

BACK TO BASICS



*Some ABCs of the Christian
life, by Pastor David Legge*

Compiled and Transcribed by Andrew Watkins

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Contents

- 1. The Morning Watch - 3***
- 2. The Fullness Of The Holy Spirit - 10***
- 3. Temptation - 18***
- 4. Obedience - 27***
- 5. Fruit - 34***
- 6. Guidance - 42***
- 7. Love For The Lord - 50***
- 8. Love For Others - 58***
- 9. Love For The Lost - 65***
- 10. The Church - 72***
- 11. Discernment - 79***
- 12. Assurance - 85***
- 13. Worship - 93***
- 14. Warfare - 100***

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Back To Basics - Chapter 1

"The Morning Watch"

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I want you to turn with me to Psalm 5. We're beginning a new series this morning that I hope will be a help to us all in our Christian pilgrimage and pathway with the Lord Jesus. It's entitled 'Back to Basics', back to basics, and the subject this morning that I want to take up in the time that remains is 'The Morning Watch', the morning watch. One verse I want to read, we'll look at quite a number of verses from the Scriptures, but just one verse to be a springboard for our contemplations this morning, verse 3 of Psalm number 5: 'My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O LORD; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up'.

There is a great need, I believe, in this modern church age in which we live, an age of modern technology, an age of slick programmes, an age of emphasis on professionalism, to reassess what really matters in the life of the church and in the life of individual believers, Christians. We need to reassess what really brings blessing to the people of God, what we really need if we're going to know true success before God - and I use that phrase 'success' advisedly, because there is such a thing as 'true success' in the word of God, but it's not always as we quantify it today; as numbers, as professionalism, as excellence. If we ever, as the Iron Hall here, or as the church of Jesus Christ where He has called us to be a witness; and if we are ever, as individual Christians, going to succeed for God in a biblical sense, it is essential for us to go back to our roots and examine where we came from, and get back to basics.

I hope you understand what we're saying today. If we feel, perhaps, that in our own personal lives, and as the church - perish the thought - that we have lost our way, it is imperative for us to go back to basics, to examine our roots, to go back to the first principles of Christ - if you like, the ABCs of Christian discipleship - and ask ourselves: are we still practising these things, and is it the absence of these things that are the reasons for the absence of blessing in our lives?

Now this Sunday morning we're looking at 'The Morning Watch', but on other Sunday mornings we'll be looking at the Lord's table, we'll be looking at baptism, we'll be looking at witnessing and soul-winning, we'll be looking at various things that we ought to be doing as Christians in our lives, how we face temptation and so on. We'll hopefully get back to the basics of the Christian life, and if we've never learnt them - if you're newly saved - we'll learn them on these mornings; but if we've forgotten them, or left those old paths of blessing, that we'll get back onto them and know God's blessing in our life once again.

This morning's basic that we've got to get back to is what I've called 'The Morning Watch'. S.D. Gordon, who was a great devotional writer, wrote these words, I quote: 'A life of victory and power hinges upon three things: one, an act; two, a purpose; three, a habit. An initial act, a fixed purpose, a daily habit'. Now that initial act that Gordon was talking about was the act of personal surrender to the Lord Jesus Christ, when you come to faith in the Saviour at that hour of salvation. But then that purpose that he's talking about, a fixed purpose, is to obey the Lord as a believer in whatever He tells us to do. So there is an initial act, there's a fixed purpose, and then he talked about a daily habit. If we're to know power, vitality and success in the Christian life, we not only have that initial act of salvation, and that purpose in our minds that is fixed to

obey the Lord in whatever He says, but we need to have a daily habit. That daily habit is meeting with the Lord, day by day.

S.D. Gordon said, in summing all that he had just said up, 'After the initial act of surrender, the secret of a strong winsome Christian life is in spending time daily alone with God over His word'. Now here's the question: do you observe the morning watch? Early in the morning, are you found pouring over the word of God, praying to God and bringing your needs to Him in prayer? You might say: 'Well, that's elementary, every Christian should be engaged in such an act', and that is true - but my question to you this morning is: are you engaged in it? What an obvious mistake, you might think, for a Christian of all people to stop reading their Bible, to stop praying, to stop meeting with God in the morning - but the fact of the matter is: many of us are defeated as Christians because we do not observe this basic in the Christian life. We do not come daily before the Lord and meet with God.

The reason for many of us is that we are too busy to pray, but you know those great saints of God that we read of in the Scriptures and we read of in Christian history were not too busy to pray - in fact they were too busy not to pray! The morning watch was such an essential thing in their lives that Watchman Nee, for one example, said 'No Bible, no breakfast'. 'If I get up this morning and I don't have time to read my Bible, well then I don't have any breakfast until I get to that place where I'm pouring over my Bible before God and bringing my prayers to the throne of grace'. Martin Luther was a very busy man, in fact he was busy with the Reformation affairs in the whole of Europe, but he said these words: 'If I fail to spend' - and I'm not laying down a specific time for any of you, but this is just what he said - 'If I fail to spend two hours in prayer each morning, the devil gets the victory through the day. I've so much business I cannot get on without three hours, at times, daily in prayer'. He goes on to say: 'If I should neglect prayer but a single day, I should lose a great deal of the fire of faith'. That's what Luther said, a man who turned Europe upside down for Christ - but here's my question to you in the light of his testimony, and the testimony of Scripture: have any of us lost the fire of faith, the vitality of our Christian lives, the power, the victory? Could it be because the morning watch is neglected?

Now please note, I'm not talking this morning specifically about Bible reading. I'm not talking about praying - I've done plenty of talking about praying and Bible reading in the past. I'm not even talking about what has been commonly called today 'the quiet time', which is an expression that was used in a valid sense when it was first christened, but now I believe has got out of all control, and people think that 'the quiet time' is to just read a portion of Scripture and get through the Bible in a year or two years or whatever, and then pray through a list and bring your needs to God - that is not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about meeting with God, specifically meeting with God in the morning.

The necessary ingredient of a life of victory and power in the Lord Jesus Christ is a life, not reading the Bible or praying, it is a life of communion with the Lord Jesus Christ that will bring you into the immediate presence of God. It is the morning watch, it is what saints of God in bygone eras called 'the trysting time'. You might think that's rather an archaic name, and I suppose it is, because it's an old word for a time and a place where lovers used to meet. You would arrange to meet under such-and-such a tree, or at the corner of such-and-such a street with the one that you were courting. There is to be a time, and there is to be a place in all our lives - and I believe the biblical time is the morning, and I'll show you this in a moment - but there is to be that time when we meet with Jesus, the Lover of our souls, and to His bosom we fly!

Is there that place? Others called it 'the still hour', 'the quiet hour', the title we take this morning is 'the morning watch'. The name is a historic one, 'the morning watch', in fact the name is a biblical one. It's directly suggested by David in the verse that we read, Psalm 5 verse 3: 'O Lord, in the morning shalt thou hear my voice; in the morning will I order my prayer unto thee'. It was held through the saints of all the ages that the morning was God's appointed time to meet Him. Murray M'Cheyne put it like this: 'I ought to pray

before seeing anyone. I feel it is far better to begin with God, to see His face first, to get my soul near Him before it is near another'.

Now is this the modern day practice of the church of Jesus Christ, and individual Christians? The morning watch? To see the face of Jesus before we see any other face? We uphold men like David who said: 'Evening, and morning, and afternoon will I pray and cry aloud and seek Your face'; we uphold the apostles who went up to the synagogue early in the morning to pray; we uphold the Lord Jesus who was found early in the morning in the place of prayer; we uphold men like Murray M'Cheyne and Martin Luther - but as E.M. Bounds says on that very light: 'We build these men's tombs and write their epitaphs, but we are careful not to follow their examples!'. Do we follow their examples of the morning watch?

Now please note, before I go on any further, what I'm not saying. I'm not saying that the morning is the only time to meet God, that is not what I'm saying. Some people, I'll not name anybody, are not morning people - the fact of the matter is, they're grumpy in the morning, it takes them a couple of hours to wake up and the morning is not so conducive to them. I'm not saying that your main 'quiet time' has to always, by some rule or regulation, be the morning. Some people work shifts, and it would be impossible almost for them to meet God, in some sense, in the morning. Some people are ill, and they're not feeling well in the morning, and it takes them a little time to get body and soul together before they can meet with the Lord. I'm not talking about those specific instances, but the principle that I'm espousing is this: we ought to begin the day with God. Whatever our day is, however it begins, as far as it is physically, emotionally and spiritually possible, and however short that time may be - if you take your main quiet time later on in the day, I'm not saying that you can't do that or you shouldn't, but I am saying that we should at least, as soon as the day dawns, have a time with God - because it makes the difference.

Men of God have testified that it makes the difference, and I'm not talking about legalism now - don't misunderstand what I'm saying. I'm not putting myself or yourself into bondage, I'm not saying you must do this or you should do this, rather I'm saying - mark - you need this! You will perhaps even come to a place in your life, if you begin to practice this, where you will want this - there will not be a bondage, but it will be blessing; it won't be penance, it will be a privilege to get up and lift your voice to God in the morning. Let me give you this basic in two titles: one, the morning watch is the most biblical of practices; and two, the morning watch is the most beneficial of practices.

Let's take the first: it is the most biblical of practices. Now we don't have time to go into all this, let me just say that if you were to go to Genesis 19, Abraham rose early in the morning to meet with God. In Genesis 28 Jacob did the same; in Exodus 8, 9, 24 and 34 Moses did it; in Joshua 3, 6, 7 and 8 Joshua rose early in the morning; Gideon in Judges 6; Hannah in 1 Samuel 1; Samuel in 1 Samuel 15; David in 1 Samuel 17; Job in chapter 1 verse 5; the apostles in Acts 5:21; Mary in Luke 24, Mark 16, John 20 and our Lord Jesus Christ - who is our supreme example and gives us the power to live like Him, in Mark chapter 1 and verse 34.

Let's turn to that portion for a moment - Mark 1:34, and it says: 'He healed many that were sick of divers diseases, and cast out many devils; and suffered not the devils to speak, because they knew him. And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed. And Simon and they that were with him followed after him. And when they had found him, they said unto him, All men seek for thee'. Now just imagine the scene please, the Lord Jesus has been busy all the day before healing the sick, making blind eyes to see, doing mighty miraculous works before men. The crowd is around about Him, everybody is thronging Him, everybody wants Him, they're pushing up against Him in the press; and the nightfall comes and He goes and retires to His bed - and almost like a voice to Samuel in the night, He hears the voice of His heavenly Father, and He arises. There is none other arisen in the house, no one else in the town is awake, and carefully He gets out of His bed and He walks on tiptoes to the door of that house. He lifts the latch and closes it gently, and He goes out into that same street, past the same houses

where people were thronging after Him from. He goes into the countryside, and then into the fields; and He sees a crevice, perhaps, in a rock that is nearby - and there He gets upon his knees and He faces God in heaven, and He cries to Him for power! Not another soul around Him - no one sees it - but there He is, the Son of God in the morning watch.

Now this is biblical, the statement 'the morning watch' goes right back to ancient times, where city walls were guarded. The guards would stay up all night and take shifts in order to protect the city. In the earliest times the morning watch was divided into three watches. There was a watch from 6pm to 10, then there was a watch from 10 to 2, and then again there was the watch from 2 to 6am - those three watches. In Roman times, in the days of our Lord Jesus and the disciples, the division was into four watches of the night. The first watch was from 6, tea-time, 6pm through to 9pm, that was the evening watch; then there was the midnight watch which was from 9pm to 12 midnight; and then there was the cock-crowing watch from midnight to 3am; and then there is what is called the morning watch from 3am to 6am. Now it is interesting that in the Bible it's constantly repeated that the Lord keeps the nightly watch over His children - what am I talking about? When you're asleep and when I'm asleep, and when the children of Israel were asleep in the Old Testament, it was the Lord who would keep them during the night - He was watching over them, Psalm 121: 'The LORD is thy keeper: the LORD is thy shade upon thy right hand. The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night'. He watched over them, in fact Psalm 127 verse 1 that says: 'Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it', also says, 'except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain'. The word for 'keep', 'except the Lord keep the city', is the same word for 'watchmen'. So you could translate it like this: 'Except the Lord watches the city, what is the point in the watchmen watching it, if the Lord is not over it?'

Why am I telling you all this? It's simply this: there was this idea in the Old Testament and, I believe, the New Testament that the Lord was watching over His people all through the night, the watches of the night, and then out of respect and reverence for Him and devotion, out of a heart of love - before, as it were, the final watch was over where the Lord was taking care of them, they would rise out of their bed and come to meet with God. Do you understand this? It's as if the Lord is saying: 'I've been watching over you all the night while you've slept, and I wish that you would give me the refreshment of a quiet bit of talk and fellowship with you before the day begins'.

Isaiah chapter 50 tells us about this, please turn with me, Isaiah chapter 50 verse 4: 'The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he' - speaking of God - 'wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned'. That is a morning appointment with God, and it is at His special request. Look who is waking us up! It is the Lord who is waking us up in the morning. It is daily: 'he wakeneth morning by morning'. Look at the results of it: a trained ear, a trained tongue, a life of helpfulness, a life of power, a life of victory - and it's early in the morning, because the Lord has to waken us up.

Let me show you another illustration of this in allegory, turn to the Song of Songs for a moment. Song of Songs 5, I believe Song of Songs not only is a typology of the church of Jesus Christ and the Lord Jesus Christ, but also an allegory of the Christian in communion with the person of the Lord Jesus - I think that is perhaps primarily what it is, the love relationship that we have with Him. Here you have the bride, as the church or as the individual Christian, and she says in verse 2: 'I sleep, but my heart waketh: it is the voice of my beloved that knocks, saying, Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night'. So here is the Bridegroom knocking on the door, and He is damp because of the dew of the early morning, and He wants entrance into the bridal chamber. He says: 'I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them? My beloved put in his hand by the hole of the door, and my bowels were moved for him. I rose up' - but notice, she waited for a while, and then she rose up - 'to open to my beloved; and my hands dropped with myrrh, and

my fingers with sweet smelling myrrh, upon the handles of the lock. I opened to my beloved; but my beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone: my soul failed...I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but there came back no answer'. It was her trysting time with her beloved, and the verses following tell us because of her reluctance in sleep to rise, the desired interview with her Beloved was missed. As we read on in this story we find that she suffered defeat in her contact with the world that day because she had not had that sweet communion with her Beloved.

This is the most biblical of practices, but let me show you in the moments that are left that it is the most beneficial of practices. Now mark this please, this statement: God has chosen the early morning hour for giving special blessings to men. I hope I've shown you that already from the word of God, but let me show you it more: Jacob at Jabok, crossing that ford of Jabok, and there he is a wicked twisted man, just what his name says. He needed to be changed, he needed to have a touch from God, and you remember what happened: there he was, and he was awakened at midnight, during the night, perhaps thinking that one of Esau's men had come and ambushed him, and he turns and he wrestles with this figure - and we know that it was an angelic figure. He wrestles, it says, into the early hours of the morning; and at that point of the morning that supernatural figure touched his thigh and he became weak, and Jacob is heard to utter these words: 'I will not let you go until you bless me' - and it was at that early hour of the dawning of the day that God blessed him. He was given the name 'Israel', a prince with God and with men, and that place was called 'Peniel', the face of God, because it was there in the early hour of the morning that he looked into the face of God.

What about Moses in Exodus chapter 33 and 34? He has the burden of the sin of the people, their idolatry and all their iniquity. He has had the awful experiences that we read about in that book, trying to lead the people of God. But as he prays to God, he asks this prayer: 'Lord, show me Thy glory' - is that not a prayer that all of us desire? 'Lord, that I would have more power, that I would have more consciousness of You in my life' - what does the Lord say to him? Exodus 34:2: 'Be ready in the morning, and come up in the morning unto mount Sinai, and present thyself there to me in the top of the mount' - did Moses keep his morning appointment with God? Yes, he did, and it says: 'and Moses rose up early in the morning, and went up', and he got such a glimpse of the glory of God, what happened? As he came down that mountain after spending much time with God in His presence, it says that his face shone and all the people could see it, though he was unconscious of it!

In John 20, and I want you to turn to it, we have Mary Magdalene, John 20, on resurrection morning: 'The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre'. Now please mark that in Mark's gospel 16 verse 1 it says that Mary, the other Mary, and Mary the mother of Jesus came at the rising of the sun - but it says here that Mary Magdalene came while it was yet dark. She had an arranged appointment to go with the other two Marys, but she couldn't wait until that, so she rose up early in the morning when it was still dark, and she went to anoint the body of our Lord Jesus Christ with those spices. We read on that when she got to the tomb there was no one there. She went back and told Peter and the disciples, and as they ran back to the other disciples we read that she stayed there, and she stood beside the empty tomb weeping, thinking of the Lord Jesus Christ. Then the angel came to her and said: 'Woman, why weepest thou?'. She said: 'They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him'. Verse 14: 'When she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him', this is beautiful, she doesn't even name Him because there's only one man in her life, 'Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away. Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master' - O my Master!

When did she meet the Master? Can I correct that - when did the Master choose to meet her? Early in the morning, she could go away and truly say: 'I have seen the face of Jesus, tell me not of aught beside; I have heard the voice of Jesus, all my soul is satisfied'. Will you allow me to go to the next chapter, chapter 21? We see seven disciples this time, verse 1: 'After these things Jesus shewed himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias; and on this wise shewed he himself. There were together Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two other of his disciples. Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a fishing'. Now do you know what that statement was? 'I've had it with this Christian lark. Christ is dead, our promises are buried, there is no hope. The fishing that I left to follow Christ to be fishers of men, I will retort to because there is no hope'. 'They say unto him, We also go with thee. They went forth, and entered into a ship immediately; and that night they caught nothing. But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus'.

When did the Lord Jesus meet those bitterly disappointed and downcast disciples? When it was the breaking of the day, they noticed Him in the dim dawn light, someone standing on the beach. Now I have given you loads of examples here today of how the morning is the most biblical practice to wait upon God; how it is the most beneficial practice where God has chosen to meet us, and where God has promised to bless us before the world awakes, before our minds and our hearts are filled with all the distractions of a busy day - to give the best time to God, do not underestimate it! Please do not miss the difference that makes.

Several years ago Barbara give me a poem entitled 'The Difference', and you might have heard it or read it, you might have it. Listen to it - and I want to finish with two poems, this one first. It goes like this:

I got up early one morning and
rushed right into the day;
I had so much to accomplish that
I didn't have time to pray

Problems just tumbled about me,
and the heavier came each task.
"Why doesn't God help Me?" I wondered.
He answered , "You didn't ask".

I wanted to see joy and beauty,
but the day toiled on, gray and bleak;
I wondered why God didn't show me.
He said, "But you didn't seek."

I tried to come into God's presence;
I used all my keys at the lock.
God gently and lovingly chided,
"My child, you didn't knock."

I woke up early this morning,
and paused before entering the day;
I had so much to accomplish
that I had to take time to pray'.

Do you take time to pray in the morning? Do you hear the voice of the nail-pierced hand knocking, and saying to you: 'Behold I stand at the door and knock, if any man hear my voice and open the door I will come into him and sup with him, and he with me'. Here's an individual who heard His voice, and from that hour

hearing His voice wrote this prayer of the experience that she had in the presence of the Lord Jesus that was second to none. Listen to this poem carefully as I close with it, it's called 'The Grey Dawn':

'At the grey dawn, while yet the world is sleeping,
And the sweet matins of the birds begin,
One who hath held me in His holy keeping
Standeth at my threshold waiting to come in.

Oft had He knocked to give me gentle warning,
My heart seemed willing, but my flesh how weak!
Until one morning, O that blessed morning,
When my own name I heard Him speak.

Yes, t'was my name - no other voice could speak it
To stir my heart and melt my very soul.
And I rose so quickly to obey it:
Flung wide the door and gave Him full control.

O, then I feasted on divinest beauty,
The altogether lovely loving One,
While blessing me through radiance round each duty,
That in His name should on that day be done.

Peace fell upon, while to Him I listened,
And in that secret hour I talked with Christ
As ne'er before, and we together christened
With tears of joy, new joy, our sacred tryst.

Can I afford to miss such rare communion?
To let the health of my own soul decline?
May Christ forbid, His grace secured the union,
While I am truly His, as He is mine'.

Is your morning hour given to God? For if it is, I tell you as one who has practiced it, and one who has failed many times in it and missed out from it: it makes the world of difference to begin the day with God. Can I ask you before we pray: did you meet God this morning? Did you? It is that why there's an absence of power and vitality and joy in your Christian life? It's very easy to rectify - set the alarm tomorrow morning and meet with Him, and what a difference it will make!

Lord, let us hear the voice of the Saviour in the morning, getting us up to meet with Him in that appointed trysting place, where we will watch with Him and He with us. Bless us in it, we pray, and bless us today as we continue on in Thy presence, that we will see the wondrous face of beauty, and know the gentle touch of care. Amen.

See Appendix A – A note from Pastor Legge on 'The Morning Watch'

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Back To Basics - Chapter 2
"The Fullness Of The Holy Spirit"

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To listen to some, being saved would appear to be all that really matters. Of course, being saved is the most important thing in life, the most important experience that any of us will encounter is the decision whether or not to trust Christ for salvation, and to know for sure that we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus and we are on our way to heaven. There is no other more important essential thing than that. But to listen to many Christians who emphasise the evangelical gospel of the necessity to believe in the Lord Jesus and be saved, there is a danger that we convey the message: 'Well, that's all that matters'. It is the most important thing, but it is certainly not the only thing. In fact, it is only the beginning of this great Christian life. It is, if you like, only the threshold experience that ought to introduce us to a lifetime adventure of many more spiritual experiences, and many more supernatural encounters with God.

I wonder do you believe that? Not just intellectually, but experientially, do you believe that conversion is only the start, and after conversion there will be many experiences, many encounters with the divine godhead, Father, Son and Holy Spirit? Now we are not those who call ourselves Pentecostals, we are not those who call ourselves charismatic, and I'm not making a critique of either of those two societies at all, that's not my purpose this morning. The danger is that because we reject, perhaps even a great deal of teaching that comes from those two camps, we almost categorically ignore the third person of the blessed Trinity, the Holy Ghost of God. We are ignorant, perhaps of His work within our lives, unto sanctification, unto power, and in fullness, that we all ought to know no matter what denomination we stand under.

So, it's so important that early believers, right at the beginning of their Christian lives, understand that there is more to life than just being saved, that there is an experience called the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Do you know that? Christian who has been on the road for 20 years, 30 years, 40 years, 50 years - have you ever entered into what it is to be full of the Holy Spirit of God? There is more to the Christian life than being saved, as Faber, the poet whom I love so well, put it:

'Tis not enough to save our souls,
To shun eternal fires;
The thought of God will rouse the heart
To more sublime desires'.

The experience that is taught in the Bible, chiefly from Ephesians 5 verse 18 that we read from, is an experience called 'the fullness of the Spirit' which may be simultaneous with conversion. It could happen, theoretically, at the same time at which you're saved. I think there are instances of that within the Scriptures in the Acts of the Apostles, but this is also an experience - perhaps more commonly in our present age, whenever it does happen - that is subsequent to conversion. It happens after the moment of initial belief and confession of our Lord Jesus. This expression 'the fullness of the Spirit', or 'to be filled with the Spirit', or 'to be full of the Spirit' is found fourteen times in the New Testament. It's found four times in Luke's gospel, in one it refers to John the Baptist who was full of the Holy Spirit in his mother's womb - imagine that! Then it refers to Elizabeth, his mother, and Zacharias his father, who were both full of the Holy Spirit. Then finally

it's mentioned of the Lord Jesus Himself, after His baptism, that there He was full of the Holy Spirit; and then later as He went on to be tempted, He was led of the Holy Spirit into the wilderness.

Those four occasions in Luke's gospel are the only four occasions prior to Pentecost. Pentecost is that event that we read of in the Acts of the Apostles chapter 2; the Lord Jesus has died, been buried, rose again, and has now ascended to heaven - but He promised His disciples that He would send to them another comforter, another strengthener that would be with them and would enable them to do greater things than He was able to do on the earth just Himself there and then in one body. He was sending His Spirit into each believer to do the works that the Lord Jesus Christ had done in the preaching of the gospel.

Let me show you this in John chapter 14, it's important that we understand the biblical foundation of this doctrine of the fullness of the Spirit. John 14, you know well the initial introductory verses about that great mansion and dwellingplace God is preparing for us. The latter verses are not so familiar from verse 16 on, the Lord Jesus said: 'I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you'.

