

The Impossibility of the Christian Life, Part 4

S.N.E. Reformation Conference

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Bible Text: John 15:1-14

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Let's open our Bibles one last time to John 15, beginning in verse 1,

“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.

“This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. You are My friends if you do what I command you.”

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Father, we come before you in the name of your Son for this last meeting together. Lord, we need your help, that your truth may go forward and your people might be edified. Lord, direct everything in this last meeting, direct our words, our thoughts, Lord. Lead us in the way that you would have us go, that we would not only begin to understand this passage but that its application to our lives would be a reality, a growing reality. Lord, we know so many things and so few of them are applied. Lord, help us not to be hearers of the Word but also doers of the Word and be truly blessed. Lord, for those who are here

that may not know you, that even in this text they might see their great need for a Savior. Lord, I ask all of this in Jesus' name. Amen.

In the last sermon before I began to preach I gave you a summary of all the things that we had been studying. I see little need to do that in this evening's session because it should be still warm in your mind, the full summary of what we've gone through. Actually, the notes that I've been preaching from were the first sermon I was supposed to preach on Friday night, it's just that it's all kind of been extended. I have six more sermons but I don't think that we will get to all of them this evening.

We've been talking about the impossibility of the Christian life. That is not a cliché, it's not a hyperbole. The Christian life is an absolute impossibility apart from abiding in Christ and drawing spiritual life and strength from him. In the Christian life, Christ and the gospel are not one element, they are *the* element. Christ is everything. When the Christian doctrine and the gospel is truly proclaimed as it ought to be proclaimed and men reject it, what they need to know is that they are not rejecting religion, they are not rejecting certain principles, they are rejecting a person. If you're here today and you're apathetic toward Christianity, maybe you're here out of coercion, manipulation, maybe you have to because your parents still have authority over you. You're here, you abide by those rules but your heart is not here at all. Know this: you are not rejecting a religion; you are not rejecting a set of principles.

Now, to do that is very, very dangerous because ones who set aside the law of God, the law of Moses, were to be put away. But I want you to know what you're doing: you are apathetic towards the one person that God loves more than all of creation combined, his Son. When you reject Christianity, know this: you are rejecting the one for whom the entire world was created. Know this also: that God will deal harshly with you for your arrogance against his Son. Know this: that maybe in your humanism, maybe in your youth, maybe in your foolishness, you've set your heart as stone against God and none of what I'm saying causes you to tremble. Like a young man once said, "I'm not afraid to stand before God. I'll face him and my fate." And the old preacher told him, "Young man, you will melt before God like a tiny wax figurine before a blast furnace."

Your proud heart demonstrates nothing more than your own stupidity. Creation testifies against you and you, yourself, know that the very God you are rejecting is the one before whom you will stand. So, I want you to know that when I deal with these texts, there are two groups of people here tonight: there are people who are here because they love Christ and in loving Christ, they are seriously concerned for pleasing him and for growing in holiness; there are others here who care not for holiness and the reason why they do not care for holiness is because they simply do not care for Christ and that is a very, very dangerous place to be.

Now, we've gone through several pages of notes and we've seen a lot of things but now we're going to turn our attention to something that is extremely important. As we look at our text, we see something: that ten different times in this short text, there is a word that appears and it's the word "abide." And I have said over and over that the only way that

the Christian can be fruitful in the Christian life is to abide in Christ. Now, if I tell you this, it is very important I explain to you what that means. You know, preachers are famous for telling people what to do and then not telling them how to do it. I remember one time as a young Christian, this man, he preached for something like an hour and a half on the necessity to walk in the Spirit and it was a fabulous sermon and it proved to my young heart that I needed to walk in the Spirit. The only problem is, he never told us what that meant. So, I went up to him after the service, not intending to wrangle, I was happy with what I heard, I thought it was very edifying. I just thought, "I'm a very immature Christian. I don't have a clue what it means to walk in the Spirit." So, I went before him and I said, "Sir, wow, that was just wonderful. I see that in the Scriptures. I need to walk in the Spirit. But, sir, I don't know what that means." That man became very put-out with me. He said every manner of thing but he never told me what it meant to walk in the Spirit and I walked away as a young Christian saying, "That man just told us to do something that he, himself, does not know how to do. Therefore, he just told us to do something that he, himself, is not practicing."

So, we always want to be careful whenever we're exhorting people to do a certain thing to actually be able to explain to them what it means. And so, I have told you that the only way you can be fruitful in the Christian life is to abide in Christ, now what does that mean? First of all, the word "abide" is not that complex in Greek. It's meno; it means "to remain; to abide; to stay." Now, when we bring in the metaphor of a branch, you can see that a branch must be connected vitally to a vine in order for that branch to continue with life and even bear fruit. So, somehow you and I must be vitally connected with Christ. Herein lies two sides of a coin and it's often the case in Christianity. We have two sides of the coin: one is, positional and the other is our actual experience. Now, I want to say positionally, first of all, what I was explaining in the last session: if you are truly a Christian, and I don't say that lightly because most people in America who call themselves Christian are not Christian, and some of you who call yourselves Christians are possibly not Christians. It's very important to understand. Let me put it this way: if you consider yourself a carnal Christian, you're lost. You're just lost. Do Christians sin? Yes. Can Christians fall into grievous sin? Absolutely. Can Christians live a continuously carnal lifestyle without fruit? Absolutely not.

So, if you are a true believer, you are vitally connected to Christ. He is the vine, you are a branch. He is the head, you are the body. We have many metaphors like that to indicate this unique position we now have with Christ. Another is: the Bible talks oftentimes in spheres locatively. For example: you're in the sphere of Adam or you're in the sphere of Christ. You're in the sphere of condemnation; you're in the sphere of justification. You are in the sphere of the flesh; you are in the sphere of the Spirit. So, if you're genuinely a Christian, you are a branch and you're vitally connected.

But here's what we need to understand: this position that we have does not lead us ever in the New Testament, to being passive but it always promotes a zealous application of this truth, a desire for this truth to be worked out in our life, to become manifest and let me use a word that many people are afraid of, to be experienced. It's an actual reality. One of the men that was so very key in my discipleship until today uses a word all the time that

always brings me back to center and he'll say this, "Yes, Paul, but is it a reality in your life?" When he listens to a sermon, he'll say, "There was reality there." And that's kind of what we're talking about: not just a theological supposition or a theological or propositional truth but is it a growing reality, is it the experience of your life? Do you experience fruit-bearing? Do you experience communion with Christ? You can quote all my favorite creeds but that does not guarantee that you experience the truths that are found there.

Now, as a Christian, we are united with Christ but in the Christian life sanctification is progressive. I think you all would agree with that. It's progressive. Well, let me explain what that means: when you think of progressive sanctification, you probably think that as you grow in your Christian life you become more holy, more holy, more holy and that's true, but a lot of times we leave things out of that formula that ought to be included. For example: repentance. Did you know repentance is subject to sanctification? There is a sense in which I repented unto salvation but I am growing in repentance. Did you know that? I'm growing in saving repentance. I repent more now. I see more sin now. You see, I'm growing faith. My faith is subject to sanctification.

There was a time when I believed unto salvation but that faith has become subject to sanctification over the last 30 years. It's deeper; it's stronger. It's the same way a new believer immediately starts bearing fruit. Really. And many times, the first few months of our lives, we see an abundant amount of fruit. But we ought to be growing in our fruit-bearing. A believer, the moment that they believe, they enter into communion with Christ and they experience that. The love of God is shed abroad in their heart but as they grow in Christ, this initial experience of the love of God, of the indwelling of the Spirit, it ought to increase, it ought to become more mature. Now, that doesn't mean that they go from experience to experience or this greater manifestation to greater manifestation, but it's referring to reality. Every one of these things that happen to us at salvation, they become a deeper reality and they begin to manifest themselves in a greater way in our lives.

