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CHAPTER ONE THE CALLING OF SALVATION

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Joy to the World, the melody to one of our most cherished songs, was created with simply one musical octave. George Frideric Handel used just eight tones to compose the melody that applied to that vibrant text from Psalm 98, O sing to the Lord a new song... The Lord has made known His salvation...

There are eight callings found in 2 Peter 1:5-7 that can be likened to the eight notes found in a musical octave. The great preacher, Dr. W. A. Criswell, compared these eight callings to eight strands of thread put together to form a rope, and interwoven to create strength. These eight biblical standards applied in our lives must be woven together before the beautiful song of faith can be completed on our soul's eternal score.

Peter said that we are to:

Add to our FAITH

MORAL EXCELLENCE, to our moral excellence

KNOWLEDGE, to our knowledge

SELF-CONTROL, to our self-control

PERSEVERANCE, to our perseverance

GODLINESS, to our perseverance

BROTHERLY KINDNESS, and to our brotherly kindness add **LOVE**.

Faith, our beginning keynote, is the calling of salvation. In John 6:35-40 we find the first calling of God in your life and mine.

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst. But I said to you that you have seen Me and yet do not believe. All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him, may have eternal life; and I Myself will raise him up on the last day."

The elements of salvation include a past, present and future. The first calling in your life must be to God's salvation. Unless you are saved, you will never understand the other seven callings.

"I have been saved;

I am being saved;

I shall be saved," Paul explains in the book of Romans. There is a

past, a present, and a future salvation depicted here. Paul is saying, "I have been saved." That happened on the Damascus road. He continues, "I am being saved." That is, he was being made more like Christ every day.

And finally, "I shall be saved." He was saying this final event will occur when he dies and goes to heaven. In our lives there must be a point where we can look back and say we have been saved. Then with Paul we can say we are being saved as God works in us. Lastly, we will be saved when we die and go to heaven, our eternal home.

Every person needs salvation for no one is righteous, no one. Every man, every woman, every boy, and every girl is a sinner. We are born once, but then we all must be born again.

You will never come to faith in Christ until you say, I'm lost. I'm not right with God. You must understand that you are condemned before you can be converted. And that occurs through the convicting power of the Holy Spirit. It doesn't matter what you have done, how good you think you have been, or how much money you think you have given. Until you understand you are lost, you will never come to faith in Christ. When you witness the revelation of the holiness of God, then you will perceive the conviction of the sinfulness of your own soul.

Baptism and the Lord's Supper paint the picture of salvation. Baptism is one of two events in the church that helps paint the picture of this progression in salvation. It declares publicly your profession of faith. There must be that experience in your life when the Spirit of God calls and you place your trust in Christ. This salvation is once and for all. You are saved and then bap-

tized. This baptism is also a one-time experience. It testifies that Jesus Christ is your Savior. You die to the old ways and the new you is born.

The Lord's Supper (also described as the Lord's Table, Communion and the Eucharist) is the second statement of salvation in the church. You don't receive the Lord's Supper just one time. You observe the Lord's Supper on a continual basis. Each time you take the piece of bread and eat it you are remembering the broken body of our Lord. We pass the cup; you take the cup and drink in remembrance of Christ's blood shed for you. The renewal of your faith after your baptism is ongoing through your life in Christ. Your worship through the ordinance of the Lord's Supper reflects your gratitude for this new life in Christ by His death on the cross.

Scripture teaches there is the Plan, the Assurance, and the Evidence of your salvation. Some things I want to show you regarding salvation are all found in John's gospel, chapter 6. Number one, I want you to see what I'm simply calling the plan. This plan, the calling of salvation is found in verse 37 where Jesus says,

"All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out."

There seem to be two conflicting sides regarding the call to salvation. The word "come" used in verse 37 is translated from two different words in the Greek New Testament. "All the Father gives Me will come to Me." Here the Greek word heko is used which means they will definitely come. They have no choice in the matter. All the Father chooses will come. They're on the way.

God's Spirit calls. God will draw them and bring them to Himself.

However, as Jesus continues, He says,
And the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.
The Greek word erchomai applies here. This word speaks of the decision of the one coming. So Jesus explains that there are some who will definitely come and some who will choose to come. As God calls, we choose to respond.

Matthew 22:14 says, For many are called, but few are chosen.

Galatians 1:6 teaches you are called by the grace of Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 1:9 Paul writes, God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

In 1 Peter 5:10 he states, ...the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.

God has a plan of salvation

The age-old question is posed, is it the sovereignty of God or the free will of man that brings us to salvation? This controversy has brewed through the ages. John 6:37a seems to say it is the sovereign call of God. Verse 37b seems to say it is the free will of man.

Down through the reformation this debate continued. John Calvin, born in 1509 championed the view that the elective graces of God removed the choice for man. He would quote John 6:44:

"No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day."

A Dutch theologian, Arminius, born in 1560 was all about free will. He believed that every man comes to Jesus when he gets ready; it is freedom, freedom, freedom! Consider this: if you are free to choose to get saved, then are you also free to get unsaved? Baptists say NO!

Look at the tension here. Which is it? Sovereignty or Freedom? When I was saved, I made a choice. When God called me to salvation, I was sitting in the church, seventh row from the back attending Vacation Bible School. I was ten years old. The day before, Nolan Ford, my pastor asked,

"Ted, you've never been saved?"
I replied, "No sir, I've never been saved."

That next day I was the first of sixteen to walk down the aisle. I said, "Brother Nolan, you said Jesus died for me. I want to be saved." I knelt down on my knees and prayed, "Lord, come into my heart. Lord Jesus, save me." I was saved that very moment.

I believe if I had understood that day what I have come to understand today, I would have known I was saved before the foundation of the world. My name was already written in the Lamb's Book of Life. I was an Arminian when I knelt down. I was a Calvinist when I stood up. There is the sovereignty of God. There is the free will of man. I want you to understand this. You can get out of balance on either side of this issue and err biblically.

If you are an Arminian who says it is all up to man, you will miss the sovereignty of God and the security of the believer. You will miss God's work in salvation. On the other hand, if you are in the sovereign camp, the Calvinistic side rather than the Arminian side, you might overreact and cease sharing the gospel. You may do away with missions and simply say, as some told our early missionaries.

"Dear Brothers, sit down. If God wants to save somebody, He can do it without your help."

There are others who say you should stand in the middle of these two issues: sovereignty on one side, free will on the other. Let me tell you, you will go mad trying to do that. I believe, as one preacher stated,

"You must go to both ends of this pole and go to the extreme in both issues." You say, "That doesn't make sense."

Well, it doesn't make sense that water contracts when it gets cold until it turns 32 degrees and then it begins to expand. It doesn't make sense that light consists of both waves and particles. You say, "It doesn't make sense to me about the sovereignty of God and the free will of man."

When you read the Bible, you will run into both of them—much of the time on the same page. God's plan is that He died through Jesus Christ and there is no other way to heaven save through Jesus Christ our Lord. This is God's plan of salvation! Jesus is the way and He will draw all men to Himself. The Bible says in Isaiah 55:11, So shall My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing

what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.

When you preach the Word of God, you send it out. It will not return void. As you preach, God reaches out to accomplish His purposes.

Returning from a short vacation trip with my wife, Liz, we stopped at an outlet shopping mall in a neighboring town. A gentleman I did not know called to me, "Pastor!"

Jokingly I answered, "I'm out of state and off duty." We shared a laugh and he continued, "Pastor, I listen to you every Sunday on the radio. God has a way of blessing my heart when you preach the message."

He further shared all God had been doing in his heart through the witness of the preached Word of God. Now I didn't know he was out there listening and I didn't look him up. But through the sovereignty of God, His Word goes out and it does its work according to God's purpose.

At the same time there are people like a couple I visited not long ago. I aggravated them to death knocking on their door and calling their home. Finally, they came to church, soon put their faith in Christ, and linked their lives with our church family. You see on one side sovereignty. On the other side is the influence of man and the choices we make.

You say, "I don't understand it." Join the Baptist camp. I don't understand it. As a matter of fact, I don't have to understand it.

You say, "Well, is the Bible foolishness?" No, the Bible is mystery. There is a mysterion to the extent that you will never be able to bring these things together. That does not make it less true any more than cold water contracting and warm water expanding. God has chosen us before the foundation of the world and He has called us to come. "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." Acts 2:21 This is His plan of salvation.

God gives assurance of salvation

Secondly, not only do we find the plan of salvation, but we also see the assurance of salvation. Jesus states in John 6:39, "And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day." Do you understand? Once you become saved you are always saved! Do you understand that when you come to Christ you are secure in Christ? There are people who believe you can get saved today and you can lose salvation tomorrow. These people read the Bible and say:

"Well, Preacher I walked with God and I was saved for fifteen years. Then I turned from God and I'm going to hell if I die."

They have not understood the Word of God. Jesus said if you are Mine, I will never lose you. Now you and I have lost things. But let me tell you. Jesus doesn't lose things and He's not going to lose you. The Bible says that Jesus is in God's hand; you are in Jesus' hand and no man can pluck you out. Drive down these stakes to bring yourself assurance of your salvation. Today there are some stakes you need to drive down that will bring assurance of your salvation. What are these stakes?

Confession of Jesus as Lord,

Confirmation of the Holy Spirit, and

Confession through baptism.

You may ask, "Why do I doubt my salvation?" It might be because you have unconfessed sin in your life. If you are not growing in your faith, 2 Peter, chapter one tells us that you will doubt your purification. If you come to the place that you do not believe the Word of God, you will doubt your salvation. Confession is the first stake to drive down. Romans 10:9-10 explains, That if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.

Confirmation of the Holy Spirit is the next stake. Romans 8:16 says, "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God." When you confess with your mouth, the Spirit of God begins to confirm with your spirit that you are a child of God. Thus, another stake is driven down validating your salvation.

I heard of a little boy who began doubting his salvation. The preacher told him that in Romans 10:13 the Bible says, ...whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved. The little boy went out behind the barn, took a big long 2x4 and formed a stake from it. He wrote Romans 10:13 right on the board. Then he took a hammer and drove his stake down deep into the ground. The next time the little boy doubted, he went out to the barn and pulled up his stake. He looked at what he had written: ...whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved. He held it in the direction he thought the devil was and shouted,

"Listen to me, Devil. This is the promise of God and I'm staking my life on it." Satisfied, he drove it back down into the ground and walked away.

Finally, there needs to be confession through baptism. God brings assurance in your heart through the ordinance of baptism. Baptism is a one-time assertion declaring that Jesus is your Lord. There must be a confession with your mouth, a confirmation of the Holy Spirit, and the third stake of confession through baptism. These three declarations bring confidence and reassurance in the truth of salvation. As doubts creep in throughout life, and they will, grab hold of these stakes, hammer them down again—and again—and again! Stake the very assurance of your eternal life on them, and hold fast.

There is the evidence of salvation. There is the plan of salvation. There is an assurance of salvation.

As a final point, there is the evidence of salvation. John 6:40 says, For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him, may have eternal life; and I Myself will raise him up on the last day. When you have eternal life, there will be evidence of that life. I have physical life and there is evidence of that physical life. I've had evidence of that for more than 50 years. Some of you have lived 70 years. You are a septuagenarian. Your hair is falling out. You have evidence that you've been here 70 years. Some of you at the end of the day are going to take your teeth out—evidence you've been here 80 years. Some of you couldn't climb stairs if you wanted to—evidence you've been here 90 years. But you have life, and there's evidence of that life. You're still breathing. You're still eating. You're still

kicking. You're still going. Some of you are still complaining. Some of you are still rejoicing. Some are still smiling. You see, there is evidence when there is life!

There are six evidences of eternal life:

A new awareness of right and wrong
A hunger for the Word of God
A desire for a changed life
An increase in testing
Love for other Christians
A desire to tell others about Jesus

Not only is there evidence of physical life, there is also proof of eternal life. Let's note these six evidences of eternal life.

The first evidence is a new awareness of right and wrong. In John 16:8 the Bible says of the Holy Spirit, "And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment." When you get saved, there will be a new understanding of right and wrong. The Spirit of God that lives in you will reprove sin, righteousness, and judgment. While a student in college, after attending a Civitan meeting in Orlando, Florida, when I found myself in a bar with my friends, I heard the Spirit of God say to me, "You do not belong in this place." He was reproving me of sin, of a righteous stand, and a judgment to come. There is a new awareness when the Spirit of God moves in and takes up residence within.

Second, there is a hunger for the Word of God. In Hebrews 5:14 the Word says, "But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and

evil." When you are saved, you have a new appetite. If you can go 10, 15, or 20 years and never want to read the Word of God, you should have some doubt about your reservation in heaven. If you can go months and months and never have concern for the Word of God, I do not know if you have ever experienced the Bread of Life. If you ever taste the sweetness of scripture, you will understand it is like honey to your soul. It brings strength to you that nothing else gives. The evidence of eternal life is a hunger for the Word of God.

The third evidence is a desire for a changed life. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, "Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come." When you come to faith in Christ, you want a changed life. You desire things to be different. It doesn't mean you will do right every time. It doesn't mean you will bat a thousand. It does mean you have a desire for a changed life.

Evidence four: there is an increase in testing. 2 Timothy 3:12 says, "And indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." Mark it down. When you begin to take a stand for Christ in this world, there will come persecution in your life. If nothing is bothering you, you may not be bothering the devil. When you begin to live for God, the old wicked one gets upset. He begins to hassle you. James 1:2 reminds us to "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials."

The fifth evidence of salvation is a love for other Christians. 1 John 4:7 says, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God." I had somebody ask me recently about a certain individual, "Do you love him?" I replied, "Oh yeah, I love him. I just don't trust

him." John didn't say you had to trust everybody. If somebody stabs you in the back two or three times, you may not be able to trust him completely, but you do have to love him! First Corinthians 13 tells us that love is kind; it's hugging; it's wonderful! However, love also speaks the truth! Sometimes love is tough.

Finally, the sixth evidence of eternal life is the desire to tell others of Jesus Christ. For the Bible says in Psalm 107:2, "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so." When you know Christ and you know you are going to heaven, you want to tell somebody. You want to share the gospel with others. Let the redeemed of the Lord speak up! Speak up!! Say so!!! Let the name of the Lord be lifted high!!!

The plan of salvation is this: when you were born, you were born a sinner. Christ died for you. He wants to forgive you and come into your heart and save you. When He does, He wants to become your best friend all the way to the end of life. He will receive you if you will confess your sin, your need, and His adequacy.

FAITH is the first calling of God through His salvation. Will you say,

"Yes Lord, Yes"?

CHAPTER ONE

CHAPTER TWO THE CALLING OF SEPARATION

[2]

Moving to the next note in our octave is the second calling of God: the call to separation. Peter makes clear that beginning with your

MORAL EXCELLENCE, to your moral excellence add
KNOWLEDGE, to your knowledge add

FAITH you are to add

SELF-CONTROL, to your self-control add
PERSEVERANCE, to your perseverance add
GODLINESS, to your godliness add
BROTHERLY KINDNESS, and to your broth
erly kindness add LOVE.

Understand this: Christian maturity does not come instantaneously. It is a process constantly moving us forward toward acquiring these qualities. Peter tells us if these traits are ours and

are increasing in our lives, we can obtain great assurance that we are children of God!

Moral excellence is the calling to separation.

We have looked at the calling of salvation beginning with faith. And now we add to our faith moral excellence. This is the calling of separation. In 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1, Paul writes:

"Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, "I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate," says the Lord. "And do not touch what is unclean; and I will welcome you. And I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me," says the Lord Almighty. Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

Be separate from the world

The first lesson a Christian must learn and the first discipline we must master is to be separate from the world. For either we separate ourselves from all forms of evil or evil will separate us from our fellowship with God. You cannot be separated back into a lost condition. However, unless you learn and master the discipline of coming out from the world and being separate, this world's spirit will cost you intimate companionship with God.

Isaiah 59:2 says to us: "But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He does not hear." Psalm 66:18 warns, "If I regard wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear." Our sin and our iniquity that we hold onto will draw a curtain between us and God, and He will not hear us. I am not saying just to be separate from the world; I am telling you to be separated unto Christ. For when you separate yourself from the spirit of the world and receive the spirit of Christ; when you separate yourself unto Him, there is a joy unspeakable and you will be full of the glory of God. I want to show you three distinctions related to the calling of separation.

Learn the principle of separation

First, we will discover what I am calling the principle of separation. Then we will look at the power of separation. Third, we will see the promise of separated living. In 2 Corinthians 6:14 Paul declares, "Do not be bound together with unbelievers." There is the first principle. That phrase bound together with unbelievers, is derived from the one Greek word, heterozugeo. When we divide this word to discover its meaning, we find the first part heteros denotes "other" or "different." Combined with the second part, zugos, the word for "yoke," we see that Paul is saying that believers are not to be yoked together with one that is different from them. That is exactly what we read in Deuteronomy 22:10 where the writer in the Old Testament said, "You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together." Why not? Because the step and the strength of an ox and a donkey are not alike. The step and the strength of a believer and an unbeliever are different. Come out and be separate and be voked only with fellow believers.

During a visit to the home of one of our members, I saw a very clear illustration of this issue. On my fortieth birthday, which happened to fall on a Sunday, our church choir surprised me by holding up 8x10 photos of their pastor's face as Happy Birthday was sung. One of our deacons took one of those pictures, framed it and put it on his wall at home. Hanging next to my picture was a picture of a popular president whose lifestyle differed greatly from mine. I told him, "That, my friend, is being unequally yoked together." We laughed and had a great time. Much later when I visited again in his home, the president's picture had been taken down and the pastor's picture was left on the wall.

You must understand that there are some people you do not associate with; there are some places and positions where you as a believer do not belong. You will be heterozugeo. You will be unequally yoked together. Moreover, God says when you get saved, "come out from among them and be ye separate." How do we apply this principle to our daily lives? First, let me tell you what it does NOT mean. It does not mean you are without friends in the world of unbelievers. Look at what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 5:9-13:

"I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters; for then you would have to go out of the world. But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he should be an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? But those that are outside, God judges. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves."

When Paul tells us to come out and be separate, he is not stating we should have no acquaintances with the lost world. We must. You would have to leave this world to avoid all association with unbelieving people. But our presence in this world requires us to be like salt and light. We must not allow the spirit of the unbelieving world to become our spirit.

Another important area that we must define, where the principle of separation does NOT relate, is in our marriage commitment. If you get saved and your spouse remains lost, you are not to divorce your unsaved spouse. I've had married people come to me after being saved, while their spouses are still unsaved, and announce, "Pastor, I believe God's leading me to divorce my lost mate and go out and be separate."

NO! The Word of God does not teach that mistaken belief. That is not the teaching of separation. Paul speaks to this situation specifically in 1 Corinthians 7:12-16. He says,

"But to the rest I say, not the Lord, [Now Paul is not implying that what he is about to write is not scripture. He's simply saying that Jesus has not spoken to this but he, Paul, is still under inspiration.] that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, let him not send her away. And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, let her not send her husband away. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through the believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy. Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace. For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or

how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?"

When two unbelievers have gotten married and one comes to faith in Christ, this calling of separation does not imply that the saved spouse is allowed to divorce the unsaved spouse. Regrettably, that is a false, erroneous teaching that has infiltrated the local church. The spirit of the world poisons our lives and paralyzes our testimony. So what does this principle of separation stand for? In 1 Corinthians 2:12 Paul says, "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God." You should underline this verse in your Bible. When you get saved and come to faith in Christ, you are still living in the world but you now have the Spirit of God. We are warned that there is the spirit of this world with which we are not to participate. In James 4:4 there is the warning that friendship with the world is enmity with God.