Now at that moment in time the Holy Spirit dwelt with the disciples, in a certain sense the Spirit of God accompanied them - but the Lord was speaking of a day coming Pentecost in Acts chapter 2 when the Holy Spirit would not just dwell with them, but would be - future tense - in them. He would come to dwell with His people. The Holy Spirit, inevitably, would be poured upon all flesh, and anyone - whatever they were, Jew or Gentile, bond or free, male or female - who would meet God on His own terms, and put faith in Jesus Christ, could have the experience of being totally inhabited by the Holy Spirit.

Now it's important that we understand that in the truest sense the disciples were not 'complete Christians' until Acts chapter 2. What I mean by that is, you need to understand that the Gospels are a transitory period - but if we're wanting to understand what the new birth really is, and what the church of Jesus Christ comprises of, Acts chapter 2 is the birthday of the church of Jesus, it is Pentecost, it is the time when the Holy Spirit comes to reside among His people, the church of the living God, as His temple, His dwellingplace - and He empowers them to go into all the world and preach the gospel. Never had God dwelt with men like He did at that moment and on from Pentecost.

Do you understand this? The disciples became, in their fullest sense, Christians in the upper room on that day. They became, collectively, the temple of the Holy Spirit; individually their bodies were temples of the Holy Spirit, for the Spirit of God came to reside in them. Now, from Pentecost on, in the New Testament the fullness of the Spirit is mentioned ten times, nine times in the Acts of the Apostles alone, and this one occurrence in Paul's epistle to the Ephesians. Now let me just say, and this is important, because this is a series primarily for those who are new in the faith, and trying to get some of you who are old in the faith back to basics - it's important for all of us to understand that the church, historically, in its most blessed times has always emphasised this truth of the fullness of the Holy Spirit; that we need the Spirit's help; that we cannot do anything without the Holy Ghost of God. Many well-known and mightily used servants of God, if you read Christian biographies you'll know this as well as I do, all of them testify to being filled with the Holy Spirit - or others call it 'anointed with the Holy Spirit' - some in a very dramatic way.

Let me give you, perhaps, what is one of the most notable accounts from the life of D. L. Moody. I read his words, he says: 'The blessing came upon me suddenly like a flash of lightning. For months I had been hungering and thirsting for power in service, I had come to that point where I think I would have died if I had not got it. I remember I was walking the streets of New York, and I had no more heart in the business I was about than if I had not been in this world at all. Well, one day, O what a day, I cannot describe it, I seldom refer to it, it is almost too sacred an experience to name. Right there in the streets the power of God seemed

to come upon me so wonderfully that I had to ask God to stay His hand. I was filled with a sense of God goodness, and I felt as though I could take the whole world to my heart. I took the old sermons I had preached before without any power, and it was the same old truth, but there was new power. Many were impressed and converted, and this happened years after I was converted myself. I would not now be placed back where I was before that blessed experience if you should give me all the world. It would be as the small dust in the palace'.

He experienced an encounter with God that filled him full of the Holy Spirit and changed his life. We know the great work that D. L. Moody did for Christ, and there are others who testify to such dramatic experiences when they surrender everything to the Lord, and the Lord comes in in fullness of power. However, let me also say this cautiously: there are many other men of God, equally as great, and who have been equally as used of God as D. L. Moody, who do not testify to any great dramatic manifestations when they were filled with the Holy Spirit. R. A. Torrey, who was Moody's helper in his campaigns and then subsequently became his successor, and saw many many thousands of souls led to Christ, but he said that he was just filled with the Spirit when he came and asked the Lord to do it, and believed that the Lord would do it upon the authority of His word, and knew it was according to God's will. He just took God at His word, and He testifies that nothing felt different, nothing changed in that sense internally or emotionally with him. C. H. Spurgeon testifies to knowing the fullness of the Holy Spirit, but he never mentions an experience like D. L. Moody. Billy Sunday claimed to be filled with the Holy Spirit, but he accounts no testimony like D. L. Moody.

So there are some who experience a dramatic filling, there are others I think that don't experience anything dramatic, yet testify to the power of God in their life. They may not experience the same phenomenon or drama in the event, but that's not the important thing, and that's the thing that many folk get hung up about - the important thing is this: that you know God's power throughout your life. That's why we should never define doctrine by the biographies of men's experience, because men's experience varies.

So we're asking the question: what is the fullness of the Holy Spirit? Do you have it? Let me first of all say what it is not. Now it would be good if you jot these down, or at least mentally note them. The fullness of the Holy Spirit is not for Christian workers alone. Because we read Christian biographies about great men like D. L. Moody, we think this is something for the special people - if you think they're special - on platforms, or on the mission field, or something like that. There's a sense in which it is for the work of God in Acts chapter 1 and verse 8, the Lord Jesus told the disciples that when the Holy Spirit would come upon them they would receive power to be His witnesses. There is a necessity to have the Spirit's power to witness to others in the gospel. In Acts chapter 4 and verse 8, if you turn to it with me quickly, and I want you to turn to a few verses, Acts 4 and verse 8 we read: 'Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel...', and he goes to preach this great sermon, because it's necessary to be filled with the Holy Spirit to really preach God's word as you ought to preach God's word.

So there's no doubt about it that the fullness of the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures is an anointing, an equipping, an unction and enduement of power for those who are doing God's work - but it is not just that. Because, let's face it, all of us ought to be doing God's work. All of us are to be witnesses, not just evangelists, or pastors, or teachers, or missionaries - it is for all Christians, it is for our living. That's why Paul in Ephesians 5:15 says: 'See that you walk circumspectly', other translations translate it more generally 'See that you live' - it's for life! It's for your life, believer, to be filled with the Holy Spirit of God. It's not just for Christian workers, although it is that.

Secondly, it's not to impart the gift of the Holy Spirit. This is very important, I'm not splitting hairs here, I'm making distinctions that are biblical. In Romans chapter 8, if you turn with me to it, Romans 8 and verse 9, verse 8 says: 'So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the

Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his'. Could you paraphrase that? I think you could: 'If any man has not the Spirit of Christ he is not a Christian', for that's what Christian means, one of Christ's ones, Christ's followers. So you cannot be a 'Christian' unless you have the Holy Spirit. The gift of the Holy Spirit is given to you at conversion in the new birth, that's what the new birth is: the Holy Spirit opening your eyes, the impartation of life in your soul that has been dead in trespasses and sins.

So the fullness of the Holy Spirit is not this sort of idea that you confess Christ, and six months down the line you get the Holy Spirit for the first time - that is not found within the Scriptures. Thirdly, it's not just for Christian workers, it's not just the gift of the Holy Spirit, and it is not more of the Holy Spirit. What I mean by this is, because Paul uses an illustration of being full or filled with the Holy Spirit, you've got this idea of a cup or some kind of receptacle filled with liquid, and you think that being full is being up to the brim, but some people aren't so full and so on. That is not, I believe, the illustration that the apostle is trying to get across to us, because we're not talking here about a liquid in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not some kind of cosmic force; the Holy Spirit is a person, and you can't have part of a person and not have the other part! You can have a person's confidence and less or more of their trust, which I'm sure is so with regards to our relationship to the Holy Spirit - but it cannot be that we have, in some way, got a little bit of the Holy Spirit, and other people have got more of the Holy Spirit. That is not the sense that we have here within the word of God.

Fourthly, the fullness of the Spirit is not the baptism of the Spirit. Many great writers and men of God have called the fullness of the Spirit the baptism of the Spirit, even up to this day. They understand the same theology that we have but they just put a different name upon it, but I believe it's erroneous because Paul in 1 Corinthians 12 and verses 12 and 13 says that 'We have all', emphasis on that word 'all', 'We have all, the members of the body, been baptised into one Spirit, and we have all drunk of that one Spirit'. The baptism into the body is the moment of conversion, so therefore we are baptised, we're identified, we're taken into Christ as His own at that moment of salvation. It doesn't come subsequent to it.

It's not for Christian workers only, it's not the gift of the Holy Spirit, it's not more of the Spirit, it's not the baptism of the Spirit, but also please note that it's not total sanctification. The fullness of the Holy Spirit is not all of a sudden being free of sin, as some would claim, and Wesley claimed was possible - yet he himself did not attribute it to himself, he didn't believe he'd got there. But many do believe that you can be free of all sin, now this is erroneous according to 1 John 1 and verse 8. John says: 'If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us', ultimately we make God a liar. In fact in Galatians 5 and 17 we read there that the Christian life is an experience of a civil war within our hearts, that the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh - the two are contrary to one another, and there is continual pulling. This is what many young believers don't understand, and I think I'll spend maybe a week alone on it in this series, explaining that when we are converted we still have two natures, we still have our old nature and we have our new nature in Christ - but it depends which one we feed that will overcome the other. You will never be totally sanctified until you're in heaven and you're like Jesus.

That is not what the fullness of the Spirit is, and let me say also - finally - that it is not a once and for all filling. There's no such a thing found within God's word. If you look at Ephesians 5 verse 18, literally it could be translated as this: 'Be being filled with the Holy Spirit'. 'Be being filled' - you say 'That doesn't make sense', well it's the present continuous tense, you could translate it: 'Be continually filled with the Holy Spirit'. It's not an idea of having been filled at some point in your life, although there will obviously be an initial experience that you will have with God by faith - but it is being full, present tense, at that moment in time, even now this morning being full of Holy Spirit. Now it may begin with a crisis experience, but what Paul is talking about here is that it must become a consistent characteristic of your life. It's not ticking a little

box in spiritual criteria and qualification, where you say: 'Well I've been saved, and I've also been filled with the Holy Spirit' - how are you know? Is it a continuous characteristic in your life?

Look at what it says about those who, I believe, became deacons in Acts chapter 6. In Acts chapter 6 and verse 3 we read, because of the various rows that were going on, and the distributing of the resources did not seem to be done fairly, and so the apostles decided that they would labour in the word of God and in prayer, but the church was instructed in verse 3: 'Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full', not who have been filled, 'full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business' - they were full of the Holy Spirit. Look at Acts chapter 7, on a chapter, and verse 55: 'But he', Stephen, 'being full of the Holy Ghost' - he was full of the Holy Spirit. Now I want you to see the distinction here: you could be filled yesterday, but you may not be filled today. You may be grieving the Spirit today, but here in Ephesians 5:18 the command is: 'Be continually filled with the Holy Spirit'. Therefore, if you at this moment in time are not full of the Holy Spirit, you are disobedient to God's word!

Now it might surprise you that I have prefaced this message with the fact that this is elementary stuff, because it is in a biblical sense. There's nothing as elementary as the fact of the matter that the Christian should have God in complete and absolute control of his life. Let's look at this verse quickly, the two commands that are given in verse 18. There are two, one is 'Don't get drunk' - a lot of Christians would need to really look at that verse, because there's a lot of you that think there's nothing wrong with social drinking. But you've forgotten that after that one drink there comes two drinks, and more drinks, and you don't realise you're tipsy but everybody around you realises it. Don't get drunk! In other words, you keep control of your mind! Don't give your mind over to a spirit that you put in a bottle and put down into your stomach, and it takes control of your faculties, your brain and your heart.

The second command, which is like to it, is: 'Be filled with the Spirit'. It's in the imperative mood, not an option, you're not allowed to ignore it, you must be filled with the Spirit. It's in the plural, which means it applies to all Christians, not a select few. The verb is in the present continuous, it's constant, not on special occasions or for special events. The verb is in the passive mood, we do not fill ourselves with the Holy Spirit, although it's a command, but we have to get to the place where we are able to be filled by the Holy Spirit. In other words, you could translate it like this: 'Let the Holy Spirit fill you'. Do you understand?

Well, the question is obvious: how do you let the Holy Spirit fill you? Well, this word 'fill' in the New Testament is used several times. It's used of things, to fill the fishermen's nets with fish; that's the way it's used. You can fill a building with people, you can fill a city with populous, and you can fill someone's needs - Philippians chapter 4. It's also used of people, it's used of the Lord Jesus Christ that in Luke 2:40, as a child, He grew and waxed strong in spirit, and was filled with wisdom - the grace of God was upon Him. It's also used of believers in Acts 13, the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Ghost. Now some of you know what it is to be filled with joy, and Romans 15 says: 'Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing'. You know what it is, or what it is not to be filled with joy or to be filled with peace - well, it's used in the same way here in Ephesians 5:18 of being filled with the Holy Spirit, and it's the same sense in which it's used.

Now what is that sense? Well, Charles Price helped me out with this one how he put it, he pointed out that these things - joy, and peace, and other emotions that are mentioned in the New Testament of us being filled with - they are things that one, dominate our personalities; and two, determine our behaviour. They dominate our personalities and they determine our behaviour. Incidentally, that is exactly what alcohol does, isn't it? Think about it - you've seen a drunk man, and his personality is changed to someone he's not. If he's a grumpy man he's all of a sudden a happy man when he's filled with that spirit. He comes out with things that he would never imagine himself saying when he's sober. It dominates his personality and it determines his behaviour. It makes him walk from one side of the street to the other. Paul's illustration is this, simply: 'Do

not be drunk with wine, but, in regard to what drink and alcohol does to your personality and to your behaviour in a negative sense, allow the Holy Spirit to do to your behaviour and your personality in a positive sense'.

Dr Martyn Lloyd Jones was a Hardy Street specialist. This is what he said about alcohol: 'Drink is not a stimulus, it is a depressant. It depresses first and foremost the highest centres of all the brain. They are the very first to be influenced and affected by drink, they control everything that gives a man self-control, wisdom, understanding, discrimination, judgment, balance and the power to assess everything. In other words, everything that makes a man behave at his very best and his highest, the better a man is controlled the better he is - but drink is something which immediately gets rid of control, that is indeed is the first thing it does'. Drink controls you, drink takes your faculties and uses them to its own ends, which you are out of control of. It affects the highest centres of the brain, it controls everything that the man is in wisdom, understanding, discrimination, judgment, balance, power to assess everything - but if you let the Holy Ghost control your brain, He will control the best part of your whole life: your soul, your emotions, your intellect, your will - and it will make you your best for Christ!

Do you see what the apostle is saying? Let me leave you with three thoughts that Charles Price outlines, which I think are tremendous. There are three ways how you know a man is drunk. The first way you know he is drunk is how he walks, isn't it? He staggers from side to side. The second way you know how he's drunk is the way he talks, he talks gibberish. The third way you know he is drunk is the way he smells, you can smell the alcohol off his breath and maybe even his clothes. These are evidences that a man is filled with that type of spirit, he is controlled by the same spirit - but in the same way you can know if you, or others, are filled with the Holy Spirit by the same three characteristics: how you walk, how you talk, and believe it or not, how you smell!

Let's take first and foremost how you walk. Galatians 5:16 says: 'Walk in the spirit, and you will not fulfil the lusts of the flesh', and the works of the flesh are mentioned, and also the fruit of the Spirit is mentioned, but it's actively asking us to walk in the Spirit - walk as He has taught us to walk. How you live your life: how are you living your life? I'm not talking about some kind of skip that you do from Sunday to Sunday, or Sunday to Monday night, and then to Thursday, and then to Sunday - I'm asking you how are you living your life in the home? How are you living your life in the workplace? How is your personality dominated? How do people see you as an individual? How is your behaviour determined? Is it determined by what God's Holy Spirit says within His word, and because your life is completely inhabited by Him?

Ephesians 5 tells us that our life is to be circumspect, 1 John 1:7 that we are to walk in the light as He is in the light, and once our sins are shown up to us we've to plunge them beneath the confession of the blood. Do we walk in the light, or are we Christian people that hide things from God or from others, or even in some ignorant way from ourselves? How are you walking this morning?

How are you talking? Here's an evidence whether you're full of the Holy Spirit or not, the Lord Jesus said in Matthew chapter 12 that out of the heart originates what comes out of your mouth: 'Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks'. If your heart's full of bitterness, if your heart's full of anger, that will come forth in fruition in the words that you speak about others, the words that you speak even about God, the things of God, the church of God! How do you speak to others? How do you speak about others? It's very interesting that in the Acts of the Apostles, when people were filled with the Spirit something happened to their mouths. At Pentecost they all began to speak in tongues, then we find that Peter, full of the Holy Spirit as we read, preached - he used his mouth for God. We read that the apostles preached boldly, without fear - look at chapter 5 of Ephesians, verse 19: 'Be full of the Holy Spirit, speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns, and spiritual songs; singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord'. It affects your mouth, your talk!

I'll tell you, if there's one problem to blessing in the church of Jesus Christ in any age, it's people's tongues - how they use them. How is your walk? How is your talk? How is your smell? What am I getting at? Well, in 2 Corinthians chapter 2 we read these words, verse 14: 'Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place'. Do people know Christ because of you? 'For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?'. You are meant to bring with you in life, wherever you go, into the deepest hell-hole that God leads you any particular day, the savour and the fragrance of Jesus Christ. Do you bring a savour or do you bring a stench? Do people smell Christ about you?

The Lord said that when He, the Spirit of truth, would come, He would guide them into all truth, 'for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me', Jesus, 'for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you'. There are people running around and all they talk about is the Holy Spirit this, the Holy Spirit that - there's nothing wrong with talking about the Holy Spirit, but Jesus is saying that the mark of a man or a woman filled with the Holy Spirit is that he'll talk about the Christ of God, and glorify Him!

What dominates your personality? Is it Christlikeness? What determines your behaviour? Is it Christlikeness? It was John Owen, that great puritan theologian who said that the church is stuck somewhere between the cross and Pentecost, as if the Spirit hasn't come! My friend, have you realised your blessings in Christ? Watchmen Nee, that great Chinese Christian, said that we're like a man walking into a bookshop, and buying two books. One book is conversion, and the other book is the fullness of the Spirit. Both of them are ours, they've been purchased, but we walk out of that shop and we forget the second, the fullness of the Spirit. It's truly ours, but we've never really come and entered into the fullness of it all. It's ours by the blood of Christ, by His death and resurrection, but are we living in the good of it?

I know there's a debate about what to call it - do you know what Billy Graham said, and I think he said well? I don't care what you call it, just get it! There was once a school fire in Texas, and 263 children were killed. After the war they built a new school, and they installed within it the finest sprinkler system that man had ever made. It was so good that there were people who came for tours of the school to see it, to put it into their schools, the great mastery of technology that was in it. After seven years of post-war boom, they decided to expand the school again, and when they began to do that expansion work they found that that sprinkler system, second to none, had never ever been connected. They had it, it was purchased for them, but it wasn't doing the work that it was purchased for because they weren't hooked up to the source.

My friend, I'm asking you: have you ever known what is to be filled with the Holy Spirit? I'm not talking about bright lights, I'm talking about giving your whole life to Christ and knowing that He's got everything that you know about! Have you once been in that place, believer, but you're far from it today because you've grieved the Holy Spirit, you've hurt the Holy Spirit, you've caused Him pain? Like the dove-like personality that that He is, He has flown away! Does Christ dwell in your hearts by faith, that means does He feel at home in your heart this morning?

Our late brother, Rex Mathie, who preached in this place - he has gone to be with the Lord of course - but I remember having the opportunity of having him in my home one of those times. I asked the question that I was pondering at that particular time, what his thoughts were on the fullness of the Spirit. He had thought much about it, he said, and considered the matter over the years. He himself did not testify to any dramatic experience in his life, but he came to the conclusion that the fullness of the Spirit is the opposite side of the coin to the lordship of Jesus Christ. He put it like this to me: 'David, when you and Jesus aren't arguing about anything, you will be full of the Holy Spirit'.

D. L. Moody was being considered to come and take a great campaign, I think it was in England. Some of the spiritual pygmies who were organising that campaign, asked in a sort of sarcastic way: 'What? Does it have to be D. L. Moody? Has he a monopoly of the Holy Spirit?'. The answer came back: 'No, no man has a monopoly of the Holy Spirit, but the Holy Spirit has a monopoly of D. L. Moody'. Does He have a monopoly of you? For when He does, you will be full of Him.

Lord, forgive us if we have grieved, quenched, even resisted Thy Holy Spirit. But Lord, may we let Him fill us now with the fullness of Christ. In His name we pray, Amen.

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Back To Basics - Chapter 3

"Temptation"

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Now we're turning in our Bibles to 1 Corinthians chapter 10 for our reading. As I said, we have now on these Lord's Day mornings begun a series entitled 'Back to Basics', looking at really the ABCs of the Christian faith, that if we are new to Christ and have only come to faith in recent days we need to learn as elementary truths right away if we're going to find our feet and get the most out of the Christian life. But also it's good for us as believers for perhaps 10, 20, 30 or more years, to read and remind ourselves of these important basics in the Christian life. So it's relevant to all of us. We looked in the first week at 'The Morning Watch', and how important it is to rise early in the morning before day and meet with God in both prayer and the reading of God's word - chiefly to have communion with God. Then the last week I was with you, that Sunday morning we looked at the subject of 'The Fullness of the Holy Spirit', which is a concept that has been largely lost to many in Conservative evangelicalism today.

This morning we're going to look at the subject of temptation. Let's bow in a word of prayer just before we come to a subject that affects all of us, if we're honest, a subject that is very prevalent today as a problem amongst those who are young in our gathering today. So let us pray that the Lord may help us and really speak to us all in our hearts:

Father, we thank You today for the words that we have been singing, 'Ask the Saviour to help you, comfort strengthen and keep you, He is willing to aid you, He will carry you through'. Lord, we thank You that we have a friend in the Lord Jesus, we have One who sticks closer than a brother, One who we can bring all our problems to, our temptations, our trials, our testings - because we know we have a High Priest who is touched with the feelings of our infirmities, because He was tempted in all parts like we are, except sin. Lord, we pray that we would know today His sympathy, Lord we pray for those who are ill, we pray for those who have been bereaved in recent days, those who are going through problems in our marriages, with our families, in the workplace, those who are struggling with terrible temptations that will not be quenched, that will not be silenced. Lord we just pray at this moment for those who are in our gathering who really at this time are almost calling it quits with regard to their faith in Jesus Christ because they cannot overcome a certain sin in their lives. Lord, would You help them today, give them grace, and give us all grace to struggle and to overcome with sin in our lives. Lord, we pray for our missionary friends, those who are serving You afar off in fields where they are white unto harvest. We pray too that You will thrust forth further labourers into the harvest field. Lord, we pray for us all, that we will be more like Jesus, that in this world that is so sinful, so evil, that our God, we may know what it is to be victorious Christians in this life here on earth - that others may see our good works, not see our failures, and glorify our Father who is in heaven, to whose glory we pray these things. Amen.

Let's read this verse together, 1 Corinthians chapter 10 and verse 13, Paul writes: 'There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it'. Let's read that verse again, please note every single word and phrase and sentence in it: 'There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it'.

Some years ago there was a girl in Colorado in the United States who was released from jail. She emerged with this exclamation: 'Fine, just as I expected, I am cured - no wedding bells for me!'. That might seem a little bit obscure to those who don't know the background to why she was locked up in prison, but what had happened was: she had sent herself to jail in order to prevent getting married. It was the holiday season, and this girl by the name of Margaret Carrow who was 17 years of age, appeared in a juvenile court and asked the judge to put her into jail until January the 20th, the date of her wedding. That, she explained, was the date that she didn't want to be married. Now you would be forgiven for thinking: 'Well, why did she agree to her fiance in being married at all?'. She related to the judge the fact that when she was engaged to be married, she was engaged to be married to a much older man who she didn't really want to marry, but the fact of the matter was he was so charming, so romantic, that when he turned it on she just couldn't resist him! She knew that if she turned up at the altar on her wedding day, she wouldn't be able to resist saying: 'I do', and she was afraid that she would get married. So she tried to break the spell, and got herself locked up in jail.

Now we laugh at that, but the fact of the matter is that many of us struggle with temptation in a similar way. We just don't know how to resist one, two, or more particular sins; and when they come along we wish almost that we could lock ourselves up. Of course, that's what the monks did, and the nuns, the reason why they secluded themselves away from the world and, they thought, the devil, was to overcome the temptations that are in the world, in the flesh, and posed to us by the devil. But we know, and they hopefully by now know, that it is impossible to resist temptation by locking yourself away. Because not only is there a problem with the world and a problem with the devil, but there is a problem with ourselves. Hopefully by the end of this morning's study you will recognise that.

There are three things first of all that I want you to recognise from this verse that we read together, if you'll look down at 1 Corinthians 10:13. There are three 'buts', this little conjunction 'but' is used three times, and significantly the first 'but' that you find there in verse 13 is: 'There is no temptation taken you but such as is common to man'. Now here's the first elementary principle that you need to understand if you're ever going to overcome temptation in your life, it's this: all people, men and women, boys and girls, teenagers alike, are subject to temptation. Everybody is tempted!

Now I know, and you know, that when you're being tempted, particularly in some very very hot seemingly unbearable way, you feel you're the only one in the world who is being tempted in that particular manner. The fact of the matter is, as one paraphrase put that verse, Paul is saying: 'Remember that the temptations that have come into your life are no different from what others experience'. There are young women and young men who actually commit suicide because they feel that no one is suffering, no one is being tested or tempted like they are. They think they are unique, but they're not. None of us are; all of us have been tempted, are tempted, and will be tempted.