Now, I'm going to take a definition from D. A. Carson. I'm going to quote him a few different times throughout the teaching that we're going to do tonight because he says some things that are absolutely marvelous. D. A. Carson is a well-known New Testament scholar and he's been very helpful to almost every minister who cares about the Word of God. But he defines "abiding" in this way:

"The imagery of the vine is stretched a little when the branches are given the responsibility to remain in the vine."

Now, if you notice, he says, "I am the vine, you are the branches," but then he goes outside of this metaphor and he tells us that we need to do something to continue abiding. You know, branches just kind of sit there, don't they? But there is something that we must do and basically it's that we must cultivate this relationship which we have.

Now, he says this:

“The point is clear: continuous dependence upon the vine, constant reliance upon him, persistent spiritual imbibing...”

What does “imbibing” mean? It means “to drink; to absorb.”

“...continuous persistent spiritual imbibing of his life, this is the indispensable and essential action, condition or ingredient of spiritual fruitfulness.”

Now, up to this point, do you realize what I’ve been doing? I’ve been building up to this moment. I’ve been trying to show you that you cannot do anything apart from the life and power of Christ. I’ve also talked a great deal about the providence of God, how God in his providence will send trials our way, difficulties, things we cannot overcome, obstacles that we ourselves cannot endure. Now, why does he do this? Is it because he hates us? Absolutely not. All these strong winds are designed to convince you and me that we simply cannot.

In the Christian Manifesto which is, of course, the Sermon on the Mount, the first virtue that is given us is this: blessed are the poor in Spirit; blessed are those who live in a profound dependence upon God. What is the most God-honoring thing that we can do? To live in a profound dependence upon God. What is the most dishonoring thing that Israel ever did? Independence. Is that not true? The most dishonoring thing that Israel did under the old covenant was independence. “We don’t need you. We can do this on our own.” Do you realize that almost every saving activity of God does not begin until first he empties men of all hope of saving themselves? Whether it’s Israel in Egypt; whether it’s Joseph in prison; whether it’s Gideon against the Midianites. What is he constantly doing? He’s constantly emptying us of ourselves, of self-confidence, of self-reliance. Why? So that we will live in absolute or full dependence upon him. Can you see how vital this is?

Now, you’re maybe thinking to yourself, “Brother Paul, just go on.” No, I can’t. Like I used the example two nights ago: it was necessary that Peter fall. Why? He made that self-reliant, independent, John Wayne type of declaration there in the supper, in the Passover “though all deny you, I will not.” He had to fall. It was necessary that Satan sift him and that he fall. Why? To rid him of that “I will not deny you.” Look at this: the great Peter, the rock, denies Christ before a little servant girl. It was necessary. Some of the old preachers used to say, “Christ spent three years emptying the disciples so that he could fill them in a second on the day of Pentecost.” I mean, God can fill you like that, the emptying part is problematic. So, he’s constantly doing this, constantly sending things our way to empty us, but to cause us to cling to him. To cling to him.

There are three aspects of abiding because I’ve just told you that you need to cling to Christ. You need to lay aside self-reliance and independence and you need to cling to Christ but now you’re probably saying, if you’re a thinker, “Okay, but, again, how do you do that?” Well, there are three aspects to this and I’m going to take part of D. A. Carson’s

definition and use it within these three aspects. First of all: abiding in Christ is through continuous dependence on his Word, constant submission to his Word, persistent spiritual imbibing of his Word. Now, look in chapter 15, verse 7, "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you." Now, look at verse 10, "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love."

Now, you know the old song that says,

"Trust and obey, for there is no other way.
To be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey."

Well, that might sound kind of trite, but let me just share with you something: trust and obey, there's no other way. I'm sorry. I know that you live in a culture where you've been going to every Christian bookstore and find 1,000 books on 10 steps to do this, I'm sorry, quick fixes here and there, microwave Christianity, instantaneous this and that. No, my friend, you have been given a book which, I dare say, most of us despise. You say, "I don't despise it." Let me share with you something: have you ever been a street preacher? You know, there is something worse than the crowd turning around and all of them getting really mad at you. Do you know what's worse than that? They neglect you altogether. You're standing there preaching and they all walk by you for hours like you're not even there. There was a time in my life when I actually thought I was invisible.

No, the worse thing you can do to me to despise me, is neglect. That I'm not even worth arguing with. Now do you see? The neglect of God's Word? You see, we're always wondering, "Where is the power?" Or you see a man or a woman who seems to be fruit-bearing and full of power and zeal and you want to find their secret. The problem is, there is no secret and when they give you the answer, you're not going to like it. What is it? I have no wisdom or understanding of my own. I do not know how to walk from the bedroom to the bathroom apart from the Word of God. This world is a minefield full of danger. I have no telepathic ability to discern where all the mines are hidden but I have a map. I do not know how to discern the things of God but I have been given truth in Scripture. I'm sorry, my dear friend, if you are waiting to find out something that would really just be brand new to you about how to abide in Jesus. I'm sorry but it is this first and foremost: he has given you his Word. And, again, I go back to old John Bunyan. They said of him if you cut his veins he would bleed the Bible.

The old story that's been told in several different ways about Stone Face, about supposedly a man who would come and visit a town and be a blessing to the town and that he would have a face like the face that was carved into a natural formation on a stone and everyone waited for that person. One time, a little boy was born and he kept hearing the story about one day someone would come to save the town and he kept looking at that stone and looking at that stone and looking at that stone until at the end of his life, he realized he had become that face and he was the one who had helped the town. It is just us going into the Word, going into the Word, going into the Word. Not even seeking to be transformed by the Word, just recognizing the importance of the Word and living in

the Word and eventually, without us even knowing it, we begin to take on its characteristics. Do you see that?

Let me give you an example rather than a vulgar, trite, common example. Let's say that you come to me and you have a big spot on your forehead that's just a bloody mass and you say to me, "Brother Paul, I've been to every doctor in the world and no one can figure out why I have this. Could you please try to pray to the Lord that he would give you wisdom with regard to why I have this on my forehead?" And I say, "Well, I'm no doctor, but sure, I'll pray about it." But I decide one day to be even practical and I decide to follow you around for 24 hours and I notice that at 1:00 in the morning, the clock strikes 1 and you get up out of bed and you hit your forehead against a brick wall one time and go back to bed. And then I watch and it's 2:00 and you get up precisely at 2:00 when the bell strikes and you hit your forehead twice on a stone wall and go back to bed. Now, I notice as you go through the day, every turn of the hour, you hit your head against a wall that many times. At the end of 24 hours, I come to you and I say this, "Look, I'm no doctor but I think I figured out your problem. If you will stop banging your head against a brick wall every time the clock strikes the hour, I think your head will heal." You say, "That's absurd." I say the same thing to you, "You neglect the Scriptures. I'm sorry."

And then, do you know what Evangelicalism has done in America? It has conformed itself to your flesh. If I have heard it one time, I've heard it 1,000 times, people and teachers and pastors and supposedly educators in Christianity saying, "We don't live in a culture anymore where people can even pay attention for five minutes so we've got to give them little sound bites with regard to Christianity." You know what we've done? We're the first group of Christians who believe the Bible, the first group in history that no longer believe that our culture is to conform itself to the book. We're now trying to conform Christianity to the culture. I say if our culture has become too dumb to read for half an hour, that in the church, we do not give in to that but we start teaching people how to think and how to read and how to meditate. To turn off televisions, to turn off vain conversations and to get into the book.

Let me share with you something about Western culture and I want to be very careful here but I just want to make a few observations that may help you understand you. You know, everyone says Western culture this, Western culture that, we shouldn't try to take Western culture and apply it to other cultures. Let me share with you something about Western culture: Western culture has to do with the Americas and also Western Europe. I guess, you're all familiar with that. Prior to the advent of Christianity, Western culture meant we were a bunch of tribal people living in Northern Europe, running around naked, painting ourselves blue and eating one another. That's Western culture. So, what changed Western culture? The advent of Christianity. Yeah, and because of Christianity, we stopped worshipping twigs and streams and crickets and hatchets and horns. We came to understand a living God and we came to understand a creation in light of that living God. Our culture began to change. The very height of literature and art and music and everything in Europe owes itself to the advent of Christianity coming in and changing a group of blue-painted barbarians.

