

Bristol Conference 1964 (Apostasy) - Part 1

by William MacDonald

The sermon emphasizes the importance of developing strong Christian character in the face of apostasy and false teaching, and highlights the need for courage, knowledge, self-control, godliness, and brotherly kindness.

Duration: 44:01

Scripture: 2 Peter 1:5

Topics: "Apostasy"

Description

The sermon transcript discusses the concept of love and its connection to the will. It emphasizes that God's love for the world was not based on emotions but on His will, as He gave His only Son for it. The sermon also highlights the importance of carrying the gospel to all nations. The transcript then moves on to discuss the personal qualities that Christians should cultivate and the benefits they can gain from growing in their knowledge of Jesus Christ. It encourages believers to immerse themselves in the Word of God and make use of the provisions and promises that God has given them.

Transcript

to 2 Peter, and I think for the sake of time, we're going to begin reading at verse 5. 2 Peter, verse 5. Yes, is there anyone here who hasn't received a copy of the Limeographed Outline? If you'd raise your hand, Brother Soot would give you one. I think there are a few left. These were passed out yesterday, but perhaps you weren't here to receive it.

I think if you don't mind, we'll just go ahead and read in order to utilize the time, because it goes so fast. It says, 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 make you that ye shall be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But he that lack of 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 ye do these things, ye shall never fall. For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth. Yea, I think it meet as long as I am in this tabernacle to stir you up

by putting you in remembrance, knowing that shortly I must put off this tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath showed me. Moreover, I will endeavor that ye may be able after my deceit to have these things always in remembrance." Now we're taking up the subject of latter-day false teachers.

I opened the mail this morning and somebody had sent me a clipping. It was a clipping about Dr. Albert Schweitzer, noted medical missionary in Africa. Dr. Schweitzer went out under the Lutheran Church to serve in Africa.

Recently the Unitarian Church in New York announced that Dr. Schweitzer was now one of their followers. Some of the newspaper reporters went to Dr. Schweitzer and said, well, does that mean you're no longer a Lutheran? Well, he said, I'm a Protestant, and I can find entrance into all the Protestant churches. And then somebody said to him, what about the Trinity, Dr. Schweitzer? And his answer was, I wonder if either Jesus or Paul believed in it.

That's the type of situation that Peter is dealing with in his second epistle. Now last time we saw in the salutation Peter greeting these Christians who had obtained life's precious standing with him before God. And we noticed in the first few verses the emphasis upon the knowledge of God, in contrast to the false knowledge of these professed teachers.

But then in verses three and four we found out that God has given us all things that are necessary for life and godliness. We don't have to fall prey to these men who are apostates from the Christian faith. God has made us partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

Now tonight brings us to section three in our outline, the responsibility of believers to develop strong Christian character. Verses five through eleven. This is God's way.

Now the connection is this. In verses three and four he tells us what provision God has made for us. Now in verses five through eleven he tells us how we are to appropriate that provision that God has made, and we do it by growing in the Christian life, by maturing in the Christian life, by going on for the Lord.

Now in the King James Version it says, and besides this, at the beginning of verse five. But I think you would get the connection better if you go to one of the other versions and find that it really means, yea, and for this very cause. Now that helps me.

Yea, and for this very cause. For what very cause? Because God has given us all that is necessary for life and godliness. Because he has made full provision, he has given us great and precious promises.

Yea, and for this very cause. Giving all diligence adds to your faith virtue. Now the Apostle Paul reminds us that the cultivation of the Christian life, the cultivation of Christ's likeness, is something that requires all diligence.

If you just go on in the Christian life, drifting and taking what comes along, you'll never make history for God. The man who makes history for God is the one who presses on. And so he says, giving all diligence adds to your faith virtue.

Now notice that the Apostle Paul begins with faith. It's wonderful, the word of God. This is where God begins.

He begins with faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and of course Peter assumes that these people have faith. So he doesn't say add faith. He says, to your faith supplement virtue.

And what he does in this portion of scripture is give a list of Christian characteristics that we should develop in our lives. Now let me just say this, that you might read it and get the idea, well this week I add virtue to my life, and next week I add knowledge, and next week temperance, and next week patience, and next week... Now that isn't what it means. Actually, we're to have all of these things all the time.

It isn't a chronology that he's giving here. It isn't something that's to begin at the new birth and go on, and well, you finally add love at the end of the Christian life. No, no, no.

These are things that we should be developing all the time, but the idea is that we supplement one with the other. Now let's look at them one by one. He says, add to your faith virtue.

That word virtue has several different meanings in the New Testament, but I think that the one that's clearest for us to see tonight is the word courage. I like that. The background now is apostasy from the Christian faith.