Look at the second 'but': 'but such as is common to man: but God is faithful'. All are tempted and will be tempted, but God promises faithfulness towards us in our temptations, no matter how wild they may be. Now that is a tremendous encouragement, we'll look at that in a little bit more detail later on, but that is the very truth of God that can break the very bondage of sin and temptation in anyone's life to know this: that God is able to deliver us!

The third 'but' is: 'but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it'. Victory is possible to everyone! Isn't that tremendous? First of all: all will be tempted - a sad fact, but a fact nonetheless. Secondly: God has promised faithfulness, and God is able to deliver us; and if we trust in God - thirdly - all can know victory in their lives over temptation. Now if that doesn't encourage you to study this subject further, I don't know what will. It is depressing to think that there is no immunity from temptation. All of us will face it one time or another, probably everyday if you're honest with yourself. As Josh Billings

has said, the man who has never been tempted doesn't know how dishonest he is! All of us struggle with one temptation or another.

Now, before we go on any further in understanding temptation, I want you to understand a doctrine that is found in God's word that is misunderstood today. It causes many young Christians headaches, nightmares, struggles, because they feel: 'Well, I'm a Christian, I shouldn't have feelings like this, I shouldn't be struggling with sin like I am, because once you're a Christian everything changes - old things pass away and all things become new - maybe I'm not saved at all!'. What many overlook is the fact that when you're saved you receive the divine nature, that means God births His Holy Spirit in your heart to live the life of Christ in you, but what also happens is that the old nature of sin and flesh that you have stays there. It does not disappear, it is still with you.

I could show you many verses from the Scriptures to prove this, but one very particularly significant one is Romans 7:21-23 where the apostle Paul describes how externally keeping the law, as Philippians says, he was blameless, he kept all the rules and regulations of his religion - but internally, in his heart, there was a rule of sin, a law of sin that he couldn't overcome no matter how religious he was. He says this: the good things that he wanted to do, he couldn't do them; and the bad thing that he didn't want to do, those were the things that he found himself doing. In Galatians chapter 5 and verse 17 Paul says this, that the flesh strives against the Spirit, it fights and wars against the Spirit of God in us. That fleshly human old nature fights and tries to overcome the new nature, and the new nature fights and strives with the old nature. And as a Red Indian put it on one occasion: 'There's a black dog and a white dog in us as Christians, and they're both fighting one another, and it is the dog that you feed that will be the one that will overcome'. So Paul said: 'Do not walk in the flesh, but walk in the Spirit, that you may not fulfil the lusts of the flesh'.

Now hopefully that helps you to understand that the reason why we struggle against sin is because we still have an old nature, it is not eradicated at the moment of our conversion. That is why we need to pray, as the Lord taught us, 'Lead us not into temptation'. In other words, 'Lord, either spare me from temptation, or if I am to go through temptation deliver me from the evil governing me and taking control of my life'.

Now let me share with you four points that I believe will help you to overcome temptation, and they're necessary if you're ever going to have the victory. The first is to understand the purpose of temptation. Many do not understand the purpose of temptation in their lives. If you turn to James chapter 1 for a moment please, James explains the purpose of temptation and testing in the life of the believer. James chapter 1 verse 12: 'Blessed is the man' - blessed is the man! - 'that endures temptation'. Now we tend not to think that temptation is a blessing in our lives, it's a curse as far as we are concerned - but God's word says it is a blessing to be tempted. 'For when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of victory', upon victory of course, 'which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death'.

What I want you to understand right away is that for the believer temptation is in the will of God for us all. Now until you understand that, you will have a real struggle not just with temptation, but understanding God's will for you in allowing you to go through such things. Now I'm not saying God tempts you, because that is wrong, it clearly says here that God cannot tempt any man with evil, because God is holy. But God says that He allows us to go through the trials of temptation, because it is for our good as believers - how is it for our good? Well, it is for our growth, that is very clear from God's word, that each temptation you overcome, you become stronger when facing that temptation again. But also it is for the testing of our faith: if it was to be rosy in the garden all our lives, and the sunshine was continually beating down upon us in our Christian testimony, when would we ever need to trust in God? It is through the hard times, it is through the

times when we feel that the devil is facing us eyeball to eyeball, wanting us to sin; it is then that we really learn to cast ourselves completely by faith on the Lord. Temptation is for our growth and for our faith.

Now understand the process of temptation here for a moment in its purpose. James says, verse 14: 'Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust'. Now that's the first step of temptation, the bait is dropped - Satan or the world drops a bait in front of you to tantalise you. Then the inner desire, James says, that inner lust is attracted to that bait like a magnetism - that's why we know that you've got a sinful nature, because you're still attracted to sin, the Greek word is 'enticed'. It's actually a word for fishing, to lure by a bait. You know exactly what I'm talking about, there are some things, visual images that suddenly come into your sight, and right away there's something in you that is drawn to that sin. James says that as you yield, sin occurs - not in the temptation, but as you mentally and volitionally yield and give in, and are tantalised and satisfied by that sin, then that is transgression in the eyes of God. And fourthly, the tragic consequences are this: that death is hatched in your heart spiritually. That sin brings forth death, and as a believer what it does for us is, is cut off momentarily our communion and fellowship with God in an experiential sense. Like the fish that get hooked, we get cooked when temptation is given into!

Now let me say in passing, because I know that this is a question that will be on many people's minds as we look at verses like this: the temptation of the Lord Jesus Christ was actual temptation, there's no doubt about that. Otherwise He would not be able to succour those that are tempted. But what we must understand is that His temptation in Matthew chapter 4 was different in this regard, as James outlined, because our Lord Jesus had no inner principle of sin to be attracted by outward sin and temptation. He was tempted, but He had no inner lust and desire to come and mirror and magnetise that temptation externally. 'Well', you say, 'then how can it be called temptation at all?'. Well, although He had no sin principle in nature, He had human nature. He was 40 days and 40 nights in the wilderness, He was fasting so that when Satan tempted Him to change stones into bread, He was tempted - do you not think that His gastro-system started to grumble at the thought of bread? Of course it did! He was a human man and being that was actually in the flesh, the likeness of sinful flesh. But there was no sinful human nature in His heart that strived after those sins that the devil was tempting Him with; to fall down and worship him, to give way and to get salvation on an easy road as Messiah.

I hope you understand that. But if we are to overcome temptation, we need to understand that part of the strategy of overcoming: it is adopting the attitude that temptation in our Christian lives is not a curse, but it is the stepping stone to spiritual blessing and growth. I never cease to be amazed at how attitude has a great deal with how you get on as a Christian, your attitude to things. Your attitude to trials, and illness, and sickness, and backbiting - but this is one that is primary: your attitude to temptation. Do you go: 'Oh no, not again, what is God doing in my life? Does He not understand that this is something I could be doing without?'. God knows you need it! He knows it's for your betterment as a spiritual being.

Have you ever taken that step to understand the purpose of temptation? I've got a bit of bad news for you, because the more spiritual you get the more tempted you will be, the greater the testings and temptations that will come. As Vance Havner said: 'If you have not been through the devil's sifter, you're probably not worth sifting at all'. Do you understand that temptation is for your good?

Secondly, there is the promise for the tempted that we read - not just the purpose for the tempted, but the promise for the tempted in 1 Corinthians 10:13: there is a way of escape for everyone tempted! There is conquering and victory assured for everyone, why? Because God is faithful! Now there's some people here today who need to hear this: our God is El Shaddai, the Almighty God, the God who is all-sufficient, the God who has endless resources. Now if the first step to victory over temptation is your attitude towards it, not to fear it, but by faith to accept it; the second step is this: to realise that in God there are limitless resources and power to overcome. Now why is that so important? It is important because I know, as well as you do, that

when the devil comes along with a tantalising titillating temptation that you always fall down in front of - it is these words that he uses: 'You didn't overcome in the past, you're not going to overcome today. This is the sin that you can't overcome. This is something that is more powerful than you, more powerful than your God'. He's got the evidence of all those past citations of when you did fall into that temptation, and you start to believe his lie, and you say 'Yes, he's right, I can't overcome!' - and that is the lie of the devil that many Christians, and sinners alike, are held in grips of because they really believe that they cannot overcome when God's word says 'This is my promise: you shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free!'. The truth is this: that if you're in Christ, sin shall no longer have dominion over you.

We tend, in those experiences, not to listen to God's word, don't we? We tend to listen to the words of the devil. The purpose of temptation is not for a curse upon you, but for your blessing, but secondly you need to understand that God has promised, promised you, guaranteed you that if you do what He says you will overcome - no doubt about it! Thirdly, yes there's the purpose in temptation, there's the promise for the tempted, but thirdly there is the provision for the tempted. Hebrews chapter 2 and verse 18, if you care to turn to it, reads like this: 'For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted'. The Saviour is able to sympathise and help us in our temptation because He was tempted in this world, and tested as a man. Turn to Revelation chapter 12 and verse 11, looking to a future day, and we see how these saints will overcome the temptation of antichrist and the devil, Revelation 12:11: 'And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death'.

Now I want to speak to you of the provision for the tempted. Around the Lord's Table this morning we were thinking of Calvary, as we ought to do every time we are there, but we were thinking specifically of how, yes, at Calvary we believe that our sins were purged, reconciliation between God and man was achieved, redemption, we were bought back from slavemarket of sin into the kingdom of God's marvellous light, all those things - and we could go on and on listing many other things that took place at Calvary - but do you realise today that at Calvary there was achieved once and for all, for every believer, complete deliverance over the power of sin? Do you know that? I think Sidney was touching on that this morning in his ministry, but you see we have three enemies in this world: we have the enemy of the world, externally, the public lights of temptation that are in the sins and pleasures of this world system; we have the devil, the accuser of the brethren who continually tempts us along with his minions of demons; but there is in us a principle called the flesh, the old nature, that still lives on after conversion. It is not eradicated, it does not disappear, but what God's word tells us is that all of these three enemies have been crucified with Christ at Calvary!

Let me show you this, turn with me to Galatians chapter 6 verse 14, this enemy, the world: 'But God forbid', Paul says, 'that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world'. Does that mean you'll never be tempted by the world again? No, but it means this: the power has been cut from off your life of the world, if you would only trust in Christ and what He did for you at the cross. The world has been crucified. Turn back to Galatians 5:24: 'And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts thereof'. This old nature that is in you, it does not disappear, it can still cause you problems, but if by faith you reckon that it died with Christ 2000 years ago on the cross, it is dead and the power is gone. Then Satan, in Hebrews 2, if you turn back to it, Hebrews 2:14: 'Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, the Lord Jesus also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil'. Now is the devil destroyed today? Is he gone, if he eradicated? Of course he is not, he's still very much alive! But the fact of the matter is: he's as good as dead, because the Lord Jesus when He was crucified on the cross defeated him who has the power over death, the devil!

These three enemies are already defeated, they have already died in Christ - the victory, this is what I want you to see, this is the provision for the tempted, the victory has already been accomplished! This is why we

need to understand this today, because there are many people who are struggling and striving, and when you talk to them they'll say: 'I'm trying to overcome this temptation, I'm doing my best!' - when they need to realise that His victory on the cross has, by faith, become our victory. We stand on His victory ground. Now we must claim this day by day in faith, it is not something that just happens at salvation, but it is something every day that we must stake our claim in and face the devil with: the cross victory of our Lord Jesus, just as he will face us every day, we must face him with Calvary's victory too.

So I ask you: what temptation is bothering you? Is it the allure of the world? The tantalising pictures? Is it the music? Is it the fashions and the fads? Is it their food and drink? Is it their way of life? Is it materialism? Is it hedonism? What is it that pulls you? Is it fleshly lusts from within your breast? Fornication? Adultery? All manner of immorality? Hatred? Greed? Strife? Malice? I could go on and on! What is it? Is it Satan attacking you? Is it demonic forces getting the better over you? Are you believing Satan's lies, rather than believing God's word? Maybe you're even, as a believer, God forbid, reading horoscopes, dabbling in the occult and alternative medicines that are from hell itself! Christ, by His death, has made you dead to these things - therefore why should you live as if you're alive to them? Why should you breathe life back into the old nature, when Christ has taken the power out of it?

That's why Paul said in Romans 6: 'How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?'. There is the potential to live on in sin, but why should we do it when it ought not to have dominion over us? The power has been cut from sin in our lives, why don't you realise that by Christ's death He has made you dead to these things? The pipeline has been severed, and the power to your worst imaginable temptation ceases when you realise that it has no life in it because Christ died for it!

That means practically - OK, that's the theology - but practically that means that when Satan comes to tempt you the next time, or when your flesh begins to attract some temptation externally, you remind the both of them that Christ has already defeated both sin and Satan at Calvary. That takes out of the equation you 'trying' to win the victory, or 'striving' to win the victory, when the victory has already been won and all you have to do is claim it! Now it doesn't come automatically, you have to actively by faith claim and believe, and stand in the promise of what Christ has done for you.

We sang Martin Luther's great hymn at the beginning of our service, and Luther often graphically described the activities of Satan in his own life. When asked on one occasion how he overcame the devil, he replied: 'Well, when he comes knocking upon the door of my heart and asks who lives here, the dear Lord Jesus goes to the door and says: 'Luther used to live here'. The devil, seeing the nailprints in His hands and the pierced side, takes flight immediately!'. That is what we're talking about: we can't face the devil alone, the archangel Michael couldn't face the devil alone! But in Christ, and in the power of His death, we stand on victory ground if we will only stand on it!

Here's three things to do the next time you're tempted: one, identify with Christ's victory. Remind yourself, and remind Satan and your flesh, that you are in Christ and your old nature has died in Him, and you need not live any longer to it. Secondly, recognise that victory of Christ is complete - He is able to give you all victory forever! And thirdly put your faith in it, nothing alone, not your own strength, or your own ability - and do you know something? If you do those three things you will no longer think of defeating the devil: 'How am I going to overcome this temptation?', but you will think of him as already defeated. That's the difference!

So we've seen the purpose of temptation, the promise for the tempted, and the provision for the tempted - can I just spend a couple of moments talking about the power for the tempted? In Romans 8 and verse 2 we get a tremendous thought on the power that is available to all of us. Paul says: 'The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death'. Frederick P. Wood was the director of the

National Young Life Campaign years ago, and he summed this issue of temptation up - many of the things that I have spoken of - in one paragraph. He said this: 'All that the Father promised', that was 1 Corinthians 10, 'that the Son provided', what we've just been speaking of the cross, 'the Holy Spirit performs in us. What Jesus made possible, the Holy Spirit makes actual; what Jesus did for us, the Holy Spirit does in us'.

Let me explain it like this: if you were to get a poker and thrust it into a red hot furnace, and take it out after ten minutes or so, you would find that the nature of that poker had changed in that it was pulsating red - the fire had entered into the poker. Now you would find, after leaving it there for another ten minutes, that the old nature would begin to be seen again - because the old nature has not disappeared, it has not been eradicated, but a new overcoming nature has been inserted and infused. Now listen: victory over temptation cannot come by you in some way taking away your old nature and never being tempted to sin again, but what happens is this: moment by moment the Holy Spirit fills us, and counteracts all the sin in our being, and all the sin in the world, and all the devil can throw at us.

One put it like this: 'He has not brought us to a position where it is impossible to sin, but to a position where it is possible not to sin'. In other words, everything that is bad in us is to be replaced by what is good in Christ. I talk to people who say: 'I can't help it, I'm just naturally badtempered. I naturally look like I've eaten a sour grape. I'm naturally in some way outspoken, my father was outspoken, and his father, and all the rest - I just can't help it!'. Listen: that's your problem, your problem is what you are naturally, and you're to replace what you are naturally by what Christ is supernaturally. You say: 'I can't do it!' - my friend, you can't do it, the reason why Jesus died and rose again three days later is that He wants to live His life through you, because the only life that God is pleased with is the life of Christ, and the only way you can live the Christian life is to let Christ live His life through you. That's what the Christian life is! It's not a ream of rules and regulations, it is to die to yourself and allow a greater power than any sin, temptation, the world or the devil to rule in your life.

Can I leave you with three things that you ought to do if you really want to overcome temptation? The first is: there is an action needed, there is an action needed. James 4 and verse 7: 'Submit yourselves unto God, resist the devil and he will flee from you' - but, listen, many people try to resist Satan but they have never in their lifetime submitted everything to God. You will not have victory over your temptation unless Christ has victory completely over you. You cannot have victory unless Christ has victory in you; unless, as Redpath says, He has every key to every room of your life. To have victory outside, Christ must have victory inside.

In the early days of Saint Augustine's struggle towards truth he made a prayer, this is his prayer: 'Lord, save me from my sins, but not quite yet'. Well, he grew from that prayer to another which went like this: 'Lord, save me from all my sins, except one'. Then finally he came to pray: 'Lord, save me from all my sins, and save me now' - and that was the only prayer that gave him victory, because he had submitted himself completely to God. Now listen, some of you are struggling with sin, maybe you're moaning about it: 'How can I be a Christian? God is meant to give me power over this, that and the other' - but there has never been a time in your life when you have made this action completely before God, and submitted everything to God, and been filled with the Holy Spirit.

Secondly, not only is there an action, but an attitude. First John 5 and verse 4 says, what is this victory that overcomes the world? The victory that overcomes the world is 'even our faith'. Hebrews 11, all those men that overcame this world, and the flesh and the devil, did it by faith. Do you view temptation as a stepping stone that will give you a stronger Christian experience? Erwin T. Lutzer put it like this: 'Each temptation leaves us better or worse, neutrality is impossible'. William Ward said: 'Temptation can cause us to succumb, to sink, to sin or to stand'. Do you just invite temptation? Do you just welcome it? What's your attitude? 'I can never overcome', or is your attitude 'God has given me the victory in Christ, and nothing ought to defeat it!'.

An action, an attitude, but all of that is useless unless you have an alertness. This is where many of us fall down. James 4 says: 'Submit yourselves to God, resist the devil and he will flee from you' - you've got to resist. One way to resist is to recognise your enemy, I mean recognise where he is to be found. Now listen young people, the places your enemy is to be found, the people in whom your enemy is to be found; all of us: the programmes in which our enemy is to be found, the papers in which our enemy is to be found - I could go on and on. But bluntly, wherever the enemy lives, we ought to avoid it lest we be tempted! And second to recognising where he lives is to recognise our own weaknesses - don't all walk around like peacocks because we're able to resist something that we've never been tempted to. Stuart Anderson, preaching on the subject of temptation, reminded the congregation of a man called Bobby Leech, an English man who startled the world by going over Niagara Falls in a barrel without suffering serious harm, and yet years later walking down the street he slipped on an orange peel and was taken to hospital with a badly fractured leg. Dr Anderson put like this: 'Some great temptations which roar around us like Niagara may leave us unharmed, but a little insignificant incident may cause our downfall simply because we are not looking for it'.

You need to recognise your enemy, secondly you need to run from your enemy - Paul said to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:22: 'Flee also youthful lusts'. There is a holy running, a time to run like Joseph did from Potiphar's wife and from Potiphar's house. But sadly, as E. C. Mackenzie says: 'Few speed records are broken when people run from temptation'. Do you run from temptation, or do you run to it? As someone has said: do you leave a forwarding address when you resist temptation, in order to be tantalised again? Or do you cut off that hand that offends you, or pluck out that eye that makes you sin? Do you run from it? And finally, do you resist it unto blood? Hebrews 12:4 says: 'Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin'. The victory will cost you, the Christian life will be hard - there's no doubt it is through the narrow gate, it is along the narrow road, and if it's not costing you I would question whether you're truly saved or not! But whatever the cost, strive to win! You need to get to a place where you hate sin! Are you there? It doesn't mean you'll never be tempted by it, but do you learn actively even over the feelings you may have and the impulses that you have, do you learn to hate sin and detest it?

Billy Sunday was a baseball evangelist and reformer, and he was never, in his preaching, soft on sin. During what was called the 'gay 90s', the 1890s, through the Great Depression, he preached against everything that smacked of sin. This is what he said: 'I'm against sin. I'll kick it as long as I've got a foot, I'll fight it as long as I've got a fist, I'll butt it as long as I've got a head, I'll bite it as long as I've got a tooth; and when I'm old and fistless, and footless, and toothless, I'll gum it till I go home to glory and it goes home to hell!'. Is that how we think of sin and resist it? We need to take God's word, as the Saviour did three times in His temptation, 'It is written, it is written, it is written'. We need to take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, Ephesians 6, which is the only attacking weapon given in the armour of God in Ephesians 6, which is the spoken - the 'rema' is the Greek term - the spoken word of God: we need to face Satan and speak God's word to him!

'Can I conquer temptation?', you say this morning: yes! Philippians 4:13: 'I can do all things through Christ which strengtheth me'. No matter how many battles you may have lost up to this point, Christ has won the war, and you ought to be winning the battles too!

If there are those in our gathering who are not saved, then sin has to have the victory over you because Christ isn't even in your life and there's nothing to counteract that old nature that you were born with. You need Christ, you need exactly what we've been preaching this morning - that cross-work - to give you the victory. Believer, backslidden, far from God, struggling with sins and temptations that no one knows about: would you take Christ's victory for good today, and live in the good of it? It is possible. Some have done it, some here, will you do it? It's there for you have been bought by the blood of Christ, why not take it? If you want

to speak to me or any of the folk in the hall, please do wait behind - but all of us: what a victory! What a Saviour we have in the Lord Jesus!

Father, we want to thank Thee for Thy Son, and for the complete and full salvation that He has given to us - but help us by faith, to live in the good of it; to reckon ourselves dead indeed unto sin, that the life of Christ may be manifest in our flesh, that others may see Him. Help those struggling today, we pray, and give them the victory through the blood. For Christ's sake, Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - October 2004

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Back To Basics – Chapter 4

"Obedience"

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Now I want to turn together to 1 Samuel chapter 15, and 'Obedience' is our subject - and you can get the recording of this study and the previous studies, if you want to follow where we've come from up until now please do that. Looking under the heading of 'Obedience', these two verses - and we'll come to the context of it little bit later - 1 Samuel 15 and verses 22 and 23: "And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from being king".

On one occasion many years ago in a Children's Hospital, a little boy gained a reputation for wreaking havoc upon the nurses and all the medical staff. One day a visitor who knew the little boy made a deal with. She said 'If you're going to be good for a week, well, I'll give you a pound when I come again. Is that a deal?'. He said: 'Well, yep, it's a deal. If I'm good for a week you'll give me a pound', and he agreed to it. A week later that same lady stood at the bottom of the young boy's bed, and she said: 'I tell you what, I'm not going to ask the nurses or the doctors or the medical team if you have behaved yourself, you must tell me yourself. Do you deserve one pound?'. From a little bundle underneath the sheets came this answer: 'Just give me a penny'.

Now many of us feel a sense of failure when it comes to obedience to God's word in our lives. If we're honest with each other and with God and with ourselves, all of us, in some way, shape or form feel that we have missed the expectations that are outlined for us in the Scriptures, or perhaps in present-day Christian vogue. Now it's true that we should never get to a point where we're haughty or high-minded, where we're proud and think we stand - because the apostle has told us very clearly that when we get to that point we need to take heed, lest we fall. The Lord Jesus, in the beatitudes, told us: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit', and we need to be humble if God's going to exalt us. But there is around today a false humility with regards to obedience - what do I mean by false humility? Well, I mean this: there are people who will freely admit to you: 'Look, I'm not what I should be as a Christian, I fall far short of everything that I know I ought to be', but yet they are resigned and content to stay that way. In some kind of substandard fickle obedience to God, yes, they follow Christ half of the way, or three-quarters of the way, or 99% of the way, but just not all of the way - and they will admit it to you!

Maybe you're here today, and you will freely say: 'Look, I know I'm not what I should be, but I try my best in some factors within Christian life, and commandments, and rules, and principles' - but yet this morning, you're content where you are, you're not striving after that 100% complete dedication in obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ. If you're like that, I would vouch to say that you have never seen or understood the prominent place that obedience has in God's Word; and you have never seen also the provision that God has made in His Son, and in the Christian gospel and life, for us to be enabled to obey God.

Now I'm not going to go over the previous ground that we have covered, looking at the fullness of the Spirit, and the power that there is in the provision of Christ's death for temptation. What I want to do this morning is take a step further and ask: are you walking in paths of obedience, using and tapping into the power that God

has provided for you in Christ? Now I believe in the grace of God, and I believe that we underestimate the grace of God - and we, ourselves, here especially in Ulster, can verge on legalism, if not completely submerge ourselves in legalism, and forget the great principle that there is in grace - unmerited favour! I would also have to say that it is a misrepresentation of grace to think that grace permits us to be as disobedient as we like in our life, and you just get free forgiveness right away, and there's no consequences for the spiritual life and the spiritual fruit that you will bear. That is not grace! Paul says in retort to such an idea: 'Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid!'. We are called as Christians to obedience.