Now watch this: the spirit of this lost world will invade your Christianity, will poison your life, and will paralyze your testimony. The spirit of the world is insensitive and passive to Christ. The spirit of this world will try to accomplish two things against you. It will cause you to be insensitive in spiritual matters. The spirit of this world will annihilate discernment. You will become insensitive to hurting people and a legalist in your faith. Not only does it make you insensitive to spiritual concerns, but also, the spirit of this world will cause you to become passive in scriptural matters. The spirit of this world says, "Well, I know what the Bible says, but . . ." or "I know what scripture teaches, but . . ." It will cause you to be yielding in scriptural matters. Be very careful not to get hooked up with the spirit of this world!

Notice what Paul said in 2 Corinthians 6:14-16. He uses five descriptive associations between the believer (the one in the

light) and unbeliever (the one who is in the darkness). He asks, what partnership,

what fellowship,

what harmony,

what in common, or what agreement

can there be between believers and unbelievers?

Each time the answer is absolutely none. We have no partnership. We have no harmony. We have no fellowship. We have nothing in common. We have no agreement with the spirit of this world. Now I could lay down numerous laws for you and demand, "If you're going to be a Christian, then you must never go to this kind of movie or you must never go to this type of activity." But I'm not talking about legalism here. What I am saying is that we must discern what will bring us closer to the spirit of Christ and stay away from all things that pull us toward the spirit of the world.

When you move toward loving Jesus with all your heart, you will confront the issue of separation. That's why some have never been saved. Some go to church and hear a preacher proclaim the cross and the resurrection and still say, "Well, I'd come give my heart and life to God but I'm not willing to give up X-Y-Z. I'm not willing to stop doing A-B-C." Actually these people are not ready to get S-A-V-E-D. A person has to be willing to come to Christ on His terms alone. Some will say,

"Well, I don't have the power to do all that."

No one does! God gives us His power. What we must have is an enthusiastic spirit to proclaim, "I'm ready to say no to the world and yes to Christ."

Avoid intimacy with an unbelieving world

How do we avoid intimacy with an unbelieving world in this calling of separation? There are three vital areas of our lives that must be given attention. First, we need to avoid intimacy with unbelieving practices. The spirit of this world tells us some things are right; but for these, we as believers, should have no tolerance. Abortion is still a heinous crime. It is a sin before God. America turned its back on God when the legal system upheld that abortion is legal and right. Abortion will never be right! God will never sanction it! He is never pleased with it. Many have experienced abortion. I know there are scores of people (including members of churches) who have been convinced by the spirit of this world to personally choose abortion. The spirit of the world has said to many, "Abort that baby. It's okay." (Aren't you glad that somebody didn't talk your momma and daddy into it years ago? Aren't you glad that they didn't believe abortion was the right choice?) Intimacy with the spirit of this world will lead you to corrupt practices, so you must learn to avoid them. All across our land, abortion on demand is wrong. We need to stay away from it. Believers need to stop visiting abortion clinics.

"Come out and be ye separate says the Lord."

Avoid going to wrong places

Just as there are some practices we should not have, there are some places we should not go. If God has called you out to be separate, then God will help you recognize places where you need to go and places you should never go. There are wicked establishments in every city where godless activities take place in the name of entertainment. How sad that even church members can be found in these places. You say, "Yeah but, preacher, it's legal." Well, if we could just get all the Christians to quit going to

these places, they would have to close down. You know I'm telling the truth. We have a group of half infidels driving down to these places and getting out and looking around, making sure nobody from the church is seeing them. And in they go. There are some places we don't belong!

"Come out and be ye separate, says the Lord."

Avoid fellowship with some people

Finally, we do not belong with some people. It is true that God will not lead you to marry an unbeliever. If there is any place that we are ultimately yoked, it is with a spouse. Here is the wrong question to ask: "Is this person a Christian? If so, then I can marry him/her." The most important question should be, "Is this person a growing Christian?" If you are going to have true partnership and fellowship, you need to marry somebody who is moving toward God in his daily walk. I know some of you will say, "Oh, but Pastor, I married an unbeliever and I won him to the Lord." Let me tell you, marriage is not an evangelistic tool in the New Testament. It is not! Our calling is to separation. The calling is to come out from certain practices, certain places, and certain people.

Look at the power of separation

Well that's the principle of separation. Secondly, there is the power of separation. If you ever learn to be separate, God's power will dominate your life. We have scores of church members, (some of whom, as we jokingly say, even the FBI couldn't find) who never darken the doors of the church and by all accounts do not live their lives for Jesus. But if they ever get separated toward God, and away from the spirit of the world, we'd

have revival. The power of God will come upon a separated heart. God says in 2 Corinthians 6:16-17: "I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate." God will work for you; He will work in you; and He will work through you. He will show Himself strong on your behalf if you will come out and be separated from the spirit of this world.

More than any other character in the Old Testament the story of Samson teaches us about the power found in separation. In the book of Judges, chapters 13-16, we meet Samson. He was a man's man. Samson would have been part of the World Wrestling Federation. They would have made Samson a linebacker or tight end for the NFL. Samson was the strongest man who ever lived. Before he was born, his parents dedicated him to be a Nazirite all his life. A Nazirite is someone who is bound by a vow to be set apart for the service of God. A Nazirite could not do three things: A Nazirite had to leave his hair uncut. A Nazirite could not partake of the fruit of the vine. And a Nazirite had to remain free from all impurities including touching dead bodies. As long as Samson walked in these vows, the power of God rested on his life.

However, in his adult life, Samson violated all three of these vows. He went to a party where there was drinking going on and he broke the vow not to drink alcohol. He scooped out honey from the carcass of a lion. He touched the body of a dead lion and broke that vow of a Nazirite. Of course, we all know he wound up in Delilah's barber shop and she cut his hair and again broke the vow of a Nazirite. The Bible says the Philistines came and bound Samson, gouged out his eyes, and made a foolish display of him. Samson had entered into the spirit of the world. But in Judges 16 the Bible tells us that Samson's hair began to grow back. When he was brought to the temple of the Philistines'

pagan god, he put his hands on the two middle pillars that supported the old temple and pleaded with God,

"O Lord God, please remember me and please strengthen me just this time. . . ."

In that moment Samson renewed his separation unto God. He cried out: "Let me die with the Philistines!" The Bible says he pushed with all his might on those pillars and the temple collapsed. Over 3,000 Philistines were killed and their temple was destroyed that day. The power of God came back upon Samson's life. But what a waste!

Just as Samson, some of us waste our strength on the spirit of the world. If we would just get separated unto loving Jesus with all of our hearts, the power of God would come upon us and God could use us a thousand fold. You see, it's not just being separated from the world. It's being separated unto God. Alan Redpath said it this way: "Separation is investing every moment of your day to the glory of God in commitment to His authority and power in your life without reservation." This means living so as not to disturb your harmony with holy God. You don't want to disrupt the harmony between you and the Father. When you come out and become separated unto Him, His power will rest upon you.

See the promise of separation

Not only do we see the principle and the power, third, there is the promise. It is found in 2 Corinthians 6:18. If you will separate yourself to Jesus and Jesus alone God gives His word: "And I will be a Father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me." Here's the promise: If you will live for God, He will be

your Father. Do you have a father who loves you?

In December 2004, my daughter, Rachel, totaled two vehicles in 22 hours. On a Monday afternoon she was rear-ended and her car was totaled. The next day she went to the doctor and just as she left the doctor's office, she was rear-ended again, this time totaling her mother's van. My daughter was fine, just a little sore. When that first accident happened, we walked through it pretty well. With the second accident it wasn't quite the same.

When the phone call came that day, I was at home. I answered the phone.

"Hello?"

All I heard was, "Daddy!" and then squalling.

"Rachel?"

Another lady came on the phone and asked, "Sir, are you Mr. Traylor?"

"I am."

She said, "Your daughter's had a wreck."

"I know she had a wreck. She had a wreck yesterday afternoon."

The voice on the other end said, "Oh no, no. She had a wreck just moments ago."

I said, "Put my daughter back on the phone."

I got her on the phone. She said, "Daddy!" and then there was some more squalling.

"Darlin', I'm here and I will be there as fast as I can come."

If you get serious with being separated unto God, He will be a Father to you. And we've all had those times, haven't we? Something happens and we just cry out. But the Bible says if you regard iniquity in your heart, God does not hear you. Oh, but when you come clean with God and become separate unto God, and cry out to Him, He will be a Father to you and you will be His

sons and daughters. You see, our God is a jealous God. He will love you but He will not put up with playing games. If you don't get serious with God, observe what Paul cautions in 2 Corinthians 11:2-3, "For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin." Paul is saying, because the church is the bride of Christ, she has only one husband. There's only one man for the church and His name is Jesus. Paul continues. "But I am afraid. lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ." What happens when that satanic deception comes upon you? You get caught up in the spirit of the world. You want to be popular! You want to be wealthy! You want this world to say "Well done," rather than hearing God say, "Well done!" You are deceived and the craftiness of the old devil draws you away from God.

Imagine this scenario. My wife, Liz, leaves town for a long weekend to take care of her mother. I contact our singles division and get three or four of the girls to come over to our house. They clean and cook and take great care of my son Bennett. I even have one of them to wash my car. These aren't married women, just all single women. Then on Monday morning I have to fly to Atlanta very early. They have my bags packed and have breakfast ready for me. When I get back, they will pick me up at the airport, bring me home, and while I'm gone, they will make sure Bennett has everything taken care of for school. All these single ladies are just taking great care of me while Liz is away. Now really! Do you think for one moment my wife would put up with that? As she's said to me many times, "Sir, if I come home and you've messed up, we won't be talking reconciliation. We'll be talking resurrection!" She'll be standing over me with an empty shotgun saying,

"How do you reload this thing?" You see, our God is a jealous God and He doesn't say you are to have more than one father or more than one spouse. You are supposed to have only one! We have lost the purity of our commitment to Christ. We have said we can be married to Jesus and live with the world too. Remember, Paul said, "I have betrothed you unto one."

After Rachel had her two accidents, you know who I called? I called my daddy.

I said, "Dad, before I tell you anything else, I want you to know your little girl's okay. The apple of your eye is all right. I just want you to know she's fine. But your son, he ain't doin' too good!" If you have a father that loves you, you understand the promise of separation.

You may ask, "Well, Preacher, how do I know if what I'm involved in is right or wrong?"

Ask yourself the following six questions about any activity:

Is what I'm doing for the glory of God?

Does it have the appearance of evil?

Is it a stumbling stone to weaker Christians?

Will it be a weight that drags me down?

Does it make my prayer life more difficult?

Can I ask God's blessing on it?

I'm from the country in Alabama but I grew up in the grocery store business, so I'm really not rural. The farmers came into our store and every now and then I'd go out and get a small job in the country. I'll never forget the day when I went out to a guy's farm that had two mules. He hooked them up and said.

"Would you like to plow?"

My spirit said, "No," but my pride said, "Why yeah, anybody can do this."

Man, I couldn't keep those two mules in line even though they were naturally alike in step and strength to one another. Suppose one of those mules was replaced by a different kind of animal? You will then have two unequally yoked. They will not pull together and they will not go together but will mess up your field.

You want to know what messes up the churches? It's when Christians try to be yoked with Jesus and the spirit of the world. When that happens we're just plowing every which way. As a matter of fact, we're not even plowing at all. We're spending all our time trying to keep those two things in harmony that can never agree. The call of God is this: come by faith to the Christ who died for you. He'll forgive you. He'll love you. He'll save you and change you. The second call is to come out from their midst and be separate unto the Father.

Well, I made it to that second wreck that day. When I pulled up, I wasn't looking for a police officer. I wasn't looking for the person who hit my girl. I wasn't looking to see if the car could be fixed. I was looking for just one special person. When my daughter saw me, she came running and I started running toward her. I grabbed her in my arms as she cried on my shoulder.

I said, "Darlin' it'll be okay."

"Daddy, I thought you'd be mad."

"No, I'm not mad. Are you okay?"

She said, "Daddy, the car "

"Don't worry about the car. There are all kinds of paint and metal in this world. We can find some more of that. Are you okay?"

"Yeah, Daddy, I'm fine, now that you're here."

Let me tell you, friend, when you get separated unto God, there'll be times you need to fall into your Father's arms. I have great news. You come running. He has His arms wide open saying, "Whosever will, whosoever will, let him come and be separate unto Me."

CHAPTER THREE THE CALLING OF SANCTIFICATION

FAITH you are to add

[3]

Like eight notes found in a musical octave from which beautiful melodies are composed, so God uses these eight callings, given in 2 Peter 1:5-7 to bring the music of Himself into our lives. God desires to orchestrate these attributes into each of us and cause our lives to reflect Him. Read again what this scripture says, that beginning with your

MORAL EXCELLENCE, to your moral excellence add
KNOWLEDGE, to your knowledge add
SELF-CONTROL, to your self-control add
PERSEVERANCE, to your perseverance add
GODLINESS, to your godliness add

BROTHERLY KINDNESS, and to your broth erly kindness add LOVE.

Like eight strands wrapped together to form a strong cord, so God sews our lives into His when we obey and apply these callings He has set for us to follow.

Now we began with faith which is the calling of salvation. Next we added moral excellence and that is the calling of separation. Now we add to our moral excellence knowledge. This is the calling of sanctification. You get saved which comes through faith. Then comes moral excellence. You get separated from that old sin life as the power of God comes into your life. As you move to sanctification, you become a positive influence for God.

Truth will make you free

In John 8:31-32 Jesus is speaking about this sanctifying power that is ours through Him and through His Word:

"If you abide in My word [Did you get that? If you live in the Word] then you are truly disciples of Mine; [one of the proofs, staying in the Word] and you shall know the truth [if you abide in the Word] and the truth shall make you free."

Knowledge is a marvelous thing but it can be used for good or bad. Knowledge can be used to create a super fiend, an oppressor and killer of thousands. Or knowledge can be used to create a bondservant of the Lord Jesus Christ. Your life can be defined by the knowledge you have and the use and application of it. You see, terrorists are shaped by untrue, counterfeit knowledge. They believe the wrong idealisms and have zeal through false knowledge that leads to a twisted fanaticism.

In the Greek New Testament, when the letter "a" is placed before a word it forms the negative, creating the opposite meaning. When you put the negative with the word theos, which means "God", you form the word atheos (without God). From this we get the English word "atheist" (no God). Again by placing the letter "a" at the beginning of the word gnosis, from which we get our word "knowledge", we form the word anagnosis or "agnostics". An agnostic is one who does not believe in God. They do not have enough knowledge to prove there is a God. They're not an atheist. They think, "Oh there might be a God but there's not enough evidence to prove to me there is a God."

Now the atheist is the most self-righteous man in the world. An atheist says, "I know everything; therefore, and I know God does not exist." But the agnostic says, "I don't know everything. There may be a God. I just do not know enough yet to know there is one." Jesus replies to both of these views by proclaiming in His Word that if you come to know the truth, the truth will set you free.

I am told that it would take you 147 years to complete all the courses offered at Harvard University. Boy, you'd be educated then, wouldn't you! Spend 147 years to get all of that learning packed into your head! You see, it's your head that I'm after. Two chapters ago we considered the condition of your heart. If God can capture your heart (faith) and your head (knowledge), He will do a fresh work within you. Jesus promises freedom and truth. These, my friend, will produce sanctified living.

There is the source of truth

I want you to focus with me about truth, and the calling of

sanctification. In the text found in John 8:31-32, I see three issues that address this calling for our lives. The very first issue made is, simply, truth. What is truth? Truth must be found. The Muslim says he knows truth. The Hindu says he knows truth. As stated earlier, there are the atheist and agnostic views concerning truth. And on and on it goes with a world full of beliefs based on false facts.

My wife, Liz, and I went out to eat recently and she picked up a newspaper published by the Universalist Church. In this newspaper there were printed many ideas about truth, metaphysical, séances, weird stuff. It was telling us that God is in us when we are born. It went on to say that each of us is God. I'm here to tell you, friend, I've been a lot of things but I'm not GOD. I'll let you in on a little something. You are not God. And I want to let our universalist friends in on something—they'll know this when they die—they are not God. God has come among us and JESUS IS HIS NAME!

Three sources of truth are the person, the place and the page.

What is truth? Let me give you three sources of truth. Jesus says to "Abide in My word." You'll find truth there. You will find the person of truth. Jesus says in John 14:6 "I am the way, the truth . . . " The person of truth is Jesus Christ. I am not the person of truth; you are not the person of truth.

Second, the place of truth can be found in scripture. The Bible says the church is the pillar and the ground of truth. (1 Timothy 3:15) That word "ground" means the church is the buttress or the fortress. The church is the place that holds up truth. Let me give you a warning here: if you find yourself in a church where the Bible is not believed and truth is not proclaimed, get out! Life

is too short to live with a group of liberals who think they know more about God than God knows about Himself. Truth is always based on what God says and never on what we may think when it is contrary to God's Word.

There is the person of truth. There is the place of truth. Third, there is the page of truth which is the Word of God. 2 Timothy 2:15 teaches that the Bible is the Word of truth. Ninety-three percent of Americans own at least one Bible. However, forty percent of Americans cannot tell you who preached the Sermon on the Mount. Fifty percent of Americans cannot name the four gospels. And only thirty percent of teenagers know why we have Easter Sunday in the church. We have in America a bunch of folks that have been down the church aisle, knelt and prayed to receive salvation, and even been baptized, but sadly, most have stopped right there. They have never answered the call of separation to moral excellence or the call to knowledge of God's Word which leads to sanctified living.

Looking at Ephesians 5:25-26 we see an important application to consider. You may say, "Well, I already know these verses." Good, but are you applying them to your life? (Now Husbands, don't get scared. I'm not going to the usual exposition here. I should, but I'm not.)

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church. [that's the illustration] and gave Himself up for her [look at this] that He might sanctify her..."

There it is; the calling of sanctification. Jesus gave Himself up for the church. He died for the church so that He could sanctify the church. The word "sanctify" is the word hagiazo. It means holy, set apart, to be clean. ...having cleansed her by the washing of water with the Word.

Do you know Jesus washes His church? He washes it with the water of the Word. In the Old Testament the Jewish tabernacle is a typology of Christ. Before entering into the Holy of Holies, the high priest would wash his hands in the laver, a large basin used for ceremonial washing by the ancient Jewish priests. This was done to symbolize the cleansing of sin before one could enter the tabernacle door. Jesus is referencing this practice when He says before you can go into the Holy of Holies, before you can live for Me, you must come to the Word and you must wash yourself in the Word of God.

After you get saved, you need the everlasting fountain of truth in scripture to be washing you day by day, moment by moment, morning by morning, evening by evening. You need to have the source of truth running in you and running through you. The Word of God is that fountain. It is our source of all truth. Every Sunday before reading the Scripture at the start of my sermon, I remind us all, "Hear now the Word of God." We position the pulpit in the center and we elevate it because we teach and preach that the Word of God is the source of all truth. Yes, we need to argue against untruth with people in the world, but we never need to argue what is truth in our churches because we have the source of truth.

There is the study of truth

Not only is the Bible the source of truth, but also, it is the study of truth. In John 8:31 Jesus said that we were to abide, to live or to remain in the Word. In 2 Timothy 2:15 Paul admonishes his young disciple Timothy to: "Be diligent to present yourself ap-

proved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the Word of truth."

An unread Bible is like food uneaten. It's like a love letter unopened. It's like gold that has never been mined. It's like a sword that is never unsheathed. Dear friend, you need to read your Bible. Proverbs 23:23 commands us to "Buy truth, and do not sell it."