That's what Christianity did, but now because we have rejected Christianity, have rejected the God of Christianity, we're becoming cannibalistic barbarians once again. Oh yes, we can do all kinds of things with computers and technology, we are fabulous in IT, but we're becoming immoral beasts. Now, the point that I'm trying to make is this: you want some quick fix. The quick fix is this: spend your life renewing your mind in the Word of God; cling to the Word of God as though your very life depends on it because, sir, I can assure you it does.

Put it this way: D. A. Carson writes this,

“ ‘If you remain’ in me is equivalent to doing all that Jesus commands. Such words must so lodge in the disciple’s mind and heart that conformity to Christ, obedience to Christ, is the most natural thing in the world.”

Now see, you can't get there apart from the Word. Let me read that again, “Such words,” that's the teachings of Christ, “must so lodge in the disciple’s mind and heart that conformity to Christ, obedience to Christ, is the most natural thing in the world.” Now, how is that going to happen? Now, let's go back to something I greatly love: the law of God, the books of wisdom. And what do we see over and over? What should the king do in Deuteronomy? He should write out all the words of this law. Why? To work on his penmanship? Absolutely not. That those words might be firmly lodged in his heart and mind.

It's an interesting things when you go to the Bible and do this kind of study. How do you study the Bible according to the Bible? And you know, you will actually find only a few references to study. Did you know that? You know what the great portion is? Memorization and meditation. Lodging the Word of God in your heart. As one old preacher I know who I dearly love, says, “Folks, this isn't rocket surgery.” He means rocket science or brain surgery but he combines the two things. He goes, “This isn't rocket surgery. It's simple. You take the Word of God and you read it and your read it and your read it and your read it and you study it and if you don't understand it, you don't care, you keep working on it because your life depends upon it.”

As I said the other night, some of you who would say, “Well, I'm not a reader,” yeah, but if your company offered you a job paying twice or three times what you're now making but you have a 600 page manual to memorize, I guarantee you'd stay up night and day to memorize that. Your wife would be with you pouring you coffee and encouraging you because she wants a new bedroom set. Your children would be going “hip, hip, hooray, Dad. Go Dad. Go Dad.” And we would do something like that for something as pathetic as money to buy silly clothes with important designer's names on them. What a pathetic people and yet we'll let eternity escape right through our hands and not even move a finger.

Now, what does this look like? I want to read you some texts that have been very helpful for me. But I want you to listen to these texts as though you'd never heard them before.

That's often very helpful. I knew of one old pastor that every three years would change his Bible. He would spend three years going through his entire Bible and writing notes, filling the pages with notes and notes and then he would take that Bible and put it on the shelf and get a new Bible because he wanted to hear the Word afresh again without his notes. He wanted God to speak to him afresh. Now, listen to this as though you've never heard it before because right now you probably treat it like a cliché, a meaningless piece of New Testament poetry but I want you to listen to it as though you had to take it seriously.

This is the Incarnate God speaking, Jesus Christ, "But he answered and said, It is written, man shall not live on bread alone but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God." There is a sense in which I know you believe this. There is a sense in which you don't believe this at all. He's saying every aspect of your life is to be governed, fueled, conformed, empowered by the Word of God. Let me ask you a question those of you who are married: how much time have you spent studying marriage in the Scriptures? I mean, it's the most important relationship you have on this earth. Are you doing what it says here? That your marriage that you are seeking that it be conformed to every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God? Now, marriage is tough enough when you do know what God's Word says. How much more difficult is it when you don't even know what God's Word says?

Sometimes I'll ask music directors, I'll go to a church and it's got a big music program and all this and I'll ask them this one question: "Are you the worship leader?" "Yes." "Have you studied worship beginning in the book of Genesis 1 all the way through the book of Revelation?" "Well, no." "Well, then how do you know that what you're doing is pleasing to God? How can you know?" The sad thing is, now they say, "Well, it doesn't even matter. It's just basically left up to what you feel like." No, it's not. No, it's not.

The way you dress and I know I sound now like a 1950s fundamentalist preacher, don't I? But let me ask you a question? The way you dress, have you gone to Scripture to ask God, "What am I supposed to do?" The way you talk. Your relationships. What you participate in and don't participate in. I mean, everything. Look what he says, "You do not live on bread alone but you live on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God." You know what the Puritan genius was? Now, I don't agree with the Puritans on absolutely everything, they're men, but do you know what their genius was? They honestly sought to conform every aspect of their life to the Word of God. Now, like all of us men, they failed in some areas. They went too far or not far enough in some areas but they are one of the few peoples that ever walked on this planet that said, "Every aspect of life must be conformed to the written Word of God."

We don't believe that. As a matter of fact, we live in a culture now where it's just sort of believe in an undefined Jesus and then do whatever is right in your own eyes. No, my dear friend. Listen, you see, you don't fear and you do trust in yourself. You prove it every day by just walking according to what you think is right. Don't do that. Abiding in Christ is asking, "Lord, I am in a fallen world. There is a sense in which even though I have been regenerated, I still have fallen members of my body, even a fallen mind. I live

in a fallen world. I'm behind enemy lines." Wisdom was not born with me, it will not die with me. I must take this book. Again, I go back to Pilgrim's Progress, it's the book that guided him. The book.

Listen to this text: he tells Joshua, "Only be strong and very courageous. Be careful to do according to all the law which Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right or to the left." Do you know the average Evangelical doesn't know enough of the law to determine whether he's even turned from it or not. Really. We talk about obedience, but before obedience can come there must be knowledge. And there is such a neglect of the Word of God that we don't even know when we're walking in disobedience. That's why we can do horrendous things which within the context of a so-called local church, and not even be convicted about it. We don't even know what the will of God is.

"So that you may have success wherever you go." This book of the law. Now, let's just take this literally for a moment. Not absurdity but literally. "This book of law shall not depart from your mouth but you shall meditate on it day and night." Let me ask you a question: does your 10 minute quiet time fulfill this command? I mean, I have people boast, "Well, I have my quiet time." "Describe it to me." "Well, you know, 15 minutes in the Word, 15 minutes in prayer." I applaud you for whatever attempt you're making but don't pat yourself on the back.

He's saying this Word it "shall not depart from your mouth but you shall meditate on it day and night so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it, for then you will make your way prosperous and then you will succeed." Now, this is not to be interpreted in the context of televangelists. It's not talking about "then you will prosper financially." It means "then you will prosper in the will of your God and be a useful servant to him." That's what being fruitful means. So, abiding in Christ is to take this gift of his teaching and learning to follow it.

Now, as we see here in verse 12, "This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you." Let me say a few things. I want to draw a balance here. I don't want to throw the baby out with the bathwater, I want to explain this. The end of everything that has to do with God's commands is this: "To love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and to love your neighbor as yourself." That's the end of it all. As I said a while back: Christianity is not primarily an ethical or moralistic religion; we're not about just keeping rules. We're not. We're about an intimate relationship with the living God, loving him with all our heart and entering into intimate relationships with people and loving them with all our heart and showing them the mercy that God shows us. That's the fulfillment of the law.