So I want us to look very very briefly, but yet in a sense comprehensively, at the prominent place given to obedience in God's word. We want to start at the beginning of the Bible first of all, if you turn with me right back to Paradise, to Genesis chapter 2 - I'm going to make your fingers work this morning turning to passages, but it's important that you understand the prominent place given to obedience in the Bible. Genesis 2 and verse 16: 'The LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat'. Then in chapter 3 and verse 11, you will see what transpired, Adam and Eve's disobedience: 'And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?'. Please note this, that right at the beginning of all time and creation, the beginning of all things, obedience is the one thing that was commanded of God to man. Please note further, that obedience was the one and only condition for Adam and Eve to abide in the Garden of Eden. That's so important: the one thing that the Creator of man right in the beginning asked of His creatures, was absolute obedience - nothing more and nothing less.

Please note in the first three or four chapters of the book of Genesis that outline creation and the fall of man, there's not a mention of faith, there's not a mention of humility, there's not even a mention of love, but the prime subject that God brings to His first creatures is: 'You must obey me'. What is implied in that is that obedience incorporates love, humility, faith, and every spiritual virtue that exists can be under the umbrella of complete and absolute obedience to God.

We're starting right at the beginning and we're laying down the foundation of first mention here, that in the life of man, to obey was the one needful thing as far as God was concerned - that's right at the beginning of God's word. Now, we're going to look at some passages in between, but just to see that this is the constant message of the word of God, turn to Revelation 22, the last chapter in the Bible. Revelation 22 and verse 14, now I know there are variations in the translation of this verse: 'Blessed are they', verse 14 of 22, 'that do his commandments', some versions put it 'have washed their garments', yet washing your garments is a command of the Lord in itself, it is obedience to do such, so it has the same meaning in this context, 'that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city'. Right at the end of the Bible, obedience to God's command is still asked of mankind. Now note this: from beginning to end, from Paradise lost in the Garden of Eden to Paradise regained in the eternal state of heaven, it is only obedience on both occasions that gives the right of access to the tree of life. So you can see how important obedience is.

Now you might think I'm preaching salvation by works, I am not; and therefore you might be asking the question: 'Well, how if there was disobedience at the beginning, and that closed the way to the tree of life, how all of a sudden has obedience gained access in the end, in the last chapter, to the tree of life in heaven. What caused this change?'. Well, here's your answer, turn to Romans 5 verse 19: 'For as by one man's disobedience', that is Adam, 'many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous'. How can it be that the tree of life is closed to mankind because of their disobedience, and all of a sudden at the end of God's word and at the end of time it's open again - how can this possibly be when man is still a sinner? By one man's obedience, that is the obedience of Christ, He has bridged the gap from beginning to end by His cross and by His blood.

Isn't it wonderful today, make no mistake about it, that we do not rest for salvation upon our own obedience, but upon the obedience of another. Philippians 2 put it like this in verse 8, that He was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross - and that was after His obedience in completely fulfilling the whole of God's law, every jot and tittle, and yet He died on the cross and was obedient to God's will. So what I want you to see right away at the beginning here is that the whole of redemption of Jesus Christ that we enjoy today consists in restoring obedience to its rightful place in all of our lives and in the whole of the universe. It is always, has always been, and always will be God's chief desire to have man obedient to Him.

Now, let me give you a couple of examples from the Old Testament and the New of this. We'll look at the life of Noah. Now, if Adam was the father of the race, then the race was wiped out in the flood and God, as it were, made a new father of the race in the person of Noah. Four times in Genesis 7 verses 5, 9 and 16 we read these words or something like them, that Noah 'did according to all that God commanded Noah, so did he' - all that God commanded, Noah did. Now, you know the story and little chorus: 'Only eight were saved' - but what I want you to see is that it was Noah's obedience that led to Him saving other men, and being a positive influence in the lives of other men.

We move from Noah to Abraham, and if Noah was the father of a new race, Abraham is the father of the chosen race. In Hebrews 11, that great chapter on faith, not to exclude faith, in verse 8 we read: 'By faith Abraham obeyed'. Obedience and faith do not cancel one another out, and you will know - if you're familiar with the book of Genesis - that the crowning act of Abraham's obedience was when he bound his son to the altar, and lifted up that knife at the orders of God upon him, and was ready to plunge it into his breast - and God was well pleased with him because of his absolute unquestioning obedience.

Let's look at that passage for a moment to remind ourselves, Genesis 22 verse 12: 'And he said', as he lifted up his hand with the dagger in it, 'Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me' - verse 18 - 'And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed' - now mark this statement - 'because thou hast obeyed my voice'. Through Abraham's obedience by faith, the rest of the nation and the rest of the nations of the world would be blessed. Oh that we would realise this morning, right at the very beginning of the Bible, before Christ died or rose again, or the church was ever born, obedience is God's way to bless Himself and His name, and to bless the nations of the world all around us. A will utterly given up to God's will!

Now before we look at any more Scriptures, can I ask you, and I ask you from the depths of my heart: is your will completely and utterly surrendered to God's will? That was God's desire the day He saved you. Moses, when he went up Mount Sinai, was given the message of God to the people, God said in Exodus 19:5: 'If ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people'. Moses so often obeyed the voice of the Lord, and when it came to the erection of the tabernacle - that tent of worship in the wilderness - in the last three chapters of the book of Exodus, nineteen times you find this expression, I quote: 'according to all the Lord commanded Moses, so did he'. Then after that, and this is a telling statement, from that came the natural chain reaction that we read: 'the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle' - it filled it because Moses was obedient.

Now words cannot be plainer: God is telling us right in this Old Testament period that He dwells in the midst of His people's obedience, and it is still the same today. If you want to know God's presence in your home, if you want to know God's presence in your church, if you want to know God's presence in your business, you obey God! He crowns obedience with His presence.

Now let me take you on a bit further - after 40 years wandering, in disobedience it would have to be said, the Israelites again came to a new beginning. They were facing the promised land, they were about to enter

Canaan - if you were to turn to the book of Deuteronomy, you don't need to look at verses now, but if you were to read at your leisure the book of Deuteronomy, that is a book that is written in sight of the promised land by Moses. There is no other book in the whole of the word of God that uses the word 'obey' so frequently, and outlines the blessings that obedience will incur upon us. It can all be summed up in that familiar statement in Deuteronomy 11:27, where God said through Moses: 'I will set before you a blessing if you obey, and a curse if you will not obey'.

Now I know we're still in the Old Testament, but you know this is the principle that goes right through to the New Testament, even in grace and even in Christ, that if you want to be blessed of God you need to start obeying God! If you want to be cursed of God, even as a believer; if you want to undergo God's discipline, God's displeasure, just you live in disobedience and rebellion to Him. That's why we need to beware of praying only for God's blessing, you hear people in the prayer meeting: 'Lord, bless me, Lord bless this church', when what God's word is telling us even way back in the Old Testament is: if you look after obedience, God will look after your blessing!

Have we learnt that in our early Christian lives, or even in our state of supposed Christian maturity? The next new beginning in the Old Testament is the appointment of a King - remember the people wanted it? The first King that God chose was Saul, and there's a most solemn warning in the story of Saul that we read from in our opening text; because the story of Saul, if it tells us nothing else, is this: that God requires exact and entire obedience of all His children. In 1 Samuel 10, Samuel commanded Saul that he was to wait seven days until he, the prophet Samuel, came to him; and Samuel would perform a sacrifice, and Samuel would tell Saul from the mouth of the Lord what he ought to do. Now Samuel, as far as Saul was concerned, didn't turn up in time; and when he delayed, Saul decided: 'Well, I'm the King, I might as well sacrifice - if I can't sacrifice, who else can?'. So Saul sacrificed, and when Samuel returned we read in 1 Samuel 13:13: 'thou hast not kept the commandment of the LORD thy God', Samuel said to Saul, 'which he commanded thee, therefore thy kingdom shall not continue, because thou hast not kept that which the Lord commanded thee'.

What does that tell us? It tells us simply that God will not honour a man or a woman who is not obedient to Him. The second test of what was in Saul's heart was that he was commanded of God and the prophet to execute God's judgment against the nation of Amalek. So he obeys, there's no doubt about that, he obeys God and he gathers a great army together, about 200,000 or so men, he destroys Amalek after going into the wilderness to chase them - but what you need to see is that God told Saul very clearly, listen to His words: utterly to destroy all, and not to spare. You know the story: he obeyed God, yet he in his human wisdom decided as Saul the King that he would spare the best of the cattle, that he might as well spare King Agag, and he would take the cattle and he would do something very religious and very commendable with it - he would sacrifice them unto the living God. Yet God speaks to Samuel, and Samuel speaks to Saul and says: 'It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king: for he hath not performed my commandments'.

When Samuel comes to Saul twice, Saul retorts and protests to him: 'But I have performed the commandment of the Lord, I have obeyed the voice of the Lord!' - and so he had, we might as well think, but he hadn't obeyed it completely! His obedience had only been partial, his obedience had not been entire and absolute. God had said 'Utterly destroy all, spare not'. To sum it all up, we read the words at the beginning in 1 Samuel 15, God said 'to obey is better than sacrifice...Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, the LORD hath rejected thee'. Now if ever there was an ancient picture of modern day believer's obedience, it is that one - it is partial. You're here today, you read your Bible, you take the odd opportunity to witness to people of Christ that you know are unsaved, you keep some of the commandments - i.e. you haven't committed adultery, you haven't murdered anybody - but the fact of the matter is, you know as well as I do, that your obedience is only in measure, you're not doing all that God has asked of you! We say like Saul: 'But I have obeyed the Lord' - well, maybe you have obeyed the Lord, but could it be that we are protesting to God 'I have obeyed You', but God is saying as He said to Saul, 'But ye have rejected the word of the Lord'.

Well we must move on, this time to the New Testament, and we see first of all our blessed Saviour. We see very clearly from the New Testament that we discover that the reason that the Lord Jesus Christ came from heaven to earth at all was for obedience. You've heard Him say it, I'm sure: 'Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God', and how many times did He confess to men on this earth: 'I seek not my own will, but the will of Him who sent me'. Read the teachings of the Lord Jesus, and obedience was what He required. In the Sermon on the Mount He said: 'Many will say on that day 'Lord, Lord", but they will not get in, but He concludes that matter by saying 'but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven, he will inherit the kingdom'. In His farewell discourse he revealed at the very end of His ministry that obedience was a condition of constant fellowship with the triune Godhead.

Let me show you this, turn with me to John 14 verse 15 - what a verse! 'If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever' - verse 21 - 'He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him'. Verse 23: 'Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him'.

Can I be absolutely clear? If you want to know the reality of God's presence and moving in your life, you need to be obedient. God's word is absolute and categorical. God's not answering your prayers? God is not giving you what you want? God is not changing your circumstances the way you feel they need to be? Maybe you're out of God's will in those matters, but maybe you're not, maybe those things are genuine - could it be that you're not obeying God in some way? If you want communion and want to know God, chapter 15 of John tells us very clearly, if you want to abide in the vine, how do you do it? Is it more prayer that will cause you to abide in the vine? Is it having more faith, and trying to believe for more? Is it studying more of God's word and knowing more facts about prophecy and eschatology and all sorts of doctrines of God's word? If we believe that, do you know something? We have overlooked one of the basic simple teachings of our Lord Jesus, and it is this: obedience is the way of blessing!

John chapter 15:10, look at it, He says: 'If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love', and He gives a divine sanction for it, 'even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love'. Can you imagine this? For the Lord Jesus Christ Himself on this earth, and for us, the only way to abide in divine love is to keep His commandments. We haven't got time to look at that this morning, but we could look at the words of the apostles - Peter in Acts 2 preached on the day of Pentecost: 'God hath given His Holy Spirit to them that obey Him'. In Romans, at the beginning and the end, Paul teaches that as the obedience of Christ has made us righteous, we become the servants of obedience. In other words, the gospel of grace that is outlined in the epistle of Paul to the Romans it is the restoration of the righteousness that was lost way back in the Garden of Eden. Christ on the cross has restored to us the ability to obey God - are we?

A. W. Tozer has said well: 'To escape the error of salvation by works, we have fallen into the opposite error of salvation without obedience - and there is no such a thing'. Another has said: 'When Christ takes the burden of guilt off a sinner's shoulders, He places the yoke of obedience upon his neck'. James, did he not teach us that we're not to be hearers of the word only, but doers of the same - and he expounds from the character of Abraham that he was justified, and his faith is perfect, by what? By his works in obedience. John the apostle tells us: 'He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar' - he goes on to say that obedience is one of the certain proofs of Christian character: 'Let us love in deed and truth, hereby we shall assure our hearts before Him; and whatsoever we ask we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things are pleasing in His sight'. In other words, the evidence of knowing God is obedience. It is also the secret of a good conscience and of confident prayer. Are you labouring in prayer for something that you need from God, and God's not giving you it? John Calvin put it like this: 'We cannot rely

on God's promises without obeying His commands'. If you aren't in obedience God will never hear your prayer.

This is the place that obedience has in the Holy Scriptures, now here's the question that I ask from that: does it have the same prominent place in our lives? Can I share this with you as I close: 1) the Lord asks, and the Lord requires and actually expects every one of His children to yield absolute obedience to Him day by day, every hour of every day; 2) to enable this He has given us sufficient provision in the gift of His Son and the gift of the Holy Spirit, and as one has put it 'All heaven is waiting to help those who will discover the will of God and do it'. God has put Himself at your disposal! 3) That provision alone can be enjoyed by the soul that gives him or herself up to a life of abiding communion with God in His presence day by day.

I read a telling statement this week by Gary Colburnson (sp?), he said: 'One of the reasons people find it hard to be obedient to the commands of Christ, is that they are uncomfortable taking orders from a stranger'. Is that why you're not obeying the Lord today? Because He's a stranger to you? You see, obedience is the fruit, but the root of obedience is love. If you do not have a cultivating relationship of love with the Lover of your souls, the blessed Lord Jesus, you will never get to that point where obeying Him is an absolute delight and an absolute necessity

4) Entrance into this life demands a vow of absolute obedience, or the surrender of the whole being to God - that means to be whatever He wants you to be, to think whatever He wants you to think, to speak only that which He wants you to speak, to do every moment only His will. Simon, on one occasion after being dejected, thinking that all his dreams were drowned, was out with some of the disciples going back to their fishing nets. When a stranger at that time appeared to them, they said to Him: 'We have toiled all night and have taken nothing', but it was the Saviour and He spoke to them and gave them the command to cast their net on the other side. Peter reluctantly said: 'At thy word I will let down the net' - he was really saying 'Look, I think I know best because I have done this all my life, but I will obey You, I'll trust You that You're right'. The nets were almost breaking with fish.

Oswald Chambers said these remarkable words: 'The best measure of a spiritual life is not its ecstasies but its obedience'. Martin Luther, that great reformer and martyr, said 'I had rather obey than work miracles'. Do you obey Him? It's the whole reason why you're saved. God dwells in the midst of His people's obedience, but He requires exact and entire obedience. It is the certificate of Christian character, it is the secret of a good conscience, it is the assurance of confident answered prayer - but if we are not completely obedient to Him we can be sure of none of those things.

Dr. R. A. Torrey, the evangelist, said that one evening, during one of his crusade meetings, he was told that a minister's son was to be present in the congregation. Though this young man professed to be a Christian, he certainly didn't live the Christian life. Torrey that evening watched for him, and tried to guess who he might be, and he thought he knew who he was; so he selected, as he thought, the right man and began to preach at him. At the close of the service he hurried to the door to greet everyone, and he shook the hands of the different people; and when that young man came out, he shook his hands and he said to him: 'Good evening, I'm glad to see that you're here! Are you a friend of Jesus?'. The young man said 'Yes, I consider myself a friend of Jesus'. 'Jesus said', Torrey replied, 'Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you'. His eyes fell, he said: 'If those are the conditions, well, I guess I'm not one'.

Are you a friend of Jesus? Do you do whatever He commands you? On one occasion the Lord Jesus said to the disciples: 'Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I say?'. I came across this poem this week, and I close with it. It's as if the Lord Jesus is speaking to all of our hearts, it says:

'Ye call Me Master and obey Me not;

Ye call Me Light and see Me not;
Ye call Me Way and walk Me not;
Ye call Me Life and desire Me not;
Ye call Me Wise and follow Me not;
Ye call Me Fair and love Me not;
Ye call Me Rich and ask Me not;
Ye call Me Eternal and seek Me not;
Ye call Me Gracious and trust Me not;
Ye call Me Noble and serve Me not;
Ye call Me Mighty and honour Me not;
Ye call Me Just and fear Me not;
If I condemn YOU, blame Me not'.

Jesus said: 'If ye love me, keep my commands'.

Let's all bow our heads - believer have you reached a dead-end in your life, you've lost the joy, you've lost the peace, you know that this isn't how it should be - perhaps it is because there's something that you know God wants you to do, and you just won't do it? He wants to lead you, but you will not be led. Maybe there's a backslider here, and that's why you have gone off the road, that obstacle - obey Him! Repent and believe again in your Saviour!

Lord, help us this morning, take a dealing with every heart, to the glory of Christ we pray and to the betterment of our souls that we obey God and enjoy Him forever. Amen.

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Back To Basics – Chapter 5

"Fruit"

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Now we're turning in our Bibles this morning, in our fifth study in this series 'Back to Basics' looking at the ABCs of the Christian life, the elementary things that we all need to learn when we the first come to faith in the Lord Jesus and, sad to say, many of us forget in our pilgrimage along the journey towards heaven. So it's good for new believers here this morning, and all of these Sunday mornings, to learn these basics; and it's also good for we ourselves who have been saved, perhaps, many years, to remind ourselves and perhaps get back to basics even ourselves.

We're turning to Galatians 5, and this morning we just take the one word title 'Fruit'. We've looked at 'The Morning Watch', the importance of meeting with God every morning of our lives here on earth; we've looked at this great subject of 'The Fullness of the Spirit'; we looked at the subject which is contemporary to all of our hearts 'Temptation', and how we deal with it as we face it in this modern age; and last Lord's day morning we looked at the subject of 'Obedience', that if we're going to know God's blessing in our Christian life, just like through every era of time from Genesis right through to Revelation, we must obey God and His word.

This morning we're looking at the subject of 'Fruit', beginning to read at verse 13 - Paul, writing to the Galatians, says: "For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty", or unto freedom, "only use not liberty", or freedom, "for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another. This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth", or striveth, "against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another".

There is in Israel a counterfeit olive tree. It is counterfeit in the sense, being called the Oliaster (sp?), that it is just like the olive tree to look upon - its texture, its leaves, its bark - but the problem with it is that it yields no fruit at all. So to the naked eye at a certain season during the year, you would think it was just a natural ordinary olive tree, but when the fruit bearing season of harvest comes you would find that it bears no fruit. Now here's the unique thing about it: in every aspect, apart from not bearing fruit, it is like the natural olive tree. It is like it in this sense: it takes up a large area in the garden or in the orchard, it absorbs as much sunlight as it can on its leaves, and it turns that sunlight into the energy that would normally feed fruit on any other plant. Its great roots that go deep into the ground draw upon the vast nutrient sustenance that is in the soil - yet with all these things, it never ever bears fruit.

Now I wonder if we were to ask this morning in this congregation of Christians, how many oliasters we have, how many counterfeit olive trees that do everything that Christians do, and draw upon all the resources that are given to Christians today in our world by the Spirit and by the church, yet you are not bearing fruit or substantial fruit to the testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ? I've heard people say: 'An unfruitful Christian is not a failed Christian, but a false Christian'. Now I don't follow that all the way, to say that if you aren't bearing fruit at this minute you're not saved, that is not what I'm saying. But I am saying this: that if you are not bearing fruit to the glory of God in your life presently, you should at least ask the question of yourself, 'Am I really saved?' - for the Lord has said, 'By their fruits, ye shall know them'. Surely if the life of Christ is dwelling in you, pulsating through your spiritual veins and vitals, people ought to know that you belong to Christ because of the fruit that is in your life.

Now maybe it's exaggerating to say that some of us don't have any fruit in our lives - it may well be possible - but probably nearer the truth is this: many of us only produce some fruit in our lifetime. Now if we are saved, we must produce some fruit at least - but the question is this: how much fruit are you producing as a Christian? This is one of the purposes of the Lord in saving us, He said to His disciples in John 15: 'I have chosen you and ordained you, that you should go and bring forth fruit'. Can I ask you today: how much fruit do you produce for Christ?

Now I've talked about the oliaster tree, the counterfeit olive tree, but in the United States of America there's another tree in the southwest desert area that is called the century plant. It is, in Latin, for all you avid gardeners, 'Adave Americana' (sp?). It thrives in rocky places, in mountainous desert sites where there's not much sustenance, that's where it likes to live - but if you were to look at this plant you would see that it has dramatic splayed leaves that grow sometimes to over a foot wide. This tree has a great domineering feature about it, because it can grow to about 12 feet in diameter; but what is unusual about this tree is not, like the oliaster tree, that it doesn't produce any fruit at all, but it has a long reproductive cycle - that is why it is called the century plant. Now you're not meant to take it literally, it doesn't mean it only produces fruit every 100 years, but only every 20 to 30 years does this century plant produce flowers. You could live two decades or three and never see any flowers or fruit produced from the century tree, and then all of a sudden one year without any warning or announcement, there's a new bud that sprouts and apparently there is this glorious fruit that is shown - but you have to wait a very long time for it.

Can I say very compassionately and tenderly, as far as I can, that some of you are like the century plant. You're saved, and you're well saved at that, and you've shown some fruit in your past, but it takes an awful long time for your fruit to be produced, and for you to do really anything for Christ that means anything in a chronological sense. Your fruit only comes about after a long period of time, and that very seldom.

Often, sadly to say, we as believers do not produce the fruit of the Spirit in our lives, but what Paul calls in Galatians 5 the works of the flesh. Look down at these descriptions that he gives us: 'Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery', you know what that is, 'fornication', you know what that is, 'uncleanness', which is also impure thoughts, 'lasciviousness', which is another word for lustful pleasures, 'idolatry', putting something before God and in His place, 'witchcraft', all that's involved in spiritism, that we'll look at tomorrow night in the Bible study, 'hatred', obvious, 'variance', or discord, 'emulations', jealousy or 'wrath', fits of rage, 'strife', which is like self-ambition, pushing yourself before others, 'seditions', which is dissension, 'heresies', which describes false doctrine but also describes factions and splits. Verse 21: 'Envyings', obvious, 'murders, drunkenness, revellings', which is another word for orgies.

Now when we read down this awful list of infamy that describes the type of things that even go on in our world today as much as Paul's day, we think to ourselves: 'Isn't that awful? Isn't that heinous? Isn't that an abomination unto God that people could practice such things?' - but we need to remind ourselves, as we did when we looked at this great subject of temptation, that we as human beings, fallen human beings in the

Adamic race, have two natures, two natures! There is what the Bible calls in this passage 'the flesh', the old nature that you were born with when you were born in sin and shapen in iniquity. You've got it, and in the day and the hour that you're saved you don't lose it, no matter what anybody says; but you gain another nature, and that is the divine nature that is the very life of God in Christ imparted to you at faith and conversion, but you've still got this old nature - the fruit of which we have been reading in these verses from 19 to 21.

The remarkable thing here is, if you count down there are 17 works of the flesh, but there are only nine fruit of the Spirit. Boy, does that tell you something about human beings, doesn't it? Fossett, the commentator, put it like this: 'It is a proof of our fallen state how much richer every vocabulary is in words for sin, rather than for the graces'. We can describe sin in all sorts of ways, but when it comes to the holy things of God we're dumbfounded, and that declares our nature as sinners, as warped and fallen before God. Archbishop Trent illustrated it in this way, he said that the Tasmanian natives had scores of words for the sin of infanticide, killing children, but they had not one word for 'home' or for 'love'. Many ways to describe the sin of 'unlove' and the destruction of the family, but when it came to the positive, that which is righteous and holy in the sight of God, the home and love, they had no description.

