jesus Christ.

So whatever this message is about, it is about you throwing down every so-called teaching and gimmick that supposedly will prop up your spiritual life. And this is begging you, this sermon, to run to Christ. Like the woman, to grab ahold of the hem of His garment, to not let go.

Not just, my friend, for salvation in the sense of justification. But to grab ahold of Him and not let go for everything. Because He is not only our justification.

He's not only our redemption. He's our sanctification. He's everything.

He is the source of all true spiritual life. Now, whenever you look at a passage like this, one of the things you need to ask yourself is, did this just come up at this moment? Or is Christ drawing on a metaphor found somewhere else? Because you would be amazed if you would study the Old Testament, how much of everything Jesus said is drawn from the Old Testament. It truly is.

And so I want us just to hold our place for a second. I want you to look at something. I want you to go to Psalms 80.

And verse 8. As a matter of fact, one of the things that so convinces me as though I needed some other convincing other than the illumination of the Holy Spirit, but just in a practical, scientific sort of way, that the Scriptures are truly the Word of God, is the unity of them and how they just flow together. You can't make this stuff up. But in Psalms 80, verse 8, He's speaking of Yahweh, of God, and the nation of Israel.

And He says, You removed a vine from Egypt. You drove out the nations and planted it. You cleared the ground before it, and it took deep root and filled the land.

The mountains were covered with its shadow and the cedar of God with its boughs. And it was sending out its branches to the sea, and it shoots to the river, and then it changes. Why have you broken down its hedges so that all who pass that way may pick its fruit? A boar from the forest eats it away, and whatever moves in the field feeds on it.

And so what do we see? We see the nation of Israel was a vine that God brought out of Egypt. He redeemed the nation of Israel from Egypt. And Israel, under the blessing of God, walking in obedience, walking in the covenant with God, was to be in a sense a vine that spread out into all the world, giving what? Spiritual life and bearing fruit.

But then we see all of a sudden a turn where the one who was supposed to be bearing fruit is now being attacked, is being eaten alive. Why is that? Well, I want us to go for a moment to the book of Isaiah chapter 5, beginning in verse 1. Let me sing now for my well-beloved a song of my beloved concerning his vineyard. My well-beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hill.

He dug it all around, removed its stones, and planted it with the choicest vine. And he built a tower in the middle of it and also hewn out a wine vat in it when he expected it to produce good grapes. But it produced only worthless ones or wild ones.

And now, oh, inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. What more has there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it? Why, when I expected it to produce good grapes, did it produce worthless ones? So now, let me tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge and it will be consumed.

I will break down its wall and it will become trampled ground. I will lay it waste. Now listen, it will not be pruned or hoed, but briars and thorns will come up.

I will also change the clouds to rain. No rain on it. Now, what are some of the points that I want us to see? First of all, Israel, as many other characters, individual personalities in the Old Testament, were raised up by God as types.

As types of something that was to come that would be much greater. A perfect completion of that thing. And here we have the nation of Israel which was to be something of a source of spiritual life for the nations and bear fruit unto God, but we see what? That it failed.

That it failed. Why did it fail? Because it was flesh. Because it was man.

Because it was dependent upon men. And every time man is figured into the equation, there is failure. But this thing in the Old Testament that we see of this consistent failure is designed to produce in us what? A looking away from man who is nothing more than a nose full of breath at any given time.

To look away from men and to look to God for all spiritual life. Let me give you an example. We see it all over.

Here we see the magnificent, faithful Noah. But isn't it amazing that in the end, what do we see about him? He fails. Why? Because men are not saviors.

And Noah and all his failure is pointing to One who is to come who is greater than Noah. We have a Moses. Magnificent Redeemer of Israel.

One used mightily of God to deliver His people from the land of bondage, but He Himself cannot even enter in. Why? Human failure. So what do we learn from this? That if there is a vine out there, if there is some fountain to give us life, it is not a man.

Nor is it the work of men. It is 100% God. And therein lies your problem.

And therein lies my problem. Whether we are trusting in Christ or another man, or another teacher, or another camp, or we are trusting in Christ Himself, whenever man enters into the equation, all you can expect is faith. Now, another thing that I want you to see.

In this metaphor of the vineyard and of the vine, of course, ultimately it is speaking about Christ, but there's also some warning here for us today in the church. We are not the vine, but we are the branches. And we are to grow and spread and go over walls and bear fruit throughout all the land, that there is a thing that can stop that.

And that is our own disobedience. That is our own failure to see that we have been separated uniquely for God and for no one else. The God who governs over His church is a jealous and zealous God.

It is because He loves you. He did all this to bring you to Himself and not to share you. The men and the women down through church history that have been most used of God have been quite different in their personality and even sometimes in their theology.

But they all seem to have one common thing running through their veins. A sense of separation unto God. That they belong to God and that the fruit they bear is to be bore unto Him and for His glory.

I know that you want to bear fruit. I know that you want to do good things in the name of your God. But you've got to realize this is not I'm going to go 25%, 35%, 75% or even 98%.

You must have a heart that although you will never achieve perfect devotion, you must have a heart that is longing for that. God, I want to be all for You. I turned 50 a few months ago.

My only regret is not what I've given. It's what I've kept. It's what I've kept.

And I hate it. And it hangs on me like canker sores. As we talk about Christ as the true source of all spiritual life, I want you to know it's just talk unless you're willing to go after the major problem.

That is a heart given to Him. All for Him. Everything for Him.

Your life for Him. Breathing for Him. Heartbeats for Him.

Movements of the hand, feet, nose, mouth and ears. All for Him. You are not your own.

You were bought with a price. I can teach you absolutely everything possibly you need to know about John 15, but it will do you no good unless a decision of the heart is made unless it comes to you taught by the Spirit that you belong to God and you are to bear fruit for Him alone and you say, yes, by the grace of God, this one thing I will pursue. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

So many people think that that has to do with mysticism or some type of monkish purity. No, the word there literally means unalloyed. A heart with no mixture, with no competing loyalties.

You see, you can bear fruit and you can be mightily used of God with a bare minimum of information in your head if your heart is pursuing purity, undivided loyalty to God. But, some of you who are young believers, your desire ought to be to pour yourself out for Him, to be His vineyard, to bear fruit for Him, that everything you do, whether you eat or drink or any other thing, you do it all unto the glory of God. And if you are older, beyond my years, in your 60s and 70s and 80s, your passion should not be diminished.