But, then again, we are a people in a very distorted culture and wisdom was not born with you at your physical birth and I want to tell you that wisdom was not born with you in your spiritual birth. Wisdom is something that is acquired. Now that you have become a Christian, you have the capabilities of acquiring wisdom and wisdom is necessary. Now, every time I talk in the last few years about the law of God, the commands of God,

everyone screws up their faces and get really mad. They go, “We’re free from the law. We’re free from the law.” And I’m thinking, “Does anybody even know what that means anymore?” Free from the law. The law has nothing to do with this, absolutely nothing. “We’re free!” Free to what? “Free to do whatever we want. We believe in Jesus. We’re free to do whatever we want.” Hold on, first of all, a person who is unconverted, which most people call themselves Christians are, and they have that kind of teaching, “I’m free to do whatever I want,” but their heart has not been changed so their heart is filled with worldly, carnal desires. They go to church every Sunday and worship God in the praise service and then they live like an abomination throughout the week. Let’s figure out what we’ve saying here.

Let me ask you a question: when it says that we’re free from the law, what do you think that means? That we no longer have to obey God? Or does it mean that we’re just supposed to love one another? But herein lies a big problem, people have some really distorted views on love. So, what are we talking about? I mean, if we say that we don’t even need the law, we don’t need to think about it, we don’t need to read it or anything, then do you know what we have to do? We have to literally cut out the book of Psalms and throw it away. Do you realize that? Because the book of Psalms, look at it, “I delight in your law. Your precepts are true.” I mean, what are we going to do?

Or as one person said one time in a meeting I was holding, at a conference and I was talking about the law and this person raised their hand and said, “We’re free from the law and you’re trying to put us under the bondage of the law that oppresses us.” And I said, “Wow. Okay, let me ask you a question, you just told me that the law of God is oppressive, is restricting, restrains you and puts you in bondage. Okay. Let’s just go over some of the laws and you tell me which one of these is restraining you from doing what you want to do. Let’s see: you shall have no other gods before me. Are you mad about that? Because that’s restraining you from having other gods? Let’s try another one: you’ll not steal your neighbor’s wife. Is that oppressive to you? You shalt not lie.” I went down through all the laws of God that I could remember and in the end, I’m sitting there and the man starts to kind of slump in his chair because he knew what was happening. I said, “If these beautiful laws are oppressive to you and restraining what you really want to do, what kind of evil person are you?”

Do you see? Now, when he says we’re free from the bondage of the law, what it means is: all those detailed laws of sacrifice, all those things have been fulfilled in Christ. That’s part of it, but the big part of it is just this: the law says do this and live. Now, I want to tell you something: that’s not bad. That’s not sinful, that statement but, you see, we’re under bondage because we can’t do those things and, therefore, we can’t live and, therefore, we should die because we have violated all the law. We’re free from that curse of the law. It’s not because the law is bad, it’s because we were bad. We’re freed from it because Christ has fulfilled the law and died in our place. So, we’re not justified by the law and we shouldn’t be legalistic people who are trying to kill other people with all our rules but the fact of the matter is, I delight in the law of God. I love the book of Proverbs. I get really excited even about the commandment in the Old Testament that says, “You ought to build a fence around the roof of your house.”

And someone says, “Well, do you have a fence around the roof of your house?” No. “Well, are you disobeying that law?” No. You see, you have to understand what it’s saying: you build a fence around the roof of your house because in that time, most people, especially in the summer, lived on the roof of their house and you build a fence around the roof of your house because you love your neighbor and you don’t want him to fall off your roof. Actually, some of our common laws in this country with regard to property and the welfare of others are based upon that law. As a matter of fact, I don’t find anything in the law that is displeasing. I can delight in it. The law, the wisdom that is found in Proverbs and in the law itself, protects my marriage, shows me how to raise my children. So, if you’re tell me, “Washer, don’t put me under the bondage of the law,” I’m going to say, “Just exactly what do you want to do?” Do you see?

So, how do we abide in Christ? Abiding in Christ is not completed by just our obedience to the Word of God because our relationship is much more than that. But abiding in Christ cannot be separated from his Word, his commands and obedience to him. You need Romans 12:2 “renewing our mind in the Word of God.” Isn’t it amazing. Some of you came here this week and you probably have not been in this church before and you’re going, “Man, they read the Bible too much in their services. It’s kind of boring just sitting there listening to him read a whole chapter.” What does that say about you? What does it say about contemporary Christianity that the Scriptures aren’t even read when exactly in 1 Timothy it says they should be publicly? You see, the reason why we’re so weak in Christianity today is because we have a neglect of the Word.

Now, listen to this, Psalm 1:2-3, “But his delight,” the righteous man, “is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night. He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, Which yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither; and in whatever he does, he prospers.” Fruit-bearing. Do you see this? When Jesus is teaching, please understand me, it’s not plagiarism because he wrote the Old Testament, but most of his gospel teaching is drawn right out of what he said in the Old Testament. Do you understand that? He’s been talking about fruit-bearing for a long time and every time he talks about it, it has something to do with his Word, with the Word of God.

Young people, you come to me and you say, “You know, Brother Paul, I’ve been listening to your sermons. I want to grow. I want to be used of God. What should I do?” I always tell them, “Robert Murray M’Cheyne.” They go, “Robert Murray M’Cheyne? Who is that?” “It’s a young man who died when he was 28 and had probably progressed more in holiness than just about anybody at that age.” And he has a reading list. He read through the New Testament twice a year and the Old Testament once a year. Do that. Get his reading list and do that. Read through the Scriptures over and over and over. And if you’re a brand new believer, I’m not going to tell you that you should read a little. Man, if you’re a new believer, you’re probably on fire. Read the Bible hours a day. Consume it. You want to be used of God? Prove it. You want to be fruitful? Prove it. My dear friend, my only regret in the last 30 years is not that I studied the Bible too much, it’s that I allowed myself to be distracted from it so much.

So, abiding in Christ is abiding in his Word, saturating our lives in his Word and seeking to obey him. Now, we come to a second thing: abiding in Christ is through continuous, get ready, continuous dependence on prayer; constant reliance upon prayer; persistent spiritual imbibing of the life and power of Jesus Christ through prayer. Now, let me quote D. A. Carson,

“The text suggests that the fruit in the vine imagery represents everything that is the product of effective prayer in Jesus’ name.”

Now, I want us to look at verse John 15:7. It’s very interesting. He says, “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.” Look in verse 16, “You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you.” Now, let’s look at this. This is extremely important. There is a lot of mystery here that I cannot explain to you, no one can. As a matter of fact, if you meet someone who can, run from them, they are a heretic. There is some mystery in this passage.

This is one of those texts where you’re just going to have to take God at his word because if you try to make this spit into some system of thought, you’re going to explain the passage away and you don’t want to do that. Now, isn’t it amazing that in both passages, he’s talking about prayer and it’s in the context of bearing fruit? That to be a fruitful Christian, prayer is absolutely essential. Prayer in the name of Jesus. Prayer believing that God will do. But I also want you to notice something: in verse 7 he says “abide in Me and My words abide in you.” So, what are we seeing here? We’re not seeing this: we’re not seeing a person who neglects the Word of God, whose mind is not renewed at all. We’re not talking about a person who doesn’t have the mind of Christ. We’re not talking about a person who neglects the Word of God and then just asks a whole bunch of stuff because usually the stuff they ask for are carnal and outside of God’s will.

What we’re talking about is a person who is abiding in Christ and he is abiding in the Word of Christ and the Word of Christ is abiding in him. What is it? We’re talking about a person who through their constant imbibing upon the Word of God, their constant feeding upon the Word of God, the Word of God constantly renewing their mind, they are beginning to develop, what? The mind of Christ. They are beginning to know, as Romans 12:1-2 says, they are beginning to know what the will of God is. Isn’t that amazing? He says, “you may renew your mind that you may know what the will of God is.” Okay?