Now here's a challenge that I want to throw out into our meeting this morning before we go on any further, and it's this: do you realise, and will you admit even as a believer today in this church, that you are capable of any of these sins that are written down in verses 19 to 21? Can you admit that? I will freely admit to you from this pulpit, and it's no big thing, that I am capable in and of myself to commit any of these sins, any and maybe even every one of them. Sometimes I hear in the prayer meeting, when folk are describing the type of things that are going on in our world, people saying that they can't understand how people could do such things - well, if you can't understand it, you don't understand yourself! You don't understand the deep depravity that your old nature can delve to, that your very nature as a human being could be harbouring the seeds for every one of those sins that you've read about this morning. If you're honest, as a believer, that is the reason for the struggle that is in your life at this moment in time. Because if you're honest - yes we've got to learn to hate sin, and I've taught you that in recent weeks; and that can happen when you surrender yourself completely to God's nature - but if you're honest you've got to admit that as we go down this list, some of us if not all of us not only like this stuff, but we love it.

You might be sitting there audibly or inaudibly 'tut-tutting', but the fact of the matter is: there is something in all of us that enjoys the works of the flesh, and if you can't admit that you're a liar. You see, this is how the producers of the soaps get people hooked - because you could read this verse 19 to 21 almost as a script to 'Eastenders' or to something else that maybe you cherish very dearly. This is how the press sell their tabloids, by plastering all of this type of work of the flesh all over the front pages - and people buy it! Now when we are saved we get a new nature, but we still have the old nature, and God's plan - mark this please - is not to improve upon our old nature, but to replace the old with the new. This is where people flounder, because they try in some kind of way, in a legal sense, to restrict themselves. They try to bind the flesh, they try to tame the flesh, they try to train the flesh - one of the greatest illustrations of that is the monks in the monasteries. They try to cut themselves off from the world, but it does not work - Christ has created us as new beings to be in the world, but not of the world. There is a power in the Holy Spirit that we'll see in a moment that can allow you to walk through the world, not leading yourself into temptation, but walk through this age with all its temptations and trials and resist them in the power of Christ - not cut yourself off from them.

You see, the Gospel is not about, from start to finish, what I can do for God, it's about what He can do for me. That's why you should never try to sanctify the flesh, because the flesh is bankrupt, even the good flesh, even your own righteousness is as filthy rags in the eyes of God. But God's goal in redemption is to replace all that the old nature loves with all that Jesus is - can I make that any plainer? The goal of the Gospel is to

make you like God's Son! It is through, of course, constant transformation - 2 Corinthians 3:18 - that we are being changed into the same image of the Lord Jesus, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. It is a process, but I'm asking you, before we look at this fruit of the Spirit: how is the process in your life today? Are you feeding on the works of the flesh - you can do that as a believer - or are you producing the fruit of the Spirit?

Well, let's look at the fruit of the Spirit. If I was to ask you the question: how many are there are of them? The answer would probably come back 'nine', but if you look at verse 22 you will see that the word fruit is not in the plural, it does not say 'the fruits of the Spirit', it says in singular 'the fruit of the Spirit'. It does not say 'the fruit of the Spirit are', even though there are plural descriptions given, but it says 'the fruit of the Spirit is'. This is a singular fruit, it is not nine fruits, it is one fruit. So the idea that the apostle Paul has here is not: 'Tom has love, he's a very loving person; and James, he has peace; and Joy, she has joy', and you could go down a list of people with these particular attributes - he is saying that this is one fruit, and all of these attributes are evident in the life of the person that has this fruit in them. Do you understand that?

In fact, this fruit could be described in just one word, it is the word 'character' - character! What is your character like? I hear people say: 'Well, I'm quick-tempered', 'Oh, I'm humorous, I have to make a joke about everything', and we could go on and describe all sorts of characters: those who are melancholy, those who are jumping over the moon all the time. That is what you are as a natural individual, and taking personality descriptions aside, there is a certain amount of that that is rooted in our old nature that we can't just resign ourselves to and say: 'Well, that's just the way I am' - your character has to be changed into the character of the fruit of the Spirit. Now you ask: 'Whose character is that?' - one word answer again, the character of 'Jesus'. That is simply what it is.

Oswald Chambers, that great spiritual writer, put it like this: 'The works of the flesh are separate acts performed by the man, but the ninefold fruit of the Spirit is the issue of the one life within'. One life issuing ninefold fruit, one fruit, because it is the life of none other than the Lord Jesus Christ! If nothing else proves that this is beyond man to live it, it is that: that only the life of Christ can produce such fruit. Philippians 1 reads like this, verse 11: 'Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ' - the fruits of righteousness. Righteousness is the character of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the fruit of the Spirit is the character of His righteousness.

So if you like, the fruit of the Spirit given here ninefold is a perfect portrait of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Therefore, not only is it a portrait of Him, but it is a description of the ideal Christian, for Christian means 'follower of Christ', 'Christ's-one', 'one who is like Christ'. For true Christian character to outflow in us there must be the fruit of the indwelling Spirit of Christ living within us. If you would pardon the expression, we all should be 'little Christs' walking about the face of the earth!

One true evidence of the fullness of the Spirit that we looked at several weeks ago is not gifts, whether you call it tongues or this, that or the other; or any preaching gift, or any other particular gift - that is not the evidence for the fullness of the Spirit. The evidence for the fullness of the Spirit is not ability, whatever you may be able to do for God and for men, that is not the evidence. The evidence of the fullness of the Spirit of God is character - character! The fruit that is in your life.

Let me show you this, in Matthew 7:22, the Lord Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount said that on the day that He would come again and judge the world, that many would say unto Him: 'Lord, Lord' - in other words, they would have the language but not the life. Then they would say: 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? Have we not cast out demons in Thy name, and done many great miracles in Thy name?' - they had gifts, they had gifts, but the indwelling Spirit of God was not in them! Do you know what that tells me? You can counterfeit gifts, you can counterfeit ability - anybody can preach, anybody can talk, anybody can

perform a miracle even with the power of the devil himself, and we'll see that tomorrow night - but no one can counterfeit the character of Jesus Christ! That is impossible. There's only one Jesus, and there's only one Spirit of Jesus.

Now I want you to notice the difference not only in the fact that this is one fruit, not plural fruit even though there is a ninefold description given - but I want you to notice the difference between the word 'works' and the word 'fruit'. The works of the flesh, this word 'work', what does it speak of? When you think of work - don't all turn off now on me! - but when you think of work you think of effort, don't you? You think of energy, you think of mechanics and toil and labour, and stress and strain, and being spent - that's what works does. What is the result of work? It is weariness, faintness, tiredness, frustration - and it could be that there's someone here who is trying to live their Christian life through works. You're putting in all the energy and it seems that you're getting nothing back in return, only weariness and frustration, because fleshly effort and fleshly display and noise is all that work has got to do with, but that is not what brings forth the character of Christ. What you do doesn't matter to an extent! This is not works, this is fruit.

What does fruit involve? Well, it doesn't involve any work on the part of the tree, but it is the result of life working within. In other words, it's the result of receiving - the tree receives the nutrients, the tree receives the sustenance and the light, and it yields to it - it doesn't close up its leaves and dig its head into the ground - it accepts it all, and because it surrenders completely to the resources and environment around it, it yields fruit.

My friend, this is very simple, but it is profound; because what I'm asking you from that illustration is this: one, have you received from God everything that He has provided for you to bear fruit? Two, are you yielding your life and everything that you are and have to God, so that you might bear fruit. Three, are you accepting God's will for your life and all these aforementioned, and if you are you will bear forth much fruit. Someone has said well: 'A machine works, but only life can produce fruit'. Are you just working for God, or are you living for God and allowing the life of Christ - which is the only life that can please God - to live through you?

Do you know what it means, if you're going to bear fruit? It means this: that you will have no confidence in the flesh, that means the good flesh as well. You know you can do good works, and say good words, and pray good prayers in the flesh; but if you want to bear fruit you will have no confidence in the flesh, but you will do a couple of things - one, you will confess your weakness and utter depravity before God, because the Lord Jesus said 'Blessed are they that are poor in spirit'. You will make an earnest plea - now I'm talking to Christians - for forgiveness in your life for those things that you have done that you ought not to have done, and for those things that you have left undone that you ought to have done; and you will make a complete surrender to the will of God and Christ in your life - now, have you ever done that? Because I think most believers today, especially in Ulster, have never done that!

You might ask the question: why is the picture here fruit rather than flowers? Have you ever thought about that? Flowers are, in a sense, the produce of a plant; but why does Paul use fruit here? Well, I believe the reason is because flowers are decorative things, flowers make the tree and the plant look better - but they don't really do an awful lot. The idea of the fruit of the Spirit here is not that Christians are nice people to have around, and say nice words, and are all polite to you all the time - because they're not, apart from anything else! But the idea here is fruit that can be eaten and digested by other people - fruit is food, and food is for hungry people! You see, you don't go home and hang some apples and bananas on the wall, unless you're having a harvest service, because they're food. They're not to decorate the place. John Stott put it like this: 'The Christian should resemble a fruit tree and not a Christmas tree'. Fruit is for feeding hungry people, and these qualities of the fruit of the Spirit - you would think at times, to hear us, that they're in order that people would just stop and look up into our eyes and say: 'What a wonderful person he is, isn't he

tremendous?'. These attributes of fruit are to feed hungry people, they're in order that people who need love will find love, that people who need joy and peace and long suffering and gentleness and kindness and faithfulness will find it in us as God's people! If people see us as good, and we never get involved in their lives, that is not fruit.

Let's move on, because I want to give you in closing three categories of this fruit that are mentioned in verse 22 and verse 23. Let's take the first three: the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace. Now this is tremendous, think of this: there is no limit involved to the Spirit-filled believer regarding the way that they may experience love, joy and peace. You can have as much love, joy and peace as you can handle if you're filled with the Spirit of the living God. You may, Paul says, enjoy the love of God that passeth knowledge. You may enjoy joy unspeakable and full of glory. You may enjoy the peace which passeth all understanding. Imagine this! Is this yours? This is the fruit of internal experience, the internal experience that the child of God ought to have.

You'll notice that love is mentioned first, because all the other fruit in this whole series of nine outflows from love, and are really love in different forms and shapes. You will notice in Galatians 5 verse 14 that love is commanded: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself'. You might say: 'Well, how can something that is commanded be a fruit? If I have to do it, and you say it's not work, how it can be a fruit described in verse 16 to 18, walking in the Spirit that you should not fulfil the lusts of the flesh'. The reason is simply this, we were singing it last week: 'Trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey'. You're to obey the command of God to love your neighbour; but if you're a believer you're to trust God to give you the resources, sometimes, to love people who are very unlovable - and that's being honest.

You see, love in the Scripture is more volitional than emotional. It's not this airy-fairy feeling and tickle, and hairs going up the back of your neck that Scott and Heather are enjoying at the minute, but it's something more than that. It's something less subjective but objective, something that you can see in the actions of men, rather than feelings. That's what the Lord said in Philippians 2, when He came to this earth and made Himself of no reputation, and he told them to let that mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus - what was the mind? Esteeming others, Philippians 2 verse 4, better than yourselves! The sense is not 'higher up than yourself', the sense is esteeming others more important than yourself.

Some people here and everywhere are intoxicated with a sense of their own importance, rather than esteeming others more important than themselves. If you were to ask the question: how do you know someone loves you? What would be the answer? Well, I think perhaps the answer - at least one - could be this: you feel important to them, you feel important to them. Someone has well said: 'People don't care how much you know, till they know how much you care'. That is what this fruit of love is, it's found in 1 Corinthians 13, look at it for a moment please - 1 Corinthians 13, this great chapter on love. Verse 4, substitute 'charity' with 'love' for a moment: 'Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Love never fails'. Now what is that? Oh, it's very apt description of love, isn't it? But I want you to do something for me: let's read that again and substitute the word 'love' for 'Jesus'. 'Jesus suffers long, Jesus is kind; Jesus does not envy; the Lord Jesus does not vaunt himself, is not puffed up, He does not behave Himself unseemly, He does not seek His own, He is not easily provoked, He thinks no evil; He rejoices not in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; He bears all things, He believes all things, He hopes all things, He endures all things. Jesus never fails'. Is this not the character of Christ?

Now, do another thing for me: put your name in. 'David suffers long'...well, I'll agree with that one...'He is kind, he does not envy'...I'll have to stop. I can't go on any further, can you? This is the character of Christ, that is what the Spirit wants to make you! Years ago it was said of the Christians: 'See how they love one

another' - I wonder can that be said today? Charles Price asked the question: 'Is that really a characteristic of the true Christian and the fruit of the Spirit, because Christians love one another?'. Can I remind you of the words of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 5:46, where He said: 'Even the tax collectors and publicans love one another, you're not any better than they if you just love each other'. You're a Baptist, or you're a Brethren, or you're an 'Iron-Hallite' whatever that may be - and you love the people here because they all think like you, and they talk like you, and they look like you, and they walk like you - but what about the people who call themselves Christians who aren't like you? I'm not talking about ecumenism here - ecumenism does not stop us loving people, you may think it at times! But here in East Belfast there are many churches, denominations, and we who believe not in denominations can be the very ones that use denominations in order to separate believers - that seems an irony to me. Maybe you can explain that one to me sometime. But the fact of the matter is this: there is also working men's clubs, football pubs, and they each love one another in their own way, and have the same fellowship that we can have, and the Lord is saying: 'What is that more than anyone else?' - this is the fruit of the Spirit: to love someone who you don't like, and to love someone who you've nothing in common with!

Now my friend, if you don't have that love, you, I would say, don't have the fruit of the Spirit. It's natural to love someone who's like you, it's supernatural to love someone who is beyond your particular taste - and I give you the reputation of our Saviour, when it was said of Him 'He is the friend of publicans and of sinners'...is that your reputation? If people aren't talking about the type of people you're hanging about with, you don't have the reputation of Christ - and I apply that to myself as well.

We must move on swiftly, that's the fruit of internal experience: love, joy and peace. Secondly the fruit of external behaviour: long-suffering, that is patience, gentleness, goodness. This is the fruit of the Spirit towards others - not just how we relate to ourselves with the Spirit of God with love, joy and peace, but how we relate to others around us. The Lord Jesus, it says, was reviled, and when He was reviled He reviled not again, and when He suffered He threatened not - He had patience! Gentleness, the gentleness of Christ - we could spend all morning talking about that. Goodness, it says of Him that He went about doing good continually; and Dorcas, His disciple, was full of good works, because goodness is godliness! Are you patient, are you gentle, are you good towards others?

The fruit of internal experience, the fruit of external behaviour, but thirdly the fruit of spiritual character - towards God this time. Not into yourself, not out to man, but towards and up to God if you like: faith, meekness and temperance. That faith there is just faithfulness, that's the sense. Faithfulness, temperance, another word for self-control. Meekness, faithfulness to the Lord - if you're filled with the Spirit, like the disciples who were timid and fearful, all of a sudden when they were filled with the Spirit they followed and were faithful unto death! What about meekness? Is the meekness - not the weakness - but the meekness and humility of Christ being reproduced in your life? The One who said: 'I am meek and lowly in heart'. What about temperance? Self-control? We come back to the start again: are you mastering the appetites and the passions, sensually, that are in our old nature that we all have. This is what makes us different from animals, God has given us the ability to control ourselves!

Do you know what this list is a summary of? It is God's complete responsibility towards men regarding Himself and regarding other men, it is the sum total of the law of God to the New Testament Christian. Can I leave you with a story that Charles Price told? He tells of being invited to a big conference, and there were many speakers there and pastors and teachers also listening and being taught, but there was one man who particularly impressed him by the name of Juan Carlos Ortiz. This man, when he introduced himself to him, was the pastor of a church I think in Buenos Aires in South America. When he went to that church there were only 300 people in his congregation, but within three to five years that congregation was multiplied to 3000 people - imagine that, we'd be building a new building all over again! One day, high with the pride that such things can give a man, he was driving past his cemetery and he noticed that it was growing as well. He

thought to himself: 'When I came to this church we had 300 fat Christians getting fatter, who didn't really care about anybody else but themselves. Now after three to five years we have a church of 3000 average Christians, fat Christians getting fatter, who don't really care about anybody but themselves'. He became unhappy about the situation, and wanted something more and something real.

He decided he was going to preach a series on love. The first Sunday he got up, while he was in the pulpit - this sometimes happens to preachers - he felt the Lord telling him not to preach his sermon, so he binned it. After the worship time he got up to preach, and he said: 'This, brothers and sisters, is my text, 'Brothers and sisters, love one another''. Then he sat down. The worship leader, after a couple of minutes, got up and said: 'Do you want us to sing another song?'. He said 'No, that's it'. Then he got up again and he said: 'Brothers and sisters, love one another'. Then he sat down, people looked at one another, his wife in the balcony thought he'd finally flipped his lid - until he got up again and said: 'Brothers and sisters, love one another'. Then the fourth time he got up, there was someone in the back corner of the church turned to the other person and said: 'Tell me some way that I could love you?'. For three months he preached that sermon - now you might think that's ridiculous - but that first morning there were 28 unemployed men who went out of that service employed. There were single mothers who went out of that service with a guarantee that they would become an adopted member of another family where they could eat twice a week. This man, Juan Carlos Ortiz, said: 'If I had preached and differentiated between the various Greek words for love in the New Testament Scriptures, I would have got a pat on the back on the way out, but there would have been 28 men that would have gone out still unemployed, and many young single mothers who would have gone out without a helping hand'.

Well, as you would know, there were 300 people who objected. They said they were going to leave, 'We've employed this man to preach the word of God, sure anybody can say 'Brothers and sisters, love one another'. His retort was, 'Well, I've been preaching and teaching for years and you don't listen to a word that I'm saying, and now things are getting done'. But nevertheless, after three months, he got up and said 'Brothers and sisters, I've changed my text', and there was a roar and a shout and a round of applause, as you can imagine - 'Brothers and sisters, love your neighbour as yourself'. They all looked at one another, and then got out of the church and into their cars and drove home, went to their next-door neighbours and said: 'I am a Christian, is there something that I can pray about for you, is there something that I can do for you?'. Within weeks that church was revolutionised, and people were ringing it up to say: 'Is that the church that helps people?'

Imagine 2000 years after the Lord Jesus Christ, the people in the world are only starting to ask the question: 'Is that the church that helps people?'. I've gone over my time, but what is the fruit of the Spirit like in your life?

Lord, we remember that the cry of the world on one occasion was: 'We would see Jesus'. Lord, our cry today is: 'I would be like Jesus'. May we surrender all to Him, and allow Him to live His life in us. Amen.

 Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - October 2004

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Back To Basics – Chapter 6

"Guidance"

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Now I want you to turn with me to James chapter 1, the epistle of James chapter 1, and if you have been with us these Lord's Day mornings, you will know that we're presently going through a series entitled 'Back to Basics', looking at the ABCs of the Christian life, the elementary principles of the Christian faith that all of us need to learn very early in our life as a Christian. It's important that the lambs among the flock here do get to learn these facts and teachings very early in their spiritual lives, because a lot of how they will succeed and go on and mature in the Christian faith will depend upon how quickly they implement these things in their experiences. But, all of us would be honest if we said that we all need from time to time, and certainly at this time, to remind ourselves to get back to basics and maybe retrace the old paths that we have lost in recent days, or over many years of Christian testimony. We've looked at 'The Morning Watch', we have looked at 'The Fullness of the Spirit', we've looked at the subject of 'Temptation', the subject of 'Obedience', and now this morning after last week - what was last week? Somebody remind me - no, last week, this week is 'Guidance' - can you remember? 'Fruit', fruit! Some of you were here last week at least, some of you have already heard this sermon obviously, before I've preached it! But this morning we're looking at the subject of 'Guidance', and this is a terribly important one, and I think a lot of young people in particular - because of the great decisions that they have to make in their education, and regarding their career, and marriage, and where they'll live and so on - are particularly interested in guidance. I would encourage some of you young people that are here - some of our young people are away today - to let the other young people know that this was the subject this morning, so that they may glean some helpful thoughts from it.

But it's not applicable just to those who are young among us, I think all of us have decisions from day-to-day that we need to know God's will regarding. So we read preliminary verses from James 1 verse 5 first of all. James says: 'If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord'.

Guidance: God has promised to give it to us. Now Christians are often troubled about this subject of guidance, because they want to know, and they want to feel that they're in God's will. They don't want to take a wrong step or a wrong path. Sometimes guidance seems to be so obscure, and that accentuates the fear - because it's so hard, we feel, to know God's will, and therefore so easy to take a wrong step. I would have to say that I fear that there are more Christians today who are not concerned at all, or not troubled about God's guidance in their lives - they're content to make their own decisions, to plough their own furrow as they see fit. I'm not interested in those folk specifically this morning, but in those who are troubled about the issue of guidance, and if it is possible they want to know the will of God in every situation in their lives, and they want to know how to know God's will - if it is possible at all.

Now let me say that if you are confused about the issue of guidance and God's will today, you need to be very careful - because Satan's objective is to make believers, men and women and boys and girls, confused about guidance and God's will. Because, of course, as we would know of him, he is a liar and a murderer and a cheat from the beginning, he doesn't want us to find God's perfect plan for our lives - but this is often how

he goes about confusing us. Sometimes what he does is he comes alongside a believer, and he accuses them of not obeying something in the past that he says, and they think, was God's will - now, it was not God's will at all, but he accuses them of taking a wrong path, and this believer has discerned in their mind that they have in some way chosen 'Plan B' and they can't get out of it, they're locked into it because of something in the past that they did wrong, a wrong choice that they made. Now if you're thinking that today, you need to know that that is of the devil. Because even if you have made wrong decisions in your life - you need to join the club, because there's not one of us here this morning that has never done that - you need to know that the Son of God can set us free. There's not two plans in God's mind, or two routes in God's map, but God can break out into so many realms that we have not even imagined - God can set us free, and set us on the right road again. So don't believe that lie of the devil regarding God's will.

Then he can confuse us, not only into thinking that we have chosen the wrong path in the past, but he can confuse us regarding how to discern God's will in the future. This is probably where the most of us are: 'I've this great decision, how do I make it? I can do this, that, or the other. How do I know? Is there some kind of red direct telephone line to heaven, whereby I can discern and divine God's holy will for my life?'. Now, we're going to look at it very practically today, but let me say before we go on any further: it is important that as children of God we must know how God guides, we must know! We must know how to discern God's will!

Let me say, as a foundation before we enter into the actual preliminaries and practical principles involved in God's guidance in our lives: do not believe the lie of the devil that God's will and God's guidance is obscure, that it's something airy-fairy, something mystical, something magical that only these people who have got their heads in the heavens can discern and know which path and which way to go. God's guidance - now mark this - is always clear guidance. Did you hear that? God's guidance is always clear guidance! You might have to wait for a little while until it becomes clear, but when it comes it's always clear. God's word says: 'God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all'.

Now I'll freely admit to you that it's not always easy to discern God's will, but let us say categorically today: God is not the author of confusion, God's leadings are never obscure. Satan's ways are full of obscurity, uncertainty, and doubts, and anxiety, I am sure you will agree - but God's will is never like that. Therefore, if His will is always clear, always precise, always definite, the problem must lie with us regarding how we do not tune in to what God wants us to do in our lives. Never lay the problem at God's feet, the problem is always at ours.

So, how can we know God's guidance? Well, this is the first point that I want to dwell on this morning: the primary preparation that is needed, the primary preparation that is needed if we are going to know God's will for our lives. What is the first thing that needs to be done in preparation for you and I to know what God's path is for our lives? Here it is very simply: the surrendered will, the surrendered will. Now I think you'll find that that is the same sermon I've been preaching ever since we started this series 'Back to Basics', but does that not tell a story in itself? The secret to everything in the Christian life, and the secret to guidance in God's will, is a will that already is obeying whatever God has revealed to it at any cost, at any price. You see, if you want to know God's will and have God's will revealed to you, you've got to be prepared to obey God's will. God is not necessarily going to reveal His will to people who are disobedient, whom He knows aren't going to obey it.

You see, there are people who come and they will, in counselling, ask the question: 'I can't find out what God's will is on this particular issue', and it often is the case that there is another issue in their lives, and they're not obeying God regarding it. They're living in disobedience in one area, yet there is another area they want God to speak to them on! Or, perhaps they have found God's will on the issue that they're seeking it

upon - but they don't like what God has had to say on it, so they've convinced themselves that there must be something else that God wants me to do: 'It can't be this, because I can't handle this'.

Let's, before we enter into all the supposed formulas regarding the will of God and guidance, lay this down as the primary preparation that is needed to enable us to fulfil God's will: it is being absolutely obedient and surrendered to Him in every area of our lives, finding that God's will is us bending to His will, rather than trying to bend Him to our will - and there's a world of difference! You see, as well as asking regarding God's will, we also need to listen. There's a lot of us do a lot of asking - 'God do this, God do that' - and we're not prepared to sit down, surrender ourselves to God, and listen to what He has to say to us, rather than just talking about what we want to happen in our lives! We need to seek to know God's will, that's true, but we need not just be guided - we need to seek God's will in order to be used.