You should still be crying out, I want to give more to God than I have given. So you see, it's not just about learning what does John 15 mean. It's preparing the heart.

Lord, I want to be Yours. I want to bear fruit for You. If You've given me talents, I will not spend them on the world.

If You've given me gifts, I will not use them for my own advantage. If You give me breath, I will return it to You in praise. If You give me strength, it's that I love You with all my strength.

You see, we almost need to stop now, don't we? Because a great searching of the heart is required to go on. If you want to be halfway about this, then the rest of these meetings will do you no good. But to be passionately given over to this one thing, I want to be His.

I don't want the world. I don't want its glory. I don't want its fame.

I want to bear fruit for Him. And I want to bear fruit if God wills it, in front of 5,000 people preaching. Or if God wills it, no one knows my name.

I want to bear fruit. I'm going to hit a lot of things. I'm going to throw a lot of stones.

I want you to realize this. If you're a young preacher here today, there is a terrible thing going on. Everybody thinks that being well known on YouTube or at the book table or in the conferences is a sign of spirituality.

There has never been a greater lie. You do not dedicate yourself to the cause of God so that people might recognize you, even the people of God in this life. You do not do it.

You do it for Him. And never forget this. It's a philosophical question.

Would God plant His most beautiful rose? His most beautiful branch? In the middle of a forest where no living human being ever walks. Would He do that? And the answer of the first year seminary student is, why no? How could He get glory out of planting such a beautiful thing in a place where no one passes by? You fool. He gets glory out of it every day because He looks at it.

He doesn't need other men to look at it. He doesn't need other men to applaud. He doesn't need other men to buy books in order to get glory out of an individual.

He sees a godly man, a godly woman dedicated unto Him and bearing fruit unto Him. He sees it and rejoices and He takes the attention of every creature in heaven and pulls it off the one of renown and makes them look at the one no one knows. So be encouraged.

We don't live our Christian life just on a stage for men to see. We live our Christian life on a stage for God to see. And He sees us all.

So will you make that decision of the heart? Will you make this a matter of pursuit that I long to bear fruit for Him? To not give off wild grapes. To not be a wild vine with no order to it. I long to be His and to bear fruit for Him.

That's the first challenge. Will you do this? Because if you do not, there's no need to go any farther. So we see here, Jesus says that He is the true vine.

He alone. He's not in a conjunctive relationship. It's not Jesus plus something.

It's Jesus alone who is the true vine. Now, I want you to notice something here that's very important. First of all, Jesus is, and I've said this before, but I'm going to say it again, He is the exclusive source of all spiritual life.

So whatever that means, you should know one thing from the very beginning, that if you are going to live this Christian life with any degree of power, it is going to come directly from your intimate, personal, real, biblical relationship with Jesus. He is the true vine, but also He's the bread of life. Listen to what John 6 says.

Jesus said to them, I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me will not hunger. And he who believes in Me will never thirst.

Let me ask you a question. Do you go through your Christian life many times hungry? Inwardly hungry in the soul? I do. Do you go through your Christian life at times thirsty? Inwardly there's a thirst of the soul? You feel barren? Do you know what that is? It's not the devil robbing your joy.

That is God screaming out to you. To run to Christ. To draw in deeper to Christ.

I want you to know that those who grab ahold of Him truly and imbibe of Him and drink of Him and feed from Him, they are not hungry. They are not thirsty. And if you find yourself both hungry and thirsty, it is God screaming out to you to return.

To return. I see so many believers that say, I'm hungry and I'm thirsty. So therefore, I'll go from sea to shining sea chasing a word from the Lord.

I'll listen to this new teacher. I'll watch YouTube to find out if there's some exciting personality on the horizon who can help me. And God is screaming at you saying, no! Run to My Son! We were in Romania years ago and my wife was teaching over the weeks some of the girls that were there, some of the ladies.

And in the end, they were kind of put out with her. Because one girl said, every problem I have, you give me the same answer. That I need to run to Christ through the Word of God and prayer.

And my wife says, I'm sorry, I have no other answer. But we don't want to do that, do we? We would rather run to men and teaching and procedures and methods and ten steps to get this or that rather than running to Christ. You see, the old saints knew this.

That's why they talked so much about being alone with God in the closet, reading through the Scriptures, on their knees, crying out to God. I'm sorry, America. There is no instantaneous Christian power.

There's no microwaves in heaven. There's no instant anything. It is clinging and clinging and clinging and clinging to Christ.

It is clinging. Do you know in the fall where we see that a curse comes upon the devil? A curse comes upon Adam and a curse comes upon Eve? The implications of that. Of course, with the devil, it's pure judgment.

But within the curse upon man and woman, we also see mercy. Do you know how? Every time the man goes out, he goes into the field and he works day and night only to lose his own crop. He sweats every day of his life and feels the knife pain of futility and uselessness and vanity.

You say, that's the judgment of God. Yes, but mixed in that is the mercy of God. Because every instance of futility, it is God screaming out at him, fallen, fallen, fallen.

There is no life apart from Me. Every time the woman gives birth and screams out with a pain a man has never comprehended, it is God crying out to her, fallen, fallen. Return to Me.

Return to Me. Every time the Christian inwardly feels thirst and hunger, it is God crying out to you, return to Me. Return to Me.

But you would not. You'd be led away by some pied piper. You'd be led away by some promise of a certain method that if it's applied correctly, you will be okay.

Nothing, nothing will take away your hunger and your thirst if you're truly regenerate, but Christ. Only Christ. You see, if you have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit, know this.

You are now too high a creature to be satisfied by anything less than God. You are now too high a creature to be satisfied by anything less than God. And if you can be satisfied by something less than God, it is good evidence you are not converted.

God will be the one who will ensure there is emptiness in your soul, chasing after anything except Christ Himself. It's also, He says here that He is the fountain of living water in John 7. It says, Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out saying, If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, from his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.

Now I want us to look at this for a moment because it's so important to understanding John 15. It's very important. First of all, I don't need any other text in the Bible to prove the deity of Jesus Christ.

This statement is blasphemy. No prophet talks this way. No prophet in the Old Testament.

No apostle in the New Testament. No! You can't say these things, my dear friend, unless you're God. You cannot say these things.