Now, what is prayer? John Piper refers to it as “a warfare walkie-talkie.” And I agree with him. As a matter of fact, it’s very difficult for me to see prayer at all apart from our place in the Kingdom of heaven. Most people see prayer in a completely wrong way. You see prayer as, “I think I have a need and I ask God to meet it.” That’s not the context of prayer. The context of prayer is set forth for us, where? In Matthew 6. Jesus says, “Pray this way.” Now, listen very carefully, don’t turn it into cliché, “Our Father who art in heaven.” Let’s just take a look at that. You talk about the perfect psychology of prayer,

look at the way he's addressing God: "Our Father." Wow. This demonstrates the intimacy, doesn't it? But then he goes, "Who art in heaven." Your Father happens to be the God of the universe and you ought to treat him as such.

Many of you young people were raised with no respect whatsoever for age, authority or anything. I was out at a school of a very, very famous preacher, John MacArthur. I was out there and I was teaching at Master's College for two days and I was walking around going, "Wow! John MacArthur is here. I wonder if I'll get to see him?" And I'm 50 years old and I'm going, "I hope I get to see him. What a privilege." And little 17 year old students that walk up to me and go, "Hey, Brother Paul, have you met John?" And I'd go, "What?" "John." "John, who?" "Well, John. John MacArthur." And I'd look at them and I'd go, "I am 50 years old. I have walked through hell with Christ. I have suffered for the cause of Christ. I bear so many wounds from battles and I would never call him by his first name."

We have no sense of honor anymore and when we go to God, this whole idea of Abba, Father, meaning Daddy, be very careful. That interpretation is not really correct. It does demonstrate intimacy but it doesn't demonstrate Daddy. It doesn't. I'm sorry. The language, it doesn't work. It may be really good for a contemporary Christian song, but it doesn't work. It's not biblical because it does not denote the other aspects of that intimacy which is reverence.

Now, it says, "Our Father who art in heaven," so this perfect balance of intimacy and fear. And then he says, this is the context of all praying: "Hallowed be thy name." What he's saying there is "special be your name, unique be your name." It's basically Malachi, that "his name be great among the nations from the rising to the setting of the sun." There you go again, Jesus drawing from the Old Testament but it's okay, he wrote it. And the whole idea is, my whole prayer, my whole prayer life, everything I'm ever going to ask you is going to be in the context that my greatest desire is that your name be set apart as supreme above all things, that "your Kingdom come and that your will be done." That's the context of all praying and if you don't have that context, you're not praying.

So, when we talk about asking the Father for things, for many, many years as some of you know, I've had my hips replaced, my wrist is made of metal, I've lived in great deals of pain, everything else, and I want to be honest with you, I have prayed for God to heal me and to some degree he has. He has really helped me in this last year but here's what I want you to see, the context of that praying, "God, heal me. I hurt so bad," was this: if through my healing your name will be held supreme and your Kingdom will come to a greater degree and your will of God will advanced and submitted to, then heal my body but if not, then let me die in this pain so long as your Kingdom come. So, all our asking from God is in the context of our greatest desire which is his glory and the advancement of his Kingdom. Now you're praying. It's not just, "I have a want. I have a need. I have a desire," but it's "Whatever will bring you glory." And it's in that context with that mind of Christ, that we begin to pray.

Notice, this praying “ask in my name,” what are you asking for? You’re asking to bear fruit. You’re asking for things that are genuine fruit. And what begins to happen is that you sort of start disappearing in the whole equation. “Lord, I’m an instrument. This is not about me. This is about you. Lord, if through this trial your Kingdom will advance, allow me to continue in it. Take it away only when the work is done. Lord, everything in my life is about one thing, the advancement of your Kingdom.” And so, in that context, we pray.

You know, I have gone to prayer meetings in churches and I’ll be honest with you, it’s enough to break your heart. It’s enough to break your heart. It sounds, literally, like a medical convention. It literally does. Now, I know that we need to pray for the sick, I know that, but I have sat in prayer meetings in the United States of America and watched while for 45 minutes they didn’t even pray, just people stood up and shared about people who were sick. And a big part of it was just gossip, people wanted to talk about stuff. And then I think, four billion people have not heard a clear gospel. We have believers who are being massacred in Iran. We have all these things going on in the Kingdom and the only thing that we can pray about are gallbladders. I mean, there’s something terribly wrong. And we wonder why doesn’t God visit us in our prayer meetings. You’re not Kingdom praying. If you seek first the Kingdom, he’ll take care of all these other little things you’re so preoccupied about.

So, if you’re going to be fruitful, you must pray. You must read the Word and pray, “God, make me fruitful. Make me fruitful.” And as you begin to understand the will of God, for example: it is God’s will that every creature under heaven hear the Word of God, hear the gospel. So, you pray and you fast and one day you get a phone call and you find out an entire country has just opened unto you to support their missionaries. That’s praying. You pray for your family who is hardened to the gospel. You pray and you fast and then one day, according to Colossians 4:1-4, a magnificent door has been opened unto you. The church has a need, it can’t go, it’s got a problem, some kind of need. You hit your face on the floor and you cry out unto God and you look for a magnificent deliverance. You’ve got a sin in your life that is a besetting sin and you can’t be set free from it. You attack it head on with prayer, with fasting, with reading the Word and you see victory come.

This is the kind of praying that we’re talking about. Never diminishing needs. But when you go in to hear people pray today, it’s all about them. It’s all about their needs. It’s like one old saying Ravenhill used to say, “We spend more time praying saints out of heaven than praying sinners into heaven.”

Now, I said that God answers our prayers when we’re praying in the context of the Kingdom and when our mind is being renewed so that we know what the will of God is, but I want to be very cautious here because you could misunderstand me. There is a basic idea out there, especially among Reformed guys that is this: God answers every prayer according to his will but it’s not the will of God to do anything. Now, they wouldn’t say that but that’s basically what’s practiced. Everything is written off to the providence of God. “Oh, it’s the providence of God. Oh, that nation is entirely without Christ.

Providence of God because if God wanted something to happen, he'd of done something." That's not the language of the New Testament. That might be language of a very precise camp and system of theology but it is not the language of the New Testament nor is it the language of our forefathers that we claim to be a part of. That's not the language of Edwards. That's not the language of Whitfield. That's not the language of Spurgeon. It's not the language of William Carey. It's not the language of the Puritans.

I want to tell you something: there is a mystery in prayer and I don't care if by saying this, this becomes the last Reformed meeting I ever have in my life, because if you reject this, you're not Reformed, you're deformed, and it's this: God has decreed everything before the foundation of the world, he knows the end of all things and not because he looked through the corridors of time and saw how it was going to turn out. I don't know who invented that, I would like to see these corridors of time because it's not in the Bible. God knows the end of all things, exactly how everything is going to come out and it's not because he looked through the corridors of time. It's because he's the author of history. It's going to come out just like he decreed it, okay? You say, "Wow, that's a pretty strong statement." Yes, it is and I believe it's biblical.

But I also believe that what James says is true: "You have not because you ask not." That king was given a set of arrows to smash against a floor and if he had smashed them against that floor and shown some zeal for Yahweh, something better would've happened than what happened. And I can't put those two things together and, guess what? It's not my job, nor is it yours. I am called upon to live whatever truth is given to me, realizing that if there is a God out there, and there is, and he is infinitely above me in his way of thinking, and he is, then why should I think that I should be able to figure out everything he's told me. I know this: he is sovereign over all things. And I know this: we have not because we ask not.

And I can honestly tell you this in good conscience: there are many times when I'm dealing with a country or a people group that has no gospel and I'm crying out to God, "God, what do you want to do? What do you want to do? What do you want me to do? I'll do anything, just tell me what you want me to do?" The thing that's most impressed upon my heart and moreso as I grow older, so I'm not talking about youthful zeal, when I go, "Lord, what do you want me to do?" It seems like the answer is this, "Well, what can you believe me for? What do you want to do? How far do you want to take this thing?" I told you, I'm a wildman. It's almost like God says, "You want to get nuts? You want to take this as far as it can go? I'm with you, let's go." I think that a lot of Reformed people are thinking God doesn't want to do anything and if we get him to do anything, we've got to pull him into it. I want to tell you something, my friend, God is running so much faster than the church. It's not trying to get him to catch up to you, it's trying to get you to catch up to him.