The background now is a day in which the truths of the word of God are being called into question, and Peter says, add to your faith courage. Courage to stand up for the truth of God's word. Courage to be firm for Christ.

As I said yesterday, a great watchword today is tolerance and toleration. You mustn't get excited about anything, so that today men can really question the basic fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith, and it doesn't stir people at all. I want to tell you tonight there are truths in the word of God, great fundamental basic truths for which we should be willing to shed the very last drop of our blood.

I believe that with all my heart, and I don't care for nandy-pandy Christianity. I like to see men and women and young men and young women who are willing to take a decided stand for the Lord Jesus Christ. Back in our home assembly some years ago, there was a girl, and she went to school and was taking a course in literature, and the teacher of this literature course wanted them all to memorize and recite in public a poem called Invictus by William Henley.

I'm sure that some of you have heard the poem. It's an atheistical, infidel poem from the very word go. In fact, this is the poem.

He says, Out of the night that covers me, black as the pits from pole to pole, I thank whatever God may be for my unconquerable soul. What do you think of that? That in the felled clutch of circumstance I have not winced nor cried aloud. Under the bludgeonings of chance my head is bloody but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears looms but the horror of the shade, and yet the minutes of the years find and shall find me unafraid. It matters not how straight the gate, he said, how charged with punishment the scroll. I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul.

Well, this girl Jean went to school and the teacher said, I want you to memorize that poem and recite it in public. The scripture says, Add to your faith courage, and she said, I won't do it. And the teacher said, You have to do it.

She said, I won't do it. But you know, it even made the local papers that a girl would refuse to recite that poem in school. How could she recite it and be faithful to the Son of God? And so she compromised in this way.

She said, I have an adaptation of Invictus that I'd like to give to you. That girl went to school and she recited this poem, Out of the light that dazzled me, bright as the sun from pole to pole, I thank the God I know to be, for Christ the conqueror of sin. His the sway of circumstance I would not wince nor cry aloud.

Under that rule which men call chance, my head with joy is humbly bowed. Beyond this place of sin and tears, that life with him, and his the aid that, spite the menace of the years, find and shall keep me unafraid. I have no fear, though straight the gate.

He cleared my way, and I shall from punishment the soul. Christ is the master of my fate. Christ is the captain of my soul.

She went to school and she recited the poem. You think, well, you don't need courage in the day that we're living in, but I tell you, you do. When you go to school even and sit under atheistical influence, as I tell you, it takes courage to stand and be counted for the Savior.

And I appeal to the young people who are here in the audience tonight, as you go and sit under the teachings of men who do not love your Savior, do not ever allow them to force you into a position where anything you do or say would compromise your testimony for him. So Peter says, add to your faith courage, and to courage knowledge. And this emphasizes to us the importance of the word of God, and I don't think we can overemphasize that.

People with only a smattering of knowledge of the scriptures are right prey for the cult. This is where the cult makes their biggest play. If you were to study the cult today and go in and talk to the people and interview them and say, what was your background before you joined this zealous, fanatical cult, you'd find that most of them had a background in some church system where the people themselves were not grounded in the truth of the word of God.

And the apostle Paul, writing in Ephesians 4, says that very thing, that God's will for us is that we henceforth be no more children tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine. This is a great danger, a smattering of the word of God. I believe with all my heart, dear Christian friends tonight, that God's will for you and for me is that we should go to the word of God in a systematic way, going through it book by book with a question mark for a brain, and poring over its pages and getting the balance of scripture.

The deadly thing today is that so much is being based upon single verses of scripture, and unless you have the background of the word of God, you are not able to answer it. And so this fits in with what we said a little while ago about the correspondence courses. There's a way in which you can get into the word of God, and where it's broken down in simple, easy, understandable lessons, and although your progress at any particular time might be slow and seemingly unrewarding, yet the truth of the matter is you are getting a background in the sacred scriptures.

And this is the opportunity. Now is the day I appeal to you, get into the word. I think the last time I was here I told you a story of Mr. Robert Little speaking up in one of our local assemblies, and I just repeat it for the sake of any who weren't here.

He was speaking in one of the local assemblies there in the Chicago area, expounding the word of God, wonderful really to sit under his teaching, and at the end of the meeting a man went up to him, an elderly man, white haired. He said to him, Brother Little, I just marvel, I just marvel, I sit and hear your teaching of the word of God, and he said, oh, I'd give anything. He said, if I had your knowledge of the word of God, he said, tell me, will you tell me? Here tonight, he said, tell me, what can I do? And Mr. Little looked at him and he said, Brother, it's too late.

