

The Danger of a False Center

by Scott Berninger

Scott Berninger's sermon warns against the dangers of shifting the center of faith from love for Christ to works and knowledge.

Duration: 1:08:59

Scripture: Revelation 2:2

Topics: "Danger"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of faith that is demonstrated through love. He commends the Ephesians for their works, which were done with patience and for the sake of Christ's name. The preacher emphasizes that the works of faith should not be seen as a means of condemnation, but rather as an example to follow. The foundation of our faith is based on coming to God through faith, and the essence of our religion is charity or love.

Transcript

Good morning. Let's bow our head for a word of prayer. Heavenly Father, we thank you, Lord God, for your blessing this day.

God, for the opportunity we've had already to worship you and God, to look into your word. We thank you for the memory verse, Father. Let's ask right now, Lord God, for your grace, mercy, and assistance.

I want to commit this message as well to you, Father. I just ask, God, that you would grant us inspiration. Pray, Lord, that the truth that is on my heart, Father, would be brought forth.

That you would help me to speak in a clear and concise way, Lord. I ask, God, that you would inspire every one of us, Lord. We need you, Lord.

We just commit ourselves to you, Father. We don't rest in anything of ourselves. I ask, God, that you perform your work right now.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Let's go ahead and turn to Revelation chapter 2, verse 2. This is a passage that's read a lot and sometimes I tend to want to shy from reading verses that are too often preached.

I'm doing this because I thought it was best representative of the what was on my heart, so I thought this would be a good way to springboard, even though you probably have all heard many messages on this. I'm not trying to expound this as much as use it as a good illustration or starting point. And that is in Revelations 2, we're going to read from verses 2 through 5. This is speaking of the church of Ephesus and how Christ warns them.

He says, I know thy works, and thy labor, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil. And thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars, and hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast labored, and hast not fainted. Nevertheless, I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.

Remember, therefore, from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works, or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent. I want to title this message, The Danger of a False Center. And as I look at this particular situation here, I want to try to create a principle that has, is, I feel common, not only throughout history in a large measure, but is something that all of us face in one degree or another.

And that is this, the danger of having a false center. And I'm going to put a little illustration on the board there. There are things that are naturally born out of our faith that are necessary.

Now look at the situation here. The works that the Ephesians did were commended of the Lord. In fact, he says they did it with patience, they did it for Christ's name, and they labored and didn't faint.

So they put all their heart into these things. And it was never done in a way of condemnation, but almost in an exemplary sense. If we were to read verses two and three, we could say this is an example to us to follow.

You can't look at two and three and say, well, four negates it all and we throw it away. That's not the point here. It's saying that this is good, but something's changed.

And I want to get on that, and I'm going to expound a little bit broader, hopefully broad enough to encompass all of us. And that is the danger we have of assuming that the outflow of faith is in itself the foundation of our faith or the center of it. I would say these Ephesians got to the place where the things that were started from their love for Christ, I understand they did this for Christ's name, and they did it because they had a love for Christ.

But it itself became the very center of their religion. So that no longer, the love kind of got shifted out, the focus. So I say it's the center, danger of a false center.

We're going to think of like a circle and how you can move that circle off center. So now it's not lined up. Maybe for you carpenters, you'd think of calibrating your equipment so that its center is in the right place and you're not trying to cut something and it's cutting like this, even though the line says here, it's really cutting there.

Well, this is kind of our little illustration. So I want to get into several things that can result as from a true faith, but in the end, ultimately can replace that. I'm going to put a little illustration I thought of as we did our memory verse, 1 Timothy 1.5, now the end of the commandment is charity and out of a pure heart and a good conscience and a faith on faith, I thought it was really good to really go along with what we are saying here.

I'm going to draw a little picture here. I hope I can. First, I'm going to draw a circle.

Okay. That's depicting of the Christian life, let's say. What would we put in the center of that circle? That's the ultimate question we need to ask ourselves.

What is the essence of this? If this circle would represent like a wheel, you're going to have a hub, you're going to have things on the outside, and you're going to have the center, which is the core, it's the essence of it. So if I get out the center, then the rest of this ultimately becomes dead. I'm sorry.

Yeah, thank you. So what would be a center? Get out some ideas. If I wanted to ask, what's the end result of our religion? What's to be the end result? I mean, you get different realities as far as how we live, what we say the end result of our religion is.

But in theory, what would be the essence of our religion? It would be what? Okay. One word. Charity.

I'll put that right here. I've got all the thing here that I thought of, but what is the foundation of our faith? I'm sorry. Go ahead.

What's the foundation of our faith? When do we base? How do we come to God? What's the basis? Think of our memory verse. What was the... Is that a Chris? Sure, it is. But what's the... Think of what one key word would represent.

Faith. I'm just going to do this. Because faith is not the... The problem is sometimes people put faith in the middle, and they say faith is the ultimate result of our religion.

It isn't. It's the foundation of our religion. That's why I have it here, because it's three-dimensional.

It's through faith that the result of our religion is charity. The end of the commandment is love. So we're going to talk about this situation here.

Now, we have our hub here. And from a Christian life, we result several things. That's what I want to talk about, because what happens is these things become the... Invariably, throughout the 2,000 years of the church, and we could probably say in our own lives, we always tend to veer towards putting these things as the gist of our faith.

Or not the gist of our religion. I'll say the gist of our religion. Or sometimes we even put these as the source of our... The foundation of our religion.

This is the foundation. This is the end result. These things are the outflow.

What happened to the Ephesians here is that they started with a love. They had their first love. So they had a love for God as a gist of their faith, because they had a first love.

But then it says they lost it. They were doing things out here, which I'll put maybe here in their case. I mean, let's try to summarize that.

What were they doing? I'm going to break this down into three things. I'm going to put number one. We're going to say, I'll put standards.

I think that we can either relate to that, because I find that we either veer to one thing or another. Standards, I'm going to put over here. Knowledge.

Knowledge. I'm going to put the other one. Works.

Ephesians were doing several of these things. They had standards, obviously. They had works.

They had that which they were estimating was right and what was not right. I'm going to use this as an illustration point here. The essence of it, I often, when I look at Christianity as a whole, when I see where people get off track, where throughout history have people got off track, the danger I always see is that this here becomes the measuring point of what somebody's religion.