Now on the last day, the great day of the feast. It's the last day. Have you ever been to a great feast? Even a great religious festival or a great preaching conference? You went there with this great anticipation of just your life being changed, of you being totally filled by some preacher and the wisdom that God has given him and you get in your car and you drive home and you feel almost nauseous.

Why? Because you seem to be almost as thirsty and hungry leaving as when you came. That's the mercy of God. He's crying out to you.

There is only one fountain and it's Jesus. Now you say, but Brother Paul, I've sought Him. I hear so many people will tell me this.

Brother Paul, but I've read the Scriptures and I cry out to Him and nothing. And my question, even though it may seem too practical, too simplistic, is always, how long? How long? An hour? A day? 24 hours? A week? A year? How long? Most have to just simply put their head down and say I can't even use that language. You see, my dear friend, I wish I could take you through the annals of church history and show you how superficial we are as a people.

We feel a thirst. We feel a hunger in our heart. We decide to increase our Bible study from 5 minutes to 15.

We try to sneak in a little prayer, maybe an hour or two for a couple of days and then what? It's gone. Oh, my dear friend, we're such... No. Not only do I tell you to study the Scriptures, I tell you to look at church history.

It's never been this way. What do you see? You don't see great saints who were just born great saints. What you see is desperate men.

Desperate women who had no place to go. Who became convinced they could not be satisfied. Who were known to study the Scriptures for months on end, digging with all their might.

Who were known to wrap themselves up in a closet and cry out to God night after night after night after night. We've developed this thing of he should come. If he doesn't come in a few minutes, well, this stuff just doesn't work.

Oh, my dear friend, it's a lifetime. It's a lifetime. See, one of the things I think that is so different from the preachers who raised me and the preachers of today.

Preachers of today are very smart. I don't know how much time they spend with God. Preachers of old, like the prophet, they could say, the God before whom I stand.

They dwelt with Him. They said upon His Word. They cried out in the watches of the night.

When they couldn't sleep, they saw it as God coming to them and wooing them from their bed to meet with Him. When they were confronted with problems, they ran to God. And they were known to stay there for days.

We're not like that, are we? We'll give a few minutes, a few days, and then say it doesn't work. Something's obviously wrong. Moses on a mountain for 40 days and then another 40.

I'm not saying that's what we have to do, but just look at the comparison between Him and us. Hi, dear friend. I want to tell you something.

These words are true. And that's the thing that so encourages me. They really are true.

He says, you come to Me you will not hunger. You come to Me you will not thirst. That means to me I can go into the prayer closet.

I can grab a hold of the horns of the altar and I can stay there and wrestle with my God until He fulfills the promises He has made. Such boldness God loves. He loves that.

It's almost like every angel passes by and says, you fool, how long will you tarry at this door until you can prove to me my Master's words are not true? He will answer. He will fill me. He will.

The problem is we do not tarry. The problem is we think there's a plan B. The problem is we think there's an easier way. There's no easier way than to trust and obey, than to seek Him in prayer, than to join Him in the night watches.

Listen, every time you thirst, it's God calling you to prayer. It's God calling you to the Word. It's God calling you to seek Him.

Every time you're hungry, it's God. I don't want to know. Don't talk to me about words.

The power, life, that is what validates. Talk, talk, talk, nobody cares. The power to live.

See, there's hope, isn't there? There is hope. But this Christian life is not this little thing. It's everything.

It's not this little quiet time. It's 24 hours. It's a wild and wonderful and dangerous and passionate journey, pursuit, chase after God who loves to be found.

Now, one of the things that I must warn you on more than probably anything else during this sermon time is simply this. If you look in the Old Testament and you look in church history and you look around you today, you will find that you and I, even the regenerate, even those who are truly converted, we are still prone to chase after false cisterns, false fountains, mirages that truly will not quench our thirst. And I want you to know that evangelicalism is absolutely full of them.

Now, let me read something to you. Jeremiah 2, 11 and 13. As a nation changed gods when they were not gods, but my people have changed their glory for that which does not profit.

Be appalled, O heavens, at this and shudder. Be very desolate, declares the Lord, for my people have committed two evils. They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living water, to hew for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water.

A broken cistern, I guess a synonym for broken cistern could also be just simply something that you are running to. Something that you are going to in replacement of Christ. Something that you as an individual or something that the church as a whole runs to.

And I want to give you a list of some of those things. But before I do, let's look at Jeremiah just for a moment. Chapter 2. He says here, has a nation changed gods when they were not gods? He says there's never been... This is amazing.

He's basically saying this. There's really never been a case with a pagan people that had false gods that changed their false gods. I mean, there are pagans who would die before they would change their gods.

And yet, he says, my people that have a true God, they have changed their glory for that which does not profit. Now he says this, be appalled, O heavens, at this, and shudder. Be very desolate, declares the Lord.

I want you to know something. You know, you may think about, and rightfully so, that adultery is a terrible, terrible, vile crime against God and against the body. That's true.

Murder is a vile thing. Lying, stealing, all these things against the law of God. They are vile.

God says they are an abomination to Him. But very rarely do we hear something like this. Be appalled, O heaven, at this, and shudder, and be very desolate.

He's calling all of heaven to attention and telling heaven to literally shudder at some sin that is so vile. What is it? When we go to anyone other than God to fill us. When we go to anything other than God to satisfy us.

Now again, let me go back to this. My dear believer, listen to me. God is so jealous.

Now, I know the way Hollywood puts its twist on that and the way media puts its twist on it. It's just because they don't understand the Scriptures. What that text means is that God loves you.

He really, really loves you. And that He knows there is nothing good for you apart from Him. His jealousy is motivated by His love.

He knows that the best thing you could ever do is forsake absolutely everything to claim only Him. And it angers Him to see you thirsty. It angers Him to see you poor spiritually.

It angers Him to see you hungry out of His love for you, His burning zeal for you, and therefore He cries out to you, Turn to Me. Turn to Me. This is one of the great reasons for trials.

This is one of the great reasons for all the maladies that are in our life. They are God's strong wind to blow us to Him. And I see this all the time.

If you study church history in times of persecution, you see a purified people. Why do you see a purified people? Because everything is taken away from them. Every prop and every help but God's.