Someone has said: 'God is not as concerned about what you ought to be, as who you ought to be'. I can't start this subject without getting past this one: God's primary desire for you is not that you go down Road A, B or C, or be a missionary, an evangelist, or a physician - God's will for you is that you be like Christ, and that you surrender your whole being completely to Him, and allow the Holy Spirit of the living God to fill you. If you haven't got to that place, forget about guidance! All things hang on complete surrendered to the lordship of Christ.

On one occasion an ocean liner sank just off the Irish coast - and the maritime world was bewildered, a bit like after the sinking of the Titanic, but the reason this time being that the ship's captain was one of the worlds most excellent seamen. No one, but no one could figure out what had gone wrong, what caused the sinking of the ship. Eventually divers were sent down, and one of the items that was brought up was the ship's compass box. After further examination it was opened, and there was found to be the point of a knife blade inside. Apparently what happened was, while one of the ship's mates was cleaning the compass, the sailor broke the tip of the knife off which had fallen in and lodged itself in the compass device. It was only the smallest, tiniest bit of metal, but it was enough to obscure the whole compass and to bring a bad reading - and the result was that the ship took a wrong course and crashed into the rocky coast.

Now listen, here is a lesson: the apostle says in Hebrews 12 that we are to follow those great cloud of witnesses, and lay aside every sin that so easily besets us; and look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross - but you can't get by this, you can't follow Christ in His way, wherever He wants you to go, until you lay aside those weights and sins. Those sins will obscure the reading of your compass, and send you all over the place. Romans 12 tells us the same thing: 'I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed through the renewing of your mind, that ye may know and be able to do what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God'.

Here is the primary preparation needed: you've got to surrender your all to Christ if you want to know what He wants you to do. Some of you are struggling with that - and I'll tell you, I feel like preaching on it till kingdom come, because until you get this grasped in your life, you will never get any further, you'll never succeed, you'll always be banging your head against a brick wall in your Christian experience, you'll always be defeated and dejected. If you're fighting with this issue in your life, you will always find it hard to know God's will. A. W. Tozer said: 'The man or woman who is wholly and joyously surrendered to Christ can't make a wrong choice, any choice will be the right choice'.

We must move on to look at what is probably in most of your minds: the practical principles involved in guidance in God's will. Sidlow Baxter, in his book 'Does God Still Guide?', gives very interesting illustrations on this matter and teaching. One of the first things he says is this: 'If you remember the children

of Israel in the book of Exodus, when they were in the desert and God commanded them to build a tabernacle, God spoke to them in three ways' - three ways. 'One, through the pillar of cloud and fire; two, through the blowing of the trumpet; and three, through the Urim and Thummim', which were just like jewels or crystals whereby God supernaturally allowed men to discern His will. The pillar of cloud and fire was communication to the eye, the trumpet was communication to the ear, and if you like the Urim and Thummim was a bit more personal to the individual, and it came to the heart for exceptional circumstances. Then he notices that when we move from the wilderness, and Israel become a covenant people through the giving of the law, and they enter into the promised land, there are still three ways whereby God communicates guidance to them. A bit more definite this time, first of all there is the guidance of the Mosaic Scriptures - Genesis through to Deuteronomy, the first five books of the Bible, the Torah, the Pentateuch. But again, it's the same as the pillar of fire and cloud, because it's through the eye to the mind to the heart, God is communicating His guidance through the eye. Then secondly there is the judge or the prophet, the man of God who speaks God's will, inspired of God. If the written word speaks to the eye, to the heart, then the prophet or the judge speaks to the ear, and from the ear subsequently to the heart. Thirdly there was again the Urim and Thummim, speaking again directly to the person about personal circumstances.

Now, those are threefold guidances - in the camp, what was it? It was the pillar of cloud and fire, it was the blowing of the trumpet, and third it was the Urim and Thummim. In the land, what was it? It was the Scriptures, and then secondly it was the judge or the prophet, and then again it was the Urim and Thummim. Now when we go into the New Testament, we find that there is a different emphasis, that God isn't chiefly wanting to guide a covenant people like Israel, a national race, but God is wanting to guide individual Christians - people like you and me. Although that's different, and although there are new inspired Scriptures, and the Gospels of the Lord Jesus, and although something very significant has taken place - i.e. in Acts chapter 2 at Pentecost the Holy Spirit has not just come to live with His people, but He has come to dwell in His people, the life of God in us so that we are led by the indwelling Spirit - all those things are tremendous, and great changes, but there are still three principal ways that God guides us. Those three principal ways are along the same lines: one, He speaks to us in promise through His word. This time, as New Testament believers, it's the Gospels He speaks to us through, the promises that the Lord Jesus Christ give us that we have now inherited as the church of Jesus. Secondly, He speaks to us in experience - not just through the word, but in experience, that is the book of Acts. We look at the acts of the Holy Spirit in the life of the apostles and the early believers, and isn't that still the way God speaks to us today: in our experiences, driven by the Spirit? Thirdly, He speaks to us in doctrine - that's the epistles, the teaching of the word of God, how we are to behave ourselves and act orderly and conduct ourselves in the house of God, that is the church of the living God.

It's threefold again: in promise, the Gospels; in experience, the Acts; in doctrine, the Epistles. We see right away that right throughout scripture there emerges a reliable theory and practice of guidance. Can I give it to you in summary? If you forget everything else, this is what I'm trying to make you understand today - here is how we know God's guidance in our life: one, the written word, the written word of God, Old and New Testament. Two, the inward urge, the Spirit that indwells us, God the Holy Ghost; and three, the indication by outward circumstances, things that are going on around us that have been directed by the providential sovereign hand of Almighty God. Did you get them? The written word, the inward urge, and the outward circumstance.

Now, I would have to say that those are not the only means of guidance, there are other ways that God can speak, even in very supernatural ways - and I don't want to get into that this morning, but what I do want to say is that those three principles involved in guidance are always the test of whatever other guidance we have received. Do you understand? If something does not weigh up with God's word, it cannot be from God. If the Spirit is grieved within our hearts regarding something that we think is guidance from God, it cannot be of

God. If something goes against all the circumstances in our lives that have been ordered by God, we have to reject it.

Now I'll show you in a minute or two how all these work together and agree with one another, but let me say this: in order to know that guidance is of God, if those three principles agree, guidance becomes clear. If the word of God has assured you of an issue, the Spirit of God has given the witness and peace in your heart, and thirdly the circumstances around you allow that thing to take place, you don't need to hesitate, you don't need to wait, all you need to do is agree and believe. Now if that doesn't happen, well, you should wait.

One of the most famous Bible teachers of last century, or two centuries ago now, F. B. Meyer, espoused this belief as well. He was on the deck of the Dublin-Holyhead boat returning home, and he wondered how the crew knew when and how to safely steer to the dock. It was a very stormy night, and as he stood on the deck with the visibility low he, from the bridge, peered through a window and asked the Captain: 'How do you know when to turn this ship into the narrow harbour?'. The Captain replied: 'Well sir, that's an art!', but he went on to explain, he said 'Do you see those three red lights on the shore? When they're all in a straight line, they all converge together, I go right in'. Later F. B. Meyer said in one of his writings: 'When we want to know God's will, there are three things which always occur: one, the inward impulse; two, the word of God; three, the trend of circumstances - never act until those three agree'. Did you get it? When those three converge in your life, it's time to go in!

Ecclesiastes 4 says a threefold cord is not easily broken, and this is a threefold cord concerning the will of God. Now let me remind you of it again, and I want you to write this down if you've got a pen, if you want to know God's will you need to remember this: one, the written word; two, the inward urge; three, the outward pointers. One, God's word - now listen, if God's word makes it clear you don't need to wait on the inward urge, you don't need to wait on the outward pointers, because God's word is our final rule of faith. Has it ever struck you, as a believer, that the vast majority of the will of God has already been revealed in the Bible? You're running around: 'What's God's will for me?' - most of it is in the Bible, and we've got to get to grips with obeying it before we're looking for other things to do. The inward urge and the outward pointers - let me say that if the inward urge agrees with the word of God, you can be sure it's God's will. If the outward circumstances agree with God's word, you can be sure it's God's will, but can I air a word of caution: it would be better to have all three agreeing, and wait until it is such, and then go into God's will. The word of God is always the foundation of all our guidance. Some would even add a fourth to this: godly counsel - it's not as important, but it's often advised to meet godly men or women, and seek their advice and counsel.

Now I hope you've got this in your mind: God's word, the written word; the inward urge; and the outward pointers. Now can I just leave you with a few words of wisdom on all these three, so that you'll understand what I'm saying regarding these practical principles involved in God's guidance. Let's look first of all the written word: the first principle I want you to realise is that God never contradicts His word when He guides us. God never, by His Holy Spirit, contradicts Himself. The Holy Spirit will never lead you to do something that He has prohibited against in the Scriptures. On one occasion R.A. Torrey, the evangelist, said that a man came to him and said that God was leading him to marry a certain woman. He said that she was a very devoted Christian woman, and they were greatly drawn to one another, and they felt God was leading them to be married and do a work for the Lord. Torrey retorts: 'But I said to him, 'You're already married! You've got a wife already!''.

The fact of the matter is, it doesn't matter what we feel or even what our circumstances are like, we have to obey God's word. God will never lead us to do something through circumstances, or through an inner urge, that is not found in His word, or that is against His word. Secondly, God will never lead us through His word into anything that will contradict duty, anything that will contradict duty. In other words, if you feel you're being led to do something that evades a moral obligation that you have, or violates an honest principle, that

leading is spurious. God never leads you to rob a bank, do you understand? That would be in direct disregard of God commandments, but in more obscure things God will never ask you to do something that will make you fail other men and transgress in another area of Scripture. Three: in order for God to speak to you through the written word, one of the most obvious things that you need to realise is that you need to search the Scriptures, you need to be in God's word! How can God lead you through His word if you're not reading His word? So you need to study prayerfully, and regularly, the Scriptures.

This is what often happens: you get into an emergency, your back is against the wall, and you turn to God's word! It's a big problem that you have, it's an emergency matter, but you see God guides every day of our lives - and the principle, I believe, is this: if you seek God in the small things, and commit the small things to the Lord every day in your life, when the big things come along you often know instinctively what to do. 'Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, lean not on thine own understanding; in all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct thy paths'.

Now I'm not talking about a ridiculous fanaticism that prays to the Lord: 'What colour of socks should I wear this morning?', or 'What route should I take to work?' - that makes things ridiculous and demeans the whole realm of God's guidance. What we're saying is: don't stop at seeking to know God's will for the big things, ask God's will for the small things, commit everything in your life to Him day by day - for this is the reason that God hides His will, not that we should get to know God's will, but that we should get to know God!

Do you get to know God? Or is it just to get to know the way ahead, the next step? Luther said: 'I know not the way He leads me, but well do I know my Guide'. Another principle regarding the Scriptures is this: don't make the Bible into a book of magic. Some people who consult the Scriptures only when they're in trouble, they play what some people have called 'Bible roulette'. They get their Bible, and then they flick through it, stop, and then stick their finger or a pen onto it, and decide 'Well, God spoke to me through that verse'. Now I know that there are some people, and it has happened to me too, that the Bible does open and something does speak to you - but that is the exception rather than the rule. We ought not to be doing that, and some people have likened it - and I think it's true - to pinning the tail on the donkey. It's got nothing to do with God's guidance, and it is an irreverent and improper use of the holy Scriptures. So we must guard against using God's book, theoretically, like a teacup that we were talking about last Monday night, leaving things up to chance. But if you're a person who is regularly in God's word, reading and imbibing it, when God speaks to you tomorrow after you've been reading God's word today, you know it's not a chance, you know it's not a coincidence.

Fifthly, that leads out of that, we must guard against fanciful interpretations regarding the Scriptures. Here's a rule of thumb: take the meaning of Scripture in its context, take the meaning of the Scripture in its context. You've all heard - it nearly bores me telling it again, but it's a good illustration - about the man who read that Judas went out and hanged himself, and then he flicked through the Bible again and found the text that said 'Go out and do thou likewise'. That's the danger when we use God's word in this fanciful way, we interpret everything as being directly to us, to our particular circumstances, whatever we may be in. Now listen to me: guidance at times transcends our intelligence and human reason. It can be beyond us what God is asking us to do, but there is a difference between transcending our intelligence and reason, and contradicting it - nonsensical things.

Now here is what you need to know: take the meaning as it is in the Scriptures. Let me give you an example from my own personal life, 1 Chronicles 29:1, you don't need to turn to it. I was, because of my age at the time, not allowed to go into Bible College to do pastoral theology and so on. To cut a long story short, one man of God encouraged me to put it in the people's court in the College, and I applied for the College and I got a refusal. Then I decided to wait upon God on the matter, and I believe God spoke to me through 1 Chronicles 29 verse 1, where David could not build the temple because there was blood on his hands - you

know the story - but God had chosen Solomon to build the temple. Now the two reasons why they weren't allowing me into Bible College were that I was too young and too inexperienced. First Chronicles 29 verse 1, a paraphrase is this: 'God does not want men just of themselves to build the temple, but I have chosen Solomon who is young and inexperienced to build the temple, because the temple is not for men, it's for the Lord'. Now those were the two things - that verse was not inspired for me thousands and thousands years ago, but those two things were the very two things that men were using to prohibit me doing God's will as I felt it was in my life. I took that verse and used it as the grounds for going ahead and applying for Bible College. Now do you see that there's a fine line between that, taking the verse in its context, what it meant, it meant youth, it meant inexperience for Solomon; and that's what it meant for me - but don't take some kind of fanciful interpretation out of the Scriptures.

We must move on: how do you know if the urge within you is from God, or if it's from another spirit or the devil? Well here's a very very elementary principle that will help you with this: you will know if the urge is from God's Spirit if you're living according to God's standards. This isn't rocket science: if you want to be guided by God's Spirit, you have to live by God's Spirit. You see some people want to be guided, but they don't want to live according to God's word. We're not talking about 'inner light' here when we talk about an internal witness. We have to say that we have to guard against sudden ideas of impulse that come into our minds, emotional tenseness, times when we're rocked to and fro - I always advise people that when you're in an emotional turmoil, don't make a very important decision. It's the same in the spiritual realm, all sorts of thoughts can come into your mind - and let me say this: if an urge comes upon you, and it disturbs you, you ought to distrust it.

Let me show you the rule regarding the inner urge. Turn with me to Colossians, we're nearly finished, turn with me to Colossians chapter 3 and verse 15 - here's how to know if an urge is from God: 'And let the peace of God', Colossians 3:15, 'rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful'. 'Let the peace of God rule in your hearts', that word for 'rule' is the verb form of the word for 'a judge' in public games or in the Olympics, an umpire or a referee; in other words, someone who decides over a disputed issue - was that a foul, or was that not a foul? What the Holy Spirit is saying is, this is how you discern these inward urges: if you lose your peace, the Holy Spirit is blowing the whistle, and saying there's something wrong here. Now sometimes we need to get out of our comfort zone, that's for sure, sometimes we're uncomfortable about things God's leading us to do; but what we're talking about is the inner peace of the fellowship, that ought to transcend our spirits, that we have in Christ. That's why Paul says in Philippians 4:6: 'Be anxious for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And' - what? - 'the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall rule in your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ our Lord'. Do you want to know if the inner urge is of God? Well, peace will be given to you.

Now let me give you a final general point on guidance, another practical principle. It's this: God mostly guides a step at a time, God mostly guides a step at a time. This is where many people stumble, they want to know everything before they take even the first step of faith. Dr Alexander of Princeton described a little glow-worm, which used to take a step so small that it could hardly be measured, but as it moved across the fields at midnight there was just enough light in its glow to take the next step, and the next step, and the next step, and so it moved forward in the light. Did not the Lord Jesus tell us not to worry about anything, but sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof? This is why some of you don't get guidance, because you're looking for guidance for something that is way ahead, but you ought to be looking for guidance today - and if you sought first the kingdom of God today, all these things would be added unto you!

If all else fails, let me recap on these things: the written word, the inward urge, the outward pointers - remember that God never contradicts His word, God never leads you to do something contrary to duty, you need to search the Scriptures, don't make the Bible into a magic book, guard against fanciful interpretations,

test an inward urge by the peace of God ruling your heart, take one step at a time - and if that fails listen to what Oswald Saunders says. I think this is tremendous, he says: 'I try to gather all the information, and all the facts that are involved in a decision, and then I weigh them up. Then I pray over them in the Lord's presence, and trust the Holy Spirit to sway my mind in the direction of God's will, and God generally guides by presenting reasons to my mind for acting in a certain way'.

I hope this has been a help to you, but please don't forget where we started off this morning. The hymn says: 'O pilgrim bound for the heavenly land, never lose sight of Jesus'. Did you know that the ancient mariners and sailors of the seven seas from the Phoenicians to the Vikings, do you know what they all did? Listen to this: they all fixed their eyes on one particular sight - it is called Polaris, or the Pole Star, or we know it as the North Star. It's the brightest star in the sky, it's the most reliable guide to sailor and man alike, it never sets and it never moves! An artist on one occasion drew a picture that represented a night scene. In the midst of that scene there was a solitary man rowing a little skiff across a lake. The wind was high and stormy, the billows were white and crested, they raged around that frail bark - and there wasn't a star in the sky save one, and that star shone through the dark and the angry sky above. Upon that lone star the voyager fixed his eye, and he kept rowing on and on and on, whatever was going on about him, throughout the whole midnight storm he rowed on. The artist wrote beneath that picture these words: 'If I lose that, I'm lost'. If I lose that, I'm lost!

Is God's will not presently in your life for many of these elementary reasons, but perhaps primarily because you have lost sight of Jesus? Can I say, before we close our meeting in prayer: if you're not saved, you can't expect God to lead you. If you're backslidden, you can't expect God to lead you. If you've never surrendered your life completely to the Lord as a Christian, you cannot expect God to lead you. But if you do all those things, and day by day take up your cross and follow Him, you'll not only expect it, you'll see it - God will lead you, and that very clearly.

Lord, may we all be able to say here today: 'I, being in the way the Lord led me'. Amen.

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Back To Basics – Chapter 7

"Love For The Lord"

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Now our Scripture reading this morning is taken from John's gospel 21, as I've already said we continue - this is our seventh study in this 'Back to Basics' series. You remember we started off, it must have been somewhere back in September, looking at 'The Morning Watch', the responsibility that each child of God has, and the privilege to meet with God in the morning, to read God's word and to pray, but supremely to have fellowship and communion with the Lord. We looked at the subject of 'Temptation', the subject of 'The Fruit of the Spirit', the subject of 'The Fullness of the Spirit', and a couple of other subjects as well, and we will look at several others in the future weeks. We'll be looking, perhaps, at 'Baptism', 'The Lord's Table', 'Discipline' of various kinds, whether it be our daily discipline of fellowship with the Lord, or discipline of dress, or discipline of language and so on - we'll look at all those things in the weeks that lie ahead, and even the keeping, perhaps, of the Lord's day as a special day in the week. So, God willing, in the future days we'll be looking at those things.

This morning we're beginning what I think will transpire to be two studies over two weeks on the subject of 'Love'. This morning we're looking at specifically 'Love for the Lord'. Verse 1: "After these things Jesus shewed himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias; and on this wise shewed he himself. There were together Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two other of his disciples. Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a fishing". Now we have to understand that that was an expression of his despair, not only of the fact that his dreams had been shattered, and though the Lord Jesus was now risen from the dead, don't forget Peter's mighty failure - perhaps the greatest failure that we read of within the Scriptures: his betrayal of the Lord Jesus Christ on the eve of the crucifixion. "They say unto him, We also go with thee", because remember that it wasn't just Peter who forsook Him, but it says all the disciples forsook Him - the only one that we find around the cross was John the Beloved. "We also go with thee. They went forth, and entered into a ship immediately; and that night they caught nothing. But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus. Then Jesus saith unto them, Children, have ye any meat? They answered him, No. And he said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes. Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord. Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher's coat unto him, (for he was naked,) and did cast himself into the sea. And the other disciples came in a little ship; (for they were not far from land, but as it were two hundred cubits,) dragging the net with fishes. As soon then as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread. Jesus saith unto them, Bring of the fish which ye have now caught. Simon Peter went up, and drew the net to land full of great fishes, an hundred and fifty and three: and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken. Jesus saith unto them, Come and dine. And none of the disciples durst ask him, Who art thou? knowing that it was the Lord. Jesus then cometh, and taketh bread, and giveth them, and fish likewise. This is now the third time that Jesus shewed himself to his disciples, after that he was risen from the dead. So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved

because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep", we end our reading at verse 17.

William Shakespeare expressed what he thought was the essence of true love in his Sonnet 116 which reads, you may be familiar with the words:

'...Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove:
O no! it is an ever-fixed mark
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wandering bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken...
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom'.

But none has matched the beauty of Paul's inspired definition of love found in 1 Corinthians 13. If you turn to it you find these words: 'Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not love, it profiteth me nothing. Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth', and at the end we read, 'And now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love'.

Now I'm sure you've heard the expression: 'Love makes the world go round' - I'm not sure if that's true or not, it certainly helps the world go round a little bit better, but that ought to be true as a statement to the Christian. It ought to be love that makes our world go round. Love ought to be the motivation of everything that we are, and everything that we do for Christ, because Paul has defined love as being, if you like, the foundation and the chief motivation of the Christian experience - so much that he says: 'Without love, we are nothing, and our Christian testimony is nothing'. Now let the import of that statement not run off your back like water off a duck's back, let it not miss you and hit the wall, but take it firmly between the eyes: that it doesn't matter, Paul says, what your devotion to God is - even if your devotion goes to such an extent that you're willing to give your body to be burned in martyrdom, if you don't do that in the expression and motivation of love you're nothing, and that means nothing. No matter what your service is to others, you give everything that you have, sell it and give to the poor, if it's not an expression of an act of Christian, agape, divine love it means nothing to God, and really means nothing to men. Love is everything, and if you don't have love as a Christian you are nothing!

Now we saw in our study on 'Fruit' several weeks ago in this series that love basically undergirded all the fruit of the Spirit. It certainly was the first fruit of the Spirit that is mentioned in Galatians 5:22 and 23, 'love' and then we go on to read about 'joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance', but you remember that we defined all those other fruit of the Spirit as just being different expressions of love. Love undergirds all the other fruit, they're all different expressions and manifestations of it telling us that the Christian life is to be a life of love. Our peace is to be love resting in Christ, our prayer is to be love keeping a tryst and an appointment with the Son of God, our sympathy is to be love tenderly feeling for others, our enthusiasm ought to be love working in our heart, our hope ought to be love's expectation. In the future our patience ought to be love waiting upon God; our faithfulness ought to be love

standing firm, sticking fast for Christ; our humility ought to be love submitting to His will, and even at times the will of others; our modesty as Christians ought to be love keeping ourselves out of the way, and pushing Christ to the fore. Our soul winning ought to be love pleading with others; our sanctification, our holiness ought to be love in action as, practically, we live out the love of Christ to others. The fruit of love is because the root of our Christian faith is love, because God is love!

Isn't that what John tells us in 1 John 4 in two places? Therefore love is our life's origin, John 3:16: 'For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son'. The reason why we are Christians is because God loves, God is love, and He expressed that love - Romans 5:8 - 'When we were yet sinners, Christ died for us', and that is how we have come to know that love in an intimate way. It is the origin of our Christian life, but not only is it the beginning of our Christian life, it ought to be the source and continual motivation of our Christian life - love! First Corinthians 13 and verse 4 onwards expresses what that love ought to be. You'll remember that when we looked at the fruit of the Spirit I asked you to replace the word 'love' or 'charity' in chapter 13 of 1 Corinthians with the word 'Jesus', to show that all we have in this chapter is an expression of the character of Christ. Paul is telling us that we as Christians ought to be living the life of Christ before other people. Then I asked, you remember, not to substitute 'Jesus' for the word 'love', but to put your own name, and to ask the question: does your own name fit into that chapter? Do you express such a love, the love of Christ to others? That is what the Spirit wants to make every single child of God, into the likeness of the Lord Jesus. He wants to reproduce the life of Christ in us, that it might be seen before others; the life of God in Christ in these weak clay vessels. If we are truly living with the personality and the characteristics of Christ in us, we will be manifesting love continually because Christ is our life, and He is love. Romans says that the love of God is to be shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, the very life of God in us.