It's either here, depending on whether you're academic, or it's here, depending on your background. I mean, there's these different things that we veer as, these things are all necessary, but these are not themselves the essence of our religion, even though these things may flow from it. Now, knowledge might be derived from anything from theological understanding.

We want to learn more about God. We learn about the attributes of God. And those things are good.

And I think they're needful as we grow in faith. Doctrinal positions. But I find that a person can hold that and have yet not the essence of religion.

And as John Wesley said, he can be as orthodox as the devil himself. The devil, you could say, certainly has a knowledge of who God is. He does know who God is.

He was an angel. We would believe that. I assume that we'd believe that.

So we'd assume that the devil knows who he is. Standards arising usually from convictions. I mean, if we're walking with God, that we're going to develop convictions.

We're going to create preferences, also. We might say, this is how I prefer to walk with God. Or I prefer to do it this way.

I'm not saying that you need to do it this way. Others would be convictions to say, this is what God has showed me. Regulations, perhaps.

Maybe a church says, we're going to just not do the following because we feel like we want to create some direction that we feel would be just safe to travel this way. Not saying that other churches may have difference in their understanding. And then form.

Perhaps in our services, we have the way we worship, the order of our services. We don't all stand, we sit. We don't necessarily have the men and women on different sides.

It's just different forms and all that. But these things here are not what is the reality of our faith. And then works, which is the things that we do with our faith.

Why I manifest the gifts of the spirit, or I do this, or I visit the poor, or I go to the prison. Those things are the essence of what things I do to manifest the works of God, the things I do outwardly. In 2 Peter, I want to use a little bit of an illustration here, as far as I think is somewhat of a priority.

2 Peter 1.3, it says, according as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness through the knowledge of him that has called us to glory and virtue. Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these you might be partakers of the divine nature, having

escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. And besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity.

For if these things be in you and abound, they may make you that you shall be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore, the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure.

For if you do these things, you shall never fall. The list here, I don't want to read too much into what he's doing here, but he's essentially giving an illustration like a dance. If you had these virtues are, in a sense, hand in hand with each other.

But I do think there's some note to take as far as the order he gives. I don't want to read too much into that. But I would say this, it's interesting enough that knowledge is placed after virtue, and faith being the very foundation.

That's why I have faith first, is the starting point. Too many people lay knowledge as the starting point. And they think that somehow that makes them a Christian.

Because now I've got an understanding of the things of God, and I understand who God is. I believe the Trinity. I believe that Jesus died and rose from the dead.

I believe these aspects of these doctrinal ideas. And they think that somehow that's their starting point. And they think that it's going to turn out well.

But you look at their lives, and you say, what is the ultimate reality of your behavior? And what comes forth as far as fruit in your life? And sometimes it's obvious to everybody else, but that individual. And some say, well, did you hear what so-and-so had to say about such and such? Yeah, but another person says, why would you even have confidence? That person really doesn't even seem to have a walk with God. Yeah, they have this knowledge, but there's something that lacks as far as reality.

Always be careful about that, because there are a lot of people who start with knowledge. And they have a lot to say about the Christian life, and a lot they want to tell you about the Christian life. But the end result is always, yeah, something that doesn't ring right within the life of that individual.

What flows out isn't in order. But here he says, faith is the starting point. Now, when we talk about faith, we're not just talking about an ascent into the things of, obviously, to understand faith, we have to have some idea of who God is.

We have to believe God is, and there's a reward of those that diligently seek him. We have to have some foundation as to who we're having faith in, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God, who was born of a virgin. He died and suffered for our sins, was raised from the dead.

And when we talk about that knowledge, there's some, obviously, basis of knowledge. But I'm not talking about the simple, maybe, level of, say, the Apostles' Creed, where we're just simply acknowledging in basic form who the God is we worship. But when we talk about faith, what we're really saying is our foundation of our life is not based upon knowledge, standards, or works.

I had a good talk with my brother-in-law, Irvin, and I really appreciated his testimony about how God had led him to get to the place of just, with empty hands, coming to Christ by faith, with nothing added to it, no works. None of these things being added is any kind of a foundation, but it's pure, naked faith, just resting in the mercy of God and in the power of God, outside of our ability, and acknowledging that there's nothing within us to merit anything. Many don't even come to that place.

Their idea of faith is not based upon a surrender to that, that I have nothing to offer. It's usually, I've got knowledge, but I'm going to, I have the knowledge that I have to come empty-handed to God. But it's just the knowledge, and somehow I'm cutting confidence, my center now goes on the knowledge of that, not the reality of it.

It's not an individual who has given up, as far as his own righteous standards, his own attempting to make God, to please God by his own efforts, his own works, but is a wholehearted committing himself to God's grace. That's what I'm saying about not, when I talk about knowledge, I'm drinking these distinctions, because there is a true knowledge that we're going to hear a little bit later that is built upon virtue, but it has to be built in its proper order. There is a basis of knowledge that we have the knowledge of God, and there's the knowledge of God that's referenced as far as the experiential knowledge of God, which is different than knowledge about God.

So the starting point there is by adding to your faith, which is that coming to Christ with nothing in our hands, not of my intellect, not of my background and standards, not of my pedigree. Well, I came from a godly home. I'm not coming and saying, well, I've had these strict standards all my life, so it is, I'm going to bring that, or I've really studied a lot on doctrine, and I'm really good at apologetics, or whatever it is.

I'm going to bring that along with me, so that the center no longer is starting with faith. It's faith mixed in with something I've achieved on top of that. And I'm not just saying this theologically.

I'm trying to get this down to reality. If that's what our hope is, we should re-evaluate, am I really coming to Christ on the level where I have nothing to offer, but it's faith alone? You know, when Paul, the apostle, says, it's not of works, lest any man should boast. We tend to think in works in the sense of, well, it's just the law.

Why didn't I abstain from these meats, and this, that, and the other? We tend to think of works in the sense of, I'm adding works. Like, I did good deeds, that plus faith. But we can do works as well just by adding the things that we think.