Or you see even a country church in Virginia that seems to just kind of be meandering through its spiritual life, and then all of a sudden, the beloved saint in that small congregation is struck down with some disease that is supposed to be fatal. What happens in the church? Something of a revival. Why? No one can help them but God's.

But we live in a nation that has so many props and so many helps and so many salesmen and so many things being offered to fill the people of God that we so easily turn away from Him. And we look for hope and joy and peace and life and power in so many things other than simply the person of Jesus Christ and an intimate relationship with Him. And when we do, it is appalling.

It is appalling. He goes on, My people have committed two evils. They have forsaken Me.

As I grow in my Christian life and as the years roll on so quickly, there is an intimacy. There is a thing that starts happening. Let me give you an example.

I love the law of God. I'm taught in the Scriptures to love the law of God. But I can honestly tell you, I don't walk around all day thinking about the law of God or being really concerned about breaking some precept.

It is walking around concerned that I not offend a person, that I not grieve a person, that I not quench a person, that I am walking with Christ, that Christ is dwelling in me. And yes, I meditate upon the law of God. I love the law of God.

It instructs me in all these things. But what I have is a person. And I don't just do not look there because the law says don't set your eyes on that evil thing.

No, it's do not look there because I do not want to offend Christ, because I enjoy the life of the Spirit, because there is something of a power, there is something of a life flowing through me, changing me, transforming me, encouraging me. And when that thing is quenched, it kills me. You see, it is this intimacy with Christ.

He says, My people have committed two evils. One of them is they have forsaken Me. My dear friend, you will run to every person in the world to fix your problems.

You'll run to every counselor in the world to fix your problems, but spend so little time with Jesus Christ. So little time in His Word. When I was a missionary in Peru and a young man, God was really prospering the church and it was growing.

And this Peruvian pastor came to me one day and he sat down in front of me and he said, Paul, I've come here to rebuke you. And I said, Well, okay, brother, why? You're leading your people into idolatry. I said, brother, that's a pretty stiff charge.

What's your grounds? He goes, When they have a problem, who do they come to? I said, they come to Me. I'm the pastor. And what do you do? Well, I pray with them.

I look in the Scriptures. I show them things. He goes, Paul, as a pastor, you have taken the place of God in their life.

He said, we're Peruvian. We were raised to believe that the priest had all the answers. You've just exchanged places.

And I said, well, brother, what should I do? He said, when they come to you, the first question ought to be, have you tarried with God? What has God shown you? How has God helped you? How has God directed you? And Paul, when they tell you, I don't know what you're talking about, then say that God is the only one that can fix your problems. And as a pastor, I will help you find the answers. I will lead you back to Christ over and over again so that you do not draw your life from me.

You do not draw your wisdom from me, but from God. And so people would come to me and they'd say, brother Paul, I have this problem. And I would say, okay, what is it? What's this, this, this? What has God shown you? What do you mean? Well, how much have you studied the Scriptures with regard to this matter? And how much time have you spent in prayer? And they'd say, well, I came to you.

Exactly. I want you to go back and I want you to study this. Now, there were some times when it was a crucial matter that had to be addressed immediately.

But for the most part, I could say, I want you to go back and study the Scriptures and pray for two weeks. And they'd say to me, I don't even know where to begin. I would write out a list of all the texts.

And I would say, take this, go home. Cry out to God. Seek the will of God.

Come back and I will continue to instruct you and lead you back to Him and back to Him. And if you come to me with a wild interpretation, I'll show you a better way, but I'll keep pushing you back to Him. You see, believers, we need pastors.

We need teachers. We need these things. But what you've got to understand is there are no priests except Christ.

There are no high priests or mediators except Him. Now, that doesn't mean you're an island unto yourself that you should never go to a brother or you should never go to a pastor. You most certainly should.

But you shouldn't bypass Christ. It's a false, a broken system. I want to point out something for you that I think are very, very important.

First of all, one of the great broken cisterns in our world today is religious ritual. It's very possible, some commentators believe, that when Jesus was coming out of the upper room and passing through the Kidron Valley on His way to the Garden of Gethsemane, that you could possibly look back and see the front of the temple. And over the temple gates was a gigantic golden vine.

Some historians say it was gigantic, that the grapes were the size of a man. It was a gigantic golden vine that represented Israel and represented the ritual and the service of the Old Testament cult, of the Old Testament worship service, of the sacrifices and the rituals and the washings. And it's very possible that Jesus was looking at that and saying the same thing He said to the woman in Samaria.

I'm telling you, the source of spiritual life isn't on that mountain. And it's not on that mountain. And it's not in this ritual, in that ritual, in that sacrifice, in that washing.

It's in Me. I am the true vine. And if you want spiritual life and spiritual growth, if you want to mature, if you want to bear fruit, you must come to Me to do it.

And they said, well, Brother Paul, we don't have a temple, so how could this be applied today? Well, let me give you a few things. First of all, now, please understand me when I say this. If your church has this,

I'm not trying to attack you.

And I'm not saying it's wrong. I'm just saying that it's awful interesting that it's almost on every website I see. That you look, you click on a church and you see in so many churches, especially those that specialize in church growth and categorizing people and demographics, you click on the website and the first thing you see are all these beautiful, smiling people who are there to affirm you, to love you.

They're just wonderful people to be around. You can raise your kids with them. Do you know what that's saying? They're using the congregation.

They're replacing Christ with the congregation. You can't even find Jesus on the website. It's all about this wonderful, affirming congregation.

And if you come within this wonderful, affirming congregation, then your needs will be met. My friend, that's a false system. There are so many people today around this country.

Those of you that are from more reformed circles, you may not even know this is going on, but I can assure you it is. It's all about the congregation. Come and see our beautiful, affirming congregation.

Our happy people who will make you happy too. But it's true. Now, I know Jesus said that all men will know that you are My disciples by your love for one another, but this is completely different.

You can't find Jesus on the website. It's all about a beautiful congregation and getting connected is the word now with all those wonderful people. You're lonely? We've got wonderful people here.

You have no friends? We have wonderful people here. It would be very hard for them to sing a hymn about Jesus being the friend of sinners. Being a friend like no other friend.

Because Jesus is far away in the background. Because a group of smiling, affirming, loving people is not scandalous. A crucified and risen Savior is scandalous.

