

Church Live Re-Visited: Session Four - Part 2

by Ron Bailey

The sermon emphasizes the ongoing process of spiritual renewal and the importance of trust and accountability within church leadership.

Duration: 32:39

Scripture: Luke 12:47, 1 Corinthians 3:8, 1 Corinthians 3:21-23, Ephesians 4:23, Colossians 3:9, Hebrews 13:17

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Church Leadership"

Description

This sermon delves into the process of spiritual renewal and growth as outlined in Colossians and Ephesians, emphasizing the ongoing transformation of believers. It also discusses the importance of trusting and respecting spiritual leaders in the church, highlighting the genuine spiritual authority and responsibility they carry. The sermon touches on the concept of rewards for faithful labor in serving God and the solemn warnings about accountability and perseverance in the Christian journey.

Transcript

I'm going to look just a little bit at this question of when Paul writes to the Colossians, this is why I'm keen to kind of use the words that have to do with process. When he writes to the Colossians and he's telling people how they ought to live, in Colossians chapter 3, he says this in chapter 3 in verse 9, he says, Do not lie to one another since you have put on the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of him who created him. And Paul says something very similar when he writes to the Ephesians.

In the Ephesians, you've got two things which are done absolutely and finally, and you've got another thing which is a continuing process. In Ephesians, you've got the old man that's put off and the new man that's put on. And in between those two statements in Ephesians, you've got the statement, and be being renewed in the spirit of your mind.

So you've got two crises, two events, two things that happen. You can say, yes, it's happened, it happened then, it happened then. But you've got another thing in the middle where you can't say it happened then, but where you have to say it is continuing to happen.

So the old man is put off, that's a one-off. The new man is put on, that's a one-off. But this being renewed in the spirit of your mind is a continuing process.

And when Paul uses the same idea in Colossians, he uses it here, he says it's the new man who is being renewed. Read it again so you can get it right. Verse 9, Do not lie to one another since you have put off the old man with his deeds and have put on the new man who is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of him who created him.

So you've got this, the new man is constantly being renewed. Actually, the old man, according to Ephesians, was constantly being made old. The old man was constantly being corrupted and the new man is constantly being renewed.

So these are both processes which stem from definite events that have taken place. So you can be renewed in the spirit of your mind, that's to say that this is a process that goes on and on and on. The way I sometimes have illustrated in the past, and this is getting a bit old-fashioned now and I need a new illustration.

But for those of you who've still got the old-fashioned television, these are not LCDs but you're still working with cathode ray tubes. The way, roughly, the people here can tell you properly, but roughly the way a cathode ray tube works is this. You've got a chemical that's painted onto a piece of glass and you've got the cathode ray tube which shoots out an image and what happens is that the chemical which is on the screen holds the image momentarily and then it goes back and does all the same thing again and again and again and again.

And in the old days, when they were talking about monitors and things, they would talk about what they called refresh rates. And what they meant is the faster that that image was being refreshed, you get the steadier picture. If it's only refreshed every now and again, you get a very junky kind of picture of twitching and seeing gaps in it.

But if it's being constantly refreshed all the time, it'll be rock steady. Now, we have a relationship with Jesus Christ which is made possible to us in regeneration, which makes it possible for us to have this constant renewing of the image so that all the time that the image can be rock steady, all the time, but it has to be an ongoing process that's going on all the time. And we are learning and we have to be open to recognizing the fact that we can make mistakes.

There are two things really that affect the way that we make judgments. One is the data that we get, the information. And inevitably, all the information we have will always be incomplete.

We know in part, says Paul. So there's always going to be some bit of information you don't know. And there's also the possibility not only that the data is incomplete, but also that actually the way we're interpreting it is wrong.

And this is the key thing. We interpret it wrong if our disposition is wrong, if our attitude is wrong, if we are judgmental in our spirit, if we are censorious, if we are narrow-minded, if we have this perfect little world that we've created in our things and we're defending this against all attackers. These are the things which will inevitably affect the way we interpret the data that we receive.

Does this make any sense? This is how we make judgments. We've got data and then we interpret it. But we interpret it from our own particular standpoints, from the things that we understand from our own disposition, which is why we need to have a new disposition.