Anything that creates, that is introducing pride, that is not coming in humility to Christ, it's faith plus something that puffs me up, is a work, because that's what works do. They puff up. I'm saying works by themselves, apart from faith.

If we come to Christ with, because I have studied this, or I have done this, or I have visited this many people and helped this many people, and I'm adding that along with my faith, we'll puff up. To some degree or another, it creates that pride. And the illustrations are given so clearly throughout scriptures.

The illustration of the publican who went to the temple there, and Christ gives us this differentiation between him and the Pharisee, and the publican, it says, oh, he couldn't even lift up his eyes to heaven. He didn't say, Lord, I'm thankful that I'm like not at, even to say, Lord, I'm thankful that I came and I do help people, and I don't always charge too much with my taxation, and I'm thankful that I have helped

some poor people today, thankful that I do understand. I've read several scriptures, and I, none of that.

Do you understand? He didn't give anything. It's the Pharisee that had some things to offer with God to mix his faith with. I believe there is a God, and he's a reward to those that diligently seek him.

And thank you, Lord, that I've done these, this, and this, along with that. The center becomes off where faith is the starting point. I want you to think of this like a wheel, like a little pin type thing, where faith, charity is the end result of faith, but it's still faith is in the center as far as our foundation goes.

Charity is the center as far as the end result, or what it means to have the knowledge of God in our lives. Experiential knowledge is charity. That is the ultimate reality.

That should be the, when people look at our religion, they should say that Christianity is a religion of love. Well, they don't. What they see is it's a religion of, and they grab something here, and this becomes the focal point.

If you were to take this circle and you say it's misaligned, it's like this. How has Christianity been portrayed in our culture? It should be here. If I got a little circle, if I had to put a circle, and they say the lens through which the world sees us, it should be right here.

But often it's this or this. And some of us veer one way or another. We all have something that we're, usually we're offset one way or another.

It's either our knowledge we air in, standards, or our works. Well, I believe in this, or I believe in this idea, and I go about and I prophesy, and I speak on the street corners. And that becomes what they see as our religion, the focal point.

Not something that is encompassed as a result of our faith. So adding to faith virtue, which is to me a result of, when he says adding, think of it in the sense of, like these things are holding hands. That's kind of the illustration that I understand is given here, is think of like a Grecian dance.

These virtues are coming and holding hands and coming across the platform. They would be starting with faith. And then you see these things all encompassed together.

They're all chained together as a complete thing. So I do, like I said, there's something. Charity is the very end.

Faith is the beginning, because I think charity is the end result. If charity isn't the end result, then it ultimately is, as Jesus says, you have to repent because it's no good and it doesn't accomplish anything. Yet though you may have all these other things in order, that's the result of our faith.

I'm really convinced there would be so few divisions and offenses within the church. And it amazes me, why within the Christian religion do we see such when charity is supposed to be the end result? And I think it's because ultimately we don't believe charity is the end result. We think it's something offset.

Again, it's because they didn't hold this view of that and this idea of faith is they don't hold this view of faith like I do. And it's like, well, OK, I understand. Sometimes we have to say, well, we have to agree to disagree on something, or I don't feel like this is.

But charity is the end result of it. Love for God, it's obviously the love of God and the love of my fellow man and the love of my brethren. And if I can love my brother who I don't agree with.

What I see often, I'm not just, I'm just talking about throughout history. I see this constant moving off target where this person denounces that person because he doesn't have the same outside perspective. And you say, well, what's the end result of your faith? Is it charity? Is it what you do view it like Christ did? Can you say if somebody casts out devils in Christ's name that, and he doesn't follow it, not us, that we could, would we say that we forbid, do we forbid him? In our hearts do we forbid him? Because he followeth not after us.

So that's what I'm talking about here. Or the foundation of our faith. I'm here dogmatic about one of these things here, but yet there's no reality.

And you look at my life and you say, but the end result of your life is inconsistent with everything you're talking about. This is not like Islam. We're not going to emphasize ideas and just saying, all the Christian faith is about believe this, this, and this.

Throughout the years, even within the last century, we had the rise of what was called fundamentalism, which rose in reaction to what the liberal theology that was coming down the pike. And fundamentalism was a re-emphasis on the basic tenets of the Christian faith. And it was necessary to do that when you have people, churches coming out and preachers saying, well, Jesus really didn't rise from the dead and he didn't die on the cross.

He really spiritually rose. And when he died, well, he just set an example for us to follow, and that's what this is about. And he really wasn't born of a virgin.

That was made up. And you start getting these attacks on the faith. So naturally, you have to do like the Ephesians.

You start to prove those things. And you start to say, no, this is what the Bible says. It is God's word.

It isn't something arbitrary that you can just pluck out of the air. And then Jesus did die on the cross, and he did rise from the dead. And these things are true.

But what happens, again, when we try to, and I'm not saying that was right to do that. The Ephesians did right. Nobody should condemn what the Ephesians did.

Nobody should condemn what the fundamentalists in the early part of the last century did. They did what they had to do, is define the right parameters. They started defining this.

They had to do that. You can't have faith and charity when you don't even have the right God, when you cast and doubt his word. You can't have that.

I mean, you look at those churches now. It's just a complete mess. I mean, they have nothing.

They're just social churches. So they had to bolster these defenses here. And they'd say, OK, we're going to define knowledge.

But what happens is all it takes is the next generation to come along. And they say, because the emphasis is so strong on believing the right thing about the inspiration of the Bible, the inerrancy, they fail to say this

is only an aspect of the Christian faith. But that's not the core center.

So what happens? The next generation comes. And they hear all the preaching. So we can counter the liberals.

And they get this. And the center goes right here. And so then the next generation comes, says, this is what it means to become a Christian.

You need to believe in the inerrancy of the scriptures. You need to believe that Christ died. He really bodily rose from the dead.

And he ascended into heaven. And that he died for our sins. Now that becomes the thrust.

And you see it going wrong. And you say, well, look at why is there such? You look at these churches. And why are things the way they are? Because what happens is the center gets.

And it's just like all that used tools. I mean, they don't calibrate their tools again. They get off.

They don't take the saw. And they don't recalibrate it. Or take the, let's think about when Brother Chris fixed my car.