Another thing that I want to point out is the church event. I have sometimes been asked to preach in places I investigate better now, where the whole thing is a cleverly designed festival. Entertainment.

Extravaganza. And everybody lives. They live from week to week just on what goes on in those meetings.

Wonderful, beautiful, orchestrated music. Powerful, emotional, full of joy. A lecture or some sort of talk that builds you up and edifies you and makes you think you can, you think you can, and you go out there again for another week.

And Christ is not in it. They're not pointing the people to Christ. It's all about the music.

It's all about the atmosphere. It's all about presenting certain things in certain ways so as to encourage certain people. My dear friend, the one thing I love so much about the church where I attend, where I'm just a member, if you're coming there, you won't come there for anything other than Jesus.

Because Jesus is the only thing offered. That's it. What do you do in your church? Pray.

Corporate prayer. The reading of the Word. The exposition of the Word.

A few hymns. More corporate prayer. Seeking Christ.

My dear friend, I love people. I love congregations. And I love music.

And I love all these things. But they are so far in the background. It's Jesus.

You need Christ. I know it sounds like a cliché, but I really mean you need Christ. Woman, you're so dissatisfied in your husband because he doesn't meet all your needs.

He was not designed to meet all your needs. And if you are a Christian, he will never be able to meet all your needs. Now that you have been regenerated, there is only one who can satisfy you.

It's not your husband. It's Jesus. It's not your wife, sir.

It's Jesus. It's not your parents. It's not your children.

It is only Christ. You see that? Everything else is a broken system. Another thing that sometimes replaces Jesus today as a source of spiritual life, daily devotions, quiet times.

I did my thing. A modern day scenario is did you read your two chapters today? Did you pray down through your prayer list? Yes? Good. The old preachers would say this.

Did you meet with Jesus in the Word today? Did you meet with Him in prayer today? Are you clinging to Christ? Are you looking unto Jesus? Are you growing in dependence upon Him? We just reduce everything down to little rituals and little blocks of time so the person can be satisfied in their Christian life. It's as though they take Jesus, pull Him out of a closet for ten minutes, and then put Him back in and go live the rest of their life. Everything in our life is designed so that we never let go of Jesus.

You see, the metaphor that we're going to get to hopefully in the next several days in this text is simply this. A branch cannot live apart from the vine. It cannot.

You cannot live apart from an ongoing imbibing and feeding off of Christ. Now, there is a sense, and we will talk about it, in which that is positional. That you have been redeemed.

You have been united with Christ. He is your head. You're the body.

But there is another sense in which that must be appropriated. That it becomes a reality. We're going to talk about that in time.

Another thing that has become very popular in churches, very popular, is that they have replaced Christ with the Colossian heresy of worldly wisdom and philosophy. Psychology, self-realization, self-help, getting your best life now. If someone wants to be a motivational speaker, that is fine with me.

Be a secular motivational speaker. It's like giving wine or liquor to a man who has no hope. Take away his pain.

But in Christianity, we don't have that sort of stuff. It's like Jesus rides the coattail of other things. Let me give you an example.

The idea of marriage. I teach on marriage. Marriage is very important to me.

But it's like when churches and Christianity is based around just having a good marriage and a good family and riding in on that is Jesus. Or even I've seen it with finances. Now, I know there are ministries out

there, Dave Ramsey's and others, who do all this stuff in finances.

I apologize for that. I appreciate some of the wisdom that's there. And I'm not blaming them.

But I see people get all excited about in the name of Jesus fixing their finances, but they have no love or passion for Christ. They're hopped up about what all this does for them in the name of Jesus, but there's no sense of relationship. My dear friend, this is wrong.

The mature Christian doesn't want a good marriage as an end in itself. That's idolatry. The mature Christian doesn't want sound finances.

That's not their goal. That would be idolatry. The mature Christian wants to honor Christ in his marriage.

Wants to honor Christ in his finances. There are professions, there are politics that have adopted Jesus as a means to attain their end. No, my friend.

All of that stuff is far less than secondary. Christ alone is primary. Another thing that we have.

Supernatural experiences. And I know I'm probably dealing with two very different or extreme groups of people possibly here tonight. There are people who are all about experiences, all about experiences, have no truth.

And there's people who have all kinds of truth and are deader than a doornail. But I want to tell you something. The Christian life, the source, is not going to some meeting and getting all excited, acquiring fire or having something happen to you.

Again, it is going to Christ. My dear friend, listen to me. As I grow and as I become older and with age and the study of Scripture, wiser, it doesn't make me more independent.

It makes me more dependent. There's so much at stake. I cling to Him.

I can't help my children. I can't help my wife. I can't help the congregations I preach.

I can't even help my own soul. The only word is to the sinner, run to Christ, flee to Christ, cling to Him, do not let Him go. And the same message is for the saints.

Run to Christ. Run to Christ. It's not supernatural experiences.

It's Christ. Another thing, and this is very important. I want you to listen to me.

This has become very, very rampant in Christianity today. A moralism. We are all witnessing the demise of the Western culture.

Some of you young people can't even understand what I am saying because they do not teach you history anymore. We do not live in the same country that existed even 25 years ago. We do not live in the same country that existed 50 years ago, 150, 200 years ago.

It is a completely different entity. Our founding fathers would be so nauseated, they would vomit. They may even turn... If they knew what would become of their work, they may have turned from it and never even sought out this grace.

It's a great experiment. So we have that demise, but I see parents, especially homeschooling parents, and I'm a homeschooler, they don't make much of Jesus. They make much of the founding fathers of our country.

They make much of principles and rules and laws and character building and integrity and precepts and all these things, these moralities, these different ways of acting that are excellent. My dear friend, my number one purpose as a homeschooler is that my children might see Christ to be everything. That they might see Christ to be precious.

Christianity is not primarily an ethical or moral religion. It has a distinct ethic. It has a distinct morality.

But our faith is not about following a group of propositional truths merely, or a certain ethic. Our faith is about following a person. It's about being devoted to a person.

It is about loving a person. And the greatest thing I can do for my children is to genuinely be passionate about Christ. For them to see that everything, even my morality is not in comparison to the person of Jesus Christ and knowing Him.

This is what we want to instill. I hear so many people will go to, when they're talking about raising their children, they'll go to Deuteronomy chapter 6. These things should be on our heart. We should teach them to the children when they go out, when they come in, when we walk by the way.