The Bible was the first book ever published on the printing press. It remains the number one bestseller. Today portions of the Bible have been translated into more than 2100 languages around the world—still not nearly enough. There are today over 30 different English translations of the Word of God. In America we have Bibles running out our ears. Sadly, we just don't get them into our hearts. Do you want to know why? Because many Christians are lazy and never read and study the Bible. 2 Timothy 2:15 instructs us to handle accurately, to divide accurately the Word of God.

You should give every graduating high school senior a copy of the book by Josh McDowell entitled 'The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict.' Two of my high school graduates called me after going off to a very large state university. They both said, "Pastor, just as you predicted I am finding my faith challenged. I'm in this biology class and they're telling me I came from ooze rather than from God. Then I have a guy over here telling me the Bible's not the Word of God. How do I know if it is?"

I asked, "Do you have your copy of Josh McDowell's The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict?"

They both said "Well, no, Sir. I left it in Pensacola."

I said, "Don't call me again until you go home and get your book. Dig it out for yourself. Study the Bible. Use those three brain cells you have - one of them is going to die before you turn twenty-five. You had better get truth into your head."

You see, we must use our minds. God has called all of His children to add to their moral excellence, knowledge. We need not only to believe the Bible but we also need to know why. Josh McDowell gives us ten things about the uniqueness of the Bible. The Bible was written over 1,500 years.

[It was] written by more than forty authors from every walk of life, including kings, military leaders, peasants, philosophers, fishermen, tax collectors, poets, musicians, statesmen, scholars, and shepherds.

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For example:
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Moses, a political leader . . .

David, a king . . .

Amos, a herdsman; Joshua, a military general; Nehemiah, a cup bearer . . .

Daniel, a prime minister . . .

Solomon, a king . . .

Luke, a physician . . .

Peter, a fisherman; Matthew, a tax collector; Paul, a rabbi; and

Mark, Peter's secretary

[It was] written in different places:

By Moses in the wilderness,

Jeremiah in a dungeon, Daniel on the hillside . . .

Paul inside prison walls

Luke while traveling

John while in exile on the Isle of Patmos

[It was] written in different moods: some writing from the heights of joy others . . . from the depths of sorrow and despair some during times of certainty and convictions others during . . . confusion and doubt.

[It was] written on different continents: Asia . . . Africa . . . Europe

[It was] written in three languages: Hebrew . . . Aramaic . . . Greek

[It was] written in a wide variety of literary styles, including: poetry, history, song, romance, didactic treatise, personal correspondence, memoirs, satire, biography, autobiography, law, prophecy, parable, and allegory.

The Bible addresses . . . controversial subjects, subjects that create opposing opinions . . .

The Bible writers treated . . . hot topics [such as] marriage, divorce and remarriage, homosexuality, [Homosexuality? They're going to close us down one day for preaching against that, but right now, keeping on] adultery . . . obedience to authority, truth-telling and lying, character development, parenting, the nature and revelation of God.

In spite of its diversity, the Bible presents a single unfolding story: God's redemption of human beings . . .

Finally, and most important, among all the people [of God] described in the Bible, the leading character throughout is the one, true, living God made known through [one man, the man], Jesus of Nazareth. That is just a sketch of three pages. Every student should have a copy of the book. Students, you're going to get challenged! People are not going to challenge you in your heart.

They're going to challenge you in your head. In 1 Peter 3:15 Peter exhorts us to: "... sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you..." The Greek word for this type of "hope" is apologia from which we get our English word "apologetics". It doesn't mean to apologize. It means to give a reason why you believe. Facts of reality must line up with truth. We must come to the place of knowing truth. We never act just based on how we feel. There was a group of terrorists who felt like blowing up the World Trade Center. You see, it isn't what you feel. The facts of reality are that God so loved the world He gave His Son. God gave us a book and we need to be in that book, handling, dividing accurately the Word of God. You need to be historically accurate, contextually true, and grammatically precise. You need to study truth found in the Holy Scriptures.

I want to give a challenge to all the men that are sports nuts—like me. I want to challenge you to take the time to read the Bible this year equal to the number of hours that you watch your teams play. That means in the fall, for me, when my football team plays, I owe God three hours in the Word of God. Then, when they go into overtime . . . You golfers, if you can calculate how to figure a handicap, you can read the book of John. I've been playing golf all my life. I still don't know how to figure my handicap. I just am a handicap when I play.

Those of you who love the news, I want to ask you to read the Bible as much as you listen to the news on TV. I'm amazed that Christians will watch the news at 5:00, 6:00, and 10:00. There's not that much news anywhere. Aren't they just repeating themselves? If you are going to give the local newscaster an hour and a half, shouldn't you give the Lord Jesus an hour and a half

of your life? You see, the deal is we just really don't want to know what the Bible says. People tell me, "Well, we can't understand the Bible." Let me tell you, friend, you can understand this book if you will read it. If you will get a copy and read it, you can comprehend it. Study the Word of God. It all begins with reading. Now, after you start to read, you need some good study books, and a good study Bible. Because God has called us to knowledge of Him, we must become students of His Word.

There is the strength of truth

I've talked about the source of truth and the study of truth, but now third, I want you to see the strength of truth. Jesus said that if you will abide in His word, it proves you are his disciple. You will know the truth and the truth will set you free. Jesus rules the church and the Scripture is the scepter by which He rules. He rules with the Word of God. When He rules your life, He does not bring oppression. He brings liberation. There is freedom whenever truth comes to your life.

You can be free from tradition.

I want you to notice four areas where Jesus will set you free. The Bible teaches us that He will set us free from tradition. Jesus is speaking about the tradition of the scribes and Pharisees in Mark 7:8-9: 'Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men." You say no to God but yes to man. He was also saying to them, You nicely set aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition. You see, if we are not careful, we'll be just like the scribes and Pharisees. We will set aside the authority of God and we will pick up our own practices. Now tradition does this. It always wants you to look right rather than be

right. Tradition says dress right, sit correctly, always look the part.

There are some of us moms and dads who don't want our boys to have an earring because it doesn't look right. Do you know you can have an earring and still be right? I'm not giving license to it. I don't want it at my house. I have made it clear I don't want it at my house. I'll make it clear again! If it comes to my house, I'll make it clearer still!!! But I want to tell you this: you can have good-looking ears and a dark heart. Tradition just deals with the outward look. We would rather be right before everybody else than to please God.

I have a dear friend who is a marvelous evangelist. He has two boys. One son is just clean-cut and slick. Any dad would be delighted to have that young man come to his house to date his daughter. Then he has another son. Oh my! He has body rings everywhere and tattoos all over his body.

I asked my friend, "How do you deal with that?"
He said, "Ted, my son, the one that doesn't look right, is right!

He's living in a culture winning men and women, boys and girls to faith in Jesus Christ, and touching people that no one else will touch. I don't like it. I despise it because of the way I think, and the way the church thinks. But I had to come to understand that the Holy Spirit was accurate when He helped write the Old Testament. It is inspiring to read that God looks not on the outside but looks on the inside." Tradition looks only outwardly to judge. God's eyes see us from His exclusive inside view. Let me hasten to say, when you get right on the inside it does affect the way you look on the outside. But those things are not inclusive of one another.

You can be free from the world's lies

The truth of God will give you freedom from the world's lies. In Romans 1:25 the Bible says, "... they exchanged the truth of God for a lie..." The world says jealousy and selfish ambition are the ways of life. But the Bible commands us to serve others and not ourselves. The Word of God, when you come to understand truth, will set you free from jealousy and selfish ambition.

Dads, I want you to hear me. Most of us want our kids to do right so it'll make us look good. What you must do is come to the place that you accept your kids just the way God gave them to you. If you always wanted a large son that could sing, and instead you have a skinny boy that loves computers, you have to love him. You see, dads are not real good at that. If you will come to understand the truth of the Word of God, you will understand that God never made a mistake when He created your child. Dad, if you will receive the truth that God is in creation, then the truth of the Word of God will set you free.

Everybody doesn't know this, but I have had two sons. I had one boy until he turned thirteen. Then I found I had "new" son. God made him one way for thirteen years just to test me. That's right. It was all for me. I didn't know what to do. I just had to say, "God, I take him just as he is." Then something happened. He went through a change in his life and I'm here to tell you, he is as good a friend as I have in the world today. He's my buddy. We hang out together. We laugh a lot.

Dad, the truth of God will set you free when you begin to understand God made your kids just like they are. You'd better get to loving them, helping them understand the way God's called them to be. Let God's truth sink into you, knowing that God has all things under His control. You can trust Him and when you do, He'll set you free. Man, if you want a ball player and you get a band player, you get happy! If you have a ball player and you want a band member, just get happy! Dad, trust God to set you free from the world's lies that your kids have to be a certain way.

You can be free from personal ignorance

Third, not only does the Word of God set you free from tradition and worldly lies, it will set you free from personal ignorance. It is amazing what Christians believe that is actually not in the Bible. It's just phenomenal. It's astounding what we believe about the devil that's not in the Bible. Many Christians will tell you Satan is in charge of hell. Let me inform you, that is not biblical. The devil is not in charge of hell. You see all those comics where St. Peter is at the gate of heaven and the devil is scheming evil doings as he sits on a throne in hell. The Bible says Satan is going to be cast into hell. He doesn't possess the keys or dominion over hell. He is not the prince of Hades. God is in charge of eternity, not the old wicked one.

Some folks think that Satan is everywhere. The devil has never been omnipresent. The devil does not mirror Jehovah God. He is merely a fallen angel. The devil mirrors Michael, the archangel.

Most of us think Satan is the source of all temptation in our lives. But he is not. Sometimes you are the source of temptation in your life. For out of your own selfish fleshly desires you go after things you know shouldn't be in your life and the devil doesn't have to even bother you. The world and the flesh have

already snared you. We give Satan way too much credit. You see, it's not the devil on one side and God on the other, fighting it out as if they are co-equal. There is just one God. Jehovah is His name, and He is the winner. He has been the winner all along. If you will just read the Bible, it will set you free from personal ignorance.

You can be free from spiritual bondage

Last, the Word of God will set you free from spiritual bondage. So many people get into oppression spiritually. They come into the church, walk down the aisle, receive Christ as Savior, take the preacher by the hand and suddenly think, I must now live like Mr. Deacon So-and-so.

I was counseling a man a while back and he said, "Preacher, I used to be in the church and now I'm not. I'm no longer a tither. I used to be a worker and now I'm not involved."

I asked, "What happened?"

"I lost my job and when I could not give, I thought I lost the capability and the responsibility and the ability to have a voice in the church because I didn't have anything to give. Then some people ostracized me and did some things wrong.

Am I right or am I wrong?"

I said, "Yes sir. You're right and you're wrong. You're dead wrong about believing that giving money validates your ability to serve in the church. Some people don't have any money. You don't and you don't have a job. How can you give if you have nothing? You see, what you need to learn is to give what you have."

He said, "Yeah, but I just feel "

"Quit feeling," I said. Throw feelings out the window and come to factual faith." God will give you the feeling that you need as it comes only out of obedience, not out of wrong thinking. And yes, you are right. The church was wrong and I'm sorry. If we ostracized you, we didn't do right. We love you and I want you to know there's a place for you to serve. And when God blesses you, you give as you can. When He gives you ability, you serve."

It was like a light came on. He said, "Is that right?"
"I told you it was, didn't I? Have I ever told you anything that wasn't true? Do you think I'd lie to you?"
"I don't think you would."
"No sir, I wouldn't. I'm telling you the truth."

If you get right with God, He'll set you free from the bond-

age that the spirit of this world wants to put upon you. First, come by faith and get saved and then begin to learn moral excellence. It is through the washing of the water from the Word of God that we are sanctified. And through knowledge God creates holiness in our lives. We must apply to our faith moral excellence and live holy lives by the truth of God. Too many of us are missing from our octave the knowledge of the Word of God.

Every believer should live life by such a creed as the following: I believe the Word of God. I believe all of it. I submit to its authority. I pledge to study it diligently. I pledge to obey it fully. God loves me and I love Him. I will take direction and I will go where I'm told. I believe the Word of God. Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

1McDowell, Josh. The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999.

CHAPTER FOUR THE CALLING OF SERVICE

[4]

In 2 Peter 1:5-7, God has given us precious and magnificent promises. He says to us that we are to be growing believers. Like the eight notes of an octave achieve the desired result of beautiful music, there are eight parts of the calling arranged to accomplish our goal of becoming more like our Lord Jesus Christ. The first note is

FAITH add to your faith

MORAL EXCELLENCE, to your moral excellence add
KNOWLEDGE, to your knowledge add
SELF-CONTROL, to your self-control add
PERSEVERANCE, to your perseverance add
GODLINESS, to your godliness add
BROTHERLY KINDNESS, and to your brotherly
kindness add LOVE.

Now I jokingly say that many Christians are just playing about three notes of the octave. Those three notes are only enough to do the opening phrase of Three Blind Mice. God wants all the notes of the octave to be in your life so that you can sing with full gusto the songs of the Lord. So we're looking at each one of these callings. We have considered faith, the calling of salvation; moral excellence, the calling of separation; knowledge, the calling of sanctification; and now we consider self-control, the calling of service.

I want you to know this is the easiest of the eight for this pastor. Self-control. I am a master already. This is a piece of cake. Anybody can have self-control if he is a liar. Boy! This is a tough one, isn't it? Look with me at the text found in 1 Corinthians 9 that I believe will help us in adding self-control to our lives. Let's look at 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 remembering now, that this is God's Word:

"Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. And everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified."

Here Paul is picking up on the Isthmian Games that took place in his century. We can compare them to our Olympic Games of today. In watching the Winter Olympics we see the athletes who run or ski or skate for that top honor of winning the gold medal in their sport. They are all there competing in the games

because they have exercised self-control. Now self-control is the ability to make the right decision even when it contradicts our desires. Those who win in the Christian life will understand and exercise self-control.

Self-control is not about our being in control. Self-control is that place God brings us to so that we can control our flesh, exercising His principles in life. Now, if you think you can just say, "I'm going to answer the call of service because I'll add self-control to my life," you will fall flat! You must begin with faith and moral excellence and have knowledge before you will ever be able to exercise self-control.

But notice the example of that ancient runner in the Isthmian Games. He is training to become the fastest runner. There would have been days he would say, "I don't want to get up." But he had self-control to get up anyway. There would have been days when he would want to eat things he should not eat, but he had self-control to say, "No". There would have been days he would not want to eat the proper diet and would want something else, but he exercised self-control and said, "Yes, I will go to the training table and take the food that I need." Why? Because he was willing to train in such a way that he might win. Everyone who has this kind of commitment will exercise self-control. Those athletes competed for only a perishable wreath. But, as God's "runners" we are running in such a way that we may win an imperishable crown from our Lord. Therefore, we bring our bodies under self-discipline so that we can win the race set before us.

We face a struggle for self-control

I want to show you three things about self-control. First of all, I submit to you the struggle we face. The Bible says in 1Thessalonians 5:23: 'Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." It was Paul's prayer that as believers we would be sanctified entirely in the body, in the soul, and in the spirit. Now, everybody knows what the body is. We all have one. Some of us have more of one than we want. Some of us have less of one than we want. If you do not have a body, then you are dead and already gone to heaven. Okay? It is our flesh. Be sanctified in your body.

Then Paul says to be sanctified in your soul. That is your mind, will and emotion. That is where self-control comes to bear. When you get saved, God quickens your spirit and you are made alive with Christ and rescued from spiritual death. It is your spirit that needs to influence your mind, will, and emotion. Now you best know your spirit when it is identified as your conscience.

The evangelist, Junior Hill, identified the conscience as "a moral standard God placed in us for right and wrong." When you begin to read about the conscience in scripture, you find it is all through the Word of God. The conscience is to bear witness to your mind, will, and emotion. The conscience is that standard of right and wrong that God gives us. It is fed by the truth of scripture and becomes pure and clean and undefiled. It will temper the mind, where we think; the will, where we decide; and the emotion, where we feel.

However, many times we err by rationalizing wrong actions out of those fervent parts of our lives; our wills and our emotions. When we rationalize a wrong action we beat down and deaden the conscience. This precludes character from monitoring, guiding, and controlling us. When the conscience is dead, when it becomes seared, when the conscience becomes calloused, it no longer rides herd on our fervent desires that are ungodly. Two things happen. We do not exhibit self-control. Instead, we embrace will-control. The will requires control. And when the will is in control of your life, here is what happens: you throw a tantrum!

I remember as a kid my daddy would make me cut the grass. I hated cutting the grass. We had acres of yard. The day I went off to college, he purchased a riding mower. But before that, we had one of those push jobs. I would put it off and put it off and wait until it was late in the day. Finally, I would start cutting that grass. I had days when I would run that lawn mower into a tree over and over and over again. Have you ever had a tantrum? Have you ever had a fit? Your will is out of control!

Recently I boarded a plane to fly to Atlanta. I was seated in a row with two other passengers. There was a lovely redheaded lady next to me, Mrs. Kennedy. Next to her was her husband, Mr. Kennedy. There was a mother, her daughter and grandson seated in front of us. The mother was an elderly lady. She was of Indian descent and dressed in attire from the country of India. Next to her was her daughter who looked to be about twenty-five. She had long, dark, jet-black hair. They were speaking to each other in their native tongue. I could not understand a word. They had a little boy who was about two—cute as a button but wild as a billy goat. He was screaming at the top of his lungs. Every time his mother told him something he would scream. It was so shrill it hurt my ears. It hurt ears ten rows up and ten rows back. People were standing up to look and saying, "Somebody get that boy under control."

Mr. Kennedy sat against the window. Two times Mr. Kennedy stood up and leaned over and said, "Somebody get this boy under control!" (I said to myself, "Uh, oh. Somebody better get Mr. Kennedy under control.") That boy was screaming and screaming and screaming! I was sitting there writing about a sermon entitled, The Calling of Service, Understanding Self-control.

We were about fifteen minutes out of Atlanta and that little boy was still screaming. He was killing me. I had my fingers in my ears. All of a sudden Mr. Kennedy had had all he could stand and he began to kick the seat in front of him. I don't mean he kicked it once. I don't mean he kicked it five times. That little boy was bouncing up out of his seat. That man kept kicking and kicking and kicking! Finally one of the flight attendants came and said, "We will have a sky marshal meet us at the gate." And I thought to myself, Here's a man in his mid-thirties having a tantrum on an airplane. His will was out of control.

Did you know a Christian's will gets out of control sometimes? When the will, one of those fervent parts of your life gets out of control, you will have a tantrum. You will throw a fit. Some people say, "Well, my kids are just that way." Oh no. I've been that way. Sometimes I am that way now. And it is sin against God. It is when your conscience then rationalizes and says, "But that boy is hurting my ears. Therefore I can kick him out of the seat." When that man kicked that little boy for the twentieth time, that mother stood and spoke her first English word on that flight. She began to protect her son. I was sitting there wondering, What should I do? I'm just afraid I'm going to be a witness, and I don't want to be a witness. So I pretended to be asleep. Really, nobody could have been sleeping with all that "turbulence" happening.

When the will is out of control, there will always be a struggle. We all struggle with this. But we can find victory!

When the will gets out of control, it leads to a tantrum. When your emotion gets out of control, it leads to insatiable lust. Lust is not just sexual. That is only a fraction of it. Greed will enter. Anger will enter. Unforgiveness will enter the picture when emotion is out of control.