He had to calibrate the timing chain. The timing chain broke. And he had to take it and calibrate it so that, put a new one on and calibrate it so that it fired right.

The same thing I see in the Christian life is I think it's necessary for us as individuals to really take an assessment to say, am I calibrating my life so that the center is charity, which is the love of God, the reality of Christ in my life? Or do I get my calibration wrong? Is the basis of my acceptance with God based upon Christ plus something? And is the end result of my religion Christ plus something? Or is it, I feel, the balance of a hub? You've got the center point, which is the foundation. And these things are simply the hub. An illustration I wanted to give and I didn't bring with me.

But I had the thought in my mind of a shell. If I were to take a shell, and I would show you a nice conch shell and see all the intricate curves and all. And I could say, look at this.

Look at the intelligence behind this. It's depicting something of creative life. And I show this.

I say, take this shell here. Look at the beauty of it. Look at how it's orchestrated.

Something living made this. But then if I say, therefore, this is alive, what are you going to say? You're probably going to look inside and see, is it alive? Maybe it's not alive. Maybe it's dead.

All that shell tells me is that one time there was something living inside of it. It's a shell. And we wouldn't say that whatever the sea creature is, it needs a shell.

That's part of it's the result of its life was to create a shell. But the thing died inside. And it still left a shell that is still there for us to see.

Well, that's what happened in Ephesus, is they still had a shell there. They could point to a shell and say, look at these things that are done. Now, Jesus didn't say, get a new shell.

But he said, unless there's life back, unless there's life again, unless there's that first love, a dead shell is no good. That shell, maybe a crab can climb in it and take over that shell and run off with it. But as far as the life that was in it is no longer there anymore.

And I think the same thing with our Christianity. We too often emphasize the shell itself is the end result of the reality of the Christian faith. Look at the shell.

Look at our church. Look at my life. Look at the shell.

And I think that's great that we'd have a good shell. We'd have a nice, shiny, intricate shell. But it's got to have something in it.

I put that in my fish tank. It falls to the bottom. And then bubbles pop up.

And then next thing, you're just sitting there as a decoration. It's not going to climb up the walls or do anything. It's not going to eat the ology.

It's not going to. It's dead. It's just a decoration.

But it's not a decoration that Christ is pleased with. And ultimately, he has to, if it doesn't, if it's going to stay that way, he has to get that shell out, whether it's depicting of a church or a movement or whatever it is, if it becomes just a shell. Or if that's all our life is, that shell can also be manifested.

When I say it's the result of a life, I mean in general. Now, I can adopt that shell. I could be a hermit crab.

And I can come in and take that shell. But it doesn't make me the life that was once in it. I'm kind of like an imposter.

I come in and take it and put it on myself. And now I've got a crab inside the shell. That crab didn't make it.

And that shell is not the result of the life of the crab. That crab just simply was somebody else adopting those aspects of somebody else's religion. For example, we talk about the fundamentalists.

They come and they create it. They emphasize true doctrines, the doctrines that we teach. And I think it's good for us to rehearse in our minds what we believe.

But I can put that there, and that life can be dead. Charity becomes dead. And the crab can come in and take over and walk off with that and say, look at this.

And we get like a hermit crab religion where you've got an imposter taking the forms. And that's what happened. The generations come up.

And it was like, we believe these things. But not those who are born of God. They just simply had the knowledge of those things.

They took the shell of past generations and walked with it. But it was not the life that the past generations had. Because they themselves have to come directly to God for that life.

And that's the problem is that you can't preach life. All you can do is preach truth. We can preach doctrine.

And we need to do that. And we can create this shell. We can create the standards.

And we can say, these things are not right behavior. This is the way Christians should behave. And we can define our shell.

But we can't define and preach the life. That has to come from God. And oftentimes, again, what happens is, and especially for the second and third generations, or second generation Christians, I'll use that.

Lightly, I use that, is the danger is that they've got the shell, which is good. But they somehow maybe misplaced that as an evidence of life. No, it may be the evidence of the life of your parents.

They got those convictions. But you've got to get that life firsthand yourself. You can't be a second generation.

God has no grandchildren, as Corrie ten Boom said. God has no grandchildren. You have to have that reality, the centerpiece in your life, afresh from God.

This here cannot be. We can pass the knowledge of the faith. But this experientially has to be done by us alone.

And we can't. People can lead us to Christ. They can point the way.

But we have to. This is something that is between us and God alone. Nobody can force that or preach that into you, so to speak.

Man can't do that. It's God himself. It's the relationship between that individual and Christ that that reality comes into place.

Knowledge, it says in 1 Corinthians, puffeth up, a charity edifieth. And the context there is touching things offered unto idols. And again, here's a scenario.

The Corinthians, who would eat these things offered unto idols, had a knowledge, which was true knowledge, and a knowledge that we could preach ourselves to say, it's true. These idols are nothing. There's no other gods that are out there.

These are false gods. There might be demons behind it. But you'd say they're not gods.

They're not gods in the sense that they're propped up to be. And we have knowledge of that. And he's not saying be ignorant of that, because it puffs you up.

But that's why I think the order here has some significance to why he says add to your faith virtue and then to virtue knowledge. I look at virtue as encompassing humility. Meekness.

I would say this. As much knowledge as you add to your understanding, make sure that you have more charity and humility to gird that up. Otherwise, what you're doing is you're creating a building that has a heavy top and a very weak structure to it.

It'd be like me trying to build a skyscraper on top of my little mobile home. And I'd crush that thing if I did that. Well, that's what we do with knowledge.

We build this superstructure, but on a weak foundation. We don't have the humility, whereas somebody says we don't have the head or the heart for understanding. We have neither the head nor the heart.

And maybe we have the head sometimes, but if we don't have the heart, we can't undergird that. And it does say to add knowledge. And I believe knowledge encompasses more than that.

It's true wisdom, as Mr. Wesley defined it, by which your faith will be increased and your courage directed and preserved from degenerating into rashness. That knowledge is necessary. Otherwise, I've seen a lot of people have a lot of zeal without knowledge, a lot of zeal without knowledge, and do a lot of irrational things.

And that ultimately hinders their faith. Knowledge is necessary, but you have to lay the underpinning of humility. Psalm 131, David says, Lord, I exercise myself not in things that are too high for me.