Now that has happened at salvation, that is the origin of our salvation - the love of God being manifest to us, the Holy Spirit of love being planted in us. But do you know something? That isn't where it ends: we have a responsibility in our everyday pilgrimage of the Christian life to continue to dwell upon that love of Christ, and draw upon the source, the motivation for our continuance in the faith. That's why Jude says that we are to build up ourselves in our faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keeping yourselves in the love of God. So we have a responsibility to keep drawing of the source of God's love - so I'm asking you right away today: how is your love life? I'm talking about your love life to the Lord, your expression of love to others that we'll look at specifically next week, how is it? Because God's word is saying there's nothing more important than this, because love is the lubricant of the Christian life. Love, if you like, is the oil that makes the cogs go round. A lot of people get into problems in their Christian experience and backslide and dry up spiritually, because the motivation for their Christian life is not love to the Lord and not love to others. They serve Christ out of duty, or they follow a list of rules and regulations and laws, and they can't keep going on their own steam of self-righteousness - or maybe they operate on fear, they fear God in some kind of terrifying way, or they fear a denomination or religious system or code. My friend, the motivation and source of your Christian experience ought to be love! You ought to have started with love, you ought to be continuing with love, it ought to be the motivation and the source of everything you are as a Christian - and if it is not, you will fail!

Now let's move on, because basically there are four loves that the Christian will encounter and have to face up to one way or another in his life. They are really, in my thinking at least, two pairs of loves that are pulling in two different directions. Two of them pull us away from God, and two of them pull us towards God - but also, in their own right, they, each four them, pull in different directions. Let me explain what I mean: the first two pull us away from God - loves that we will experience in our life. The first that pulls us away from God is a love that pulls us in a downward direction, it is a love for sin. The second love that will pull us away from God is the love that pulls us in an inward direction, and that is a love for self. The third love is a love that pulls us toward God, and that pulls us in an upward direction to the Lord. Then the fourth love that, God willing, we will look at next week, is a love that pulls us toward God in an outward direction,

expressing it to others. We'll look specifically, God willing, next week at the love that we have to others - the love to the Lord's people, and the love to the lost.

This morning I want us to look at these first three. Let's look at the first pair which express love that draws us away from God, and the first is a downward love - a love for sin. Now although we're converted, and of course we have to remember that, and I'm trusting that I'm speaking to most people this morning who are Christians. You may think: 'Well, this isn't a problem for me any more, I don't love sin', but the fact of the matter is - as we learnt when we looked at the study on 'Temptation' - you, even though you're saved, still have an old nature. That old nature loves sin. Now, when you get saved, God gives you a new nature, and that loves the things of God - righteousness and holiness. But you don't get rid of your old nature, and it just depends on which nature you feed, as to which will have the preeminence and dominate in your life. So if you're a Christian, and you feed the old sinful nature with sin and temptation, it's no surprise that you're defeated in the Christian life. The only way to have victory is to feed the new nature with righteousness.

Now, because we still have our old nature, the more we feed it the more we will love sin. But alternatively, the more we love Christ, the less we will love our sin. This is elementary, but so many Christians fail to grasp it early in their Christian life: true love for Christ will mean a hatred for all types of sin. The whole book of 1 John, the little epistle almost at the end of the Bible, is on this theme: that you cannot say that you love God if you're living a life of sin. You can't serve God and money, you can't serve God and sin, you can only serve God exclusively and love God exclusively. Martin Lloyd Jones, the great preacher who has now gone to be with the Lord, said: 'If you claim to love Christ, and yet are living an unholy life, there is only one thing to say about you: you're a barefaced liar'. Those are strong words, aren't they? But John said those words: 'If we continue in sin, and say that we love God, we make ourselves a liar and the truth is not in us'. You can't sin and love God, you can't love sin and live a life of love with God, because love is expressed in one word: obedience. We spent a whole week looking at 'Obedience', but the Lord Jesus tells us this: 'If you love me', He said to His disciples, 'You will keep my commandments'. Listen: if you love Christ, you will have put aside the love for sin, that love that pulls you downward and away from God.

We must move on, for the second love that pulls us away from God is an inward love, the love of self. You have to realise that not only do we love sin, but we are created as human beings that we must love something or other. If we don't express that love toward God, we will inevitably express it toward something else - usually ourselves. So you either love sin or yourself, and the Lord Jesus expressed this in Luke chapter 14, where He told His disciples that if they were going to follow Him they would have to hate father and mother, husband and wife, children for His sake; they would have to deny themselves, take up the cross, and follow Him, or they could not be His disciples. Now you might say: 'Well, that's a very negative statement', but it's not! What the Lord Jesus is saying is: 'If you really want to love people the way you ought to love people, you have to give me your exclusive and best love, the priority in your life'. C.S. Lewis put it like this: 'When I love God more than I love my earthly dearest, then I shall love my earthly dearest more than I do now'. Christ first, and then you will experience and express the very love of Christ to others! But you cannot love yourself and love the Lord! You've heard the expression in the cowboy movies, 'This town is not big enough for the both of us'. Well, our hearts are not big enough for self and the Saviour, for sin and the Saviour. His love will not share a place with anything else in our hearts. He yearns after exclusivity, priority in everything that we are.

Pulling us away from God is this downward love of sin, pulling us away from God is this inward love of self, but this is the one I want to dwell on this morning: pulling us toward God ought to be this upward love to the Lord. The greatest and best thing that can be said of any man or woman is that he loved the Lord. Augustine, that great saint of God, said: 'I would hate my own soul if I did not find it loving God'. The great people of this world in the church of Jesus Christ and Christian history were simply those who loved God more than other people. They had a passion and a love and a zeal for God, and I honestly believe when I look into my

own heart and I look into the church at large in the West, that we have no greater need today than to fall in love with Jesus all over again. Could the Lord not say to us, as He did to the church at Ephesus in the book of the Revelation: 'Nevertheless, I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love'. Have you left your first love? Is there another place in your heart that has preeminence over His place?

I think that the greatest dramatic question about our love for the Lord is found in John 21 that we read together this morning, if you will look at it for a moment. The backdrop of this dramatic scene is the early morning Sea of Tiberius. The stage is a rocky beach set with a glowing fire. The characters present, if you read in verses 1 and 2, are Jesus, the apostle Peter and six other disciples. Now to understand this scene fully you've got to appreciate the sense of failure that gripped Peter's life at this time. His soul is anguished and troubled, he feels that he has completely let down the Lord Jesus, and he has backslidden into a place of no return. You remember the eve of the crucifixion, he denied the Lord Jesus three times, and the final denial was a sleazy, shameful cursing and swearing as he said: 'I do not know this man that you're talking about!'. What made it more painful for Peter was that when he said that, he didn't see the Master coming out of an inner chamber - he never realised until the last moment that the Saviour saw it all and heard it all! We read in the Scriptures that their eyes met, and the meeting of their eyes must have been electric, it must have been like a dagger going into the soul of Peter. Behind them was the echo of the cock growing in the dawn's darkness, and there was a cry from Peter's heart: 'I have failed Him, after everything that I said I would do for Him, I have denied Him!'. Jesus' crystal clear, x-ray, piercing eyes looked into Peter's heart, and weighed him, and found him wanting. The Bible says Peter went out into the night and he wept bitterly. Irrevocably he had failed Christ!

Well, the scene that we have in John 21, as the morning mists are rising from the lake, we find some of the same characters. We find Peter, we find the Lord Jesus, and just like the night of betrayal at the eve of the crucifixion they're standing face-to-face. The smoke of another fire is wafting into the air - can you imagine how Peter must have felt? The Bible doesn't tell us, but perhaps his heart, I'm sure, was racing, his stomach was churning, his face perhaps was blushing - and it wasn't the heat of the fire. His eyes were welling up as he thought of the similar scene not so long ago when he had let the Lord down so badly. What do you think he felt like? How do you think he even looked? There is silence, he is speechless. Then Jesus breaks the silence first with a piercing surgical question: 'Simon, son of Jonas, do you love me more than these?'

Now great speculation has been made what the 'these' were. Was it the boats? His fishing trade that he had gone back to? Was it the fish that they had drawn? Was He talking about his friends, or his family? Or was He talking about was his love greater than the love of the other disciples? Whatever it was, the Lord was asking him to make a comparison of his love for Christ to his love for other things. I think it probably was the love of the other disciples. He calls him 'Simon', He doesn't give him his divine title that the Lord had give him, 'Peter', which means 'stone', or something that is rock-like, hard, immovable. That was simply calculated to cut him to the bone - Peter who, all through his life, had this personality and characteristic of making himself look unmoveable, the hard big 'rock' fisherman would not be shaken: 'I'll go for You anywhere, Lord. You'll never wash my feet! I'll stand up for You'. You remember him with the sword in the garden, and then in the Upper Room, what was it he said? 'Even if all fall away on account of You', in other words, 'Even if the rest of these boys, these disciples, fail You and betray You, I will never!'. Jesus is piercing him, using this old name: 'Simon, who is not such a hard rock and stone now, do you really love me more than these?'

He answered by saying, if you look at it: 'Yes, Lord; You know' - and I give you the Greek rendering - 'You know the affection I have toward You'. Jesus used the word 'agape', which means 'divine love', the greatest love of all. Peter couldn't bring himself to use that word, and he just replied with the word 'filio': 'Yes, Lord; You know that I have an affection for You'. What agony Peter must have felt, that he couldn't bring himself, as Christ unblinkingly looks through His eyes, past the smoke into Peter's eyes of failure, and the question

hangs in the air: 'Do you love me?' - and all that Peter can say is: 'I have an affection for You!' The word 'filio' is a word that means 'love', or 'friendship', or 'deep affection'. The reply that the Lord gave him was: 'Well, if you have that love, tend my lambs'. In other words, 'If you have what you claim then you may serve me'.

But then there's a second surgical question that He says: 'Simon, do you love Me?'. He leaves out the comparisons now, He's not saying: 'Do you love me more than these, or this person?', but He's just asking the simple question, dropping all comparisons of others: 'Do you really love me? Do you agape-love me?'. Not just a 'filio' love, but an 'agape' love. He's saying: 'This is the bottom line: do you love me with this love?'. Peter says: 'Yes, Lord; You know again, I have an affection for You, I have a filio for You'. Now that was not a bad answer, or a wrong answer, because Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 16: if anyone does not have a friendship love, a filio, for the Lord, a curse be upon him. We all have to have an affectionate love for the Lord. So the Lord said: 'Shepherd my sheep' to him.

Then there's a third question, which literally was this from the Lord to Peter: 'Do do you have a filio for me?'. He had asked twice: 'Do you have an agape love for me? Do you have an agape love for me?', and the third time, after Peter has replied twice 'I have an affection for You', the Lord says - if you like - 'Peter, do you even have an affection for me? Do you even have that much?'

Well, how do you think Peter felt? The first question challenged Peter's stone-likeness and superiority of his love. The second question was asking whether he had an agape love at all. The third even challenged Peter's humble claim to a less exalted affectionate love. Peter, the Bible says, was grieved, literally pained - but out of his pain he answered: 'Lord, You know all things, You know that I have a friendship love for You'. He cast himself on the omniscience of the Lord. You see Peter did love Jesus, but at this moment do you know what had happened to Peter? He had been stripped of all his illusions, all his self-righteousness had been taken from him and been demolished as he stands before the holy Christ of God. What the Lord Jesus was doing was performing spiritual surgery on Peter's heart. You remember at the last fire that they stood eye-to-eye at, there were three questions that were followed by three denials. Now over this fire that Christ had carefully laid, there were three questions, but now there are three confessions, and three commissions from the Lord Jesus Christ as Peter is restored in the love of God.

Deuteronomy 6 tells us: 'Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might'. The Pharisees who debated so much over the laws, which were the ones that were important to keep and which weren't, came and asked the Lord Jesus in Matthew 22: 'What is the greatest commandment?'. He replied: 'To love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind; and to love your neighbour as yourself'. My friend, what we're saying today is: it's possible to be the best preacher in the world, the best Christian writer in the world, the best thinker, the best communicator, the best songster, and not love Christ! You can do it all without loving Him! One of the greatest exercises any of us could do today is just imagine yourself alone along the shore with Christ. There you face Him, silhouetted behind Him is the shore and sea of eternity, and He's looking at you with His loving, piercing, all-knowing eyes - and He says: 'David, do you love me?'. You have to answer honestly, because He knows all things, as Peter said. You must answer like Peter, because you can't be helped unless you're honest before Him and confess your need.

How are you living your Christian life? Is it through duty, is it through law, is it through fear? Or is it through love? Do you love the Lord Jesus? The love that God wants expressed to the Lord Jesus from you is His own love, the love that He had for the Son from before the world began. Not just an affection, and that's good, but it's His own love reciprocated back to Him by the Holy Spirit in our hearts. As Madam Guyon put it in her poem:

I love my God,
 But with no love of mine
 For I have none to give;
 I love Thee, Lord,
 But all that love is Thine,
 For by Thy life I live.
 I am as nothing, and rejoice to be
 Emptied and lost and swallowed up in Thee'.

How do you love the Lord today? J.C. Ryle said this: 'Of all the things that will surprise us in the resurrection morning, this I believe will surprise us most: that we did not love Christ more before we died'. Who of us this morning cannot sing:

'Lord, it is my chief complaint
 That my love is weak and faint'.

A man or a woman's spiritual health is directly proportionate to their love for the Lord Jesus. If you're struggling in your Christian experience today, could it be that your motivation is something other than love, whatever it may be? You just don't love the Lord enough. We're all guilty of that. A man on one occasion was a tyrant as a husband, and he insisted on his wife doing absolutely everything for him. He made her rise early in the morning and prepare his breakfast. He was very demanding with regard to her care of the house. He required a strict accounting of all the money that was spent on groceries and clothes for the children. Then he died, and later the woman married another man who was the complete opposite: loving, tender, unselfish. One day she was going through the effects of her first husband, and she found a list of all the things that he had required her to do - and to her amazement, she realised that she was doing all the same things for her second husband, yet he didn't make her do them, she did them because she loved him.

Romans 7 verse 1 tells us: 'Ye know, brethren, that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth? For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man. Wherefore, my brethren', the illustration of marriage, the death and ability to marry another husband, is how we have become dead to rules and laws by the body of Christ and by His death, 'that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God. For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death. But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter'.

Love ought to be our life in Christ. Philip Brooks put it like this: 'Duty makes us do things well, but love makes us do them beautifully'. Saint Augustine was asked the question on one occasion: 'What is the secret of the Christian life? What is a code that we can live our lives by?', and he simply said this: 'Love God, and do as you like'. That is not licence, for if you love God you will not love sin, if you love God you will not love self, you will love the Lord of all your heart. The first advice that I can give you if you want to love Christ more, is to spend some time with Him, and you will grow to love Him, you will grow to be like Him, and you will cry from your heart: 'Abba Father, dearest Father I love you, I love you, I love you'. F.W. Faber said:

'O Jesus, Jesus, dearest Lord
 Forgive me if I say,
 For very love, Thy sacred name
 A thousand times a day'.

Do you love Him like that? Next week, God willing, we'll look at the fourth love towards God, the outward love, the love of others, the love for the Lord's people and the love for the lost.

Father, teach us to love Thee, and to love Thy Son, and to love the Godhead, three-in-one. To Thy glory we pray, Amen.

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Back To Basics – Chapter 8

"Love For Others"

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Now we're turning together in our Bibles to Matthew's gospel 22, chapter 22 and beginning to read at verse 34. We began last week in our series which, if you're new to us today I'll just explain for a moment, is called 'Back to Basics'. For a number of weeks we have been looking at the basics of the Christian life, and that would be especially useful for anyone who is new in the Christian faith, but I also believe, and I hope you have come to know over these weeks, that it's good for all of us no matter how long we are in the Christian life and pilgrimage, to remind ourselves of these first principles - the ABCs, if you like, of the Christian life. We've been looking at various things over the weeks, and now we have come just last week to look at the subject of love. I thought initially we could look at it in one study, and then I found out that we needed two studies, and now I'm going to tell you that we need three studies! Because last week we looked at our 'Love for the Lord', and this week we're going to look at our 'Love For Others'. Now I did say last week that we would look at it under two titles: our love for the Lord's people, and our love for the lost - but we're going to have to divide that up, and just look at love for others today, and then the next week I'm with you we'll look at love for the lost in our evangelism.

So this morning we're looking at what the Bible has to say that our responsibility is as Christians to love others. Matthew 22 verse 34: "But when the Pharisees had heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together. Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting", or testing, "him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets".

It was Richard Sibbes, that great Christian of several centuries ago, who said these words: 'We are as we love, not as we know'. We are as we love, not as we know. John Calvin, the great reformer, said: 'Whatever is devoid of love is of no account in the sight of God'. Now several months ago in our studies in 1 Corinthians, I spent a lot of time going through 1 Corinthians 13, and we're not going to take time in doing that in this study - save to say that I touched on it last week, what a great definition Paul gives us of love there. He basically tells us that if we as Christians are devoid of love, we are nothing, and whatever we express or do is nothing as well. Whatever we know of devotion to God, if it is not motivated and fired and fuelled by love, the love of God, agape love, it is nothing. Whatever we know of service to Christ, or for others, it means absolutely nothing if the common denominator in it all is not the love of God shed abroad in our hearts. We saw that Galatians 5, the fruit of the Spirit is lineated for us there, the undergirding principle is that of love, because the root of all fruit of the Christian life is God, God's Spirit, it is the fruit of the Spirit; and God is declared in 1 John 4 as love - God is love.

So the origin of the Christian life, we've already seen, is love; because the origin of our life is God - 'For God so loved the world'. We also saw that the source of our Christian life, not just the moment of conversion, but every day of our Christian experience, the source and motivation of that life - however it is expressed - must be the energy of love. The source of that love, in 1 Corinthians 13, we saw is the very life of Christ - isn't that what it is? That kindness, that patience, that long-suffering, not keeping a record of wrongs, and so on

that we read in that great passage of love - it's simply the Holy Spirit reproducing the life of Christ in us seen before others.

Let me remind you of what we studied last week. We saw that there are two loves that take us away from God; that was a downward love, the love of sin; and an inward love, the love of self. We saw how the love for the Saviour cannot abide in a heart that loves sin or that loves self. Then our main concentration last week was on one love that takes us nearer to God, toward God; and that was an upward love, a love for the Lord. So we've looked at a downward love, the love of sin; an inward love, the love of self; an upward love, a love for the Lord - and now we're going to look this morning, and in two week's time, at an outward love: a love for others.

Now at the time that Moses gave the ten commandments, and I hope most of you're familiar with the ten commandments, it was basic, it was very clear. Although there were a few other rules and regulations that the people of Israel were given at that time, basically God's law was cut and dry. But by the time Jesus comes on the scene, we find that legal traditions, rabbis, Pharisees, or as it is in the Authorised Version here 'lawyers', had added thousands more laws to God's law. To such an extent that it weighed the Jewish people down that they couldn't keep any of the laws, let alone all of them, perfectly. There was a dilemma here before the rabbis and the leaders, they asked the question: 'What laws are the most important laws? We've got to make an accommodation to the people, we admit that they can't keep all these thousands of rules and regulations perfectly, so we're going to have to decide which are the most important ones that out of them all we must keep first'. So they divided the law into 'heavy laws' and 'light laws'. The heavy laws were the ones that were binding, the laws that you must keep under any circumstances; but the light laws were the ones you could give or take a little on.

That gives us a bit of the background into some of the discussions that the Pharisees have with the Lord Jesus Christ. But there were some rabbis that went a little further than that, they said that if a man just selected one great precept out of all the thousands of laws, and kept that one precept and observed it alone, he could basically disregard all the other laws. As you can imagine, that became very attractive. It was against this backdrop that this lawyer came to the Lord Jesus with a question: 'Rabbi, Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?'. Right away we find that in the Lord's answer He establishes that love, and love alone, is the highest of all spiritual virtues in the kingdom of God: 'Love the Lord your God with all your soul, with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your strength; and the second commandment is like unto it: Love your neighbour as yourself. On these two rest all the law and the prophets'.

The Lord Jesus was indicating in the second greatest commandment that man is to love his fellow man as well as love God. Now it may be a revelation to you that there are many more verses in Old and New Testament that speak of our love for fellow man, than speak of our love that ought to be toward God. Now of course the first and greatest commandment is to love God, so the frequency of verses on that subject doesn't demean the responsibility or the primary part that it plays in the spiritual life. But what it does tell us is the important place that loving others has in the mind of God, that the Scriptures has so much to say. What the Lord Jesus is saying here is that we are to have a love toward our fellow men and women like the love that God has toward them. God loves men, and we ought to love men and women as well.

Now here's the question, I asked you last week: how's your love life? I'm asking you more specifically this week, not in relation to your love to the Lord, but how is your love life towards others? Now we'll look in a further week at our love towards the lost, but the Bible teaches in both Old and New Testaments that our love towards others should be shown in four ways. I want you to take note of these, at least note them in your mind if you don't have a pen and paper. Here they are, straight from scripture: one, love your neighbour; two, love your brother; three, love your family; and four, love your enemy. Now let's take time as we go through

all of these, and this is the whole counsel of God in relation to how we as Christians ought to display the love of God towards others.

First: love your neighbour. Now this is a command that is found often in the holy Scriptures, and it's first found in the book of Leviticus chapter 19 - you don't need to turn to it, I'll read it: 'Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself: I am the LORD'. Then that command given in the Old Testament law is repeated approximately eight times in the New Testament Scriptures, and Paul states in the book of Romans chapter 13 and verse 10 that all of the law hangs on this, just as Jesus said. Love for your neighbour is a fulfilment of everything that the Old Testament law was meant to do. Romans 13:10 says: 'Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law'.

Now you will remember that on another occasion another lawyer came to the Lord Jesus in Luke's gospel chapter 10. He asked the question, after the Lord Jesus again said that you were to love God with all your heart and love your neighbour as yourself, 'Who is my neighbour?'. Maybe that's the question you're asking: is it the person in the semi-detached beside you, is that your neighbour? The person whose driveway adjoins you? Is it a neighbour geographically to your town or to your state? Well, the Lord Jesus told a parable, and you remember it was the parable of the Good Samaritan. Now I'm not going to have time to expound this parable for you, but I'm sure that you know it very well. A man travelled from Jerusalem to Jericho, he fell among thieves, he was beaten up, stripped of his raiment, wounded, and they departed and left him. Then the priest, the Jewish leader of religion, walked by and ignored him. Then the Levite walked by and ignored him, another religious man. But it was the Samaritan that stopped by, helped the man, put him on his ass, took him to the inn, paid for his keeping, helped him. Jesus asked the question: 'Which of these men was a neighbour to the man who fell among thieves?'. The answer came back from the lawyer's mouth, although he didn't like it: 'It was the Samaritan'. Jesus said: 'Go and do thou likewise'.

So what the Lord Jesus was teaching this particular lawyer in the parable of the Good Samaritan was that showing love to your neighbour is more than showing love to your mutual acquaintances, it's more than showing love to people who are like you, look like you, sound like you, live like you; it's more than showing love to people who are of the same nationality, ethnic race as you, or even religious persuasion or denominational creed as you. Loving your neighbour is loving past all boundaries, and there was no greater boundary than between the Jew and the Samaritan - the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans. This is not something new to the New Testament, this is something we find in the Old Testament for Moses enjoined the Israelites to love the stranger and the alien in the land. In Deuteronomy chapter 10 verse 19 we read these words: 'Love ye therefore the stranger: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt'. 'Just people', Moses says, 'as you were strangers in the Egyptian land of bondage, whenever a stranger comes into your Canaan land of promise, you be good to them'. The same injunction is upon us, whatever your political persuasions are about immigrants, the fact of the matter is this: we are to be kind to those who have come among us who are different, as the people of God.

Frederick Samson has said: 'Love goes beyond safety'. Love to our neighbour goes beyond the safety of boundaries, and I touch a sore point here this morning to people in Ulster: you are to love the Catholic, you're to love the Nationalist, you're to love the Republican - and I don't care if that causes you a problem, because that's what the Lord Jesus Christ teaches. Love your neighbour as yourself, and man is to be concerned with other men as God is concerned with men. The command, in fact, is to love your neighbour to the degree that you love yourself. Now what is the point behind that? Well, if you're honest with yourself and God today, I'm sure that you'll admit that man, including you, is basically selfish and concerned about himself. The Lord is coming in and homing in on our selfish element, and He's saying that in the same way as you love yourself, that is the degree to which you should be concerned for others!

I like to call this: how to sanctify your selfishness. We've all got the problem, don't we? The way to sanctify it is to use it, actually, as a measure for how you ought to love others! When Paul is talking in Ephesians of how a husband should love his wife, he says that he should love his wife as himself, for no man ever hated his own flesh. You men, including you women, look after yourselves, don't you? At least it looks like some of you look after yourselves this morning! In the same way as you protect yourself and groom yourself, you're to pour that love, that selfish love, selflessly into the life of neighbours - people that you maybe don't even like! That's hard to take, but that's God's word: do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Oswald Chambers said: 'If my heart is right with God, every human being is my neighbour'. Hard stuff, isn't it?