And then we've got a chance of interpreting the data properly. But even then, we need to realize that we only know in part. So that all our judgments are, in a sense, all our assessments are actually kind of a work in progress.

Only God can actually finally say, this is the judgment, this is it, this is the final thing. And that comes by revelation. OK.

I want to talk about that kind of gift to the spirit discernment. And I want to talk about the authority that God has put in the Church. This is the judgment of spiritual authority.

This is a reference I've just read to you from Hebrews chapter 4. But I want to go on to another passage in Hebrews, later on in Hebrews chapter 13. And I think this is such a key passage of Scripture to help us in understanding the whole pattern of Church life. And the way that it's supposed to work.

I'll read it first of all as we have it in the Authorized Version. Hebrews chapter 13, verse 7, 17 and 18. There are three occasions in chapter 13 where the writer refers to some people who, in verse 7 as one, remember them, it says in my Authorized Version, that have the rule over you.

Then again in verse 17, obey them that have the rule over you. And then again in verse 24, salute them that have the rule over you. Now that is a really bad translation.

It's a really bad translation. And it's one of the times when the political life that was going on when the King James Version was being translated has had a real impact upon our Bible. You had King James VI of Scotland become James I of England and he was trying to establish his authority and he wanted everything to be done in a certain way and he wanted a clear hierarchy.

He wanted things in absolute pattern. And that comes through all the time in the King James Version and it's not there in the original. It's not there in the original.

Over 40 times in the King James Version you've got a little reference to something where it will say something like the office of. So it will speak about the office of the elders or the office of the deacons or in the Old Testament it will speak about the office of the priests or the office of the baker or the office of the butler. It will even speak about the office of the midwives in Exodus chapter 1. And in none of those 40 instances is there any justification for the word office.

This officialdom, this official way of looking at things, this idea of having everything nicely placed into boxes where you've got an organisation charted they call the Nord Charter. They're all carefully connected and everyone knows who they're accountable to and everyone knows who's above one and who's beneath the other one. There is no trace of that in the Bible.

No trace of it. So when we come to try to understand authority in the church we've got a bit of a struggle on our hands because we've actually got a hostile witness that we're turning to all the time. This word rule really ought to be translated the ones, it isn't even your leaders it's the ones who are leading you.

So he says three things. He says remember the ones who are leading you. He says obey, we'll come back to that word in a minute.

Obey the ones who are leading you and he says salute, it really means greet and embrace them, those who are leading you. I've actually created my own, I do this very occasionally I've created my own

paraphrase of this verse here. So I'm looking at Hebrews chapter 13, 17 and 18.

Listen to it, this is what it ought to say. Trust those who are leading you and submit yourselves to them for it is they who are keeping watch over your souls being those who will be rendering an account so that they may do this with joy and not with grief. Pray for us, we trust we have a good conscience willing to live honestly in all things and maybe you've noticed that in my version I've used the word trust twice because in Hebrews 13 and verse 17 and the word that is translated in verse 17 in verse 18, my sixth word is translated trust.

Is it so in yours? Chapter 13 and verse 18 Pray for us for we trust. Ok, we've got the word trust that's exactly the same word that's translated obey in the first word of chapter 17 and verse 17 and trust is a far better word. This is not talking about blind obedience this is talking about confidence.

This is talking about learning to trust people that God has given as leaders and who are exercising oversight and by oversight I don't mean something kind of harsh and official I just mean that they are keeping watch over their sheep by night like the shepherds did. In other words, they were caring for them. There is an authority that God has put in the church and it's a genuine spiritual authority and it's something that God has put there because there are times when we need an authority that's greater than what has just come from one person and it's the reason why I often talk about the oversight rather than an element or the elements because the oversight is a corporate group it's a function it's something which God has welded together in his own particular way.

In our church here we have four men and the four men together are the oversight. I believe with all my heart that God has given these men the responsibility of watching over us watching for ourselves. The consequence is that our instinct ought to be that we trust them that we have confidence in them.

It should not be hard work for them to persuade us if they feel they have the word of God or if they feel they recognise the word of God coming through some other source. Our instinct ought to be that we trust them. It's our instinct.