I don't know if you saw the story one summer not long ago. At a midwestern university there was a 6'3", 260-pound young man who played football. His story went across America on the internet and many publications picked it up. After practice one day, he went to a nearby Taco Bell. He ordered several things but when his order came, they had not given him everything. They had left a chalupa out of his bag. And the football player lost control. He got out of his car and started to climb through the driveup window to get his missing food and to make somebody pay. About thirty minutes later the paramedics arrived to extract the 6'3", 260-pound young man who had gotten himself trapped. He could not go in and couldnot get out. He was stuck in the driveup window at the Taco Bell. What a witness! Have you ever been stuck in the drive-up? I hope you haven't. But have you ever had your emotion get out of control when you were not served like you should have been served?

The Bible says to add to your knowledge self-control. We all struggle, don't we? When our wills are uncontrolled and our emotions are unrestrained, we become undisciplined rather than retaining self-control. Let me tell you, when we get out of control, our testimonies go out the window. In Acts 24:16 Paul has been arrested. His Jewish opponents are demanding that he answer

their accusations against him in front of Festus the Roman king. In his reply Paul states,

"... I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men."

Paul is saying that he strives to stay faultless before men and before God. Now watch this: if our conscience is going to be clean, our struggle is not only with allowing God to be in control, but what is more, we will struggle with mankind on a horizontal level. When we will not forgive and we will not forget, and we get angry with others, we cannot uphold self-control. Consequently, we cannot safeguard a clean, pure conscience with others nor will we have an unsoiled, untainted conscience vertically with the Lord. Paul said, "I am striving." That was his struggle. We all share it, do we not? We all share that struggle because our wills and emotions get out of control.

The Spirit we possess develops self-control

But I submit to you not only the struggle we face; second, I also want you to see the spirit we possess. The Bible says in Galatians 5:22-23: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law." Because God lives in us, we have the ability to produce the fruit of the spirit. One of the nine fruits of the spirit is what? Self-control.

If you are a Christian today, right now you have a conscience that is either clear by living up to the principles of Christ (1 Timothy 3:9), or you have a seared conscience caused by giving into sinful living (1 Timothy 4:2). You see, the seared con-

science has no feeling. Therefore your mind, will, and emotion are not tempered by your conscience. Your conscience has been seared by your own corrupt acts. According to 1 Timothy 1:5, ". . . the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith."

But notice the warning found in Titus 1:15:

"To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled."

Your conscience will become defiled by the thought processes of this world. When believers think like the world and the culture they live in, their consciences are corrupted.

This world has said to us that it is okay to have an abortion; therefore, abortion is not sin. It is not wrong. And we as Christians begin to think like the world thinks. Our consciences are so defiled that when a daughter becomes pregnant and she is not married, it is okay for her to have an abortion because the world says it is. But a clean, clear, pure, blameless conscience says, "What does the Word of God say?" The Word of God will call it murder. We must decide; will our consciences be clean and clear or will they be seared and defiled? Only when we allow the Spirit of God living within us to have total control, can we experience a life of divinely-driven self-control.

The following six actions will develop self-control. I want to give you six actions you must take if you are going to walk successfully with God and achieve self-control.

Give up control
Ask for forgiveness
Flee temptation
Adopt high standards
Resist the "bait"
Be utterly enthralled with Jesus

The first thing you must do is give up control. Today a favorite "toy" among men is the remote control. Amen? Most of us have half a dozen in our homes. You have to surrender the remote control of your life and place it in the hand of God. You begin by saying, "Lord, I am no longer in charge. I give control unto You. I am not the Lord of my life. I am not the master of my way." You must say, "God is in control." You have to abandon that desire to be in command of your life. Hand control over to the Father.

Second, you have to ask forgiveness of those you have offended. You will never have a clean conscience until you say, "I was wrong. I'm sorry." The only way to get your conscience clear is to go and deal with the people you have wronged. Some of you have so wronged your children that you need to ask their forgiveness. You have not only hurt your conscience, you have hurt theirs. For you see, there are many people in their forties and fifties still being ruled by their parents. Some of you are being ruled by your parents and they are dead and gone. They rule you from the grave. You cannot relinquish some things they said that you know are not according to the Word of God. Even though you have been hurt, you are going to have to forgive them and forget their bad teaching.

Third, flee temptation. The Word of God tells us to flee youthful lust, to run away from temptation. When you see it coming, turn and run! Recently, Dr. Tommy Turner, who is a pastor

friend of mine, spoke at one of our men's retreats. He said to us, "Every temptation comes with a small window of decision time." You may get a half second, a second and a half, or three seconds before temptation sets in. It may be that a certain program comes on television. You may glance at that certain magazine on the news rack. A tantalizing thought slips in. But you have that window, that opportunity. You will either flee or you will forge a relationship with that sin. You must learn to escape from harmful temptation.

After you give up control, ask forgiveness, and flee temptation, number four, you must adopt high standards. You see, if you are going to have self-control, you have to make up your mind before you get in the war that you are going to win! You have to decide which way you are going and on whose side you will be. Make it your objective to adopt the highest standards, those found in the Word of God.

Many of the teenagers in our churches have made a True Love Waits commitment. They have adopted the standard to remain sexually pure until marriage. They have said, "This is the way I am headed." They have made the commitment to raise the standard high. You may say, "Well, is that foolproof?" No, it's not foolproof. Each teen must personally say, "I have said with my lips that true love waits. But as I am faced with high pressure dating temptations, I must answer the question, "What am I going to do with my hands and eyes and actions?" You see, they must embrace that standard. Set the benchmark high and pursue standards of biblical proportions.

Number five: resist the bait! This world is tossing enticements out in front of us all the time. They are trying to evoke us to succumb to temptation. Magazines, television, videos, the

internet and a thousand other things are out there persistently grasping at our attention. The enticing lure of sin is all around the believer. We must learn to refuse to accept the bait.

Finally, be utterly enthralled with Jesus! You have to be in love with Jesus more than you are in love with anything in this world, or you will never come to the place of having self-control. Now self-control is not the easy part of the Christian life. It is not the easy part for me. There are times when my emotion and my will want to jump in. But friend, when I have given God control and when I have walked with these six disciplines, my standards are set and I can flee temptation. I want to find myself every morning, every afternoon and every waking moment in love with the Lord Jesus. I then find that I can embrace self-control.

Why is it that Paul uses an athletic illustration for self-control? Man, I know why it is. Athletics will kill you if you don't have self-control. As we watch the athletes in today's Olympic Games, we are amazed at what they can do. There is that big guy who takes that little girl and lifts her over his head as they skate so skillfully together. They are holding on to nothing as he lifts one foot and she has one leg tucked up behind her arched back spinning around. Somebody called it inertia. I mean, she is just laid back, hanging on like—and I'm thinking, they have done this before--yeah, about a million times! My goodness, the self-control in their lives is so obvious, even to an amateur. Self-control is displayed so significantly from the example of athletics. The Spirit of God lives within you and will encourage you, energize you and help you to sustain self-control.

God's control leads to service

Third, some people say, "I can't make the connection between self-control and service." Here is the connection. If you are in control, that power in your life will lead to selfishness. But when God is in control and you come to the place of allowing Him to control your mind, will and emotion, then you are released to do service. In Galatians 5:13 Paul is writing and as he is coming up on the fruit of the spirit passage found in verses 22-23 where he mentions self-control, he writes,

"For you were called to freedom, brethren..."

After you get saved, you have been set free. Thank God. But you are not free to do anything you want.

"... only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh,"

That is your mind, will and emotion. Do not let your freedom say, "Well I'm forgiven so I can do anything I want."

"...but through love serve one another."

You see, when you come to have self-control, you grow into becoming a bondservant to Christ as demonstrated in Exodus 21.

In this Old Testament passage a Jewish slave could choose freedom or choose to become a permanent servant to his master. If he chose to stay, he would have his ear pierced with an awl against the doorpost signifying his commitment to remain with his master and become a bondservant. Out of our free volition we also must decide for God and say, "I want to serve the Master. Lord, I choose to serve You."

The greatest service is serving children

I want to talk to you about service. Out of that Galatians 5:13 passage we see the need for loving servants. The greatest service that can ever be done is to serve children. I have set a goal for our church to have the greatest children's program known to mankind. I want us to teach boys and girls to love God.

Why is serving kids the most important service we can do? Let me give you two reasons. First, the greatest reason we must serve kids is because it is at this time in their lives that most people get saved. Under the age of eighteen, the percentage is in the nineties that someone will get saved. But if you get to eighteen years of age and you are not a Christian, it is very unlikely you are ever going to get saved. It doesn't mean you won't. It does happen. Nevertheless, young hearts are much more pliable and bendable. A child's heart finds it simple to love God and open up to Him. They are going to say, "Jesus, I want to follow you." So the number one reason you should to serve kids is to give them the opportunity to learn to know Christ and get saved.

The second reason is proven when you talk to preachers or missionaries or other servants in the kingdom. You will discover that most of them first heard the call of God to ministry during their early years. You say, "Oh, Preacher is that really true?" Oh yes! I'm here to tell you. I was twelve years old when I heard it for the first time. Brother Banks was preaching in my church. I was like one of those kids who sit in the back filling in all the circles, drawing in all the zeros. I was sitting in the back of the church when suddenly God grabbed a hold of me. I looked up and I thought, I think I'm going to do that. I'm going to answer God's call. It was the first time I ever felt a stirring in my spirit. It did not

come to fruition until I was seventeen. That was when God made me a preacher. But it began when my heart was young.

We need folks to practice self-control and quit asking for everybody else to serve them. We need people in our church to get involved in our children's missions programs. We need them in our children's choir program and Sunday school. We need help in our Upward Basketball recreation program or to coach a softball team. We need folks to start doing many things. We must touch the lives of children!

Zechariah 8:5 says, "And the streets of the city [New Jerusalem] will be filled with boys and girls playing in its streets."

This is why we're here. It is why we put up with young ones all throughout the week. We try to teach them how to bounce a basketball or kick a soccer ball or learn to cheer. Why? So we can have the opportunity to lead these children to faith in Christ. I'm telling you, children can light you up like a torch. Are you looking for something to fulfill your life? Serve! Serve! Serve! And the greatest place to serve is with children!

If you can say, "No" to serving children, then one of two things is real in your life. Either God has not called you to serve children, (He doesn't call everybody, but He does call many) or you are so in control of your own life that you cannot hear the call of God to service.

Service. Service. Until you have self-control, you will never serve in kingdom work here on earth. Oh, but when God is inside you and He is in control, there comes forth a loving servant-hearted labor in your life.

As I mentioned earlier, one of my very close friends spoke at a men's retreat. We grew up together. I used to be at his home a lot on the weekends and he was often over at my house. We played ball together. We did many things together. We began to talk this particular weekend about the influencers in our lives. Of course, we talked about our basketball coach. We both loved him like a father. You see, it was in sports that he first captured our attention as he taught us how to bounce a ball and how to shoot it. Coach Cooley was pretty rugged and spoke some rough language. He was out of the Navy and he had been saved, but wasn't sanctified for quite awhile. Oh man, he was rugged. I once introduced him to somebody and said, "This is Coach Paul Cooley. He has yelled every word in the English language at me." And he said, "Oh no, son. I never hollered 'shoot' to you." What a guy! He's dead now and boy, I miss him.

We talked about Mr. Gamble, our Sunday school teacher. We didn't have a nice new children's building. We had an old house across the street from the church. We loved it, though. It was like a big tree house. Our sixth grade class met upstairs in that wood frame house. It was cold in the winter and hot in the summer. Stinkin', nasty, but we loved it. Boys like that kind of stuff. We would hang out in there and bring our pocket knives and carve on the walls, you know. Old Mr. Gamble would say, "Cut that out and open up your Bibles." So we would put our knives away. Then they moved us over to the cinder block building where Mr. Kenimer was our teacher. It was an old mildew-filled place. I can still smell that Sunday school room today. Stinkiest place I had ever been. Man, it wouldn't pass a building code now. I guarantee you, we would get sued for using it. But Mr.Kenimer—he loved us.

Shorty was our RA director. Why, he couldn't find Genesis or Matthew. We knew more Bible than he knew when he started. But there was something about the way that guy loved us. He began to learn the Bible and he taught it to us. When you were around Shorty, he would always give you a hug and rub you on the head. As I think back, these were my influencers. There was Mrs. Gant. The night she died I watched them roll her body out. Influencer. When I was seventeen, Mr. Claude Wheeler taught me to be a soul winner. He showed me how to mark my New Testament to be a more effective witness. Influencer.

My wife, Liz, and I were really busy one year during the Christmas season and as a result we sent out our Christmas cards late. Actually we changed them and instead of Christmas cards we sent all our friends out of town a Groundhog's Day card. (Like I said, we were running just a little behind.) One day shortly after, I received a note back from Mrs. Katie Wright. She lives in a senior adult facility in north Alabama. With an obviously shaky hand, Miss Katie wrote, "Thank you for the card and family picture. I thought I wasn't going to get one this year." She continued, "I prayed for you when you were a boy."

Many years ago when I went forward to announce my call to preach, Miss Katie came through the line to shake my hand. This bondservant of the Most High God took me by the hand and said, "Ted, God told me six years ago you were going to be a preacher. I've been waiting on this day." I said, "Well, Miss Katie, why didn't you tell me? She replied, "Oh no, son. If you can't hear God call you to preach, you'll never hear Him call you to pastor a church." I believe she still prays for me every day.

These were not master theologians. They were bondservants. These were not people with tons of money. They were bondservants. These were people with self-control. They were unashamedly committed to Jesus. Perfect? Goodness, no. They simply lived under the control of the Master, serving kids like me.

I am here to tell you, we need great children's ministries in all our churches. We have to do it! We must pile resources and place tremendous efforts into the children's ministries. God makes it a must! Do you know why we must? Twenty-seven million boys and girls live in America today who do not know their biological fathers. Countless numbers live in every city and town. They need a daddy. They need a man. They need a bondservant to love them and we must do it. We must be a family to these kids and we must lead them to Christ!

Today in your heart say, "Yes, Lord, yes to Your will, to Your way. Yes to Your control. Yes, Lord, to service for Your kingdom's sake." Add to your

FAITH
MORAL EXCELLENCE, to your moral excellence
KNOWLEDGE, and to your knowledge add

Say YES to the Lordship of Christ in your life.

SELF-CONTROL.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE CALLING OF SERVICE

CHAPTER FIVE THE CALLING OF SUFFERING

[5]

In 2 Peter 1:5-7 we have been looking at what practices we must add to our faith so that our lives are in agreement with God's will. Just as we practice our skills in music, we must also sharpen our spiritual talents. First we are called to salvation with faith. With our FAITH as we practice

MORAL EXCELLENCE and apply KNOWLEDGE, we gain SELF-CONTROL.

Now we are ready to add to our abilities, PERSEVERANCE.

Look at 1 Peter 4:12-19 as we continue to see how we can learn to live in harmony with Christ:

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some

strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. By no means let any of you suffer as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; but if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not feel ashamed, but in that name let him glorify God. For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And if it is with difficulty that the righteous is saved, what will become of the godless man and the sinner? Therefore, let those also who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right. I was in a service a few weeks ago and heard a lady say, "You cannot have a testimony without a test." Now friend, when the tests come, perseverance is the call. Endurance is a critical factor in any successful venture. So rare is sudden success that it is almost non-existent. It is perseverance that opens the heavy doors of success in this life.

Most of us know the story of Christopher Columbus. On August 3, 1492, he sailed the ocean blue in search of a new land and found that new land October 12. For almost three months he worked, ventured and sailed. What we normally do not remember is that for ten years, from 1482-1492, he worked and asked, and worked and asked, requesting funding for his passage to the new world. He would not have discovered our shores without the fortitude that led him to the Spanish king and queen, Ferdinand and Isabella. They consequently gave him the financial backing for the voyage. Columbus possessed the distinctive quality of perseverance.

On October 29, 1941, Winston Churchill, that grand old leader from England, revisited the Harrow School he had attended as a boy. That day as he addressed the young men of that school he made this statement, "Boys, never give in, never, never, never, never end anything great or small, large or petty; never give in except to convictions of honor and good sense, and never yield to the force that is apparently overwhelming against you. Never, never, never, never give in." It was that kind of spirit that prevailed against Hitler and the German forces that came against our good neighbor, England. Never, dear Christian, give up. Never, dear Christian, give in. Never, dear Christian, sink back. Always endure to the end!

Every believer experiences suffering

For every believer there is a calling of suffering. Friend, we are going to face the heat in life as Peter explains in the before-mentioned text. In verse 12 Peter tells us not to be surprised at the fiery ordeals. That word "fiery" is translated from the Greek word puroo. He goes on to tell us not to be surprised at the "testing" which comes from the Greek word purosis. Both of these words come from the root that gives us our word "pyromaniac."

I have raised a pyromaniac at my house. If you have a boy, you probably have raised a pyromaniac at your house. They can burn down anything you can build. There is just something about little boys and fire. When my son, Bennett, was young, we would go to the father/son RA campouts. Someone would bring a load of wood in the back of a pickup truck. If there were a hundred boys there, we would have a hundred campfires going. I mean, we would smoke up the whole north end of the county where

we camped. Finally, the camp leaders had to make a rule that we could only have so many fires. Did you know that pyromaniacs grow up? We men kinda like it, too, don't we? Boy, there is just something about fire.

When the fire of suffering comes, we don't like it, do we? But you mark this down: the heat is coming if you stand for Jesus Christ. The issue is not if it will arrive, because it has certainly been promised to come. As a matter of fact you cannot grow in spiritual maturity without it. It is one of the essentials for developing our Christian walk. You will either say, "Yes Lord, yes to Your will and way and suffering," or you will never reach the apex of God's presence in your life He so yearns to bring about. So as we look closer at suffering, we will examine the heat of the battle and our endurance and perseverance in it.

There is the sureness of the heat

There are four elements in the heat of suffering. First of all is what I call the sureness of the heat. 1 Peter 4:12 says, "Do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal . . . as though some strange thing were happening to you." Somehow we have come to the place today that we preach the gospel, ask someone to give his life to Christ, and then say, "You know, now your life is going to be the greatest life you've ever had." Indeed it will be; the longer I serve Him, the sweeter it grows. But let me tell you this. You have shared a bogus gospel if you have promised people that all of their troubles are over. On the contrary, when you get saved, fiery trials are going to come. It is not a strange thing but it is common, widespread and frequent.

As a matter of fact, Peter goes on to say in 1 Peter 4:14, "If

you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed". Well, I could do without that blessing, couldn't you? Even so, if you are despised in the name of Jesus, you have been blessed. So you should shout while you suffer. You say, "No way, Preacher." Yes, I know it's tough. It is a matter of the will and the power of God within you to endure, persevere, and go all the way through.

I want to show you a verse I discovered not long ago. In Colossians 1:24 notice what Paul has to say about the sureness of the heat: "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body (which is the church) in filling up that which is lacking in Christ's afflictions." You may ask, "Does that mean that Jesus' afflictions are not complete?" That's right. Now, Paul is not indicating that Christ's atonement is not satisfactory for salvation. Christ alone completed the costs for us all through His suffering and death on the cross. More accurately, Paul is explaining that the affliction of the cross did not end at the cross. Instead, the afflictions of Christ will be passed on to us who are identified as part of the body of Christ. Our suffering comes as we carry on the privilege of telling a lost world the gospel. We can be joyful as we bear suffering in the name of Christ because we know that lives are changed and people will be saved. Paul desired for us to understand that in our flesh we are going to share with His body (the church) in the afflictions for Christ's sake. We are to be vessels through which God, by our sufferings, completes us and carries on the work of the church. Until Christ returns, we the body of Christ will suffer just as Christ suffered here on earth. Recognize this, fellow-believer: you will never come to maturity until you say yes to the call of suffering.