And I say that for the benefit of the young people who are here tonight, that this is your opportunity. Don't neglect the word of God. Add to your courage, knowledge.

You might have ever so much courage, but if you don't have knowledge to go with it, it's a one-sided testimony, zeal without knowledge. Then the next thing, add to your knowledge, he says, self-control. Self-control.

Knowledge pops up, so it's nice to have as a partner for knowledge, self-control, isn't it? And this is important. Men who do not exercise self-control are in for trouble. And that's why the Apostle Paul said, I keep under my body, lest, having preached to others, I myself should be a castaway, reprobate, put on the shelf as far as usefulness for God is concerned.

Isn't the balance of scripture wonderful? I admire it when I stand here and think of it. Add to your faith, courage. Add to your courage, knowledge.

Add to your knowledge, self-control. What does it mean? Well, you can see that he's just drawing the picture of a well-rounded, full-orbed Christian character. What a man should be for God in a day of declension.

Self-control. Satan has two ways of trying to trip up people. If he can't do it in one way, he'll do it in another.

First of all, he'll try to trip you up doctrinally. He'll try to get you off as far as the truth of the Word of God is concerned. There are some people he can't trip up doctrinally.

They're grounded in the truth of the Word. He has another trick. He'll try to trip them up morally.

Try to lead them into moral failure and sin. Self-control. When we come to chapters two and three, we're going to read about the very opposite in connection with the false teachers.

They don't practice self-control, and they don't teach others to do it. The word there is license. That's what they're teaching in the schools today.

They're saying, give full reign to your appetite. After all, you want to be a well-rounded personality, don't you? You don't want to be inhibited, do you? You don't want to have a warped personality, do you? Well, those things are all natural, and if you don't give full reign to them, you'll just become dwarfed and stunted, and nobody will want to be around you. This is what's being taught in the classroom today, but it isn't what the Bible teaches.

The fruit of the Spirit is self-control, and God knows what he's talking about, and only God knows the full extent of the misery and woe that the child of God is spared by listening to the word of God. Add to your knowledge. It says temperance here.

The word is self-control. And then it says, add to your self-control steadfastness, or patience, but a better translation really is steadfastness. This is greatly needed in the Christian life.

It's easy to start off in the Christian life in a blaze of glory, but I want to tell you, it's a different thing to go on patiently, year after year, in spite of opposition from within, in spite of knots from within, in spite of discouragement and disillusionment and all the other things that can come in the way. God wants us as his people to go on steadfastly for himself, keeping the Lord ever before us. The Apostle Paul says, and I think this is a good illustration of steadfastness, he said, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I pressed toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ.

He said, I don't want to just start the race like the glorious athlete and then peter out along the way, but he said, I have my eye on that finished ribbon at the end of the race and the prize that is waiting there for me. Incidentally, I think there's a lovely picture of steadfastness in 2 Corinthians, and I think we'll just turn to that in the life of the Apostle Paul. You know, a lot of Christians, I fear, are too thin-skinned, and they become too easily offended, and then they grow cold in heart toward the things of the Lord, and I tell you, they hurt themselves more than they hurt anybody else.

You can't be thin-skinned. You can't be touchy in the work of the Lord, in the service of the Lord. You've got to be able to take criticism and all these other things that go with it.

Listen to the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians chapter 11, steadfastness. Verse 23, 2 Corinthians chapter 11, verse 23, speaking about his battle scars, battle ribbons. Today ministers of Christ I speak as a fool, I am more.

In labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent in death's docks, of the Jews five times received I forty stripes they won. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep, in journeyings often in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren, in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness beside those things that are without that which cometh upon me daily, the chair of all the churches. My, what the Apostle Paul went through! For the namesake of the Lord Jesus Christ there was real steadfastness there to your temperance, patience.

And then it says to your patience or steadfastness, godliness, godliness. This is a book dealing with apostasy from the Christian faith. Do you know that a great deal of apostasy has its roots in moral failure? Men who profess to be believers fall into sexual sin, and instead of being broken about it and saying, I have sinned, they turn around and they blame God, and they become apostates from the Christian faith.

A. J. Pollock in one of his books tells of walking down the street one day and meeting a young man, and that young man began to spew out to him, a young man who had been a professing Christian, he began to spew out to him all kinds of intellectual doubts about the word of God and about the Christ of God and about the salvation of God. And with true brokenness of heart, Mr. Pollock listened to this young man dishonoring the Lord and the things of the Lord. And he said to him, when the young man was all finished, he said, young man, I want to ask you a question.