That's a good psalm just to meditate upon. There's a sense at which I think we can become a little bit over ourselves as far as what we think is true. There's a sense we have to back up and say, Lord, I don't have all the answers.

Make it real to me. I mean, I've got a lot of doctrines. Myself, there's a lot of things I've had to just step back and say, you know, maybe I've adopted things.

It's the best of my understanding. I might believe these. But in the same sense, I have to be careful about how I commit myself to a lot of things.

And just leave that, say, you know, Lord, I want to be open just to be re-taught. Because some of these things, I may never have a full understanding on this side of eternity. And there's that humility with knowledge.

I think as the more mature we grow, I think the more we should feel that we don't know. I really do. And not to say that we become ignorant or foolish, and we don't exercise ourself in understanding.

But there's a sense of realizing that there's more to God's truth than we can comprehend. So add to your faith virtue, then to virtue knowledge. And I look at that.

Again, I don't want to read into the word of God and create some sort of a something it's not saying. But I do believe that there's something to that. I mean, just by experience, and also what I see elsewhere in the scriptures, that virtue has to undergird our knowledge of God.

Our doctrines, our understanding of theology, for example, should be undergirded with ever more humility. The more that we take in, the more humility, more just saying, Lord, I exercise myself not in things too high for me. I need to come like the publican, more and more to God, and less and less be coming in with my sword to say, you know, I've got this understanding, and you don't got it, and I'm going to argue with you.

And like I said, very few have the head or the heart to really debate issues. It takes both. And it doesn't come out the same when you've got a person who's yielded to God on these.

When God gets a hold of somebody, and they're humble, it doesn't come out the same when they get into discussions and debates. And then it becomes more of just, to me, it doesn't come out right. Add to faith virtue, virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness, brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity.

And again, like I'm saying, I don't think there's necessarily some sort of an order, per se. Though I do think it's interesting that faith is mentioned first, and charity. And that's why I put that there.

And with our memory verse, it just seems that the scriptures over and over always emphasize faith is like the starting point. Because faith just simply is the reality that we have nothing that we can make any claim of, other than God's promise. It's God himself that is, in a sense, doing that.

He's providing the means by which we can find peace with him. There's nothing that we can offer, and reward, or in payment. And faith and charity is the ultimate summation of reality.

Faith itself, it says in 1 Corinthians, will fade. It will be brought into sight. Hope itself shall fade, but charity.

These three, faith, hope, and love, this one will yet abide, and that is charity. In 2 Timothy, as you look at some of these other things, he talks about those who have a form of godliness, but deny the power thereof from such turn away. For this sort are they which creep into houses and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with diverse lusts, ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.

I don't believe that when he says these have a form of godliness, it's hard to say they had some outward standard. I don't know what it was. I don't know if these are Judaizers.

And in what way did they lead about captive silly women laden with sins? I don't know that. But I think we can say some sort of a relevance here. A form of godliness can either encompass the way we live our life.

The Pharisees, for example, had a form of godliness. I don't think it means these were just a bunch of heathens. These had a form of god.

They had something external about them that commended them as religious people of some relationship to God. They were some sort of a religious people that believed in God. So they had a form.

But it says denying the power thereof. Now, we ever ask the question, what's the power thereof? Now, some might say, well, working miracles. And again, you might take this and say, well, the power is another one of these things on the outside.

But I don't believe so. I think it's charity is the ultimate reality. The power of God manifest in their life, love being the chief end of the law.

But these individuals had a form of godliness. There's something about them. And maybe some of that was good.

Maybe that form wasn't even a bad form. We don't know. We don't know if it was pharisaical, maybe the phylacteries.

Or maybe it was, I think we can all identify. There are many out there that can say their form is good. And we would say, if they ever get right with God, don't change your form.

We maybe appreciate your form. However, you don't have the power of God in your life. You're not right with God.

You just have a shell. You're like the hermit crab. You took over a shell of formality, which might not be bad.

But you're not the life that was once the inhabitant of that shell. That life isn't there anymore. The charity, which is the foundation, the power of God in your life isn't there.

And these ones ever learn, but never come to the knowledge of truth. And I think the same reason I brought before. If virtue does not undergird knowledge, all knowledge does is puff up.

All it does is it helps us be ever more mindful of just how much we know in relationship to other people. Other instances, Jesus speaks of those who say, Lord, Lord. So they acknowledge even Jesus himself is Lord.

We could say there's knowledge of who Christ is and that they acknowledge Christ is Lord. And it says that they shall not enter the kingdom of heaven. But then he says, but he that doeth the will of my father, which is in heaven, which to me is emphasized.

To me, I think when you look at the reality of how do we know if someone has charity? Well, those who do the will of the father, obviously they give evidence, the charity, the love of God in their hearts. Many will say in that day. So it makes me wonder, many will say, why are there many that say it? And I think it's because generations come up that take the formality, but they don't have the substance of this religion.

This here has to be the starting point. And we can adopt these things, but I think even if we're ignorant of God and we get the scriptures and by reading the scriptures we come to faith, these things can start on their own. You don't necessarily have to adopt it.

I mean, it's great that we have a lot of resources we can go back to. We can say, how do people live their lives? How did they believe? How did they? We can use those to help us, but I would say if you have to make a decision, a choice between the two, it'd be better to have none of that, start over and start with the Bible and not knowing anything of church history and coming to faith and having those things develop again, if that's what it takes, if that life is not there. Well, there's those who will say, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied? And this is the only thing that works here.

These individuals prophesied in the name of the Lord and they cast out devils and they did many wonderful works, it says. And I'm thinking again of the same old miscalibration that, I mean, all of us either have been there or we have met people who have emphasized the reality of their Christian life. I did this, I speak in tongues, I prophesy, I have visions.

And those things now become, this is the evidence of the life of Christ within me because these things are manifest. If you're really a true believer, you will manifest by, I'm just throwing things that are out there. I'm not trying to belittle anybody.

I'm not belittling the gifts of the spirit, but those are not the foundation. They are not the center of our faith because here it says there are those who can do those things and it doesn't evidence anything. And Jesus says, I never knew you.