In 1988 Yellowstone National Park burned for eighty-one days destroying 1.6 million acres. Nevertheless by the year 2002,

Yellowstone Park was never more lush and beautiful. Did we want it to burn? No. But even nature goes through the burning and the scarring. And when it happens, she bounces back with even greater brilliance. You too can pull through with great spiritual brilliance when you undergo suffering.

Mark it down. It is coming. Now you must decide: Are you going to endure or are you going to get as bitter as wormwood? You see, that is what happens to most of us. When the suffering comes, we get mad and/or we get even. We grow to be bitter and we just stay that way the rest of our lives. Why do we have unpleasant lay leaders in churches? You walk into their church, try to change a little something, and they will say to you, "Stop!" Listen to me. You show up on Sunday morning and some unkind teachers filled with bitterness will just want to cut you down to size. You say, "What's going on? I just came in to ask if there is any coffee and donuts in the room." They are so twisted up with sourness that you cannot come to them and talk about one thing. Christian, that is not the way you should to respond to suffering. Learn this lesson and God will use it for His good!

The source of the heat of suffering comes from four places First there is a sureness of suffering that will come to us all. Second, I want you to see the source of it. What is the source of the heat? Where does this suffering come from? Well there are at least four places.

Satan
Personal Sin
Sin-cursed world
Spiritual devotion

The first place it can come from is from Satan himself. In the book of Job the Bible says that the devil went after Job. In Luke 13:11 is the story of a little lady who was all bent over. She was bowed. Her physical malady was of the devil. In a church in Alabama during a revival I saw a man preach in that position for forty minutes. He remarked that the only time that lady would not have looked bent over with sin would have been when she was sitting. In Luke 13:16 it is Christ who says that Satan had bound this lady for eighteen long years. Your suffering can come from Satan. Not all of it does, but some can.

Another source of our suffering can come from our own sin. 1Peter 4:15 warns us: "By no means let any of you suffer as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler;" Let me tell you, if you are a murderer you are going to suffer for it. As a thief, you are going to suffer. An evildoer or even a troublesome meddler will suffer.

I had three boys break into my home when we first moved to Pensacola. They stole everything in our home worth anything. Shortly after, the police caught them. I will never forget it. They took our camera with our film in it and shot pictures of themselves with our stuff. (Brilliant crooks they were.) I stood before the judge the day of their sentencing. I told him I thought these boys should be sentenced to hear me preach every Sunday for the next three months. That would be jail term enough. However, the judge said he could not do that exactly. But that judge looking down and pointing that big, long finger—you know his finger is really long if you are standing on the other side of the bench—with unquestioning authority said to those guys, "If you ever stand before me again, I will only have one question to ask you and that is whether you have heard Dr. Ted Traylor preach. And if

your answer is no, it is over."

I personally invited all of them to church, but to my knowledge they have never come. Being a thief brought those young men suffering. Being an evildoer will bring suffering! Being a busy, interfering person will bring suffering!

Satan does it. Your own sin can do it. Suffering can also come upon us from the sin-cursed world we live in. Even creation itself groans for a redeemer. Tell me why innocent children suffer illnesses, starvation and diseases. It is not because of their sin. It is not because of something they have done, or their parents have done. God is not looking down at the nursery and saying, "I am going to make this child mentally deficient." Or, "I am going to make that child physically deficient." Why is it that some child would have cancer and die at six months? Why is it some of our Americans are at war today? Why must some die in the war? They did not ask for it. We suffer from natural disasters because this earth is no longer the Eden God created. Earthquakes, fire, flood, hurricanes, tsunamis all take lives and possessions and we suffer. Famine and disease cause suffering. Suffering can come simply because we are part of this imperfect and fallen world.

Along with Satan, personal sin, and sin-drenched creation, suffering can take place because of our spiritual devotion to God. When you are spiritually dedicated unto the Lord God, you will answer the call to suffering and learn to endure through it. For Proverbs 17:3 says, "The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, but the Lord tests hearts." The Lord will test us. You can mark it down. There are times when suffering comes to you from the hand of God. It is there to test us, to prove us and to make us His obedient children.

There is the survival of the heat

The sureness of suffering is coming! The sources of suffering appear from various places. Third, there is what I call the survival of the heat. How do you survive the heat? Can you get through it? Can you make it? Peter states in 1 Peter 4:19, "Therefore, let those also who suffer according to the will of God [There it is—suffering from the will of God] entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right."

There are five steps for getting through suffering

You ask, "Preacher, how do I get through suffering?" I want you to remember five things and then I want to tell you a story. To begin with, whenever you are suffering, remember your vision. What is it God has called you out to do? What is your God-given vision?

Next I want you to revisit your goals. What goals are you trying to accomplish? Don't forget them. God may be using them to teach you endurance and perseverance even though you may feel you are up against a brick wall.

Third, relax. Tension is a chief enemy of perseverance. When you allow tension to penetrate your life, you are less likely to stay in God's timing and direction. Rest in the Lord. Also, recommit to communion with God. Suffering will do one thing; it will drive you to your knees. That is what suffering is for. We have not fully learned how to pray. We have not fully learned to be in the Word. Through suffering, we recommit to communion with our heavenly Father.

Finally, but not least of all, after you:
Remember your vision,
Revisit your goals,
Relax, and
Recommit to communion with God, then:

Rely on your friends. Your friends who have been through the suffering are going to help you. For you see, God is faithful and He has His people. His people are everywhere.

Several years ago as a pastor I went through the hardest time I have ever been through in my life. I was ready to quit. I didn't want to quit preaching; I just wanted to quit my church. I didn't think I deserved the church and I knew they didn't deserve me. I wanted out; I had been facing two very difficult circumstances.

I had been facing a situation involving a racial issue that threatened the safety of my family. I had invited a local African-American preacher to speak at our church. He came and preached to our congregation. Soon after that I received an anonymous letter from someone who said, "If you ever have another, (and he used an expletive) I'll burn your house down." I went home and informed Liz, "Hallelujah! You're getting a new house, bless God!" In spite of the danger, I decided not to allow this intimidation to determine my actions. So the next time, we didn't just have the African-American preacher, we had his entire choir come with him. (By the way, we still have our same house. As a matter of fact, I can't get rid of that house even though I've tried.)

Months later we went through a difficult time in the release

of a staff member. Some people did not like it, and I received some really surprising mail about it. In fact, my wife received an unexpected letter addressed to "Jezebel." The return address was "Legion." (That's what it said on the envelope. We still have it. You figure out where it came from. I believe it came from the pit of hell.) Now my wife has had some bad days in her life, but she has never been that mean—she has never been as mean as Jezebel. Man, that letter hurt.

During this troubling time, I had some people giving me advice such as, "Preacher, we think your time is up here. You have probably done everything here you need to do and it would be best if you would find somewhere to go." I responded, "If I could find somewhere, you wouldn't have to worry about me. I would be gone in a minute." (You know, when you want a pulpit committee, you can never get one.) I was low and really down. I wanted out. I didn't like the folks in my church and I didn't think they liked me. I knew I had not been pristine in everything I did. I'm human just like others. We fussed, fought, and argued, and I was sick and tired of it. I just wanted out of there.

One night while Liz and Rachel, our daughter, were out together, my son Bennett and I went down to the mall to give away quarters—you know it's called going to the arcade. When my son and I returned home around 8:30 that night, there were three people sitting on the curb by the mailbox in front of my house. I thought, Well, this may be it. I sent Bennett upstairs and I went outside. I saw silhouettes of three men I knew. I walked down to the edge of the yard and asked, "What are you guys doing?"

They said, "Well, Pastor, we've been on a little trip today." "Well, where have you been?"

They replied, "Well, you're always telling us about your home in northern Alabama and that cool artesian water that runs out of the hills"

I nodded, "Yeah?"

One of them piped up and said, "Have you ever read 2 Samuel 23?"

"Well I've read the whole Bible but I don't have it memorized. Just help me a little bit. I don't know that chapter."

"You remember when David was in the cave at Adullam?"

"Oh yeah, over at Adullam and Rephaim. I remember the story."

My friend continued, "David was there fighting the Philistines and he made this comment while hiding in that cave, 'Oh, I wish I had a drink of water from the well at Bethlehem.' That was David's hometown. Three of David's men broke through the lines, went down and drew water for the king to drink from the well at Bethlehem, brought it back in a gourd and gave it to him. David told the Lord that because these men had risked their very lives for him, he would not drink the water. Instead, he poured it out as a libation to God."

I said, "Yeah, I've read the story."

They said, "Pastor, we rented a car this morning around 5:30 and drove three hundred and twenty miles to your home. We asked your mother for a drink of water for our pastor."

They had a light lunch and drove those three hundred plus miles back and sat at my house waiting for me.

They said, as they handed me a quart fruit jar, "Pastor, we've brought you a drink of water from the well at your 'Bethlehem." I'm telling you, we had a Holy Ghost spell right there in my front yard. Trust your friends when you are walking through the fire.

I said, "You guys better go on home."

"Well, we have one more thing, Preacher."

[&]quot;Well, what is it?"

"You've told us that after God called you to preach at seventeen, there was a huge rock where you'd go and lie down to watch the Tennessee River running through the valley."

"Yeah," I said, "a beautiful place in the Pisgah Gorge."

"We asked your daddy to take us to it and he took us as close as he thought he could. We took along a hammer and broke off two pieces of that rock and brought them back to you." (If you want to see them sometime, come to my house. I have them placed right next to my bedroom window. Every now and then I go out and put one foot on one and one foot on the other.)

And here is what those three men said to me, "Pastor, the same God who called you on these rocks will sustain you if you will stay with the one who is the rock of your soul."

We had another spell. Lord, have mercy! When you are going through the fire, trust your friends.

"Y'all better go home," I said. It was getting on toward 10:00.

"We have one more thing. Pastor, you know that rhododendron that grows up there? Well, we brought you some fresh flowers from home." You remember those big old two-pound Maxwell House coffee cans? They had placed gravel in the bottom of a can, filled it with water and stuck a rhododendron in it.

I said, "Boys, it's a \$50 fine to cut these flowers at the Pisgah Gorge."

"We saw the signs. But we've been sitting under the preaching of a pastor for five years who has taught us that it is easier to get forgiveness than it is to get permission, so we did it anyway."

Well, those flowers faded away but I took a picture of them and I have that picture of those flowers on my credenza at home.

Those men said to me, "Pastor, if you will trust God, He will be the fresh flower of your soul every day."

When you are going through the fire trust your friends.

Then they looked at me and said, "Pastor, we've been talking about this. We want you to know something. We want you to know we will die for you." "Now wait," I said. "No. We have chosen our words carefully. We will lay down our lives for you. We believe you to be God's man and we're here until the end. If you will remain biblically pure and only sleep with your wife, we will lay down our lives for you." One of them told me if I ever became a liberal, or slept with someone else's wife, he would kill me.

When you are going through the fire, trust your friends. When you are going through the fire, be a friend. When you see others going through the fire, go get them a drink of water from the well at their Bethlehem.

Since that night, I have preached a sermon built around that illustration hundreds of times. I have seen scores of preachers encouraged. I have had stories come to me of deacons having foot washings for pastors. Stories have come back through Liz's ministry to wives that have been encouraged. Is it anything of mine? No. It's nothing of mine. It is about three men who ministered to me and helped me survive the heat.

You ask, "Now Pastor, who are those guys?" Well in 2 Samuel 23 David's friends are unnamed. My friends and I have a bond. We will never tell who they are until they die. (I am taking that as God's promise that I will outlive all of them. So I am not going to worry about eternity until at least two of them die.) The names

of the three mighty men of David are not known in scripture, nor have we ever told anyone the names of the three men who ministered to me. The names have been erased to protect the blessed. Will you be a friend to someone going through the fire? You will survive if you learn to rely on the people God sends you.

There is the sovereignty of the heat

Finally, I want to show you what I call the sovereignty of the heat. Why do we go through suffering? You ask, "Preacher, why did you go through those things?" I want to show you why. Look at this in 1 Peter 4:13:

"But to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation."

That is the reason you suffer—for the revelation of His glory. When you suffer and persevere, He reveals His glory in you and through you so that you may rejoice with delight. Then you can say, "Glory to God! Glory to God in the highest!"

Now the only way for that to happen is for you to learn to keep going on. Hopefully and cheerfully persevere while staying under the load. Perseverance is patiently enduring. We find the actual background of this word in "metamorphosis."

There is the Cecropia moth that becomes a butterfly with a wingspan of six inches or more. When the moth gets ready to die she finds a leaf and lays an egg. In the right time of year that egg then produces a fuzzy caterpillar that works its way through life eating leaves. At the time of its appointed death it will lie upon a leaf. Out of one end it begins to spew silk to make a cocoon until

it wraps itself up very tightly. Over a certain period it begins its metamorphosis.

Through God's divine design, that old ugly worm becomes a beautiful butterfly. It starts kicking out, gets its head out, then a wing comes out. As it begins immerging from its cocoon, it is wet. Now watch what could happen. Someone could come by and say, "Oh, look at that thing. I want to help it." And so he reaches over and helps the butterfly out of the suffering that nature intended to use for its glory. Sadly, he has ruined the butterfly's life. For it is in the struggle for freedom that the blood is forced into the farthest extremities causing the wings to dry and lighten, enabling them to flutter and finally allowing the butterfly to fly.

Let me tell you, you will never have a soaring faith until you persevere through your suffering. Without suffering you will never fly. You can go to every great preacher, every missionary, or every great Christian you know, and if they will be honest with you, they will tell you they have had to walk through the fire. It is only in the fire that they have been changed so they can wing to greater heights. For some of them it is a child that has gone astray. For some, it is a physical malady. For some, it is a struggle that they have been through in the life of the church.

In the early 1900's James Chalmers, who was a missionary from the London Missionary Society, returned home to give a report about his work in New Guinea. At the conclusion of his report he said, "I am your missionary and I am going back to New Guinea. If it costs me my life with the savages, I will go." James Chalmers went back and indeed the natives killed him. However during World War II, when soldiers came to the shores of this large island in the East Indies, there were no barbarous tribes. The

gospel had changed the entire island. It was only in Chalmer's suffering that the glory of God was revealed. And it was only in his perseverance that the glory of God did the work. Moses stayed in the race. For forty years he was in the wilderness, but he stayed in the race. Joseph was sold into slavery and later, based on a false accusation, was imprisoned by Potiphar for over two years, yet he stayed in the race. Although Job lost his entire family, fortune, and health, he stayed in the race. Most importantly, Jesus went to the cross and on that day on a hill far away—it became midnight at noonday—AND JESUS STAYED IN THE RACE!

My question for you today is will you stay in the race? Will you stay? Will you add to your self-control perseverance? As you allow God's glory to come through your sufferings, He will transport you to the loftiest heights of His presence where you can experience a life full of joy unspeakable and bursting with His splendor and majesty no matter the cost.

I shared my story from my message based on 2 Samuel 23 with a group of men from a little association of country churches. I told them, "You need to go and love your preacher." Nothing much happened that night. After a time, my wife went and taught a women's conference. Afterwards, a very young preacher's wife came up to Liz with tears rolling down her face. She asked, "Is your husband the one who tells that water story?" Liz said, "Indeed, he is." The young lady said, "Let me tell you what God did."

"We live in a little house down a dirt road where nobody ever goes. We have about fifty in Sunday school and nobody ever comes out our way. My husband and I were facing a real period of discouragement. The night after your husband shared that message, I looked up and as far as I could see down that dirt road

there were the headlights of cars coming our way. I don't know how many came but those cars all stopped at our house. Men started getting out and we thought, Uh oh, we're dead and gone. They've fired us. They had a secret meeting at the church and we are gone.

They asked to come in, while some went to the backyard, grabbed a washtub and filled it up with warm water. Then all those men knelt down, took off my husband's shoes and socks, and washed his feet. They said, 'Pastor, we're here to be bondservants with you and walk through any flames that may come." This dear lady said to my wife, "Please tell your husband to tell whoever those unnamed guys are that God did it again."

Friend, if you will persevere, heaven will record what God achieves through you. But if you shrink back, your wings may be clipped and you may never soar to the summits of God's grace. If you are reviled for Christ, you are blessed.

So when the heat comes, shout, "Turn it up, Lord! Halle-lujah! I'm ready to learn and learn in a hurry!" However, we all want out of the heat, don't we? We want the lush beauty without the fiery scars. Even so, God's beauty shines forth the brightest through the scars of battle left only after we have walked all the way through the heat. Persevere and God will reveal His glory through you.

You may be a wife about to give up on your marriage. You want to quit. Let me encourage you to stay by the stuff and watch what God is going to do. You may be a person who is ready to quit church altogether. You have already thought that you have gone your last time. You used to sing in the choir. But

you gave that up and then started sitting about midway in the congregation. Slowly you moved to the back pew and now you come to church only rarely. You are about to quit on God. Don't you guit on God. God has not guit on you!

He is the faithful Creator who can be trusted no matter the cost to always do what is right. Some of you are ready to give up your teaching. You are thinking, I've taught a class for the last time. I'm going to give up. I'm going to quit. Those people in my class don't appreciate me. Let me tell you, being appreciated by those who listen is not a prerequisite for teaching. You see, you have to stay, stay and stay! Those who are faithful to the end will be rewarded.

Can Christ count on you to walk in endurance? God wants to use you, as together we continue in the afflictions of the Lord Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER SIX
THE CALLING OF SUBMISSION

[6]

Recently I was reminded of a young husband who came to church, was saved, and God changed his life. He decided he was going to be an overcomer. When he returned home, he was going to help his wife by doing all the laundry for one weekend. As he started washing the clothes, he held up a shirt and hollered out to his wife, "What kind of water do you use? Hot or cold?" She called back, "Well, it's according to what it says on it." He replied, "University of Alabama. Now what do I do with it?" Well, some of us just have to work harder at being overcomers than others, don't we?

In 2 Peter 1:5-7 Peter talks about being an overcomer because of great trials that had come. He said if we are going to prosper in our Christian journey, we must begin with FAITH, and then add to our faith

MORAL EXCELLENCE. To our moral excellence add

KNOWLEDGE, to our knowledge add

SELF-CONTROL, and to our self-control add

PERSEVERANCE. Then to our perseverance we add

GODLINESS. Along with these we must add

BROTHERLY KINDNESS, and finally

LOVE.

Out of those eight words, like eight notes in an octave, we can come together to sing the songs of Zion. God's orchestration is complete when we begin with faith and include all of these attributes in our lives. The sixth attribute is godliness. Add to your perseverance, godliness. To learn about godliness we go to 1 Timothy 4:7-16.

"But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. [I'm not the brightest person in the world but I am not going to write or speak on that line just yet.] On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness; for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. It is a trustworthy statement deserving full accep tance. For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers. Prescribe and teach these things. Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe. Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to

exhortation and teaching. Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed upon you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery. Take pains with these things; be absorbed in them, so that your progress may be evident to all. Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things; for as you do this you will insure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you."

Now the word "godliness" is actually two words put together. Godliness in the Greek New Testament is the word eusebeia. The front end of it, eu, means good, and sebeia on the backside means worship or devotion. Good worship. It is like our word "eulogy". Eu on the front of the word means good; logos on the back means word. When someone dies, you give a eulogy, and say a good word about the person (if there is a good word to say). For us, godliness means good worship. It is devotion. It is submission. This godliness is found only in our bowing before the Lord God. Jesus said it this way in Matthew 22:37-38: "... You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and foremost commandment."