It ought to be the exception whenever we say, well hang on a minute brothers can we just kind of think about this? Our instinct ought to be, trust those trust those who are leading you who are watching over yourselves and those who are going to give an account. It's a very, very awesome onerous responsibility to be part of the oversight. It really is.

They will give an account. And God only holds people accountable when he has given responsibility to them. And with responsibility God gives God gives gifts.

And there are times when I've been in oversight and I'm not now so I can say this fairly easily there are times when you're in oversight when you know things which if you could reveal them it would change everything. But you can't reveal them. Because some of the things you know as a result of confidences that have been shared in you some you know as a result of revelation that God has given to you.

And you share this with the other brothers in the oversight so that there is accountability so that there's other you're not just kind of going off half cocked and saying well this is what I think. But the thing is being assessed in this the safety of this oversight. But there are times when it's necessary for an oversight to say to the church brothers and sisters please trust us on this one.

There are times when that's necessary. Because there are times when the oversight will have information that they can't possibly share. And there's a really gentle balance in authority in the New Testament that is genuine spiritual authority.

It's real authority. It's accountability. It's responsibility.

You've heard me say before in management terms they say if you give somebody responsibility without giving them authority you've actually only given them blameability. That's to say you've actually given a name that can actually be blamed if something goes wrong. But if you haven't given them the genuine authority you haven't actually given them responsibility.

No, God doesn't do that. God gives genuine authority. God gives gifts.

God gives the tool necessary for the job. And he gives to those that he has recognised and the processes by which we can see how that works in the church. And I think these are one of the safety one of the safety nets that God has put into these things.

That we're not at the mercy of everyone's impression. And we're not at the mercy of what this person says and what that person says. By all means listen to these things.

Listen to them. Take them before the Lord. And if you can't come to clarity in your own mind then bring them to the elders.

Bring them to the other side. And ask them to pray with you over these things. I feel very strongly about these things because I think there is There's a beautiful pattern that God has set in the church.

And it is so finely balanced that if you interfere with any part of it you end up either with an authoritarian situation or you end up with a situation in which there's no authority at all in which everyone does what's right in their own minds. And both of those are misuses. But the correct remedy for the misuse of authority is not non-use but right use.

And the correct remedy for misuse of impressions or gifts, whatever they are is not non-use but right use. And I do believe that God has set the solitary in families. I believe God cuts things together into a family so that we're not vulnerable.

Do you remember how Paul says we have the mind of Christ? Did you know how he said that? Did you know he didn't say I have the mind of Christ? He didn't say that. He said we have the mind of Christ. And when John writes in his epistle he says we have an anointing which teaches us.

You notice he doesn't say I have an anointing. He says we or you. It's always plural.

There's always a plurality in this. There's safety in the multitude of counsel that's set in the cross. And this is such a delicate balance that I feel, you see one of the books I want to write one day about the true nature of biblical authority because it is real authority.

But it's moral authority. It's functioning because people are trusted. And these three admonitions that are given to the people in Hebrews, I think, I've gone way off my course now but I'm going to just say this and then stop.

These three things, let me preach to you instead of teaching you. The first thing he says is remember. Chapter 13 and verse 7. Remember those who are leading you.

It's present tense. It's not leaders in the sense of a label that's slapped on somebody. Remember those who are leading you.

Who have spoken to you the word of God. Whose faith follow considering the end of their conversation. I don't know if you've ever noticed you know chapter 13 and verse 8. You all know those things very, very well.

Have you ever wondered what connection verse 8 has with verse 7 and verse 6? Because it's a great verse but it doesn't seem to have any connection with everything that's gone before it. This is the verse, verse 8. Jesus Christ is saying yesterday, today and forever. You say, oh yeah, sure.

What's that got to do with what we just said? Well, what he's got to do with it is that he's just been speaking about the quality of life of the leaders. He's just been saying whose faith follow considering the end of their way of life. In other words, the goal of their direction.

What he's saying is look at these people. Look at the way that they're going. See where they're heading.

And you'll know if they're heading in the right direction because there's some things that never change. Jesus Christ is saying yesterday, today and forever. He is the goal.