I mean, you were never even, you didn't have life. You just had, it was just a shell with a hermit crab inside of it. That's all you were.

It wasn't, there was no life there. I never knew you. You were iniquity, the charity, the love of God was manifest in your heart.

All you were is puffed up that you thought you were some great man like Simon the Sorcerer or someone who thought he was someone great. And he did these mighty things for God, he said, and maybe others, maybe he made it clear to others that he was a mighty man of God and people give him money, I don't

know what they do, or they follow him and they say, this is the voice as one speaking as a God. Many will come that day.

And we did it in the name of the Lord. We had these things in our lives and he'll say, I never knew you. You didn't have the life of Christ.

Ephesians aren't gonna be exempted. These are individuals who had the reality of God. He says, you have to have it back.

Get yourself recalibrated. There's some that never started by faith. I never knew you.

We can say that at least Ephesians knew God. It's just, you had to get that priorities back in order. But many will not even come by faith and yet think that they have the reality of God in their lives.

And I just, sometimes I hear Brother Jim's stories of different ones in the prison and they start with, it sounds like what I hear Brother Jim relate. It's like they're coming around with these things and they're saying, yeah, but I believe this. And Jim says, yeah, but what's the reality of your life? What's the fruit of it all? I think we're kind of speaking the same thing.

What's coming forth? Is that what your faith is based on? Is that what the reality, your foundation? If it is, you could be just as lost as everybody else. That's not going to, that doesn't say anything. Those things will pass away.

Prophecies will cease. Tongues will be, those things will all cease one day. And all that will be left is, not even faith.

Faith will cease, but all that will be left is charity. Is that the ultimate, if someone were to summarize your life, would it be summarized by the love of God manifest in this individual, this life here? Is it the demonstration? If someone says, what, if we were talking about the love of God, could they say, this brother here is an example, the best example physically I could give of the love of God. Brother Paul mentioned the sister, Norman Grubb's wife, that just talking to her on the phone, the presence of God was there.

That's what I'm talking about, of what we need our lives to be calibrated with, that it wasn't, his wife was telling me about this doctrine and that, and this is how she performs her, this is the things that she wears, and she doesn't do this, and she does that, and then Paul was impressed by this, that it was just simply not even speaking, just something about her life that represented the life of Christ. It was the centerpiece that affected him. Now, she may have had those other, I'm sure she did, I mean, she has the love of God in her life, she's gonna have the rest, you can't have a life without those defining boundaries.

I just can't emphasize, I would really encourage you, when you go through the scriptures, mark how many times charity is represented as the fundamental of the Christian life. How many times does Jesus bring it up? How many times does the Apostle Paul bring it up? How many times does John bring it up? Mark 12, 28 to 34, I'll just kind of give a real quick synopsis about the scribe that came to Jesus, and he tries to question him, and he says, which is the first commandment of all? I think he's thinking, I don't know what the scribe was thinking, maybe he was trying to stumble him, maybe he wasn't, and Jesus could have said, well, it's to do this or to do that, but he says, hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord, and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind. That's the essence of the, that's the greatest commandment.

That means the greatest. If you're going to meditate on God's law, that's the chief one that you start with, and then the other one is, thou love thy neighbor as thyself. Well, John makes it clear that you can't have the second, if you don't have the first, the first one's not real to begin with.

It's not like they're two separate, like I can say, I don't steal, but I've killed. We can't, though you can do that with those commandments, you can say, I've coveted, but I've never murdered anybody. I've never actually stolen, but you can't say the love of God and the love of your man's that way.

They are inseparable. If I say, I love God, and I say, I hate my brother, he says, you're a liar. You can't, but he wouldn't, I wouldn't be a liar if I said, I never stole, but yet I've coveted.

I mean, probably I'm a liar because everybody's done those things, but I mean, it's theoretically possible that I could do one and not the other. You wouldn't say, well, if you say you, in fact, James says, if you violate one, you violate the whole. He didn't say you had to have violated.

He's not saying that you've literally violated the whole, but it's as if, since you broke one point of the law, the whole becomes, you become guilty under the whole law. You can't just say, well, I'm just a thief, but at least I didn't kill. Okay, you didn't break the law.

He's saying the law is violated if any point is violated, but here you actually cannot do the one without the other in obedience, and that is love is that encompassing. You can't violate the love of God and then they'll have to love, or violate our love for our fellow man or our brother or neighbor, as the scripture says, and yet say we have love for God. And then he says, it's all more than, more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.

Now think about what he's saying there, all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices. He's saying in the sense that this is worth everything else that the Christian life is even about. Everything we do in the Christian life is nothing compared to loving God with all our heart and loving our neighbor as ourself.

Don't just look at it as Jewish sacrifices. Well, that's irrelevant to us. We'll just write that off as, well, that's just pertaining to the Jews.

We'll look at it from what it represents. The whole of our religious system is worth nothing compared to loving God with all our heart and loving our neighbor as ourself, is what he's saying. All this stuff out here is worth nothing in comparison to loving charity in the middle, loving God, that's what charity is, loving God with all our heart and loving our neighbor as ourself is the essence of the Christian faith.

These other things are whole burnt offerings, sacrifices, understandings of human heart, but the human mind, all worth very little in comparison to that. And if the center is gone, they're worth nothing. And then Jesus says discreetly, he says, thou are not far from the kingdom of God.

That's something, think about what the implications there. This man had, he was on the right track. That tells me if that centerpiece isn't there, then maybe I am not, if my life is void of this reality, I'm not saying that as believers, we might have to get recalibrated.

I'm just saying there are some that don't have this as reality, but have this. And I have to say, are you far from the kingdom of God? Are you in the kingdom of God or would Jesus say you are not far? Or would he say you're not close? But I have these things here, but that's not what Jesus says is the, in response to being far or close to the kingdom of God, it's what's the reality of the life? And then we read in Galatians,

the fruit of the spirit is love. And love is always mentioned there as like the finality, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, against such there is no law.

And they that are Christ have crucified the flesh and the affections and lusts. And then it says, if we live in the spirit, let us also walk in the spirit. That's to me is a faith charity.