He said, what sin have you been dabbling with lately? That young man stood up to the test and out came a lurid story of sin and shame. A great deal of apostasy from the Christian faith finds its roots in moral failure. And so it's no accident here that the Apostle Peter tells us to add to our steadfastness, godliness, nothing feels the lips like the life.

And Satan, as we've already heard from our brother Satan, is ceaselessly trying to trip us up. Then it says, add to your godliness, brotherly kindness, brotherly kindness. This has to do with our relationships with our fellow believers.

Is it important in the day of false teaching? Is it important in the day of departure from the Christian faith that we maintain active fellowship with the saints of God? Well, I think that's the emphasis here. Some people think that they can go it alone. They strike off as lone wolves.

They think it's a matter of no importance. But the like-minded believers, brotherly kindness, love of the brethren is what it is here. I want to tell you this, that when you find some man who begins to be taken up with a false teaching, there's a little thermometer you can put in his mouth and take his temperature.

You can ask him what he thinks of the brethren. You don't have to ask him usually. One of the first symptoms is that he becomes critical of the brethren.

They're all wrong, and he's all right. Add to your godliness love of the brethren. I was impressed in reading Psalm 16, I think it is, the other day, where the psalmist says, For the saints that are in the earth, they are the excellent, in whom is all my delight.

I like that. It spoke of a man who was in fellowship with God and in fellowship with the people of God. As for the saints that are in the earth, they are the excellent, in whom is all my delight.

Isn't that lovely? I think it is. And then it says, And add to your love of the brethren love. Isn't that nice? What does that mean? Well, love here is in a wider sense than love of the brethren, and this love would go out to all the world.

And I tell you, I think that embraces an aggressive evangelism. The scripture says, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. The greatest missionary verse in all the word of God, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

And so I see here that Peter is telling us, by inspiration of the Spirit of God, that our lives are not going to be selfish, that love is to be shed abroad in our hearts to others by the Holy Ghost. Incidentally, I'd just like to say a word here for your consideration. Maybe somebody can correct me on it, but my impression in studying the New Testament is that this love, divine love, is not so much a matter of the emotions as it is of the will.

When we think of love today a la Hollywood, it's simply a matter of the emotions. But love is a commandment in the New Testament, and God isn't commanding emotions, He's commanding the will. I can't say, well I just can't love those natives in Africa, I just can't love them.

I can love them, and I can manifest my love to them by giving myself for them. Love manifests itself in giving, and giving is a matter of the will. And so I just mention that for your consideration, that when He says, Add to your love for the brethren love, you can't say, well I just can't do it, I can't find it in my box of emotions.

It's a matter of the will, and you can. God so loved the world, I tell you there weren't any emotions in the world to draw out His love. He loved the world and gave His only begotten Son.

Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it. It was a matter of the will, and that's what it is for us too. And so, this is a picture I think, even in this word love, of carrying the gospel forth to all the world.

Now there you have the well-rounded, full-orbed Christian life. For a day, and such is the day in which we are living. Now, we go on in our outline, and the next thing is, those are the personal qualities to be cultivated, verses 5-7.

Then the present benefits to be gained, verses 8-10. It says, For if those things be in you and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Isn't that interesting, we get that word knowledge again.

And he says now, if you go on, if you press on in the Christian life and develop these qualities, they will ensure you against a life of barrenness and unfruitfulness. Isn't that a striking expression? Barren and unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Here is a man and his head can be just chock full of intellectual information about the Bible, about the word of God, but I tell you, it takes more than that.

It takes the development of that in the life. It takes a life that's broken before the Lord, a life that's open to the influence of the Holy Spirit so that he can work ungrieved in that life, producing conformity to Christ. And so Peter is saying to me and to you, let's be exercised.

Let's not be satisfied with our current attainment. Satisfaction is the graveyard of progress. Don't feel you have arrived, not as though I had already attained.

Either we're already perfect. That's not the point at all. Keep pushing on.

So he says, If these things be in you and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he that lacketh these things is blind and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sin. Here's a man and he's been saved, but there's no growth there.

There's no going on for the Lord. He's stagnant. He's like the dead sea, perhaps, everything going in and nothing coming out.

Well, it says first of all about that man that he's blind. What does it mean? It means that he doesn't have the vision of faith. The vision of faith looks beyond this scene in which we're living, and it looks to the heavenly scene.

It's not occupied with what's temporal. It's occupied with what's eternal. And here's this man and he's grumbling around in a pile of dung, and above him is holding an angel offering him a crown.

That's the picture. He's blind. You know, if you look in Hebrews chapter 11, the chapter of the honor roll of faith, you'll find that one of the things of those men of faith was they had keen vision.