Decades ago a great military leader, the Duke of Wellington, went to a small rural church in England. The church members were thrilled that the Duke of Wellington had come. They invited him to sit right on the very front pew. It was their custom when taking the Lord's Supper for worshipers to come and kneel at the altar. From the communion table the clergy would offer the wafer and the wine to each partaker. As the Duke came to kneel, an old beggar came and knelt alongside of him. A gentleman from the church came forward to rebuke the old man and said, "Sir, please move. Do you know who this is?" But the Duke put out his hand

and said, "Sir, stay right where you are. There are no dukes at God's altar."

When we come before the Lord God, we come on level ground. We come not thinking that we are someone special. We come with the understanding that we are nothing without Him. That is where godliness is birthed. We bow before the Master because godliness demands submission. You will never know worship until you answer the call of submission. You must bow before the Lord with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.

I want us to look at what it means to answer the call of submission which yields godliness in your life and mine. Now I believe these eight attributes named by Peter are in a particular order. They are placed there by the breath of God and by the inerrant Word of God. Godliness follows perseverance. Submission follows suffering. And it is often out of suffering that we are bent. We bow and come to the place where godliness can be developed within us. How do we get it?

The foundation of godliness combines three ideas

First of all, I want you to see with me what I am calling the foundation of godliness. Now to get to the foundation, you just have to understand the backside, the underside, and the bottom of this word eusebeia. I've been talking to you about godliness. Where does it come from? Well there are three ideas that are all wrapped up in this word godliness. Let me give you these three words.

Godliness is found in humility

1 Peter 5:6 says, 'Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time." The word "humility" in Latin comes from the word humilis. Out of that word we find the root word humus. Humus is that organic matter in dirt. It is the humus or organic matter that decays when an animal dies, or you die, and they put you in the ground. That organic matter decomposes and goes back to the earth. That which is alive feeds off of that which has died. Literally, the death of plants and animals yields life to that thing which is growing.

Where do we find life in the church? It is not in our self-exaltation. It is in our self-death and our humbleness. It is in our dying, ceasing and degrading of who we are. I must decrease and He must increase. You see, the life of godliness is found in humility. The day we as church begin to think we are something on our own is the day we start to sink. The day we get too big to bow at the altar, we are dead in the water. The day any of us gets too important to do any job, we have missed humility. We will never have the foundation for godliness.

I have watched deacon ordination ruin too many men. You see them serving so you ordain them. Now they think they have a position or title. They have become somebody. Friend, there is nobody lower in the church than a deacon, except the pastor. (When we have a business session, I don't even get to vote, unless it is tied, and then I don't want to.)

You see it is the humus; it is the humilis, it is the humility, it is the brokenness, it is the "bendability" of your life. Yet some people will say, "I'm just too scared of what people will think if I walk down the aisle of the church and kneel and give my heart

and life to Christ." Well, if you are more concerned about what people will think than what God thinks, you will never be a godly man or woman. Godliness comes out of humility and it is there that the nourishment comes to everything else that is trying to live.

Godliness is found in the fear of God

The second thought found in this word eusebeia is the "fear of God". Matthew 10:28 says it this way: "And do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." Don't just have fear of those who can destroy your body. Your greatest fear needs to lie with the One who can deal with you, not only physically, but in the spiritual realm as well. Understand that God is the One you need to fear.

I am not referring here to the same kind of fear we have when we spot a state trooper. Have you ever noticed it doesn't matter how fast you're going? When you see a trooper's flashing light, you tap your brakes. The other day I hit my brakes while I was sitting still at a stop sign. But I'm not talking about that kind of fear. Nor am I talking about the fear that you have of someone who has been abusive to you, either verbally or physically. Friend, this word fear is even more than reverential awe. I am here to tell you there is some trepidation when it comes to reverencing God. When you walk into the presence of Holy God, there is an anxiety. Yet it is full of comfort. Nevertheless, a fear factor warns, "He is in charge and I am not. Therefore, I fear Him and will do as He says to do."

Godliness includes honoring and praising God

Godliness is birthed in the foundation of humility. The third part of this word formulates into "worship". Add to your perseverance, eusebeia, "good worship". It is praise unto the Father. Godliness comes when you give Him glory and when you give Him honor.

Christians worship in many different ways. We put tags on it now. Is it traditional? Is it contemporary? Oh, my soul! Somebody once asked me about it. "Pastor, do you have traditional or contemporary worship?" I said, "No." He asked, "What kind do you have?" I mustered up all of the self-sufficiency and arrogance I could muster (and I can muster some) and said, "We have authentic worship." He looked at me like, "What is that?" I said, "I don't know, but it is as good as the words you are using."

Worship is exalting God as we bow in submission. Sometimes you do it with a praise chorus born out of victory. Sometimes you do it with a hymn born out of faith. I do not know how you do it every time. All I know is this: when Jesus is high and lifted up, and I bow before Him, He touches me and then I know I have worshipped.

I do that sometimes at home. I do it every Saturday night. I go through every Sunday service the day before. I take the order of worship and I sing every song. I pray every prayer. I baptize every person. I preach every sermon note and I just have church at my desk. I can visualize our members gathered for worship. I have worship when no one else is there. I am just one-on-one with God. He is lifted up. I am bowed down. You, too, should have a time like this in your life.

We also look forward to coming together corporately for worship. You see, there is a time for worship when together we lift high the Lord. You should be awake and ready to go when you come into the place of worship. The foundation of godliness is humility, fear of God, and worship. Our strength is found through a foundation based on godliness.

In the late 1800's the Eiffel Tower was built. It is an architectural work of art, 984 feet high. We remember the beautiful images of this magnificent structure captured during the worldwide millennium celebration. It was a gorgeous sight with all the fireworks displayed around it. (That was also the night we all thought the world's supply of computers was going down. You remember Y2K? Boy, they took us to the cleaners, didn't they? We were sold all those books and nothing happened.)

On that historic night, January 1, 2000, they lit up the Eiffel Tower in Paris. But underneath the Eiffel Tower, the real master-piece is located. You see, underneath this great 984-foot high structure there are four massive masonry blocks. Two of the masonry blocks, the western foot and the northern foot, are closest to the Seine River where the ground is softer. In each one of those feet, an 800-ton hydraulic jack is built into the base of the structure. It can move when the earth moves which enables the tower to stay level. Some people think the Eiffel Tower just sits there on the ground. It does not. It sits on a firm, solid foundation.

If you are going to be a godly individual, your life must sit and rest on humility. It must rest on the fear of God, and on the worship of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. You must worship with all your heart, all your soul, and with all your mind. No one else can see what the true foundation of your life is based upon.

Friend, you know today what is in your heart. You know this very hour whether your foundation is firm or whether you are playing a game. You know if you are displaying a façade, a false appearance for others to see while actually concealing your true self.

The formation of godliness rests on its foundation

After placing your life on the foundation of godliness, there must be what I call the formation. The foundation is laid on humility, fear of God and worship. How do we form a tower of godliness? There are three things we must do. We need to work out look up and bear down.

Spend time in the "gym" working out

Now notice what Paul is saying to young Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:7, "... have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. [Earlier in this passage, Paul compels Timothy to stay with the Word of God. Don't believe something is true just because someone says it is truth, but rather stay with the Scriptures.] On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness." Now this word discipline is a great word. It comes from the word gumnazo. We get our word "gymnasium" right out of this word. We work out. If you do not begin to work your faith muscles, you will never run for the prize. It takes time in the gym in order to go for the gold. That is exactly what Paul is speaking of in this text when he says to discipline yourself. Discipline for the purpose of godliness. Work out!

The believer's workout includes three disciplines

If you belong to the body of Christ, you will find yourself already in the "gym" working out with other believers. As a matter of fact, if most of you do not work out with other people, you won't work out at all. You sleep in. You say, "Oh, Preacher, I'm disciplined." Sure, but for how long? Most of us won't last long if we don't have somebody to keep us accountable. That is why the church is so very important. How are we going to form godliness? We have to work out to develop godliness. How do we work out? Well, there are three key disciplines I want you to see. They are found in 1Timothy 4:13-16.

Be attentive to God's Word

First of all there is discipline in the area of scripture reading. I hope you believe in this book, the Bible. Don't just wear it out reading or looking at it, but also believe it. Now notice what Paul said in verse 13: "Until I come, give attention [Here's the discipline—give attention to three things] to the public reading of scripture, to exhortation, and teaching." A godly man or woman believes everything written in the Bible. This is our guidebook. This is our God's word to us and we stand upon it!

Now let me just chase a rabbit here for a few moments. Since September 11, 2001 we are doing better as Americans in a very important area. Prior to that day, during the singing of the national anthem, kids were running around and people were talking and carrying on. Frankly, I was tired of that happening.

While attending a football game in Alabama at the age of 12, an incident happened that I will never forget. I was standing up on the next to the top row of the bleachers with a buddy of mine. During the performance of the national anthem we were giggling

and punching each other.

All of a sudden something hit me in the back of the head. I turned around to see this guy who was a retired Marine who knew my Daddy. He had taken his big old ring, turned it over, and hit me in the back of the head with it. Clunk! Ouch! In no uncertain words he said, "Boy, when they play that song and they raise that flag, you stand still, you sing, and you listen!" Since that day I have not moved a muscle during the singing of our national anthem. Buddy, when our flag comes in, I put my hand over my heart and I have one eye looking over my left shoulder for that Marine. God knows we need to show respect and attention to our national symbol.

Have you noticed that sometimes in church when we read the Word of God, people will fidget? Let me emphatically state, when the preacher opens the Book, you should listen! I mean we always should come to attention when "Thus saith the Lord" is read. If you are not going to pay attention any other time, at least pay attention at the public reading of Holy Scripture. Discipline yourself to hear the Word of God.

Receive the preaching of God's Word

Not only should we be disciplined by the reading of the Word, but also through exhortation of the Word. Exhortation is my spiritual gift and this is why I am so passionate about this word. That word "exhortation" literally means to call alongside. It is the paraklesis. It is the para, alongside of, and the klesis or the call. When you hear the Word of God, it will call you to stand alongside our Lord. That is why you need to be in church on Sundays and whenever else the church gathers for worship and Bible

study. You need to be where the Word of God is expounded. It will take discipline, but I am here to tell you, it will make you godly.

Attend small group Bible study regularly

Through teaching and instruction we learn the doctrines of scripture. We find that our English word "didactic" can be applied here. You will gain wisdom through the teaching and learning that occurs during a Bible study class. I know some people do not like small groups. I can understand that. Some people are frightened that they may be called upon to read aloud. Perhaps some of you have had the unfortunate experience of being embarrassed or somehow intimidated in a small group setting. And maybe you are still frightened or fearful. I simply want to encourage you to try a small group again, because in a small group you will hear doctrine. It is there that you will be loved. It is there that you will use your spiritual gifts. So I encourage you to get into a small group so that the teaching, the doctrine, the instruction of the Word of God can infiltrate your life. Unless you discipline yourself in this area, you will never form a tower of godliness.

Develop and practice your spiritual gift

A second key discipline Paul says is the workout of your spiritual gift. Notice in 1 Timothy 4:14, "Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed upon you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery." Paul is instructing Timothy to recognize that if someone is saved, he has at least one spiritual gift. For Paul, giving it to Timothy, it came subjectively. When Timothy was saved, the Spirit of God came to live in him, and subjectively he understood his spiritual

gift.

The awareness of his spiritual gift was not only subjective, but was also objective because a prophetic word was spoken. There will be an objective prophetic word to you. Someone will say to you, "I believe you have the gift of this or you have the gift of that." That person will see the hand of God upon and within you. Before I understood the call to preach, I had people say to me, "Have you ever thought about preaching?" And I would say, "Absolutely not. Not going to. Don't want to." Yet people continued to say, "Maybe that is where you calling will be." You see, there was that objective word from others coming to me.

Not only was it subjective and objective, but there was also a corporate word. There was the laying on of hands of the presbytery. This is one reason why joining the church is so important. The body life of the church is essential. Some of you attend again and again and never submit yourselves to the local church by membership. You need to walk the church aisle and surrender yourself. If it calls for baptism, be baptized. If it calls for repentance, repent. Whatever it is, subject yourself to membership at the local church.

People go everywhere and join up. For instance, you don't just visit your local bank one day and say to the bank employee, "Well, I'm just going to come in and out. I don't want to put any money in. I just want to get the free apples or whatever you are giving away." No, you have to have an account. Some people need to open a church account. You ask, "Why do I need to open an account?" Because the corporate influence of the local church brings to your life accountability. There is a stirring of your spiritual gifts that you will encounter no other place. It is important

to join the church. I called a lady recently to say we were glad to have her visit our church. She said to me,

"Oh Preacher, I'm one that has been visiting for five years."
"Five years? You have four to go before you set the record."
We laughed a little and she confessed, "I know I need to join the church." So being the kind, compassionate person that I am, I said, "Well, why don't you? Don't tell me you need to. Just do it."
You see, the bodylife of the church makes a difference. You do not need to be a lone ranger sitting on the creek bank. When you do that, your offering goes for bait. You don't need to spend God's money on bait. You need to be a part of the local church. It is a discipline that will yield godliness in your life.

Develop and exercise self-control

Added to the discipline of scripture and the discipline of spiritual gifts in your life, is the third key, the discipline of self-control. 1 Timothy 4:16 says:

Pay close attention to yourself [That is some folk's favorite part of this verse. I pay close attention to myself.] and to your teaching; persevere in these things; for as you do this you will insure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you. There is self-control. Watch. Pay attention. Evaluate. Look at your life. Am I the same person that I have always been? If you are, then say, "God, what is it that I am not doing now that would help me to move toward more self-control. Teach me to increase and apply this discipline to my life more in days to come."

Look up and fix your hope on God

So it is time for some of us to join the gym today and work out at our local church. Next we must learn to look up. Notice what the Word of God says in 1 Timothy 4:10. Paul is telling Timothy: "For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers."

Why should you fix your hope on God? Well, Paul points out two reasons. Foremost, Christ is the Savior of all men. What does that mean? There are people today who teach that through universalism everyone is going to heaven. Regardless of whether one believes or not, the universalist says he is going to make it to heaven. This is totally false doctrine. There is nothing true about it according to the Word of God. Jesus said there is a "narrow way" and few are going to find it. There is also a "broad way" that sadly many more are going to find. Those who travel the broad way are going to hell. Those who travel the narrow way of Christ are the only ones going to heaven. Jesus never taught a "universal" salvation.

Jesus is the Savior of all men. But what does that mean? Well there is a common grace. You see, God loves every man. However, there are those who will teach you today that Jesus did not die for the sin of all mankind. There is a theological argument in place today concerning this. There are those coming from the reformed theology camp that teach this view. They say Christ only died for the people who are going to be saved. This text says He is the Savior of all men who offers a common grace. God loves every man, whether each person is going to believe or not believe. It means that Jesus came with everybody in mind.

As Jesus walked here on earth preaching the gospel, He continually pleaded with all the people, "If you believe, come." There was a common, wide and broad spreading of the seed and sharing of the grace of God. Fix your hope on Him because

of common grace and fix your hope on Him because of saving grace. Christ is the Savior of all men. The believer must place his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and trust Him. Therefore, not only common grace but also saving grace has come into our lives.

Fix your eyes on God

Do you have your eyes fixed on Him? Friend, you can not trust anything else to get you to heaven except Jesus and Jesus alone. You have to get your eyes focused on Him. Many of you have your focal point on something else. Some of you have your eyes set on elephants, gators and tigers – of the sports team nature. Some of you have your gaze locked on checking accounts, stocks and bonds. Others of you have your eyes steadily directed on your families, your kids, or grandkids. None of these things are wicked, dear friend, unless they take your gaze off the cross. Fix your eyes on Jesus.

Have you ever noticed that when you get into trouble with any of the things that I just named you look upward? Some of you, while watching your favorite team playing, will pray for their guys to win. Not long ago some of you were praying for a basketball game between Alabama and Florida – like God was even watching or that He cared. Then you started thinking that maybe your team could gain the winning edge with God by counting up who had the most Christians on their team. I'm thinking, God, what's going on? Coach Donovan is a Christian. Coach Godfrey is a Christian. They're both believers. I've heard their testimonies. Then somebody says, "Oh yeah, but the radio announcer for Florida is saved and that old boy from Alabama is not a believer."

You see, when the thing that is in your eyes gets into trou-

ble, you look to God. What you need to do is put your eyes on Him and fix your gaze on Him. Be godly and leave all that other stuff to Him. Enjoy it, have fun, kid with each other, have a ball, live your life with your family. Make all you can, give all you have, but do it with God's summons to fix your gaze on Him. Look up!

Bear down when the pain comes

Work out, look up, and then bear down. Paul gets across to us in 1 Timothy 4:15 to, 'Take pains with these things; be absorbed in them, so that your progress may be evident to all."

Godliness will cost us. Have you seen the ad on television for those battery-powered deals that make your abs hard? What they tell you is if you'll buy this equipment and wrap it around your middle and turn it on, that your two-liter will become a six-pack. You believe that? That is the most phenomenal thing. Hear me. Your abs aren't going to get hard without pain. That's why I have soft abs. I haven't taken any pain. No sit ups. No running. No work out. Friend, if you are going to be godly, you are going to have to bear down. You will have to absorb some things that will hurt. You will have to give up some things. There is no pill to swallow. There is no easy way. There is not a twelve-step plan on trusting God that you can sign up for. You must bear down with Him. No pain, no gain. That is what they tell you in the weight room. That is what I am telling you must happen in God's "gymnasium".

Godliness yields confidence

"Well, Preacher, I want to be godly, but what will it do for me?" Look at 1 Timothy 4:12 and see two things. If you are a teenager, you need to know this verse. Here is what Paul said to Timothy: "Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe." The first thing that godliness will yield is confidence. It comes from practice. As a basketball player you can successfully complete the winning free throw at the end of a game because you have thrown a million during practices. You have been working out and bearing down, which brings forth confidence. When there is a technical foul called by the referee and the game is tied, the coach is looking for the player with the best free throw shooting percentage who he knows has the confidence to make the play. That player will walk over to the referee and say, "Man, give me that ball, I'm ready." If you don't have confidence, you're over there hiding behind the guy at the end of the bench thinking, Lord, let him choose somebody else. Confidence will cause you to say, "Give me that ball. I want to shoot it. I've done my practice work."

Teenagers, if you want to have confidence that you are living for God, bear down. Don't let anybody look down on your faith. Don't let an unbeliever look down on your faith. When you go off to college, don't let a half infidel in a biology class look down on your faith. The first thing godliness gives you when you are walking with God is confidence. You can say, "I am with Him; He is with me, and we will go together." Stand with God. Stand up, stand out, speak up and speak out for Christ. There is a confidence in godliness.

Godliness yields character

Not only does godliness yield confidence but it also yields character. In 1 Timothy 4:12 Paul is showing us that character will produce godliness in five areas; in your speech—what you say;

in your conduct—what you do; in your love—what you are passionate about; in your faith—what you believe; and finally, in your purity—how you live.

In our church, every time someone joins, we give them a workout towel. It is the size of a normal hand towel, but it has a special design and purpose. On the towel is printed the word, "Bondservant". Why do we give a towel? The example Jesus shows us in John's gospel, chapter 13, illustrates what we should do to minister to our fellow believers. Jesus took off his outer garment, laid it aside, took a towel, bent down and washed the disciples' feet.

Not long ago, I had lunch with a Freewill Baptist.

I asked him, "What's the difference in a Southern Baptist and a Freewill Baptist?" He said, "Well, some Freewill Baptists don't believe in the eternal security of the believer. But I do." "So do we."