He is the goal of their lives. He is the goal of the churches that they are representing and that they're directing. He is the goal.

If it's anything else, then maybe you've got some pause to ask some questions. But remember. And he says here that I speak to you the word of God.

And remember often in the scriptures has lots of senses in it. It has the sense of praying for them. It has the sense of honouring them.

Later on in Timothy when he talks about remembering people, he's often talking about making material provision for them. That might be money. That might be cutting their lawn if they're very busy.

It just means kind of giving them respect, recognising that what they're doing is they are spending and being spent. And they will not have the time that many other people have to do other parts of life. They may not have sufficient time even to live their own living.

And they're to be recognised for this. They're to be remembered. They're to be kept in our prayers.

That's what we've been told here. Remember. And remember this is the pattern of their lives.

It's Jesus Christ. They are setting before you Jesus Christ. The same yesterday, today and forever.

Then he goes on to the next thing, which is this trust them. Have confidence in them. And then the last one in verse 24, I think is in many ways the sweetest of all.

Salute them, it says in my Old English Version. What does it say in the New King James Version? Greet them. Okay, well that's a bit better, I guess.

I mean the salute really. You can invite them to stand and do attention on that. But greeting them is better.

There are different words for greet in the Bible. And this particular one actually means to kind of gather them in. It's almost equivalent of hug them.

Embrace them. It's greet them affectionately. You're not greeting them with fear and kind of trepidation because they're bishops or archbishops or because they've got fancy titles or because they have certain powers that people have given them in the church.

It doesn't work like that. You are to embrace them. You're to love them.

There's real affection in this word. And I sometimes say that it's... You brothers who are here tonight can queue up after this. I think we should hug our elders constantly.

Give them a big kiss. Yeah, give them a big kiss so they can cope with it. Do it constantly because they need to keep on being embraced, if you like, back into the family and not put on pedestals.

They can only be targets if you put them on pedestals. But if you keep embracing them and gathering back into your arms, there's a wonderful pattern that God has given here. And we've gone miles up where we're supposed to be going.

But I think we'll just stop. I won't try and kind of hurry on through these things. I've got to talk a little bit about rewards and labours.

But I'll just say this. There's a constant theme, a couple of constant themes in the New Testament. One is that we are responsible for what God has given us.

We're not responsible for what God hasn't given us. It actually says this in 2 Corinthians when it's talking about offering. It says, well, you've made your decision.

It says, now carry them through. It says, understanding that it's accounted with God, not according to what a man doesn't have, but what he does have. So God doesn't assess us.

God does not determine future rewards based on your gifts. He bases future rewards on what you have done with your gifts. So you may have someone who has five talents and they will have no rewards.

And you'll have someone who will have one talent, and because they used it, they will have lots of rewards. It has nothing at all to do with expertise or gifts. It has everything to do with our stewardship, what we are doing with the things that God has given to us.

I've been looking through a book that I've got, and I still can't find the piece I'm looking for. There was a lady who lived in High Wycombe. I mentioned this lady who lived in High Wycombe, Hannah Bull.

She was a Methodist, contemporary of John Bursley. She was one of the leaders there, one of the pillars in the church of High Wycombe, although obviously not a minister or a preacher or anything like that. But she was a very, very godly woman.

And there's quite a correspondence that went backwards and forwards. She was almost like the secretary for the class meetings at High Wycombe. And she kept a diary.

And one of the things she says in her diary, and I wish I could have found it so that I could read it to you properly. But the Methodists constantly talked about improving the graces that God had given to us. And what they meant was that when God gives you something, you are responsible for improving it.

You are responsible for trading with it. You are responsible for using it and making sure that it increases. You are responsible.

And in fact, if you don't make it increase, you will be held accountable for the increase that didn't happen. So if you were given one talent, and you ought to have made it into two talents, you will be held accountable for having stolen the one talent that you didn't cause it to increase into. You understand kind of following the pattern there of what Jesus was saying with those things, a wicked and unprofitable servant.

And you know that there are several things he talks about servants in the Gospels. I'll say this about rewards, because I need to say something just a little bit maybe about the other side of rewards. There are some very, very solemn warnings in the New Testament.