But, see, there's a sense of faith. There's a sense of faith that comes with reading the Scriptures. There's a sense of faith that comes with studying the old men and their ways. I remember one time I was a young missionary and I came back off the field. I was very

tired and I was invited to a church and they wanted me to speak. They did a question and answer, they had a microphone in the different aisles of the church and I was answering questions and a young, red-headed boy, I'll never forget this. He couldn't have been more than 10-12 and he comes up to the microphone. He'd been standing in line all night and this is the question that he asked, he said, "Mr. Washer?" I said, "Yes." He said, "After you win everybody in Peru to Jesus, then what are you going to do?" And everybody laughed except me and him and I said, "Well, son, I suppose when I win everybody to Christ in Peru I'll just have to go find me another country, won't I?" I don't see anywhere in the Bible where there can't be a worldwide revival. I'm sorry, I don't. I don't see anywhere in the Bible where an entire people group can't come to Jesus. I don't see anywhere in the Bible where I have to die without seeing everybody at least hear the gospel one time.

Everything I have contrived and I know that behind that contriving was the sovereignty of God, I know the 1689 and the Westminster, there is nothing I have ever contrived and prayed for that was turned down by God because it was too big. You can believe him for anything. When in the context you're looking at the advancement of the Kingdom and you're renewing your mind, you can believe him for anything.

Let me give you an example: Heart Cry. People ask me to give presentations on Heart Cry. I want to make this real, that this isn't just some antiquated "God used to do these things in the past." I can't tell you how many times he's delivered us. At Heart Cry our financial principles are based upon George Mueller's principles of his orphanage: we do not raise funds; we do not ask for money; we do not make our needs known. If a church asks us to come and explain what we do in the mission, we will come and explain what we are currently doing, not what we do if we had more money.

Not this Christmas, but last Christmas, nobody knew it except me, the financial guy and one board member. It was December 31st and we had \$150,000 deficit. Now, that doesn't mean that we owed somebody \$150,000, it just meant we had spent that much beyond our budget and basically almost had nothing. Okay? Nobody knew, but God had told us just a few days before, we felt that we were supposed to do something really wild in Asia and we did it. We took on something like, I don't know what it was, 45 more missionaries knowing this was the case, but we knew, God wants to reach Asia. God desires everybody in Asia to hear the gospel. This has opened up, it's biblical, this men are sound, we're going to do it. Nobody knew. I'm in my study, it's December 31st, that's the last day of the year. It's 10:00 in the morning and I'm studying the Word of God and lifting up my worries in prayer. Kevin comes in, our financial guy. He's kind of teary-eyed. I said, "Kevin, what's wrong?" He said, "Um, somebody just sent \$60,000." I said, "Really?" He said, "Yes." I said, "One check for \$60,000?" So we got down on our knees and thanked God and I went back to my Bible study and he went back to his computer. Twelve o'clock he comes in and I don't have the figures exactly right, and he comes in, he's teary-eyed. I said, "Kevin, what's wrong?" "Someone just sent \$100,000." I said, "You're kidding?" He said, "No, someone just sent it." I said, "You mean, 60 + 40?" He said, "No, 60 + \$100,000. Someone just sent \$100,000." I said, "Who?" He said, "I don't know." We go back, 2:00 o'clock he comes in, he's really looking pale. I said, "Kevin,

what's going on?" He said, "Well, we got a check for \$60,000." "I know." "No, we got another check for \$60,000." I said, "You're kidding?" At the end of the day \$326,000 came in. Nobody knew at all what was going on. Now, I can tell you that over and over and over. This last year, a similar thing happened. It didn't happen in one day, but it happened in one month.

Now, I want you to think about something: God chose the last day of the year. Why? Because he wanted to show everybody he doesn't need 365 days. He doesn't even need 24 hours. What I'm saying is: the more you cut yourself off from the arm of the flesh, the more you desire the advancement of his Kingdom and the more you live dependent on him in prayer, you will see more miracles than you could ever imagine. This is Caleb. There are just all kinds of mountains to conquer. Pick one out and go for it. Knock down some walls. Climb a mountain. But don't do it in the arm of the flesh. The more you cut yourself off from the help of men, the more you will have the help of God. The more you make pronouncements to men so that you may gather their strength for you, the less you will see God. Oh, my dear friend, there is no end to what God will do.

As a dear man says, "God delights in vindicating the confidence of his children." Prayer. Prayer, but not just prayer for ministry, prayer for your own life. You've got besetting sin, you wallow in it, you go get all kinds of counseling but you can never get any release but do you go to him? Have you spent all night tarrying before him in prayer? Have you cried out to him? Have you fasted? Have you sought him? Have you grabbed ahold of the horns of the altar saying, "I will not let you go until you bless me!" How many of you, how many of you have wrestled with the Nazarene all night? Saying, "I will not let you go lest you bless me!" I always tell people Jacob was a better fighter than me and they say, "Why?" He only got touched in one hip, I got both of mine replaced.

I'm no scholar. I'm not up here telling you things I read in a book but to kneel before your God, like I said, kneeling before an F5 tornado three feet away. That's what'll leave an imprint on a man. To wrestle with the Nazarene. Just find out how strong that carpenter's arm happens to be. When he grabs you with it and throws you to the ground, you'll know his strength but in his blessing he turns that arm around and fights for you, you'll know his strength to a greater degree. How about experience, not just reading the Puritans, but following them in their life.

So, we must pray. We must pray. We must pray. What does it look like? 1 Thessalonians, "Pray without ceasing." Ephesians 6:18, "With all prayers and petitions, pray at all times in the spirit, in the power of the spirit." That's not referring to tongues, it is referring to being empowered by the Spirit of God to pray. With this in view, "be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for the saints." Psalm 105:4, "Seek the Lord in his strength. Seek his face continually." I hear people today and I say, "Do you pray?" and they go, "Well, I kind of pray as I go." I say, "No, you don't. No, you don't." There is a lot of wisdom handed down from the Tozer's and the Ravenhill's and here's what one of them is: you learn to pray continuously only by praying with him alone. The practicing of the presence of God does not come by just walking around thinking you're doing it. I have found out that the men and women who can most dwell with God throughout their day no matter how mundane it is, are people who spent copious amounts of time alone with God

within their prayer closet. And from that, you begin to develop a sense of the presence of God and praying so that as you're walking through the church after you preach and you see a face that turns toward you and you know that person is seeking your counsel, immediately you head towards them lifting up prayers to God, "Give me wisdom to discern this need and give an answer from your Scriptures."

You wake up in the morning and you know that your wife is a bit distraught, "Lord, how to deal with this?" Or a wife to a husband. Constantly crying out to him, this communion. Frank Laubach. Do you know who I'm talking about? Have you ever heard the statement, "He's so heavenly minded that he's no earthly good?" Well, most people are so earthly minded they're no heavenly good. Frank Laubach, is a very unique individual. Do you know what his goal was? In his journal it comes out very clear, his one goal in life was to spend one entire day with uninterrupted thoughts of Christ. That was the great goal of his life. You say, "Yeah, one of those spiritual kooks that is so heavenly minded that he's no earthly good." Frank Laubach taught the entire Philippines to read so that they could read the Bible. You can go to the Philippines right now and talk to people about Frank Laubach and they'll say, "Frank Laubach, yeah, I know about him. I studied about him in history. He was a Christian man who taught all the islands of the Philippines to read so that they could read the Bible." So, I guess being heavenly minded is pretty earthly good, isn't it? Just think of this: this man taught all these islands to read and yet his greatest goal was to have uninterrupted thoughts of Christ in communion with Christ.