Then he said, "The only other difference in a Southern Baptist and a Freewill Baptist is that we have three ordinances instead of two."

"You do?"

"Yes sir. We do baptism by immersion. We have the Lord's Supper."

"Yes, and the third is?" (I knew what was coming.)

"We practice washing feet."

"How do you do that?" I asked.

"At the end of a service we send all the men into one room and all the ladies into another room. They all have a basin."

I asked, "Do they take their own shoes off?"

"Most of the time. They take their shoes off and we wash each other's feet. We tell each other we love them and then we all congregate back together and sing a hymn and then go out." So I had a wild idea. When they least expect it (we're not going to institute an ordinance), our church is going to have a foot washing service. I'm here to tell you this: if we can play softball together, we can wash feet. (When I told our church this, it became awfully quiet.) Do you know how humble you must become to wash another's feet? Do you know how low you must go? Sure, you can wash feet and be hardhearted. You can get baptized and be hardhearted. Only you and God really know what is in your heart. But godliness must begin in your heart. It is the call to the discipline of submission.

You must diligently and daily work out in God's gym. Endure the pain of exercising your faith and suppressing your ungodly desires. Strengthen your practice of worship and the disciplines of godliness. Develop the self-control and willingness of the bondservant. Let the call of God bring you to submission.

CHAPTER SEVEN THE CALLING OF SHARING

[7]

We have reached the seventh note of the octave that we have been comparing to the eight callings of God. We are getting closer to composing and rejoicing in full melodies. Each chapter of this book is concerned with one of these callings found in 2 Peter 1:5-7 which tells us to begin with FAITH and to our faith add

MORAL EXCELLENCE. To our moral excellence add

KNOWLEDGE and to knowledge add

SELF-CONTROL. To our self-control we add

PERSEVERANCE and to that we add

GODLINESS. To godliness add

BROTHERLY KINDNESS and finally we add

LOVE.

In Hebrews 13:1-6 we will be looking at what Peter called brotherly kindness and what I have referred to as the calling of sharing in our lives. After accepting the calling of godliness, we must learn to apply brotherly kindness. It is our word "philadelphia." The front half of "philadelphia" is that word philos and we get our "brotherly" kind of love from that. It is a "friend-like" love. Adelphos, which means "brother" forms the last half of this word. So it is a "brotherly friendship" or a "brotherly kindness" causing us to love as a brother or sister. We have influencers and friends in our lives that have shown us a brotherly kind of love. That is exactly what we are talking about. In Hebrews 13:1-6, let's look at this from the Word of God:

"Let love of the brethren continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, and those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body. Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge. Let your character be free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you," so that we confidently say, "The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What shall man do to me?"

Let brotherly kindness go on and on.

Let love for the brethren, brotherly kindness, philadelphia, continue on. Let the love of the brethren go on forever and ever until Jesus comes.

During the cold war there was a wall in Germany that separated East Berlin from West Berlin. In 1987, while visiting West Berlin, President Ronald Reagan delivered that memorable request at the Brandenburg Gate at the Berlin Wall; he implored the General Secretary of the Soviet Union, "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!" While the wall remained until it was breached in 1989, the story is told that one Christmas the people on the East German side filled sacks with trash. They tied them with bows and threw them over the wall saying, "Merry Christmas." Those who found the sacks in West Berlin took them and filled the sacks with gifts, toys, fruit, and other nice items. They tied a ribbon on the sacks and threw them back over the wall with a note attached, "Let each give what each has."

Dear friend, if you are a believer in Christ today, give what you have—Jesus in you. You do not give wrong for wrong. You do not give offense for offense. You give philadelphia—brotherly kindness, the love of Jesus within you. We need to give it. Why? Because the world takes much of its notion of God from those of us who say we belong to God's family. This world will read us more than they will ever read the Book. Your neighbors are reading you. Your co-workers are reading you. Your family members are reading you.

Note three acts of brotherly kindness

I want you to understand that brotherly kindness does at least three things. First, it reveals to the world our identity with Christ. For John 13:35 says, "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another". Brotherly kindness also reveals our true identity not only to others, but also to ourselves. For 1 John 3:14 says, "We know that we have passed

out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death."

Not only does this brotherly kindness reveal who we are to the world and reveal who we are to ourselves, but brotherly kindness also delights our Savior. Psalm 133:1 says, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!"

IT DELIGHTS OUR LORD WHEN WE LOVE ONE ANOTHER

Where do we show brotherly love and how do we manifest it? The writer of Hebrews said in chapter 13, verse 1: "Let love of the brethren continue." This is not agape love which is God's kind of love but rather a friendship kind of love. He tells us to let this philadelphia continue on and on. Where do we show brotherly kindness? Where do we share as a brother? Well, there are three areas where the writer of Hebrews outlines it for us in these first six verses of chapter 13.

We show brotherly kindness in ministry to strangers

First of all, the thing we must understand is our role of sharing in ministry. The first place you show your brotherly kindness is through ministry. Notice verse 2. It says, "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, [to people you do not even know] for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it." That word hospitality has the same root as philadelphia. Philos is the root word of "friendship". Do not neglect to show this friendship or hospitality to people you do not even know. This is the ministry to unfamiliar persons. Through this ministry some of us have unsuspectingly been in the company of angels.

That is exactly what happened to Abraham in Genesis 18.

When three strangers came by, Abraham ministered to them. After spending a little time with them, he suddenly understood that they were angels of God. That is exactly what happened to Gideon in Judges 6. After a lengthy encounter, Gideon realized he was with the angel of the Lord. It happened to Manoah, the father of Samson, the Nazirite in Judges 13. Without knowing, both Manoah and his wife were visited by the angel of the Lord concerning the birth and upbringing of their son Samson. Only after the angel ascended from them in flames of fire did they comprehend who had been their visitor.

You ask, "Preacher, have you ever entertained angels?" Yes, one time that I know about. I had been in Gadsden, Alabama preaching. I was traveling with my former youth pastor, Eddie Walker. We were coming back home on I-65. I was sleeping and he was driving. Suddenly I felt the car slow down, then come to a stop on the side of the interstate. I looked at the clock. It was 12:02, just after midnight.

I said, "What are you doing?"

He replied, "We have to stop and help somebody."

"We're not stopping and helping anybody."

"Just trust me, Pastor." Now whenever a youth minister says to you, "Just trust me," and it is 12:02 AM, don't do it. I was still in a fog as he jumped out and ran back down the shoulder of the highway.

I looked in the rear view mirror and I could see a semi truck parked on the side of the road and Eddie running toward it. A young man by the name of Corky had gone to sleep while driving causing his car to leave the road and run up under that eighteen-wheeler. Suddenly there was fire flickering underneath his car. Within moments I also ran back to see if I could help. Those

that had stopped to help were trying to cut Corky out of the seatbelt that had him pinned in. We finally pulled him out through the window just before flames engulfed the car. The car and the truck were completely destroyed.

Seemingly out of nowhere a man was on the scene applying first aid to Corky. He had a backpack and was busy taking out bandages and putting them on his injuries. Things were still happening quickly as the paramedics arrived. Just a few short moments later I looked at Eddie and asked,

"Where is that doctor that walked up?"

He said, "I don't know. Let's find him."

We began to look high and low. We never saw that man again. Now, was he an angel? I don't know, but he was angelic to me. He was angelic to Corky, I guarantee it.

In fact, somebody took hold of that story and wrote it up in a magazine claiming that indeed it was an angelic appearance. (I thought they had it mixed up with my appearance when they were writing the story. However, they said, "Pastor, no, we have this correct. We didn't think you were an angel.")

I still don't know for sure what happened that night. We were thrust into that scene the moment Eddie stopped to help. I know that months later Eddie led Corky to faith in Christ. Several years ago some of our church members met him when he visited our church. As we met again, he hugged me and said, "Thank you for stopping and saving my life. More than that, thank you for sharing the gospel that saved my soul." You never know as you get involved in ministry when angels may come upon the scene.

We need to minister to those who are suffering

Not only is there a time for ministry to strangers, but there is also a time for ministry to the suffering. Notice what it says in Hebrews 13:3: "Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, and those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body." The writer is talking here about those that have been imprisoned for preaching the gospel. These are folks who have been mistreated. They have been placed in prison for the wrong reason. They are imprisoned simply for obeying God, and we must minister to them through their suffering. There are many others who are ill and hospitalized. We are to have a ministry to these. There are those who are broken from the experience of divorce. Through their suffering, we must be faithful to minister to them.

The greatest testimony we have as a church body shows forth when we are getting our hands dirty helping suffering people; when we hurt right along with the broken. They have been ill-treated so you go and visit with them and spend time with them. You are to be involved. You are to be interceding. For Jesus said in Matthew 25:40, "... Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me."

When you find those who are in prison and you visit them, it is as if you were visiting Christ, Himself. And if you do not visit, it is as if you do not care for Christ. We must set our goal to show brotherly kindness in areas such as these. You may say, "Well I don't have anything to give." Oh my! Everybody has something to give. You say, "I don't know how much time I have." Do you have a willing heart? If you do, then just say, "Here I am, Lord. Use me in one of these areas." Brotherly kindness will flourish as you

share in ministry.

What opportunities for ministry to both strangers and the suffering we have experienced in the wake of the terrible rash of hurricanes along the Gulf Coast in 2004-2005. From the Florida Keys to Galveston, Texas, there has been horrible loss and devastation. How the help has come! It has come from all over the country—electrical workers, roofers, law enforcement, firefighters, National Guard, FEMA—the list is endless. Most encouraging and heart-warming has been the outpouring of churches from countless denominations—lay workers doing all kinds of grubby, sweaty, back-breaking work. Meals, water, clothes, diapers, formula, medical supplies—you name it, they have been given. What sharing in the spirit of brotherly kindness!

Humbling as tree-cutting, meal- serving, muckraking, and clearing yard trash can be, the most humbling is having these services done for yourself, because you are the one in need. Finding out where each team of workers came from, what they usually did for a living if they were weekend volunteers, thanking them for coming have greatly increased our awareness of the calling (and receiving of) brotherly kindness.

We need to express brotherly kindness in marriage

There is a second area where brotherly kindness needs to continue. We need to understand our role of sharing not only in ministry but also in marriage. 'Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge." Hebrews 13:4

You say, "Preacher, what in the world does brotherly kind-

ness have to do with marriage?" Well, evidently you are not married if you are asking this question. You see, you must have a friend in your spouse. And there has to be a brotherly kindness toward your mate.

Now there are a couple of things I want to say about this. First we need to make marriage an honorable bond. How do we do this? We must always speak highly of marriage. Don't run marriage down. Place Christ as the head of your home. Bow before the Lord and dedicate your home to Him. You can pray something as simple as "Christ, we are going to serve you above all." Then simply fulfill your role. If you are the man at your house, be the head of your home. As the husband you will be required to give an account one day for being the spiritual leader of your household, and whether or not your home counted for God. Christ declared that you, the husband and father, are to be as His example of headship toward His bride, the church. Now you can resign and abdicate your leadership, but, dear friend, you will stand in judgment for it. Let love and respect regulate your home. Husbands, never say a bad word about your spouse.

The late Dr. E. V. Hill, former pastor of Mount Zion Baptist Church in Los Angeles, told this story right here from our pulpit. (This is not the way we do marital counseling, but it is the way he said he did it.) In their church there was a man who was beating his wife. They sent the elders to him a first time. But the husband did it again. They sent the elders a second time, again admonishing him to stop abusing his wife. Unfortunately, this husband continued, so Dr. Hill sent the elders a third time to see him. This time he instructed the elders to let the man know that if this abusive behavior continued, he would receive similar treatment. Dr. Hill said that following this third visit the man stopped abusing his

wife. What I am telling you is to show respect and love for your spouse.

Now I want you to know that while there are some men who beat their wives, I am here to tell you that there are some women who are as mean as a junkyard dog. As a wife you need to honor and revere your husband. Be that loving helper he wants and needs. Say to him, "Well done." I have left church and gone home to find my wife and lunch waiting on me and I can count on my right hand the number of times that she does not say, "That was a great message today." (Now I know she has lied a few times.) What I am telling you is that she is building me up by saying, "Well done."

I have a pastor friend who has lost his church and has almost lost his family. He said, "In the years I've been married, over fifteen of them, never has my wife said to me, 'I'm proud of you." Dear friend, you have to honor and respect your spouse. He or she should be your best friend in the world. We must continually display brotherly kindness in our marriages. Let the marriage have an honorable bond.

But second, he says not only to have an honorable bond, but also he says let marriage have a holy bed. For the Bible says here in Hebrews 13:4 to let the marriage bed be undefiled. The word "undefiled" means unsoiled, not to be dirty. We're told, "... fornicators and adulterers God will judge." The word "fornication" is from the word porneia. We get our word "pornography" out of it. A word of warning here: if you want to keep your marriage from breaking up because of adultery, there is a bunch of stuff you should not watch on television. Have you ever noticed that people on television just hop in and out of bed with anybody and every-

body? Nobody ever gets caught until an hour and thirty minutes later. Let me tell you, friend, your life is not an hour and a half soap opera or a made-for-television movie.

If you take a vow that you are going to live forever with one and then go to bed with another, you have asked for a bomb to explode in your life. Chapters 5 and 6 in Proverbs speak very directly with a stern warning against allowing lust to gain a foothold in our lives. Proverbs 7 talks emphatically about avoiding the harlot. Look in Proverbs 6:22-25:

When you walk about, they will guide you; [the writer is talking about the commandments of God] When you sleep, they will watch over you; [the commandments of God] and when you awake, they will talk to you. [Again, the commandments of God] For the commandment is a lamp, and the teaching is a light; and reproofs for discipline are the way of life, [why are they there?] To keep you from the evil woman, From the smooth tongue of the adulteress. Do not desire her beauty in your heart, nor let her catch you with her eyelids.

Recently I was downtown having lunch with one of my pastoral staff. After being seated we noticed there was a private business luncheon going on. I turned to my associate and said, "No wonder everybody is sleeping with everybody else's wife. Look around this room. There are women dressed like harlots on every side. They left some husband this morning, putting on their makeup on the way to work, getting all of that fixed so they would look right for the boss. When they left home, they had no eyelids to bat, or wonderful smell to savor. They have gone into the workplace and their bosses are being led like lambs to the slaughter. Whatever you do, don't let me out of your sight. You take care of me." Then I warned him, "You better not mess up, either. I'm not very big but I'm wiry. I'll beat your eyes out." It was amazing, just

amazing!

For on account of a harlot one is reduced to a loaf of bread, [Look at that. If you become a fornicator, an adulterer, you are likely to be reduced to poverty. After paying for sex all that may be left is a loaf of bread] And an adulteress hunts for the precious life. Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? [Well, the answer to that is a big NO.] Or can a man walk on hot coals, and his feet not be scorched? [NO.] So is the one who goes in to his neighbor's wife; Whoever touches her will not go unpunished. Men do not despise a thief if he steals to satisfy himself when he is hungry; but when he is found, he must repay sevenfold; he must give all the substance of his house. The one who commits adultery with a woman is lacking sense. [Hey, Stupid! Hear me! You are a fool if you think you can sleep with another man's wife when you are married, get caught, and it not wreck your home! Wake up!\] He who would destroy himself does it. Wounds and disgrace he will find, and his reproach will not be blotted out. Proverbs 6:26-33

Is adultery forgivable? Oh yes. But let me tell you, there is a reproach that comes from it that you will never totally overcome. There is a trust level that never re-enters the relationship. Dear man or woman, if you are flirting with somebody, I wish you would come to your senses. Wake up! Wake up! Repent! Go home and love your wife. You say, "She doesn't look like she did when we got married." Hey! Have you looked in the mirror lately? You're no prize yourself.

Recently, I received a great thrill as I saw this sweet couple coming into church. He was tall. She was tall and thin. I guarantee you, if you could run the clock back fifty years, you would see a

young gorgeous couple. I asked, "How are you this morning?" He looked at me and with a big, deep voice said, "Pastor, we are in our fifty-third year." The reason I picked on them is because they were holding hands coming into church. I said, "Listen to me. I want you to cut out holding hands here in church. That is a bad example for the teenagers." Oh, they laughed and I laughed. I thought, Thank God. There they are, fifty-three plus, still in love, still going. Friend, if there is a reproach that you cannot blot out when you become an adulterer, let me tell you, there is an honor that comes which no one can steal if you will stay faithful to the end. Be a trustworthy spouse until Jesus takes you or your mate home.

We demonstrate brotherly kindness with our money

Philadelphia—brotherly kindness—let it continue at home, in ministry, in marriage, and finally, in money. (When I preached this sermon, I told my congregation that I was about to take seven minutes of my sermon time to go over this point. I reminded them not to leave saying that all Pastor Traylor talks about is money. For the first twenty-two minutes of the sermon I had not mentioned it.)

You need to be a person who shows brotherly kindness in ministry, in your marriage, and also with your money. In verse 5 of Hebrews 13 we are told to let our character be free from the love of money. Don't be greedy. Be content with what you have. God has said He will never desert us nor forsake us.

There are a couple of things about money I want to point out. First of all, we must learn contentment. Wherever you are right now, you must learn contentment. Greed ruins many an individual. It ruined Achan in Joshua 7. It cost Israel a victory at Ai. It messed up Gehazi, Elisha's servant. After Naaman was healed of leprosy, Gehazi went back and tried to get some money from Naaman. Instead Gehazi was struck with leprosy himself. Ananias and Sapphira lied to the church and their greed caused them to lose their lives in the middle of a worship service. The pallbearers were waiting at the door, says the book of Acts. Thirty pieces of silver destroyed Judas. Because of greed he betrayed our Lord and because of great guilt he went out and hanged himself.

Learn to be content right where you are. That doesn't mean you do not have goals. It doesn't mean you do not have ambition. As my wife and I were talking about contentment, I was reminded of the time when she pointed out this very struggle I had had in my own life. In the third year at our first church right out of seminary I was becoming restless and unsure that I was in the place of ministry I wanted to be. She had looked at me and said, "If you don't get happy where we are, we are not going anywhere." Friend, get happy in today's circumstance and wait on the Lord for blessings tomorrow. God is not going to use you in a bigger and a better way until you find happiness in Him.

Over sixty years ago Dr. George W. Truett was finishing his pastorate at the First Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas. The church was about seven hundred members strong when he first arrived. Very quickly the church began to grow—and I mean grow it did there in the queenly city of Dallas. During those years Dr. Truett helped found Baylor Hospital in Dallas. He facilitated the recovery of Baylor University from bankruptcy. He started the Annuity Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. Truett was a man's man when it came to money management.

His friend John D. Rockefeller came to Dallas to visit. He heard Dr. Truett preach and when he went back to Ohio, he sent people from the church where he was a member and said, "Go to Dallas and get Truett. Whatever it costs, bring him to Ohio and we will pay him no matter the amount."

They visited with Dr. Truett, offered him the pastorate of their church with any salary amount—he could write his own ticket. (No church better do me that way. Wow! What a temptation!) Dr. Truett sat in a car with those men and said, "I will come to Ohio on one condition." The story I read said one gentleman was reaching for his wallet as he asked Dr. Truett, "What is it?" Dr. Truett replied, "If you will move my people from Dallas to Ohio, I will come and be your pastor." You see, he was content right where he was. He stayed there for almost fifty years, until he died and God took him home.

How is your level of contentment? You will never be a blessing to someone as a friend until you get content financially right where you are today. Not only must we learn contentment, but we must also learn confidence. Hebrews 13:5b-6 tells us that the Lord said,

...I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you, so that we confidently say, "The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What shall man do to me?"