They could really see faith. They weren't deceived by present appearances, they could see beyond it all. And this man here has just settled back on his oars, just resting on his oars, and it says he's blind.

And he's not only blind, it says he cannot see afar off. He's lost the vision, shall we say. And not only that, it says he has forgotten that he was purged from his own sin.

Now, this doesn't mean that he has lost his salvation. It doesn't mean even that he has lost his assurance of salvation, but it means that he's living in such a way as to completely obscure the fact that his sins were ever forgiven. What he's really doing is dabbling with the world.

That's what he's doing, and that's a serious thing. That's a serious thing, because it's going arm-in-arm with a system, the hands of which are stained with the blood of Christ. This man is living in practical disregard of the price that was paid for him at Calvary's cross.

The Bible is incisive. The Bible is like that sharp-cutting instrument of the surgeon. It knows just where to go to pierce, and gives a very accurate picture of things the way they are.

And so Peter says in verse 10, "...wherefore the rod of brethren give diligence to make your calling and election sure, for if ye do these things ye shall never fall." Now, first of all, that expression, make your calling and election sure, this is spoken to people who are already saved. It certainly doesn't mean that they can produce their calling and election, that they can save themselves. And it doesn't mean that they can keep themselves saved after they are saved.

But it does mean that they can practically outwork this in their own lives and make their calling and election sure to themselves and to those about them. It's very similar, I think, to what James tells us in the second chapter of his epistle. And it's the practical working out of our calling and election.

Election, of course, refers to that wonderful event that took place back before the world was formed, when God, by a sovereign choice, chose us to belong to himself. Calling is the event that took place in time, when that election became effective in my life, when I heard the gospel, when I repented of my sins and received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The gospel calls.

He does make your calling and election sure. How do you make your calling and election sure? The answer is given in verses 5 through 7. Mind you, I've heard that verse taken out of its context, and it may mean something entirely different. But look at the verse in its context, and you'll find that that's what it means.

Make your calling and election sure. How? Develop the Christian character by the Holy Spirit. Develop conformity to the Lord Jesus Christ.

He said, if you do these things, you shall never stumble. I want to pay attention to that verse, because life, the Christian life, is filled with wrecks along the highway, men who have fallen and women who have stumbled. And I pause, and I scratch my head, and there's inscrutable mystery connected with it all.

It's serious, and it causes me the deepest searching of soul. But I want to tell you, I come to this verse of Scripture that says, wherefore, make your calling and election sure, for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall. What I think it's saying, if I can just paraphrase it this way, is that in the Christian life, there's no standing still.

You're either going forward for Christ, or you're moving backward. The peril comes when you cease to go forward. When you start slipping back, you're in utmost danger.

And then the future reward, and that's in verse 11, it says, for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The present benefits to be gained, well, good visions and preservation from falling. And the future reward, it says, so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

All who are saved by the grace of God will have an entrance into the everlasting kingdom, but some will have a more abundant entrance than others. And here, the degree of abundance, the royalty of the welcome in that sense, is dependent upon how we have availed ourselves of the provision that God has made for us with regard to life and godliness. To put it in a nutshell, the degree to which we become conformed to the Lord Jesus in this life will determine the degree of the abundance of our entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

For so an entrance shall be richly supplied unto you into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior. Now, the kingdom has many different applications in the scripture. We have in a sense the kingdom now in mystery form.

All who acknowledge the reign of Christ are in the kingdom today. We're going to have the kingdom in manifestation when the Lord Jesus comes back again to reign over the earth, and then the kingdom will take on an eternal character. We'll never end in heaven, and perhaps that's the principle thought in verse 11.

Entrance into heaven, although I certainly wouldn't exclude the idea of entrance into the kingdom on earth, because that's where rewards are going to be manifested. But then you have God's program and our responsibility in a day when false teachings abound. What is the resource of the people of God? Well, the resource is the development of Christian character through prayer that comes under faith, through the word of God, through courage, standing for God in a scene where he is dishonored, through self-control, keeping under the body and the appetite of the flesh, through steadfastness, not buckling under the pressure, but going on for him through thick and thin.

Godliness, not lapsing into moral evil, but going on for the Lord in purity and chastity. Brotherly kindness, staying close to the people of God, fellowshiping with the people of God, and then carrying the gospel out, witnessing to those around the love for our fellow men. So may the Lord write these truths deeply on our hearts and keep us as a people for himself in days that are perilous indeed.

I think our brother Dick Andrews has the closing. Could we sing 189? 189. Some glorious morning sorrow will cease.

Some glorious morning all will be peace. Heaven will open. Jesus will come.

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