You see, we're not a meditative people. We're not a contemplative people. We're not a people who sit quietly. We are a people of noise. We are a people that every 20 minutes we have to have a commercial or we can't even watch a tv program, but in Christ we can regain what's been lost. I had a professor, and I know it sounds really funny, but he told me one time, he said, "Washer, I want to bring you to a point where you can sit in the middle of a hundred acre field and be so quiet before God you can hear a caterpillar crawling across the leaf." Now, I know that sounds a little mystic to you, but the fact of the matter is, how many times do you sit before the Lord in silence? Just quiet?

People say, "I never hear from God." Do you listen? You know, you wouldn't walk in front of the President talking, you'd keep your mouth shut until he addressed you. But you go before God before you even hit your knees, you're already telling him stuff. Did you ever think about listening? Meditating on the Word of God? Listening? Illustration I heard a long time ago: a man worked in this big noisy factory, just wheels grinding and everything else and he lost his watch. It was a very important watch that his father gave him; he lost it while he was working there in the factory during the day. I mean, how are you going to find this thing? The factory is full of men, wheels are grinding, everything is going on, noise, smoke, steam. There is no way to recover that watch. The next day though, he showed the workmen his watch, he had found it. They said, "How did you find the watch?" He said, "I waited until the factory was shut down and all the wheels stopped and all the men were gone and I lay quietly on the floor and I listened...tick...tick...tick....and I found my watch."

Think about it: we're not a people like that. If you walked into a church in which for five minutes everyone was silent, you'd probably call it a cult. You walk in a church, there is media blaring at you, there are pictures on screens, people talking, everything going on. Think about it. All the noise. I don't know if I correctly remember the poem,

“Weak from the journey, the long passing days,
Hungry to worship, to join in the praise.”

Christ coming in from the wilderness and goes into the Temple and instead of finding silence in the Temple, it says,

“His shock met with anger that burned on his face,
As he entered the wasteland of that barren place.”

That the temple had become more like a wilderness than the wilderness itself. Then it talks about how he makes a cord, a whip, and says

“They'll flee from the harm of the carpenter's strong arm.”

And then the poem says,

“At last the noise and confusion gave way to his word,
At last sacred silence so God could be heard.”

Do you know anything of a night watch? Do you know about a night watch? Do you ever awake in the night just to watch and pray? Just to sit alone with God in the night? In the dark? We are not a very spiritual people, are we? We need to pray.

Now, the last thing that I want to say and we'll quit here: we must abide in his Word, we must abide in prayer and this is one that is most beautiful to me, abiding in Christ is synonymous with abiding in Christ's love. D. A. Carson writes,

“The imagery is now changed because the agricultural metaphor has its limitations. It does not depict the unfathomable love that sets the disciples in this new intimacy.”

You must abide in the love of Christ. Now, I want us to look at this in two ways: positionally and actively. The language here is really important, it really is. I want you to listen: he says, “Just as the Father has loved me,” in verses 9 and 10, “I have also loved you.” Now, Greek scholars tell us that the aorist tense here probably suggests completeness or perfection so what he's saying is: as the Father has completely and perfectly loved me, so I perfectly and completely love you.

Now, I've written here, this is the first side of the coin or the foundation of the building: to be fruitful we must be utterly convinced or persuaded of Christ's love for us, then we must live in continuous dependence upon Christ's love, constant reliance upon Christ's

love, constant persistent imbibing of Christ's love. Now, what do I mean by all that? Jude says this, "Keep yourself in the love of God." Now, Paul says this, that he is "constrained by the love of Christ." Keep yourself in the love of God, Paul is constrained by the love of Christ. Now, many people think wrongly about this. When Paul says that he is constrained by the love of Christ, many think that Paul is saying, "I'm constrained by the great love that I have for Christ." Let me share with you something: you know, any song that says, "Oh, how I love Jesus," when everyone is singing that and it's true to sing that, that's a good song, but I kind of change the words because I'm a terrible singer anyways. I go, "Oh, how Jesus loves me," and the reason why is I look at my love for Christ and I really don't see anything worth singing about. But I look at the love of Christ for me and I see a whole lot worth singing about.

Now, don't say it's unbiblical to sing "Oh, how I love Jesus," the Psalmist says he loves the Lord. Okay? And we should love the Lord, the point I'm trying to make is the strength of Paul Washer's life is not how much he loves Jesus, it's how much Jesus loves him. That little change there will change everything. Let me share with you something that happened. As I said in my testimony this morning, I had a father that was very demanding. If you scored a 98, why didn't you score 100? If you scored 20 points in a basketball game, you could've scored 30, on and on. I was kind of never in the inner circle of anything. You know, I wasn't a cool guy when I was young, I wasn't this, I wasn't that. Here's what happened: when I got saved I thought this is going to be my one chance. I want to be in God's inner circle. I want God to love me like he loves his favorites. I know that's wrong but that was my mentality and I know it was fleshly and full of pride but I'm just telling you the facts. And I decided, this is the one place where you can really go all out even if you're not the smartest and even if you're not the prettiest, and even if you don't have the most muscles. I mean, there is nothing to hinder you in this endeavor except your own passion. I mean, if you want to be one of the top guys in this and really be loved by God and appreciated, this is it. All you have to do is have passion and, buddy, I had it. Went to Peru, worked 18 hours a day, lived on nothing, just wild. And every day became more of a grind. Every day I would see more failure, more failure, more failure, year after year until finally one day as a young man, I'll never forget it, it was in a town in Peru on the third floor of this old building that we were renting during the war because we were using it for a church and to help street kids. And I was on the third floor, there were a few steps from the third floor to the half other part of the third floor where I slept and right there I crashed. Totally exhausted every possible way after years of just full-blown, out of my mind serving Christ and I crashed.

And I crashed and all my failure right on the steps and I laid down there I cried and I cried and I cried. I said, "I don't want to go to hell because I know something of what is there. I don't want to go to hell but I don't want to go to heaven. I am so ashamed of my performance. I've not been able to do any of this right. I know you have servants. I know you have your Spurgeons. I know you have all these kinds of people and they pleased you and I know when you look at my life it just must be a joke. I just want to go somewhere when I die where I don't have to suffer but I don't have to look at you and be so disappointed and see the disappointment in your face."

I know that's insane. I know theologically it's incorrect but it's where I was and it was there that in one moment, the sin and vileness of everything I was saying was made known to me and you would think that that would grind me even more to powder. No. God should have struck me down for those kinds of attitudes but it was there empty, empty of any hope of ever pleasing God because not only had I failed in what I intended to do, what I intended to do was actually evil. Then in one moment I began to understand, I am loved. I do not have to move a quarter of an inch this way, a quarter of an inch that way, I do not have to perform, I do not have to do anything. I am loved in Christ. The very moment when God should have most judged me, he most showed me his love. What a God.

Brothers, you are so wrong in what you think about men of God. Now, hopefully, they are sincere in that we do pray and that we do want to be following hard after Christ but men of God in their best moment are only worthy of hell. And what you need to see is that the thing that can really make you strong is not that you look at your life and you're able to see all the things you're doing right, no, you give up looking at your life to find something that you're doing right and worthy of being loved for and you look at the finished work of Christ. And you look at Christ, just Christ and all that he's done and you understand he loves you and you don't have to perform. And no, you were not saved to serve. You were not even saved to love God. You were saved so that God could love you and then out of that great love for you and his empowering Spirit, you would be able to give some return on that. But that you are loved. That's a magnificent thing. Do you realize all that you can attempt when you no longer fear failure? When you no longer fear disappointment? So many believers after talking to them, this is what I'll tell them, so many believers: I'll go, "I've discerned your problem. You honestly think the first time that you look in the face of Christ you're going to see a scowl." Think about it. Yes, I know there's a judgment throne for believers. I know all these doctrines, don't think I don't, I do, but I want to tell you, believer, he didn't shed his own blood on that tree so that the first time he sees you, he would be able to show you his disappointment.