And they totally miss the point. It is not that we're supposed to just teach them rules on how to walk, how to live, how to talk, how to stand, or how to shake somebody's hand. No, the whole idea is in walking in the way and going out and going in, we teach them to love the Lord their God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength.

Yes, your children need morality. But if that's all you give them, congratulations, you're building a Pharisee. Before I became a Christian, I was a wild man.

And I am still a wild man. And it is not a desire for rules and principles that cause me to walk in the narrow way. It is a person who shed his own blood for my soul.

That's the only thing that will tame this heart. It's the only thing that will tame any heart. We follow a person.

We seek after a person. And he is real. And he can be known.

Another thing is a powerful preacher has been placed many times as a substitute for Jesus Christ. Let me share with you something. The Charismatics, they have their men in white coats who can blow on people and knock them down.

Those are the heroes. The Evangelicals, they have their men with big buildings, big budgets and a bunch of baptisms. And they are the heroes.

And in the Reform Movement, we have men who are very, very, very intelligent. And all of it's wrong. My dear friend, I have learned so much.

I love church history. I'm not ashamed to say I love the Puritans. I love Spurgeon and Martyn Lloyd-Jones.

I love many of the preachers today from the Pipers and on that have been such a blessing to me. But they cannot replace Christ. And I cannot run to them or run to their books.

I can only read their books if their books take me to Christ. And the men I most appreciate would rather have all their books burned than for someone to read them and stop there. It is Christ that we need.

And you see, I'm saying this to you, but everybody says this, don't they? But here's the thing. I know that only the Holy Spirit can make this real in your mind and make you understand what I'm talking about. It's to cut away all other things and run to Christ.

I so appreciate my wife one time because I'm always... I mean, it thunders, it lightnings or anything, I'm out of bed in a second. I'm wanting to check on my children. My little boy's in there.

Something's happening. I want to check on it. And one time it kind of thundered and one of my children was kind of stirring.

And I jumped up and my wife reached over. And she said, Paul, that child does not need to learn to call upon a dad who will come running every second. That child knows enough now and needs to learn to call upon a God.

That doesn't mean we don't seek to meet the needs of our children or go to them when they're crying. But I think the point is very clear, isn't it? My children don't even need a wonderful dad who will always be there. As a matter of fact, I would say this, it would be better that they had a drunken dad who was never there.

If his absence caused them to turn to Christ. Oh, my dear friend. I love to say this.

A young man came to me one time and he goes, Brother Paul, you're right. Jesus is all we need. I said, young man, Jesus is all we have.

That's what I meant, but that's not what you said. He is all we have. And apart from Him, we have nothing.

He's all we have. Another thing, and I want to be very clear about this, that has sometimes replaced Christ in the circles in which I run, is knowledge. Theological knowledge.

Now, I want you to know something. Again, I'm addressing several different camps of people here. People ask me sometimes, Brother Paul, where does the zeal come from? And I say this.

I love to say it this way. Systematic theology. You didn't hear me.

My question is, where does the zeal come from? And I say systematic theology. Why? Because it's gotten such a bad report for most people these days. My zeal comes from Christ, but I understand the things of Christ from the truths of Scripture.

Well ordered. And I want you to know that knowledge is not divorced from Christianity and the Scriptures. We are to grow in our knowledge.

We are to love the Lord our God with all our mind. The reason why Christianity in America is in the state it's in is two reasons. One, a great majority of the people who call themselves Christians are unconverted, unregenerate, and are not Christian.

The other is the absolute theological ignorance of those who are preaching. I will say it. And I will say it again.

It is true. I have so many young men who come to me and they go, I want to be a missionary. I'm going to go to Mission Field right now.

And the first thing I'll ask them is, okay, great, wonderful. We need more missionaries. I'm going to give you five minutes.

Talk to me about penal substitution. And they'll go, I don't even know what you're talking about. And I'll explain it.

I still don't know what you're talking about. And then I plead with them, please, whatever you do, do not go to the Mission Field. We do not need another person who wants to give his life away.

There is more missionary activity in this world today than in the history of the church. And most of it is rot. And why is it rot? I'll tell you why it's rot.

A man called me years and years ago and said, Brother Paul, I want to come to Peru and work with you. I said, talk to me about your doctrine. He said, I'm not big on doctrine.

I just want to come to Peru and give my life away. I said, how are you on intercessory prayer? He said, prayer I've always struggled with, but I want to come to Peru and just give my life away. I said, young man, there is no one in Peru who needs your life.

They need God. And they need someone who can open up their mouth and tell them about God correctly. With passion and with power.

So knowledge is necessary. But knowledge isn't everything. You can have just one fallen head teaching another fallen head.

Words, words, words, so many words, so little power. We must know that this Christian life is not just propositional truth. Our faith is founded upon the sound doctrine of the Scripture.

But the sound doctrine of the Scripture is not an end in itself. Listen to what Jesus said. He said, you search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life.

It is these who testify about Me. I know men who know all about the Scriptures, but if I were to talk to them about depending upon Christ, clinging to Christ, they wouldn't have a clue what I'm talking about. It's more than words.

It's power. And if I get a chance, I'm going to talk to one of the essentials in prayer. It's that the words that we study and the knowledge that we have, that it becomes a reality in our life, that it's fanned into a flame through our prayer lives and through the providence of God.

My son, we were doing something one day and he saw in a magazine of this metal man or iron man, he's called, that shoots flames out of his hands and his feet and everything else. And my son said, I'd really like to build a suit like that. And I told him, if you do, I'd really like to fly in it.

But then I sat down and I said, son, but there's some certain problems here. And I said, what? I said, well, I don't know much about this character, but just looking at this picture, I can tell you this. There's not enough metal in that suit to withstand the weight he is supposedly picking up.

So I don't know what's inside that suit, but I know that our technology is not that advanced. That's an impossibility, son. But I said, there's a greater problem.

He said, what's that? I said, it is the great problem in mechanics. All mechanical engineering. It doesn't matter if you can build it.

Doesn't matter if it's structurally sound. Can you empower it? Where's the battery on this thing? And the battery on this thing, unless I guess you're a metal man or iron man, would be so large that you would need all the strength of the thing to pick up the battery itself. And so my whole point is, son, the idea is you can have the structure, but if you do not have the power or the life, it doesn't matter.