Trust God with your tithe

How do you learn this confidence? Well I'm going to tell you one way. You will learn confidence in God when you trust Him with a tenth of your income. You say, "I don't believe a tithe is biblical." Let me tell you, tithing is mentioned in the Bible even before the law was given. A tithe has always been God's way. In Genesis 14 Abraham laid at the feet of Melchizedek (identified in this passage as a "priest of God Most High") one tenth of the spoils he had collected as a result of his victory over Chedorlaomer and his allies.

Let me tell you, it is right today. If you make a hundred dollars, you should give a tenth of it. If you make a million, you shouldgive a tenth of it. If you make a billion, you should give a tenth of it to God's work through the local church. That is where you should start. But you will never become a tither until you believe God will take care of your needs. You must learn to have confidence in Jehovah Jireh, our great provider God.

I want to be honest with you about money here for just a minute. I cannot believe that I get to pastor a great church and they pay me what I get paid. It is unbelievable. One day as we were preparing to go on a little vacation with Dad and Mother, I called her. We began talking about life's blessings. I said, "Momma, I'm looking forward to getting to spend a little time with you. You know we are going to be staying at a pretty nice hotel. Someone else is paying for me to stay there. It is a little pricey, so you may want to stay somewhere else. She replied, "Well, we will just stay there, too. We're spending your inheritance so it won't bother us at all."

It is unbelievable what God can do if you will trust Him. It is hard to believe that I have been so blessed by God in every area of my life. It is beyond me. I went to a little old school where not even one foreign language was taught. I attended a small community junior college and then off to Samford University (where

I barely made it through). Now I serve as the pastor of Olive Baptist Church. I thought, there is only one way I can explain it. I serve a gigantic God. There is no other explanation. He will take care of you if you will trust Him. One of my laymen said it this way to me, "Preacher, if we will take care of God's business, God will take care of our business." Amen!

Brotherly kindness—where do we get our example? If you want to find the greatest illustration of brotherly kindness, just look at the earthly ministry of Jesus. Jesus both taught and demonstrated the sharing of brotherly kindness. In Matthew 25:37 He told us that in meeting the needs of any of His brothers who were hungry, thirsty, strangers, sick or prisoners, it was the same as doing those things for Him. In Matthew 14:14 Jesus felt compassion on the multitude because of all of their needs and He healed their sick. Matthew 15:32 says that Jesus had compassion on the hungry multitude and fed 4,000 with seven loaves and a few small fish. When four men in Mark 2:4 demonstrated brotherly kindness by bringing a paralytic to Jesus and letting him down through the roof to place him at Jesus' feet, because of the faith of these men, Jesus healed the paralytic. Matthew 4:23 tells us Jesus went about Galilee teaching and healing every kind of disease and sickness among the people.

Jesus showed compassion and brotherly love to countless lost and hurting people as He met their needs. He displayed God's love for suffering humanity again, and again and again. What a friend we have in Jesus. All, all of our sins, everything, He will bear. Share brotherly kindness in ministry to others, in your marriage to your spouse and with your money in offerings to God. Give what you have as Jesus has given to you. Express brotherly kindness as you answer the call to sharing.

CHAPTER EIGHT THE CALLING OF SPIRITUAL MATURITY

[8]

Here is the question, "Is your scale complete? Do you have all eight notes of the octave or are you just a "B flat" walking around waiting for Jesus to come? We need the full orchestration of the Holy Ghost of God resounding in our lives. As we begin with faith and continue to add the other callings to our lives, God will grow us all the way to full spiritual maturity. So you see, in 2 Peter 1:5-7 the Bible says you start with FAITH and to your faith add

MORAL EXCELLENCE. To your moral excellence add
KNOWLEDGE and to knowledge add
SELF-CONTROL. To your self-control add
PERSEVERANCE and next add
GODLINESS. To godliness add
BROTHERLY KINDNESS, and finally add
LOVE.

As we look at the calling of love, we come to the completion of our journey through the eight callings of God. As the spiritual maturity evolves, we come to understand the genuine nature of agape love. So look with me as we learn how to add to brotherly kindness agape love in 1 John 4:7-21:

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has beheld God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His

love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. And we have beheld and bear witness that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. And we have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and

the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. By this, love is perfected with us, that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love. We love, because He first loved us. If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have

from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.

A few years ago in a small town in Tennessee there lived two men named Joe and Frank. Joe had a 17-year-old daughter who was a senior in high school. While in his living room one evening, Joe's wife came in and said to him,

"Our daughter has something to tell you."

His daughter sat down and said to her father, "This is the hardest thing I have ever shared. Daddy, it's bad."

"It really doesn't matter. Tell me."

She looked at her dad and announced, "I'm pregnant."

Joe jumped up, pointed his finger at his daughter and shouted, "How dare you! You will embarrass me in this town! You will cause a shadow and a blight to come over me! We do not believe in babies out of wedlock in this home. I want you to leave this house and never return." She wept as she turned and walked away. Frank lived across town and was a pastor of a local church. His own 16-year-old daughter shared the same story with him. The next Sunday Frank stood in his pulpit and said,

"I want you to hear it from me before you hear it from anyone else. I have the permission of my daughter to tell you she is pregnant. We do not agree with what she has done and she knows that. However, we are going to treat her as the father treated the prodigal son because she has come in repentance."

Which one of these fathers had the eighth note of spiritual maturity in his life? And by the way, can you guess which one of the two girls is still following Jesus today?

Agape love is the mark of spiritual maturity

Agape love—the way God loves is the mark of maturity. Now friend, this type of love is more than just a sentimental emotion. It is the outgoing of the totality of one's being to another's benefit and for their help. Love is the most often used word and the most written about subject. It certainly is that which we sing about more than anything else in the world.

While at dinner one evening I asked my wife and daughter, "Name for me all the songs that you can think of with the word 'love' in the title." They began to name song after song. I thought dinner was going to get cold.

Sadly, we so misunderstand God's love. The apostle John said it was bogus to declare that we love Christ whom we cannot see and yet not love the ones we do see. We talk a good love game but we do not show or live one. We must love the way that Jesus would have us love people in our lives. This is the mark of the mature believer. No doubt everyone has somebody who has tried to "crucify" him. But what was it our Lord said while He was on the cross? "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." My problem is when I have to pray, I say, "Father, forgive them for they know exactly what they are doing."

Perfect love follows a pattern

Four things I want you to see. First of all, I want to show you the pattern of perfect love. Having this love perfected in us, its maturity, and its coming to full completion brings us into harmony with the Spirit of God. When this occurs, we love like Jesus wants us to love. The pattern of perfect love is found in 1 John 4:9-10. Notice this:

By this the love of God was manifested in us, [This is how

we saw the love of God] that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

You see, even while we did not love God, He loved us and He sent His Son to be our propitiation. God loved us and gave us the pattern for love. That word "propitiation" is the same word that is translated in the ninth chapter of Hebrews as "mercy seat". In the Old Testament, we read about the Ark of the Covenant, Israel's most precious possession. The ark was a wooden chest covered in gold. Inside was placed a pot of manna, two small stone tablets on which the Ten Commandments were written and Aaron's staff. On two sides of the ark were carved cherubim, human-like statues with wings, representing God's messengers. The golden lid which symbolized the presence of God was called the "mercy seat". Once a year the high priest would sprinkle the blood of a bull and a goat on the mercy seat as a symbol of payment for the sins of the Jewish nation.

Hebrews says that when Jesus came, He became the propitiation. He became the one whose blood-sprinkled body on the cross became the mercy seat. He took God's wrath on the day of atonement at Calvary. He was the sponge that absorbed the entire wrath of God that should have been yours and mine. Jesus became the focus for all the wrath of God and paid our price. That is the way we are to love as His children. If you are going to love like Jesus loved, you will love sacrificially. It is an unconditional love. It is not based on our becoming better. In fact, no matter how bad we are, Jesus loves us—and that is a lot of love when I consider what I know about some of us. How could God love some of us? Rascals we are to the core. It is unmerited. We

sometimes say, "Well, I would love so-and-so if . . . " No, friend. You don't love people if they do certain things your way. You love them in spite of who they are. Isn't this what the Word of God calls us to do? We are to love like Jesus loves.

It is hard, isn't it? You can remember a time someone stuck a knife in you and then twisted it. That person doesn't deserve your love. But do you understand that you deserve none of God's love? Nevertheless, He lavished it on us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us! That's the gospel. That's the euaggelion—the "good news". Oh, if we were perfect, we would not need loving. But we were lost, dead, damned and doomed until He died for us. Oh, what a Savior—Lover of the world! He has become the propitiation, the satisfaction of God's broken law for us. Even when we did not deserve it, did not merit it, He loved us. That is the pattern of perfect love.

Perfect love requires practice

Second, how do we practice perfect love? Well notice 1 John 4:11-12:

Beloved, if God so loved us,[and He did—amen] we also ought to love one another. [Well, I know that. I ought to love like Jesus loved.] No one has beheld God at any time; [You can't see Him.] if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us.

Do you know how this world gets to know God? They get to know God by seeing Christ living in us and through us as we love this world. Where do we find the outline for love? Isn't it 1 Corinthians 13? Here is the way love is supposed to be:

Love is patient, love is kind, and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, [Now the King James translation adds a word here that is not in the Greek New Testament. The KJV says, "is not easily provoked." Oh no, friend the word "easily" is not there. Love simply is not provoked. I'm not easily provoked. Well sometimes I am, but most of the time I'm not easily provoked. But the Bible does not say that love is not easily provoked. It simply states that love is not provoked.] does not take into account a wrong suffered [does not keep a score card] does not rejoice in unrighteousness but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails

That is the way the New American Standard translation of the Bible says it. But look again with me at this same passage through the paraphrases of Eugene Peterson from The Message:

Love never gives up. Love cares more for others than for self. Love doesn't want what it doesn't have. Love doesn't strut, doesn't have a swelled head, doesn't force itself on others, isn't always "me first," doesn't fly off the handle, doesn't keep score of the sins of others, doesn't revel when others grovel, takes pleasure in the flowering of truth, puts up with anything, trusts God always, always looks for the best, never looks back, but keeps going to the end.

I can recall a time when my wife, Liz, displayed her love for me. Liz and I had not been married very long when on a particular Monday night we were getting ready to go to Monday night outreach. Our first little church ran forty-four in Sunday school. She was already dressed. Now my wife is not a practical joker. Don't play a practical joke on my wife. She just hates that. But she decided she was going to try to play one on me. I kind of enjoy a little bit of that. While I was in the shower, Liz filled a big glass with ice cold water and was going to pour it on me. She had to stand on the toilet while reaching over the top of the shower curtain to achieve this. Now we were not in the most upscale apartment complex known to man and it had one of those toilet seats that wobbled. (You have probably had one at some time yourself.) When she started to pour, God in His sovereignty moved that toilet seat. She threw the water straight up, grabbed the curtain rod and fell into the tub with me. Needless to say, that night we were late for outreach visitation. We have been married over 25 years and we don't remember everything, but we will never forget that night.

How do we practice love - the agape love of the God? We find a wonderful example in the life of Dr. E Stanley Jones, considered by some as "the greatest Christian missionary since Saint Paul." He spent most of his life as a missionary to the country of India. On one occasion after finishing a sermon on loving like Jesus loved, he had a pastor walk up to him and say, "Dr. Jones, I have practiced love. I have saturated my pastorate with love. I have loved my people. I have loved them and loved them and loved them! Still, I have one man in my church who is mean to me. He wants to split the church and he works against me. What should I do?" Dr. Jones looked at him and without blinking said, "Increase the dosage." Let me tell you, friends, when folks come against you—and they will—increase the dosage. Love—it is the Jesus way.

Power enables perfect love

Well, we have seen the pattern and practice of perfect love. You say, "Preacher, I can't do it." I know you can't. Many times when we do try we only succeed in messing up. We fall and slip because we cannot do it ourselves. But He has given us the key in 1 John 4:13. It is what I call the power of perfect love. The Bible tells us: "By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because [look at this] He has given us of His Spirit."

You see, friend, when you get saved, the Spirit of Jesus lives in you and wants to live through you. The art of love requires discipline, concentration, and patience. But most of all it requires the Spirit's power. I cannot love everyone. But when I die to myself and Jesus is all to me and He is my Lord, He will love you through me, and I will then find myself loving you in ways I could not envision.

There are some kids today who sit in church and literally hate their parents. They cannot stand them. Listen to me, young friend, you will never get happy until you learn to love your parents like Jesus loves them. And there are parents who cannot stand their kids. They don't like them and wish they had never brought them into this world. Let me tell you, they are here to stay. You see, the power comes as you begin to accept people for just who they are. You do not wait for them to change. You say, "Well, he is just an old rascal but I am going to love him like he is!"

I read a story of a psychologist who had a man come to him and say, "I have been married for twenty-two years but I'm about to divorce my wife. She has gained weight and I do not like her anymore. She doesn't look like she used to look. She doesn't act like she used to act."

The psychologist said, "Man, I have a plan for you. Here is what you do. For six weeks you treat her like a queen. You open every door and thank her for everything. You wash the dishes. You care for her. You just begin to love her. Then after six weeks just as she has gotten used to you treating her so lovingly, walk out the door and tell her, 'I hate your guts.' I am telling you, it will kill her."

The husband said, "Man, that is a plan for me!"

He began to do all the doctor instructed. He began to love and do everything for his wife.

The psychologist said that in six weeks he called the man and asked, "Are you ready to sign the divorce papers?"

The husband replied, "Divorce? I'm married to the greatest woman in the world!"

What had happened? The husband's attitude had changed. He began to accept his wife and love her. Friend, you are going to have to take a step with God toward people. Trust God to see you through loving that person that you do not think you can love. And when you do, God will use it. Oh, He will use it in tons of marvelous ways!

We had an old boy in our hometown that I hated and my daddy hated him. He was our landlord and he upped the rent on my daddy's store. We didn't like him and he did not like us. But God dealt with me and told me I had to go tell that man I loved him and ask his forgiveness for what I had said against him in our community.

Now I was sixteen and he was forty. It took me four days to gain the courage but I finally went into his store. I extended my hand, called his name and said, "Sir, in Jesus' name, forgive me. I love you." Now, friend, I could never have done that on my own.

I had to be close to God for that to happen. If we will die to self, find the principle of God, stand therein, and go forward, I am here to tell you God will reward our efforts.

While pastoring a church in Rome, Georgia, Dr. Jerry Vines tells this story of a gentleman in his church. Dr. Vines said, "I had to confess that was the best smelling man I had ever smelled in all my life. Every time he would come by he just smelled so good. Finally I stopped him one day and said, 'Sir, what is it you wear? I mean, you just smell so pleasant every time you walk by." He said, "Oh, Pastor, I work in a wholesale floral shop and handle roses all day long. I get that stuff on me and I just can't get it off. You know, Pastor, if you hang around roses long enough, you begin to smell like them."

Dr. Vines said, "I jotted that down and you know, if you will hang around Jesus you will begin to have a sweet odor. You can hang around Jesus and have the smell of grace about you."

The power of perfect love is not produced by your trying harder, but rather by Jesus working in you and through you.

Perfect love produces confidence

Well, we see the pattern. We see the practice. We see the power. Finally, look at what I call the product of perfect love. What will this kind of love produce? Notice 1 John 4:17: "By this, love is perfected with us, that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world."

There is no fear in love. When you begin to love like Jesus loves, there will be fearlessness from judgment along with a freedom to love others.

You will stand before the judgment of Christ and you will give an account for everything that you have done. If you are lost, you will stand at the Great White Throne and then be cast into outer darkness. If you are a believer, you will stand at the Judgment Seat of God. You will give an account for showing love or showing hatred. This judgment will not cause you to lose entrance into heaven, but it will cost you in reward and stature in the culture of eternity.

Some of you would tell me, "Preacher, if I were to die or Jesus were to come, I am scared to death that heaven would not be my home." When you begin to find the love of God and then practice the love of God, it causes a fearlessness to come on you, thus providing confidence that you will be God's in the judgment. Why? Because when you are showing the Christ life in this world, it lends a confidence for the judgment of the life that is to come.

Not only is there fearlessness from judgment, there is fearlessness about life in this world. "For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline." 2 Timothy 1:7

Love—it is God's way.

Note these four markers of love

Now I want to give you four markers with reference to love. Love is:

Active Transitive Serving Sacrificing First, love is active. It demands expression. You cannot say, "Oh, I'm just going to love," and then sit back and never show it. If you are going to love your spouse, your kids, your grandkids; if you are going to love your church, and if you are going to love your God, your love must be active.

Love is also transitive. It requires an object. There must be something or someone to receive your love. If you are going to love, you have to present it to an individual, to a cause or toward some object. Love is active. Love is transitive—it demands an object. Third, love is serving. And finally, love is sacrificing.

Every Friday my administrative assistant, places in the front of my Bible my schedule detailing where I am going and what I am going to do every day of the upcoming week. One particular Friday I looked down my list and there was a name of a person I was scheduled to see at 4:00 that very day—the last thing to finish my week. Now I like to finish well. I don't like some bad meeting to end the work week so I asked her, "Who is this? I don't know this person." She replied, "Trust me. This will be good."

At 4:00 the gentleman walked into my office. He was carrying a bucket. I thought, What do I have here? Were we going out to pick peas? He began to tell me about his life and how God had changed him. He began to tell me how our church had ministered to him and to his family. He said, "Pastor, I've come to make a request." I said, "Yes sir." He said, "I have come to ask if I can wash my pastor's feet." (I had just preached about it three or four Sundays earlier.)

That man went to the shower in my office and filled his bucket with water. He then took off my shoes and socks. He held

my feet like they were pieces of porcelain. He took a little bar of soap, lathered his hands, and while he washed my feet he prayed for me. He thanked God for me. He prayed for my wife and my children and for our dear church. When he finished, he took a towel and dried my feet. As I sat in my chair he crawled up in my lap, a man old enough to be my father, and hugged me around the neck. And I thought, Dear God, I have seen the eighth note of the octave.

How can you say that you love God and hate anybody? The Book says you are a liar if you say you love God and hate your neighbor. I have good news for you. No matter how mean your old heart feels, Jesus loves you. You see, I could have said to that gentleman, "No sir, I'm not going to allow you to wash my feet." I had to receive his act of love. Jesus loves you but you have to receive that love by faith. When you do it, He will change your life and He will set you on the road to loving those that are all around you. The agape love of God was shown toward us when Jesus became the propitiation for our sins; not only for our sins, but also for the sins of the whole world.

Jesus went to the cross. He was pierced, He was nailed, He bled and He died because He loved you. They took Him down off that cross and placed His body in a borrowed tomb. He died for you. Then three days later angels kicked the stone away and He arose for you. Today He sits at the right hand of the Father where He is praying for you. One day when the horn blows and the heavenly shout is heard, He will come back. Is He coming back for you?

Now I am known for many things, but having a great singing voice is not one of them. As a matter of fact, the sound engineer at our church will cut

off my microphone just as soon as he sees me beginning to sing. I expect my level of singing ability will be greatly enhanced when I get to heaven.

But I'm not so sure that any of us will be able to sing in that heavenly choir without some practice. We must learn to bring our lives into harmony with God's will here on earth.

Does the trumpet player join the orchestra without having first learned the musical skills necessary to harmonize with the rest of the musicians? Certainly not. As we gain the instruction through the Word and practice that instruction through these eight callings of God our lives can become in tune with heaven's song.

By God's grace we are made ready to sing;

And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude and as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty peals of thunder, saying,

Hallelujah!

For the Lord our God, the Almighty reigns.

Revelation 19:6-7