You see that? I mean, it's the love of God. It's what God did for us in Christ that sets us free and empowers us to know that you're loved, to know that you're loved. I remember when my son, Ian, he was just a little boy and he's always been very confident. He's always been like, "Okay, I'm here, the party can begin." You know, he's just always been very confident and I remember when he was a little boy that he was laying on my bed asleep and I walked in and he woke up when I walked in and this is what he did, he woke up and this was especially because I was always afraid of my father, he woke up, he turned around and he (opened his arms wide). There wasn't a doubt in his mind what should happen here. He is loved and his Dad's going to run over there and give him the biggest hug in the world.

What a joy. To know that you are loved. You say, "Oh, but I've failed and I did this." Why do you think he died? I mean, what is this death all about? Just so that he can say that he forgave you and then show you constantly all the reasons why he shouldn't? He saved you to put that all away so that he could have brothers that he would not be ashamed to announce them to the congregation, to say that they are his brothers. He has

set you free to be loved. It doesn't matter how big your ministry is or isn't. It doesn't matter what you do or don't. You are loved if you are in Christ.

Now, the unconverted church person hears that and goes, “Well, great, I’ll just keep sinning. It doesn't matter what I do, I’ll just keep sinning.” But the person who has been truly regenerated by the Spirit of God, what does he do? “If God loves me this way, I so desire much more to be holy.” One of the most pathetic things that a preacher has to do is to tell believers that they're loved of God because there is no way for us to describe the greatness of that love for his people. Sometimes when I’m preaching pastorally, when I was a pastor or a few times when I’ve taken over a church for a few months in order to help it because it was struggling, everybody hears me preaching on Youtube. The meanest man in the world and I’ve had those same people show up because I’ve come into their area to help a church. And I’ve had young men show up and listen to me preach to that church and it would be a very backward church, a church with a lot of problems, a lot of sin and some young men kept showing up and coming and finally they went to one of my friends after hearing me preach for several weeks, they came to one of my friends and they said this, “Uh, we got a question.” He said, “Yeah.” They said, “We respect Brother Paul a lot but has he compromised?” And the guy says, “Well, what do you mean?” He goes, “Well, everybody knows this church has a lot of problems and all he's done for weeks is taught on the love of God. You know, we expected to get some Youtube stuff. You know, sermon jam, have him with smoke coming out of his ears, preaching really hard.”

You see, here is what you need to understand: if someone has been truly converted, truly converted, you do not have to manipulate them with fear. You do not have to coerce them. If they've truly been regenerated by the Holy Spirit, the more they come to understand the glories of God in the face of Christ, the more they come to understand the love of God on their behalf, the more they'll be driven to holiness and if they're not, it's because they're not sheep, they're goats.

When I come to Christians, and yes, sometimes Christians need to be rebuked and warned and all kinds of things, but basically, when I’m dealing with a Christian, my greatest desire is to explain to them how much they are loved by God in Christ. And I find that when people come to understand, truly regenerate people, how much they are loved, they seem to blossom. “Keep yourselves,” Jude said, “in the love of God.” That doesn't mean: live in such a way so that God will love you. It means this: keep yourself basking in his love. If you tell me to come to your house because you've got a plant that isn't growing and it's wilting and dying and you say, “Brother Paul, what do you think the problem is?” I'll say, “Well, show me the plant,” and you take me into a closet where you've kept the plant for like six months. Again, I’m going to go, “Well, I’m not really an expert at growing plants but I think if you put this thing out in the sun it might do better.” The devil is constantly trying to convince the believer that God's love isn't as the Bible says. And when we begin to believe that, we wilt, we die. Keep yourself believing the truth about the love of God and it will cause you to prosper. It will cause you to grow. It will cause you to bear fruit. The sunshine of God's love upon you.

Last night, a young man came to me and he was talking about, "You know, I feel bad sometimes. You are so passionate and talking about Christ the way that you did and sometime my heart is dead." And I said, "Young man, sometimes my heart is dead. Sometimes my zeal wanes. Even last night, the tears I shed were not, 'Oh, this man loves Jesus so much,' the tears were, 'God, how can you love me so much and yet my heart be so cold?'" You see, it's not our love for God that keeps us on an even keel, it is God's constant love for us.

I had a young man come to me one time and he was a very godly young man, pursuing Christ and he said, he actually wrote me an email and he said this, "Brother Paul, I am so unrighteous and so ungodly and so ignorant of God." So, I wrote him back, "Dear brother, you are much more ungodly and much more unrighteous than you now know. Signed, Paul." I have the gift of encouragement. And he called me back up and he's like, "Thank you? Why did you write that?" I said, "Because I want to prove to you something, son. I've watched your life. You're following hard after Christ. In many ways when I look at you, I seem to think of myself that I lost my first love." I said, "You're following harder after Christ than I appear to be, but I'm much happier than you." And he said, "How can that be?" I said, "Son, I've give up on trying to earn my own keep in the Kingdom of heaven." I said, "Son, when you get up in the morning and you have a five hour time of prayer and you read the Word for 25 hours just in that morning and you go out and you witness to everybody, you're even nice to cats, you're a testimony to Christ. I mean, you're just walking in the Spirit." I said, "And you come home at night and how do you feel?" He said, "Man, I feel good." I said, "What about the next morning when you get up, you slept in too late, you missed your time with the Lord, you kicked the cat, you had an opportunity to witness, you didn't do that," and so on and so forth? How do you feel?" He said, "Horrible."

Now, there's a sense and I want to be very careful so someone doesn't pick me apart on this sermon, there's a sense in which, yes, there was sin and we need to but I rebuked him of idolatry and he said, "Why idolatry?" I said, "Your performance is the source of your joy." I said, "Son, even when you got up and had the 25 hour quiet time and you did all the stuff you did, you still only earned enough to find maybe a cooler spot in hell." I said, "A man at his best does not deserve the love of God." I said, "I've come to realize that over the years." I said, "Your joy is based on your performance. Son, my joy is based on the finished work of Jesus Christ and that's the difference between me and you. Do you see that?"

What is the Christian life like? It is like this: it has to do with revelation, brokenness and joy. You say, "Well, what do you mean?" A man is walking, he doesn't know Christ, he's unconverted. He hears a gospel preacher one day and the Spirit of God renews his heart. For the first time in his life, he sees a glimpse of how God truly is and in seeing that, he sees a glimpse of how he truly is. Something of his sin and it breaks him and he repents but he's not left to despair. Why? Because he also sees in that revelation, the grace of God in the face of Christ and he's filled with joy as he believes. Do you see that? And he gets up the next day and what happens? As he's walking through his Christian life, he sees a greater revelation of who God is, a greater revelation of God's holiness and what does it

do? It breaks him deeper than the day before. It causes his repentance to be deeper because he sees himself even in a greater light now and sees the need for brokenness and repentance. But he's not left to despair but he looks at the grace of God in the face of Christ and his joy is greater than the joy he had the day before. And you walk through your entire Christian life that way until you're 90 years old and at 90 years old, you see more of the holiness of God than you ever could have imagined. You see more of the darkness of your own soul than you ever could have imagined. You're more broken than you could have ever imagined and yet your joy is greater than you could have ever imagined but what happens is, there's been a holy transaction. When you started, your joy was coming from who you were and what you could do, now at 90, you're empty of that and your joy only comes from Christ and that's the way it's supposed to be. All our joy, all our hope, everything in Christ.

Well, now that I've summed up the entire Christian life, I guess we can close the conference. Be blessed in what God has done for you in Christ. Be blessed. Rejoice. Look unto him. Look unto him. Inward looks are necessary but to hold your gaze inwardly only leads to death. Look to Christ because he is greater than every one of your failures and your weaknesses and your sins.

"I sing because I'm happy.
I sing because I'm free."

It was all finished at Calvary. It was all finished at Calvary.

Let's pray.

*Father, thank you for your Word. I pray, Lord, that out of this your people will be helped.
In Jesus' name. Amen.*

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