It's the same way for those of you who are from a more reformed perspective. I love the creeds. I love the confessions.

I marvel in the things, the conciseness, the preciseness, the beauty of them. But I want you to know something. You can have the knowledge of David Brainerd, but unless you're out in the snow laying upon a log, crying out to God for power, it will do you a little good.

As we learn in this text, and I'm sorry we have advanced so little, but as we will learn in this text, there is a sense in which every bit of fruit that we produce, there's a sense, is a result of prevailing, believing prayer, and if you think I made that up, we're going to see it in Scripture. But also, one of the most marvelous things that I see D.A. Carson saying about this text is simply that. That the fruit that we produce as Christians, the life that we produce as Christians is directly related to prayer.

In these last moments that Jesus has with His disciples here in the book of John, it is amazing how much He is dealing with prayer. With prayer. Everything is accomplished in prayer.

The power is found in prayer. The life, at least in my own experience, if you want to hang me out on a noose for that term, then so be it. But in my own experience, I know this, that it is prevailing, enduring, loneliness with God that makes whatever difference there is in my life.

I am not a great expository preacher, although I wish I could be. My thoughts oftentimes come too fast into my head to the point where I feel like there's a train wreck inside my brain. But I have seen God do great things.

And I believe that the battles are won in prayer. And if there's life to be gotten, it is in prayer. And if there's walls to be knocked down, it is in prayer.

If there are enemies to vanquish, it is in prayer. It is the hidden life of a man before God. I come to conferences like this, they scare me to death.

I would rather be out in the jungle preaching somewhere, because all these people that are so smart, they know so much. And sometimes, not most reformed guys, but some of them just sit there and they just wait for you to say something that isn't right. And me, I'm always saying things.

Like I told Joe Beeky one time, Dr. Beeky, I've written this book, but I really want you to edit it. He said, why? I said, Dr. Beeky, sometimes I really paint in big, broad strokes. And I think some of them probably need to be redirected.

It's in weakness that if a man is weak and a man knows something of his limitations and it drives him to cling to Christ. I've even heard of Spurgeon just grabbing a hold of the chair or the table and not even wanting to go out and preach. That is Spurgeon's secret.

He is going to be so mad at so many biographers when they get to heaven. Because all they do is talk about his brain. And I know he's going to say to them, you twit! You thought you told him it was my brain.

It wasn't my brain. It was I was so helpless. I was so scared.

I was so empty. I had nothing. And that's why when he walked up into the pulpit, he would walk up into the pulpit going, I believe in the Holy Spirit.

I believe in the Holy Spirit. I believe in the Holy Spirit. So it's not simply knowledge.

And then finally, this is as far as we'll go tonight. Goodness gracious, we didn't even get to the first phrase, did we? You're just very fortunate I'm not Richard Owen Roberts. I don't know if you know who he is, but he's in his 80s and he was preaching for us last week.

His introduction to himself was 45 minutes to an hour. And then he said, now we'll go to our text for the night. And that old man preached two and two and a half hours every night.

We're more spiritual than you guys in Virginia, so we love that kind of preaching. But I'll let you guys go. The last thing I want to say that is a broken cistern that kills us is a Laodicean spirit and an independence, a strength that we have.

Jesus said in Revelation 3.17, because you say I am rich and I have become wealthy and have need of nothing, and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked. I've heard of a Chinese believer who once came to the United States and after he visited so many churches, he said this, it's amazing what you people can accomplish without God. Jesus said in Luke 6, and turning His gaze toward His disciples, He began to say, blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God.

Blessed are you who hunger now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. Now, I want to close with that.

And we're going to talk about this a great deal. There's no way I can emphasize this enough to you. Poverty of spirit is the key, if there is one, to the Christian life.

And I will say that the great force of all of God's providence, God's working in your life, which includes, as we will see, trials, disciplines, all of it is designed, every last bit of it, to create in you poverty of spirit. Everything, I'm sorry, this is true, is that God will go through your life and plan out absolutely everything to create in you greater and greater weakness. But weakness is not a hindrance to the Christian life.

You must understand this. Weakness is the catalyst to the Christian life. But your problem is not that you're too weak.

Your problem is that you are too strong, or at least you think you are. And I can prove it. How much time did you spend in the Word today? How much time did you meditate in the Word? And how much time did you pray? There, your answer will tell you just how weak you think you are.

Weakness is the catalyst to spiritual life and strength. But here's the problem. The devil, who is a murderer through his lies, will intervene and will use your weakness to drive you away from Christ rather than drive you to him.

Now, I'm saying this to the regenerate soul, not to the unconverted churchmen, because the unconverted churchman hears about grace and it causes him to neglect holiness altogether and to run into sin. But when the true convert, the true regenerate soul, the true Christian hears of grace, it causes him to run to holiness. Now, when I sin or when it is a sin, let's say the sin of impatience, that I had to apologize for, let's say, yesterday, to a child.

And then the very next day, although I truly repented before God and I truly asked forgiveness from the child and I truly and resolutely set out to abandon that sin, I find myself falling into that sin again the next day with my wife. The devil comes at that moment in the life of the believer and says, go to the penalty box. You hypocrite.

I mean, you repented supposedly yesterday and now you've done it again today. Go away. He doesn't want to hear from you.

Get things right first and then go back to Him. That is a damnable lie straight out of the pit of hell. It is in the midst of that repetitive sin, if you truly are a believer, that you are to run to Him.

Sin ought to cause you to run to Christ and not run away from Him. And now let me just make it a little larger, the circle. Everything ought to cause you to run to Christ.

Every weakness the devil will use against you, even your own heart will use against you to condemn you and tell you that you belong on the penalty box for a while to prove your sincerity before you come back to Jesus. All of it is a lie. Everything in our life should cause us to cling that much harder to Christ.

Do you see that? And I can make here even a very dangerous statement to the untrained ear that for the regenerate heart who hates sin, he can even realize that his own sin is a catalyst to drive him to Christ. When I lived in Peru during the civil war with the Sendero Luminoso and people were dying. People were dying on my doorstep.

Bombs blowing up everywhere. You'd have to stand in line for two or three hours to get a bag of rice. You didn't know if you were going to live or die.

Firefights in front of the church. Blowing the windows out of the church with bombs. Everything else going on.