But the emphasis there is by walking in the spirit, the power of the spirit to accomplish that. Then he talks about, let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another, which I look at is when you're an offsetter, you're not walking in the spirit and vain glory ends up becoming the predominance of your life. I just can't emphasize enough that.

And again, in my own life, I've seen it. And I've met many that have something that is, to me, it's distasteful. And I see these lives and they're, oh, do you believe in speaking in tongues? Oh, do you believe in keeping the Sabbath? Oh, do you believe in, it tells me where your heart is at.

That's the thing that comes out. It's not, do you know the Lord? Do you love God? Do you have the peace of God in your life? It's not that, it's do you have this doctrine? Or do you believe in doing this? Do you believe in doing that? How do you believe about this? Or it's, we go out and prophesy. Do you go out and preach? Do you do this? I'm just talking about that's the, it's not, I'm just saying that's the center of their fellowship.

They are stuck on this. Their calibration is so off. Where they can't talk about, they can't even talk about this because they're here.

Or maybe they're here and they can't even, they don't even talk about theological issues because they're so stuck on over here. I'm just saying they're out of calibration. There's not, it's not the free flow of what has Christ done in your life and how, you know, what's the Lord teaching you? It's what about these things on the outside? That's the first thing I veer towards.

What's your view of the end times? And I'm not saying this, again, and I'm not against talking about that. I don't see a problem with, you know, brother, I had another brother sitting down with me. I might ask a question.

I think that's good fellowship. I'm just saying that that isn't, shouldn't be the focus point, especially when you meet somebody who, for the first time, is a believer and that's the first things you're asking. It tells me you're off calibration.

What are your beliefs about the end times? Well, you know, that's just a friendly discussion. I'm not talking about that, but a lot of times it isn't. It's like there's something that harps on a person that is like, it rings, it resonates with that individual and they can't get out of that rut.

It's like, okay, there's something amiss. Is that the basis of our fellowship? Or what's your view on this? Or what's your view on that doctrine? Well, is that the basis of our, it's like you get this hostility and ooh, you're gonna get in an argument or a fight. It's like, whoa, whoa, whoa.

It's one thing, you know, I'm not saying that there's never a time that we can have a charitable discussion on things, but I'm saying that that is not the focus point. If it is, we have to ask ourselves, either we're out of calibration or we don't have that reality to begin with. We might need to assess, have I ever really been born again? Just because I have the shell is no evidence.

I can adopt that shell. The hermit crab can adopt the shell, but he's not a, I don't know what lives in snails or whatever live in those shells. I'm not, he's not a snail.

He just took something that somebody else generated. Second generation, third generation. I did what, took what my forefathers had to do and I embraced it all, but I don't have faith as the starting point and I don't have true charity.

I mean, we can't emphasize more than enough, by grace you are saved through faith. That not of yourselves is the gift of God. And that's how he always brings this up.

Not of works unless any man should boast. Boasting. And I'm gonna say, it's not just the idea of the starting point, but also anytime we get our, we miss the focus here where it's faith alone and the grace of God in our lives.

Where it's God's grace, it's God's reality alone too. It's the love of God. That's who God is, is love.

So if it's God alone, then it's, then we're, then our heart is made perfect in love if it's perfectly God manifesting. Just like it's faith alone as the sole foundation of our religion, so the end result is charity alone. Again, God is perfect love.

And so if God is perfect in our lives, if we allow him to perfectly manifest himself, then that's the end result. Not everyone that say, Lord, Lord, we mentioned that, but he that doeth the will of my father and he says how that many will come in that day. And I just have to emphasize why is it that he says many will, does that mean a good, you know, I don't know.

Majority, is that a good many? Does that just mean many in his day or is that, I have, I believe that it's many throughout all ages. And they say, Lord, Lord, because there's something that they've embraced that made them think that Christ was Lord, because maybe they believe Jesus died and rose from the dead. But that wasn't saving faith.

That was just simply having a knowledge of that and they say, Lord, Lord, didn't we not? And maybe some of them, so I was raised in a church where we believed in the gifts of the spirit and I, maybe they didn't have the reality of Christ in their life, but they adopted those things and are not putting down the gifts of the spirit and they believe something that was scriptural, but they didn't have the foundation right. They weren't saved. They didn't come to Christ by faith alone.

Christ wasn't Lord in their lives. It was just Lord, Lord from the outside. They can say Lord, Lord, because that's what they had the understanding of, but they didn't have the knowledge of God, of the reality of that.

It wasn't real to them. They didn't experientially know Christ is Lord. And so they can say, Lord, Lord, but yet Jesus, I didn't know you and there was no experiential knowledge.

I didn't know you. You knew about me, but we didn't know each other. I didn't know you in a personal sense and there was no relationship.

I didn't know you as a son. First Corinthians 13 is one of those scriptures that I think it's, my tendency is to, you read it and you, it should forever put within us an awe of the standard that Paul lays out here and it's oh so easy for us to read it and then we go on as a man looking at a glass dimly, we forget what manner of man we were and we go off and say, well, that's so great of it an admonition of love and then we go ahead

and harbor feelings towards people and everything else. I don't know, I just, it's one of these things where it's like, if that's the Christian life, then we missed it quite a bit.

Maybe we're really out of a calibration because this is what he's saying is to be, this is an example of a calibrated life. Then he goes on to talk about these externals again. He says, if I speak with the tongues of men and angels, I do many mighty works and have not charity and I become as a sounding brass and tinkling cymbal and I give of the gift of prophesy.

Lord, do we not prophesy in thy name and understand all mysteries, understanding all doctrine. So you could say I could write a commentary and it'd be perfectly sound and nobody could, you know, you could say this is the perfect commentary. I have all knowledge of all mysteries of God.

And though I have all faiths that I can remove mountains and have not charity, I am nothing. It's not talking about the faith different, I don't think he's talking about having faith, saving faith in this, it's the faith that to do something, maybe I trust that to have the faith. I don't look at it because you can't have true saving faith and not have charity as a result.

But even if I could theoretically have faith to move a mountain, I could trust that God would do it and God would honor that faith. Yet without charity, it doesn't profit anything. Give my body to be burned, feed the poor, give my goods.