There are some very solemn warnings in the Book of Hebrews about the possibility that we may find ourselves in a place beyond God's ultimate retrieval. And that beyond that place, there's only days to look for a certain judgment and fiery indignation of God. And the reason I'm saying this is an issue you'll see there that I'm not kind of very cognizant at all with.

Jesus spoke a lot about hell in the Gospels. And most of it is in Matthew's Gospel. And most of it is actually in discourses, that's to say in statements he was actually making to his disciples.

The most solemn warnings about the danger of hell are actually addressed to the disciples. And you've got this statement, do you remember, in Luke chapter 12 that talks about being beaten with fewer strokes and being beaten with many strokes. Remember that kind of passage description? And one of the things it says, it says that for the person who has been beaten with many strokes and knew what he ought to have done and didn't do it, it actually says he will have his portion with the unbelievers.

Now that's Jesus saying that, not me. That's Jesus saying that there's a possibility that believers will actually end up in ultimate judgment and separation from him. Obviously, they cease to be believers.

And there's a constant warning through the New Testament, the need that we need to keep on. These things are true if we hold fast. These things are true if we hold on, if we continue, if we persevere.

That's not to make it so that we get to heaven by our labors. It's not that at all. But there is this truth that comes up all the way through that God expects us to use our lives for him and that our lives are being given to us in order to serve him, in order to glorify him.

And our lives will be measured one day. We shall all stand before the law, the just and the unjust. And we shall give an account of the things that we did in our bodies.

And this isn't to frighten you into activity. But it's just to encourage you to understand that there are rewards for labors. There are crowns of righteousness and of glory.

There are things that those who have labored for the Lord labor. Now, shall I say again? Not people who had great gifts, people who brought great energies, great labors, people who gave their farthings or their

mites, people who, and she didn't have much, but she, the winner, no great gifts there. But her story is constantly being told because she gave 100% of what she'd got.

And it has everything to do with percentages. It's all to do with absolute things. So this whole aspect of rewards and labors are a key part of the New Testament.

And they come in. And one of the things, the reason they come in, they come in strongly through 1 Corinthians. And they come in 2 Corinthians as well, but Paul has a lot to say about the ministry.

It's because the Corinthians were making this fatal mistake. They thought it was all for them. They thought that the whole purpose of their Christian life, their whole universe, revolved around them.

It was me and my, every one of you, says Paul right at the beginning. He says, I am of Paul. I am of Paulus.

I am of Epiphanes. Everyone thought it was for their own benefit. Everyone was polishing their own shining whiteness.

Everyone was trimming their own gift. Everyone was taking the opportunity to display the gifts and the powers that they had. And no one was discerning the body.

No one was recognizing the purpose from which God had baptized them all in one spirit into one body. And it was so that Jesus Christ could be glorified. And it says in this amazing statement here that we read.

And it talks about all the world. 1 Corinthians, this is chapter 3, verse 21. Therefore, let no one glory in men, for all things are yours, whether Paul, or Paulus, or Epiphanes, or the world, or life, or death, all things present, all things to come, all are yours.

And you are Christ's. And Christ is God's. Do you want to ask any questions? Or shall I just pray? Let me pray.

This hasn't gone in the direction I thought it would go. And I thought it was. But I think you've guided us.

And I do pray, Lord, that whatever you want to say to us tonight, we should hear it. Lord, we don't, we're not trying to exalt or glorify ECF, or this pattern, or to say we've got it right, or whatever those things mean. There's a million things we haven't got right.

We're sure of it. But we want to hold fast, Lord, to the things that you've presented to us. We want to cherish them, Lord.

We want to discern the Lord's body. We want to be grateful, Lord, for the blessings that you have poured upon us. We shall be held accountable for these, Lord, in a way perhaps that some other churches won't be.

We as individuals will be held accountable for precious things that were cast into us. I do pray, Lord, that you will help us to be vigilant, that you'll help us to be diligent, that you'll help us to stay awake, that you'll help us, Lord, to spend and be spent, and to give ourselves to you and to the saints for the glory of Jesus in this church. Amen.

Amen. If you've got any questions, I'm up for them.

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