Death threats. Scared to death. Terror.

Paralyzing terror. The church was absolutely exquisite during that time. It was the purest form of Christianity I ever saw in my life.

You couldn't drive people out of the church. You couldn't break up their fellowships. You had to make them go home.

They wanted to be together. They wanted to talk about Christ. They wanted to reach out to their loved ones.

War was on the doorstep of Lima. Bombs were blowing up everywhere. Eternity was right in everyone's face.

And everyone knew, you're not getting out of this alive apart from some work of providence. And the church was so beautiful, so strong, because it had no hope but Christ. And then the war was over.

Foreign money began to trickle in. The parks became beautiful again. Businesses started opening.

Jobs were being put out there. You no longer had to stand in line for food. You no longer had to depend upon God.

And it became just like the church in the West. You live in a very dangerous place, don't you know? Great dangers all around you. Things that can steal eternity from you.

Follow after Christ. Cling to Him. So when I sin, I cling to Christ.

When I don't want to cling to Christ, it leads me to cling to Christ. When I look at myself and I say, I have no passion, then I must run to Him because I have no passion. Everything to Christ.

It almost comes to a point where then Jesus begins to eclipse everything. Christ is all and in all. And if you don't know Him, and I'll be willing to talk with you after this meeting, please come to Christ.

The Bible teaches that all men are wretches before God. You are in such a state outside of Christ that the last thing you will hear after you have been condemned on the day of judgment, the last thing you will hear when you take your first step into hell is all of creation standing to its feet and rejoicing and applauding God because He has rid the earth of you. That's how vile you are before a holy God.

But that God, in the great love with which He loved us, He sent His Son. And His Son on that tree the sins of His people were cast upon Him. The guilt of His people's crimes were thrown down upon His head.

And all the wrath of God that you should experience throughout all of eternity fell upon the head of Christ and crushed Him. And when He had suffered the full force of God's wrath against His people's sins, He cried out, it is finished. And He gave up His spirit.

On the third day after His death, He rose again from the dead. And the Bible says that's a public declaration of several things. One of them is this, Romans 1, that it's God's public declaration that He is the Son of God.

You can say, I need more proof. Then you will go to hell with your need because God says He'll give you no more proof. He raised Him from the dead.

But it not only proves Him to be the Son of God, it also proves according to Romans 4, v. 25, that His sacrifice merits the justification of His people. That that sacrifice was accepted as payment for our sins. And those who believe will be fully pardoned.

And the book of Acts and its proclamation tells us that the resurrection is God's evidence that this world has a King and a Judge. And He will return one day and He will judge the living and the dead. And the only

way you will stand before Him is clothed in His righteousness alone.

You say, what must I do to be saved? Repent of your sins. You say, what does that mean? Well, let me just give you an idea of what it looks like. Repentance is in one sense the utter disintegration of your reality.

You say, what do you mean? I'll give Apostle Paul as an example. The Apostle Paul, what repentance means is to change your mind. Did you know that? You say, well, that's kind of superficial.

Not when you realize what the mind is. That it's the control center of absolutely everything you are. It's the control center of your will, your emotions.

Everything. To change your mind? Let me show you with the Apostle Paul. When the Apostle Paul was headed to Damascus, on the road to Damascus, in his mind, he thought Jesus was the greatest blasphemer who ever lived.

In his mind, he thought all Christians should be killed. On the road to Damascus, he changed his mind. He realized everything.

Can you imagine this? Everything he thought was true about the most important things, he realized that moment he was wrong about everything. Everything. The one he thought was the greatest blasphemer is the long-awaited Messiah and God in the flesh.

The people he thought should die were the very people of God. He changed his mind. And what happened? He began preaching the very faith he once tried to destroy.

That's repentance. What is faith? I had an old deacon in my church back home in Illinois when I was a young man, a young Christian. He said he was always a good man, people thought.

But one day he went to a sermon. The Spirit of God illuminated his heart and showed him he was just good enough to go to hell. But he couldn't figure out what it meant to believe because he'd always, as a boy, heard about Jesus and had no problems with the fact that he was the Son of God.

But he knew that's not what the Bible meant when it said believe. And he said he climbed up in his hayloft and he just put his feet over the end of the hayloft and it was about a 10-foot drop and he just kind of went back and forth like this. And he said he looked down.

He said all of a sudden it just dawned on him. And this was the expression of his heart. He said, God, I'm going to trust in what Your Son did for me.

And if that's not good enough to save me, then I'm going to hell because I refuse to trust in anything else. Faith is when it's Christ alone. You say, how will I know when I believe? Now, here is the difference between what I believe, what I believe church history teaches, and what I most certainly believe that Scriptures teach.

You come up here tonight and I say, do you want to go to heaven? You say, yes. And I say, pray this prayer and ask Jesus to come into your heart. And you do that and then I pronounce you saved.

That's as heretical as you can get. How do you know you're saved? Are you really going to stand on the affirmation of a man? How do you know you're saved? You search the Scriptures. You get counsel.

You cry out to God until the Spirit of the living God affirms in your heart that you have been born again. The work of the Spirit of God, the love of God being shed abroad in your heart. You see, I can lead you to water.

I cannot make you drink, and I cannot tell you when you have. It is to trust in Christ, to seek Christ. I have seen people in the middle of the service while I was preaching, jump up and say, praise God.

I was over in Wales preaching. In Evan Roberts' place over there preaching. And a man jumps up in the middle of the service and said, what do I do to be saved? I said, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

He said, I'm saved. I said, well, that's good. But I've also seen people in which have had to deal with them for weeks and months, struggling.

Until one day, the Spirit of the living God confirmed in their heart they are born again. And then He bore witness to it with the continuation of their life, because the one that God justifies, He also sanctifies. And that's why there are pastors here who know enough that if the Spirit of the living God confirms in your heart tonight that you've been born again, they will rejoice with you and then they will caution you with gospel warnings.

Say, wonderful, if you truly believe you have been saved, but now we're going to go through the Scriptures. We're going to examine your life. We're going to be watching you and helping you until this faith is totally and completely confirmed.

Or they'll tell you that they'll work with you for months until God shows you. That's the difference between biblical evangelicalism and the mess that's going on today. So let's pray.

Father, I pray that You would help this people. Lord, please help us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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