And I mean, I'm just trying to, I'm using this as an example here. Though these things could be perfected, this is the perfect shell. This is when he's saying that in the utmost, there's no way to improve upon any of these points if I have this perfectly lined up.

So if you said, what's your belief on this? I could tell you an absolute infallibly what any doctrine is, and I'd be right. I could tell you what is the right way to live our lives. I can go about doing works and set the most highest standard.

In fact, die a martyr's death. And yet he says, if charity is not the centerpiece, I am, and just this theme here keeps re-presenting, I have nothing. This theme here is a, just as you go through the scriptures, I keep seeing this energy here.

It's constant, charity is the centerpiece. These are the hubs. Faith is the starting point.

But these things develop on the outside and they're imperfect. All of us are never, I don't believe on this life we're gonna have perfect shell, so to speak, because we're limited in our knowledge. We see through a glass dimly.

We don't always have maybe the right standards or the right, when I say standards, anything encompassing things that we ought to abstain from or things that we should be doing, ways that we should be living our lives. We might encompass things that would probably be best to leave alone, and we probably allow things in our lives that we maybe shouldn't to some degree or another. And maybe we put out things that we were too strict on somewhere.

I mean, we're fallible. We try the best we can, and maybe God leads us in a lot of these, and we can say, these are convictions God has given me, and others are preferences. And we say, I prefer just to cut this out, even though I don't ask other brethren to do this, but I'm just gonna make this line here.

And I can have all that, but again, if that's all that it is, then it profiteth nothing. I have nothing more than the faith of a Muslim or a faith of a Jew or a faith of a Hindu, because all of them can say that they've done things to encompass their lives that have defined it, they have abstained from things, they have embraced things, they've got beliefs about God, and some of it is sound, there is one God, others are unsound, but even if they were sound in all areas, a Muslim would still be lost. Even if his doctrine was all right, if he has not love, he's still lost.

If he doesn't come to God by faith, he's still lost. He may accept Jesus in the perfect way, instead of, as they do, they have a false notion of Jesus, but even if they did have a perfect knowledge, Jesus would still have to say, Lord, Lord, Lord, I never knew you, just because you knew who I was, but you didn't know me. And I could keep going on, I mean, the scriptures touch on this all the time, touch not, taste not, handle not, which all are to perish with the using after the commandments and doctrines of men.

Now, this is obviously speaking more in Jewish terms, because there are some things that we shouldn't be touching or tasting or handling, but even then, which things indeed have a show of wisdom and will worship in humility and neglecting of the body, not in any honor to the satisfying of the flesh, I think I can make the point to say that any of these outside things without humility, I mean, without a proper balance will puff up, whether it's things that we abstain, if I say I'm gonna deprive my life of certain things, I can honestly say if that charity isn't the foundation of my life, that that'll puff up, knowledge will puff up. I think we can make a case that every one of these will puff up if charity's not the foundation. I think you can go throughout the scriptures here, 1 Corinthians or Colossians 2.20 brings about these things, if you'd be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why is the living in the world, are you subject to ordinances? Again, even if these are right ordinances, which these aren't, that even in a right sense, if without charity, they still will puff up.

You'll still say, you know, I'm doing things just right, not like these guys over here, look at these. I stopped saying things like, you know, these dead churches and I won't do that anymore. That's just, to me, is arrogant.

One time, I remember feeling convicted, bringing up something like that years ago, and it's, yeah, but they don't believe this, and they don't do that. Okay, whatever they do, they do. I'm not gonna give an account for that, but I'm not gonna, that's not my job.

I've got enough to worry about my own life than to worry about somebody I've never met. You know, I go to Pass by churches, you see these signs, and sometimes they're good signs, and I just say amen, I'll just take it as from the Lord if it's a good encouragement, and if it's not, I just pass by. Best vitamin for being a Christian is B1.

I like that, that's good. I don't know who the people are, and I'm not gonna judge them. I don't know them.

That's not charitable for me to do, that's pride. That's, to me, it's arrogance. I leave that with God.

I'm gonna end with a quote from John Wesley. He says, but here let no man deceive his own soul. It is diligently to be noted that the faith which bringeth not forth repentance, and love, and all good works.

Understand there, that's what, when these things are actually brought forth from reality instead of just adopted, but actually bring forth because of, love will bring these things forth. I mean, at least, like I said, a living mollusk will make a shell. It will have right works.

It will have right standards. But he says, if these things are not done, and he goes, that don't bring forth repentance, and love, and all good works, is not that right living faith, but a dead and devilish one. For even the devils believe that Christ was born of a virgin, that he brought all kinds of miracles, declaring himself very God, that for our sakes he suffered a most painful death to redeem us from death everlasting, that he rose again the third day, that he ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father, and at the end of the world shall come again the judge both the quick and the dead.

These articles of our faith the devils believe, and so they believe all that is written in the Old and New Testament, and yet for all this faith, they be but devils. They remain still in their damnable estate, lacking the very true Christian faith. The right and true Christian faith is to go on in the words of our own church, which had been the Anglican church at the time.

He's speaking of their statement of the articles of faith. Not only to believe that Holy Scripture and the articles of our faith are true, but also to have a sure trust and confidence to be saved from everlasting damnation by Christ. It is a sure trust and confidence, which a man hath in God, that by the merits of Christ his sins are forgiven, and he reconciled to the favor of God, whereof doth follow a loving heart to obey his commandments.

Now whosoever hath this faith, which purifies the heart by the power of God, who dwelleth therein, from pride, anger, desire, from all unrighteousness, from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, which fills it with love stronger than death, both to God and to all mankind, love that doeth the works of God, glorying to spend and be spent for all men, and that endureth with joy not only the reproach of Christ in being mocked, despised, and hated of all men, but whatsoever the wisdom of God permits the malice of men or devils to inflict, whosoever hath this faith, thus working by love, is not almost only but altogether a Christian. And I'll end that is that I think if we were to say what's the summation here? And I have again that little illustration, it's faith that worketh by love. And I think that should be the picture.

That should be the testimony of our lives as believers. And as a church here is, if somebody were to ask what does he believe? You should say, well, his life is represented by faith that work, maybe they don't use those theological terms, but at least that they know in their heart, it's faith that worketh by love. And that should be the essence.

God bless you, brethren.

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