Love your neighbour, then coming more close to the Christian believer is the injunction: 'Love your brother, or sister'. In Galatians 6 and verse 10 Paul exhorts the believers to 'do good to all', that's the neighbour, 'and especially to those who are of the household of faith', that's the believer. So love your neighbour must be there, but as a Christian, if you're a Christian this morning, you must have a real and a deep concern literally - as Mary Slessor put it, 'To love is to live for' - you as a Christian are to live for other Christians, other believers. Now Jesus brought a new command, He said that believers were to love one another as He had loved them. He said in John 13: 'By this shall all men know that ye were my disciples'. Now to love one another was not a new commandment, we saw that in the Old Testament; but to love one another as Christ loved us is a new commandment entirely!

Do you see the pattern here? First of all the injunction given from scripture is: 'Love your neighbour as you love yourself', and now we come near to the believers, the church of Jesus Christ, the injunction is: 'Love your brother as Christ loves him'. The neighbour is to be loved as yourself, the brother and sister is to be loved as Christ loves you. Then, as we go into the epistles, 1 John, that great book on love outlines that one that loves his brother, chapter 2 and verse 10, abides in the light. You're in darkness if you don't love your brother or sister. Then in chapter 4 verse 12 he goes further to say: 'God abides in the heart of the man who loves his brother'. Chapter 4 and verse 20 says: 'The one who doesn't love his brother cannot love God'. You can't run around talking and claiming to have the love of God in your heart if you're at odds and bickering with a brother or sister in Christ. In chapter 3 and in chapter 4, his whole premise is: because God's love has been so great to you, you should love your brothers and sisters in Christ.

Now when we go out of John's writings, the gospel of John, 1, 2 and 3 John, we find that the command to love the brother in the faith is the same. Romans and 1 Peter says that love is to be done fervently; Ephesians says we are to love other Christians with forbearance - that means patience, that means not always getting our own way, but giving way and putting the other Christian before ourselves, not offending them, weak brothers included. Galatians 5 says this love includes serving one another. We see it in the example of the apostles, Paul in 1 and 2 Corinthians, he describes in great detail how he loved the believers. Then later on in Ephesians he says how happy he was that he saw the love that the saints at Ephesus had one toward the other. Now, at a very casual glance, I hope that you can see right away that love for the brother and sister in Christ was a dominant theme in the early church of Jesus - is that not clear? It was evidence to the world that they truly were disciples of Christ, it was the badge of their Christianity. Describing the first century Christians to the Roman Emperor Adrian, Aristides wrote these words: 'They love one another, they never fail to help widows, they save orphans from those will hurt them. If they have something, they give away freely to the man who has nothing. If they see a stranger they take him home and are happy, as though he were a real brother. They don't consider themselves brothers and sisters in the usual sense, but brothers instead through the Spirit in God'.

Vance Havner, a 20th-century Christian writer, says: 'Tertullian', an ancient Christian, 'writes that it was said of early Christians, 'How those Christians love one another!'; today the world might sometimes be more inclined to say, 'How those Christians hate one another!'. He concludes, bringing last week's study and this

together: 'We have left our love for Christ, and when love for Christ dies love for each other dies, when love for the Bible dies love for souls dies - everything dies!'. One of the greatest tests of if we love or brother or not is how we behave when they don't measure up to our standards. You've got your standards, I've got mine, but how do you behave toward someone else who has fallen from your grace, failed in your eyes? Someone has said: 'Perfect love', almost a paraphrase of 1 Corinthians 13, 'is slow to suspect, quick to trust; slow to condemn, quick to justify; slow to offend, quick to defend; slow to expose, quick to shield; slow to reprimand, quick to forbear; slow to demand, quick to give; slow to provoke, quick to conciliate; slow to hinder, quick to help; slow to resent, quick to forgive'. Amy Carmichael, that missionary, wrote a little poem - it was called 'If' - some of the lines of it go like this:

'If I belittle those whom I am called to serve, talk of their weak points in contrast perhaps with what I think of as my strong points; if I adopt a superior attitude, forgetting "Who made thee to differ? And what hast thou that thou hast not received?" then I know nothing of Calvary love.

If I take offense easily, if I am content to continue in a cool unfriendliness, though friendship be possible, then I know nothing of Calvary love.

If I feel bitter toward those who condemn me, as it seems to me, unjustly, forgetting that if they knew me as I know myself they would condemn me much more, then I know nothing of Calvary love'.

Do we seek to minimise the faults of others, or do we expose them gratuitously? Proverb says: 'Hatred stirreth up strife, but love covers all sin'.

We must move on: Love your neighbour, love your brother, and then thirdly, love your family. Few commands are given in the Bible in relation to this, but there are many more ample illustrations of how love ought to be found in the family. Colossians and Ephesians tell us to 'husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church'. Now interesting, coming up to Valentine's Day tomorrow, there is only once that a wife is commanded to love her husband, in Titus! The only example I find of it is in the Song of Solomon where it's mentioned; the reason being that the wife's submission to her husband is evidence of her love for him - now mark that, and remember that please, because also there's only once found a command for parents to love the children, especially for young wives to love their children in Titus 2. But there are several illustrations of that love within the Scriptures: Abraham loved Isaac, Isaac loved Esau, Rebecca loved Jacob, Jacob loved Joseph - but it's interesting that there's no command or example of a child loving its parents, no example in scripture. The reason being, again, because there's the oft repeated command for children to honour and obey their parents, which would be the evidence of their love for their parents.

Now I'm not preaching on that particular subject this morning, but what I am wanting to highlight is this: what the Bible chiefly tells us is, love is service rather than sentiment! The Bible tells us that love is not an airy fairy feeling or emotion that we need to work up, but love primarily is an act of the will where we choose the betterment of another, where we choose to live for another rather than to live selfishly for ourselves. Isn't that what the Lord said? 'If you love me, keep my commandments'. Isn't that what we find in the book of John, where we read those verses? Jesus told them that the disciples would be recognised for their love, but the Lord gave an example of that: Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, He rose from supper, He laid aside His garments, He took a towel and girded Himself; and after He poured water into a basin, He began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith He was girded. God's word says even in the family such love is to be evidenced. Timothy says that you are considered a denier of the faith, and worse than an unbeliever, if you do not provide for your home.

Love your neighbour, love your brother, love your family, and fourthly love your enemy. I think this must be the hardest of all. William Penn has said, 'Love is the hardest lesson in Christianity, but for that reason it

should be the one that we take the most care of to learn'. Is that not true? Love is the most important thing, and therefore we should spend all our time learning to love - but here is a love that really grates on many of our consciences and emotional seats, because it is hard to love your enemy. Yet Jesus, in Matthew 5 and Luke 6, commands - He doesn't advise, He commands us - to love our enemy! He says that that love will be demonstrated in your life as you bless those who curse you, as you pray for those who mistreat and spitefully use you, as you give generously to those who would rob you. Jesus shows that love is more than friendship based on mutual admiration, but it is an act of charity towards one who perhaps is hostile towards you, perhaps one who hasn't shown any lovable traits whatsoever - Jesus says: 'You love them with the love that I have loved you!'.

Jesus reminded His disciples that it's natural to love those who love them, but to love your enemies - well, that's a real act of charity. Can I say: it is to be a mark of His disciples, more than anything, that they love their enemies. Jesus, in fact, said that what will mark you different than a sinner and a Gentile is that you love your enemies and they do not - it is the most distinctive Christian love which expresses grace. The Lord Jesus is saying: God in grace has come to you and me, and has forgiven you, and has washed all your sins away; and God in grace sends the sun to shine on the unrighteous as it does on the righteous, and the rain falls on the righteous as it does on the unrighteous, for He loves all men. When we remember John 3:16, we see that God in His very essence is love, hence love ought to be expressed in the life of the believer towards the undeserving.

Did you deserve to be saved? Francis Schaeffer said: 'Love and the unity it attests to is the mark Christ gave to Christians to wear before the world, only with this mark may the world know that Christians are indeed Christians, and that Jesus was sent by the Father'. That is the distinctive mark of the Christian, that they love those that hate them. Corrie Ten Boom, who was locked up in that concentration camp, a believer in Christ, wrote these words: 'You never so touch the ocean of God's love as when you forgive and love your enemies'. Doing good to those who have no intention of returning it to you, that is the love of God in essence! A love that doesn't know the word 'because', 'I love you because' - an unconditional love! Christ loved His enemies, and the Bible is telling us that the Christian must love his enemies too. The New Testament epistles reiterate that rather than seeking revenge as believers, believers are to love those that hate them, to love those that persecute them. Now I ask you: if this is the distinguishing mark of the child of God in the New Testament, would anybody recognise you as a Christian? I tell you, I wouldn't recognise some of you, sometimes I hardly recognise myself when I measure it up to the command within scripture.

Look at Romans 12 for instance, verse 14: 'Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not'. Verse 17: 'Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him', what about that, eh? Let's not run past that: 'If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good'. Could I ask you a very pertinent question: why is it that believers are among some of the most begrudging and vengeful people on the face of God's earth? Why is that? Thomas Fuller said: 'If God should have no more mercy on us than we have charity one to another, what would become of us?'. If God judged us with the measure that we judge each other, where would we be now?

The only aggression that the Christian should be known for is aggressive love, aggressive love! Augustine was asked the question: 'What does love look like?', he replied: 'It is hands to help others, it is feet to hasten to the poor and needy, it is eyes to see misery, and ears to hear the sighs and sorrows of men - that is what love looks like'. The punch line of the Good Samaritan is the punch line of this message to you: Love your neighbour, love your brother, love your family, love your enemy - go thou and do likewise! No excuses, just

go and do it! Many of us love at our tongue's end, but not at our arm's end. Love rolls its sleeves up, love is only love when it's practical or it is not love at all.

Once a professor wrote a very learned thesis on love in a book...the only defect was that the professor had never been in love. When he took the manuscript to the typist to prepare for publishing, the typist turned out to be a very lovely young lady. When his eyes met with hers, something happened to the professor which was not in his book. He was happier in five minutes with love within his heart, than he was in 30 years with love in his head. Something like that needs to happen to our Christianity.

Are you a Christian that has not had love expressed to you in the past? For that reason you're deeply hurt and wounded, and I sympathise with you this morning. Someone has said: 'Why is it that Christians are those who shoot their wounded?'. Maybe you're a Christian who shoots the wounded? Whatever our circumstances are today, we all need healing, we all need help in this regard of loving others. Why not submit ourselves to the love of God in Christ just now, and say: 'Lord Jesus, whatever has happened, whatever I have done or has been done to me, teach me to love others'.

Lord, the disciples could say 'Teach me to pray', but Lord surely You taught them above all other things to love their brothers, and by this all the world would know that they were Christ's followers. Lord, teach us to love, so that those around us, those in this place and outside, would be able to say: 'Look how they love one another'; and may that manifest the love of Christ to them in salvation, Amen.

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Back To Basics – Chapter 9

"Love For The Lost"

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First Corinthians chapter 9 is the text that I want to take that we'll deal with in some measure later on in this message, remembering the title 'Love'. We've looked at 'Love for the Lord', which must motivate everything in our Christian lives including this morning's subject. We looked at 'Love For Others', and this morning we're looking at 'Love For The Lost'. First Corinthians chapter 9 and verse 22, Paul says - now please notice this, and allow the import and the depth of this statement to grasp you: "To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you".

Now in Luke's gospel chapter 16 we have the very poignant and tragic story of this rich man who lifted up his eyes in hell. He lived for this world, yet the pauper lived for the world to come, and because of that when both of them died the rich man went to hell, but the pauper was taken to heaven by the angels. This is a story that I could preach a series on, let alone this morning's message, but it's two verses in this passage of Scripture that I want us to home in on, verse 27 and 28. Within those two verses there are two words that I want to highlight just in introduction to this message on 'Love For The Lost' today. It's the word 'send', the rich man in hell said to Abraham: 'Abraham, send Lazarus, send, send him to my brothers', and in verse 28 the second word that I want you to notice is the word 'lest'. The first word 'send' someone to my brothers, the second word 'lest' they come to this place of torment.

I wish that God the Holy Spirit would burn on my heart and your heart today those two words; for those two words, I believe, are the cry from hell. If anything is being heard right this very morning on the 6th of March 2005 from the caverns of the damned, it is two words: 'Send, lest!'. On Mother's Day: 'Send someone, lest my mother, or my child, or my brother, or my sister, or my neighbour come to this place that I am in! I cannot get out, but send someone lest they come here'. Now the fact of the matter is, not all believers hear this cry. You may have heard of the eye of faith that is necessary to try and picture and conceive of some spiritual things in the word of God; but in order to hear this cry from hell, you need the ear of faith. The ear of faith to hear these two words 'send, lest', it is cultivated by the word of God, by prayer, by meditation and contemplation upon spiritual things - and quite frankly if you're not, as we have already covered in the 'Back to Basics' series, reading God's word, meditating on it, praying over it, praying it in, you will not hear this cry. If you're not opening yourself up to the means of hearing it, but apart from that, ultimately this hearing of the cry from hell is regulated and is proportionate to your love as a Christian. It is regulated by your love for the Lord, for the more you love the Lord the more you will love the lost. It is regulated by your love for others, because the more you love others, there is a category of those others who are without Christ, apart from your brethren, apart from some who may be your neighbour and are Christians as well, there's this great majority of people who are lost. If you love the Lord and if you love others, as the greatest commandment of all tells us to do, you will also love the lost.

'He that hath ears to hear', the Lord Jesus said, 'let him hear'. I'm asking all of us today: do you have ears to hear the cry from hell? I believe the battle today for the Christian is the battle for the heart, that could also be put 'the battle for the mind'. Proverbs 4:23 tells us that out of the heart spring the issues of life, and really this question I'm posing before you today: 'Do you hear the cry from hell?', is asking you the question: do you have a heartfelt Christianity? A heartfelt Christianity? Now we don't believe in a feelings-based Christianity,

but God deliver us from a feeling-less faith, where we don't feel things that we ought to feel - the realities of a Christian experience, and the great doctrines and dogmas of God's word don't penetrate our hearts - because the Christian faith is not a religion simply of the head, it is more importantly a religion of the heart. The prophet Ezekiel told the Israelite people that God one day would give them a new heart, and we have experienced that in the new birth - God has taken our heart of stone, apparently, and He has now given us a heart of flesh, a heart that beats with the needs of humanity that is lost. I'm asking you today: do you feel the need of those around you that are without Christ?

Now you might ask the question: what is this cry from hell? Is it 'Lord, be merciful unto me a sinner!?' Is it people asking for a second chance? Is it weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth, as we read often in the Scriptures? Is it people cursing God because He has sent them to hell? Well, I believe it's none of those things. It's not even questioning the justice and fairness of God for sending people to hell - people are beyond that, they know where they are, they know they're there forever. This rich man knew that there was a great gulf fixed, and he wasn't asking any more to get out, but his cry was this: 'Send someone, lest my family come here!'. 'Send, lest!'

Now, I know that you know that God sends us to the lost. Isaiah in chapter 6, when he saw the Lord high and lifted up, heard God say, the triune Godhead: 'Who will go? Who will I send, and who will go for us?'. Isaiah said: 'Here am I, send me'. God sends, the Godhead; the Father sends, the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world; the Christ sends, the great commission in Matthew 28: 'Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature'. We find that the Holy Spirit sends, for the Lord Jesus, as He opened the book on that great day, the book of Isaiah in the synagogue, read from that passage which said: 'The Spirit of the Lord has sent me to preach the good news'. The Godhead sends, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; but have you ever allowed this to penetrate your mind and heart: this very morning, from the depths of hell, there are people crying out to you and me to send someone to their loved ones, lest they come to that awful place of torment.

We often hear when people are preaching on evangelism that silence is a great sin, and it is, to keep your mouth shut when people are lost - but do you know what is as great a sin? It is deafness, deafness to the groans of a damned soul. Secondary causes and deafening influences may be materialism, worldliness, selfishness, neglect of the means of hearing - the word of God, prayer, and so on, as I have mentioned - but ultimately this deafness is caused by a desensitisation to the need that is all around us. That is simply down to one reason: a lack of love. Just as we have learnt already that love is a motivation for all things in the Christian life, and its absence poses meltdown for the mechanisms of the Christian experience, in the same way we are nothing without love, the lost will mean nothing to us if we do not have love! The perishing millions will not hurt us, will not touch us. Is your love for the Saviour enough, and your love for others enough to love the lost? Maybe you're saying today, as I say from my heart: 'Lord it is my chief complaint, that my love is weak and faint'.

I'm going to give you, this morning, the secret of how to love the lost, the secret of how to love the lost. Let me say first of all that is not a natural love. You can't work this love up. It is a supernatural love. The love for the lost is a supernatural love, because the love for the lost is the love of Christ. Now surely we've learnt that over these last few weeks: that the only love that pleases God is His own love. The only love that we can show through others is the love of Christ, because this love is the fruit of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus, so it is actually His love that we are showing to others, His love constraineth us, 'Greater love hath no man than this' - so we want this 'great love'. John 17 expresses in this light, the Lord Jesus as he was praying said in verse 26: 'I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them'. The Lord is praying for His church that the love that the Father loved the Son with, and that the Son had for the Father, would be in the Christian - and it is His love, for Christ is our life.

Now let me tease out for you this love threefold. To love the lost is first of all to love them with Christ's heart. Secondly, it is to see them with Christ's eyes. Thirdly, to touch them with Christ's scars. Let's begin with the first: to love them with Christ's heart. John Henry Jowett was a great preacher over a hundred years ago, and he said this in a book he wrote called 'The Passion for Souls' - a tremendous book. 'We can never heal the needs we do not feel' - we can never heal the needs we do not feel - 'tearless hearts can never be heralds of the passion. We must pity if we would redeem, we must bleed if we would be ministers of this saving blood. The disciple's prayer must be stricken with much crying and many tears, the ministers of Calvary must supplicate in bloody sweat, and their intercession must often touch the point of agony. True intercession is sacrifice, a bleeding sacrifice'.

To love the lost, you need to love them with Christ's heart - now what does that mean? Let me be as practical as I can with you today, I feel it means two things at least. It means having compassion, and it means knowing travail or pain in your heart because of the need of the lost. Compassion is obvious, when we look at the Saviour we see the compassionate one, who looked at the sheep and saw them as sheep scattered abroad not having a shepherd, and He had compassion upon them. Then we read of Him in Matthew 23, standing over Jerusalem realising that they had rejected His Messiahship, and He cries: 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them which are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thee together as a hen gathers her chicks', and as the tears trickle down His cheeks, He says: 'and ye would not'.

Now here's a simple question: do we have any measure of compassion like that for those who are lost? Do we have any compassion? That compassion will outflow itself in what used to be called - the word is lost, almost, today in Christian circles - 'travail' for souls, or 'agony', or 'anguish' for souls. This is what the apostle Paul had in Romans chapter 9, he said: 'I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh'. In the spirit of Moses before him, Paul is saying, speaking of his Israelite brothers in the flesh in his nationality: 'I could almost wish that I would be damned, that they would be saved'. He says that he is continually sorrowful, downcast in his heart - he hasn't lost his joy in the Lord, but he continually carries with him this burden, this cloud over his head, that there are people whom he loves that are lost! That compassion for them moved a step further, where he travailed.

Luther, the great reformer, said: 'It seems incredible that a man would desire to be damned in order that the damned might be saved'. Now if I came off with a statement like that, you'd think: 'You're going too far, you're going further than Scripture, you can never be damned' - Paul knew he could never be damned, but he wasn't chiefly speaking from his intellect now, not that he set that aside, but he's crying from his heart! He's got a beating heart for his lost brethren, to the point that he could almost say: 'I would nearly go to hell for them!'. We see this in Paul to the Galatians in chapter 4:19, where he says: 'Little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you'. He knew what it was to travail until these people came through for Christ, until they matured in the faith. In Philippians 1 verse 8 we have the same sentiment, I feel, where Paul says: 'For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ'. Now that's an unfortunate translation for us in this modern day, but you have to understand that the ancients, for them the bowels, or this abdominal area, was the seat of the affections. When they felt fear, or love, or compassion, they felt moved in this part of the body. You could translate it that he was 'moved in the heart of Jesus Christ'. F. B. Meyer, the great writer, put it like this: 'The apostle had got so near the very heart of his Lord that he could hear its throb, he could detect its heat; nay, it seemed as though the tender mercies of Jesus to these Philippians were throbbing in his own heart'. It was as if the heart of Christ dwelt in the breast of the apostle Paul.

This is not something you work up yourself, and try to get all compassionate for lost people - you can't do this, this is not a natural love. This is the very supernatural love, the agape love of God in Christ. It is having the heart of Christ and the compassion of Christ, and do you know what that will do? That will transform all of your human relationships. It places love on a supernatural plain, to the extent that you'll be able to love the unlovely, love the unthankful, love the people that you don't really like and don't gel with you, to even love those who are indifferent to you and those who are indifferent to the gospel of Christ. How do I get that love? Well, the potential for it's already in you, because the Holy Ghost dwells in you if you're Christ's. How do you let that love out? Well, you need to be totally surrendered to the Lord, but even if you are that there is a process that needs to be instigated, and it's simply the process of intimacy. How do you know someone's heart? You've got to get near them. You've got to learn to trust them, and they've got to learn to trust you. Then when that intimacy increases - maybe it might be in a boy-girl relationship, engagement might come along, and then eventually marriage comes along. You get to the stage - some of you older, maybe not so old, couples will be able to testify of how you start to second-guess one another. You know what each other are thinking, you almost know what the other is about to say before they say it, you maybe know what they're feeling - and that's exactly what we're talking about here on a divine level, where you get so intimate with the Lord Jesus Christ that you actually feel His compassion for lost souls with His own heart. Do you love them with Christ's heart?

Oh, we must move on, secondly: do we see them with Christ's eyes? This is talking about tears first of all, the eyes of Christ are tear-filled eyes. The Psalmist said in Psalm 126: 'They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him'. Spurgeon called tears 'liquid prayers'. Albert Smith put it like this: 'They are the safety valves of the heart when too much pressure is laid on' - I think that's wonderful! When you have this compassionate heart of Christ, and you experience this travail where it's almost that you're birthing souls in your soul in prayer and intercession for Christ, the tears start to spring - the safety valves release. Herbert Lockyer said: 'Tears win victories. A cold, unfeeling, dry-eyed religion has no influence over the souls of men'. You look at Christian history, you look at the word of God, and all of the writings of Christian biography, and you will see very clearly that all the great men of God that did any great work for God were broken spirits who had wet eyes.

Jeremiah compared his weeping to a fountain, and his head as a river of tears. Paul the apostle, at least four times, described himself as serving the Lord with all humility and many tears. Our greatest example, what is He named before He is even born? 'A man of sorrows, acquainted with grief', and His life is saturated with tears. We see Him weeping over a sinful city in Luke 19: 'And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it'. We see Him weeping over the wages of sin in His friend Lazarus, as he dies and he's put into the grave, and it says 'Jesus wept'. Why was He weeping? Yes, He had lost a friend, but I believe He was weeping over what sin had done. Then we see Him weeping over sin's sacrifice in Gethsemane: 'Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared'.

Friends, do we have tearful eyes? Do I have? Or have we reached the stage where we've got so businesslike, so slick, so professional in our Christianity that to shed a tear is embarrassing? Or maybe it's even impossible! We're at one extreme or the other - either we're freezing in intellectualism, or we're frying in emotionalism, but it seems that tears for souls, genuine compassion and heart travail has disappeared. Seeing them with Christ's eyes will be seeing them with tearful eyes, but it also means seeing them with eyes of vision. In Proverbs 29 we read those famous words that are so often quoted, but so less often lived by: 'Where there is no vision the people perish'. I've been homing in on Paul this morning, but you read the verse with me: what a vision this man had. First Corinthians 9:22: 'To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some'. That simply means that he set aside everything that hindered the Gospel's influence in his life, everything that hindered him. Now

that also means that he didn't take on methods that hindered the gospel - it doesn't mean that any way to present or communicate the gospel is right - but anything that hindered the presenting of the gospel, he led it aside. That is what is characteristic of every man or woman of God that has ever done anything in relation to winning the lost.

Hudson Taylor, I encourage you to read his life story, he went to China - if you didn't already know that - and he went to China, you may not know, at a time when Britain was at war with China - like a missionary going in World War II to Germany. Now if that wasn't a stigma enough, Taylor took the unique and monumental decision of becoming a Chinaman to Chinamen to win Chinamen. He became a Chinaman to Chinamen to win Chinamen, and what do I mean by that? Well, he shaved his hair off, he kept a long traditional ponytail that the Chinamen had, he dyed it black and in the process of doing so he almost blinded himself. He continually wore Chinese dress. Now the Chinese even believed that the white man's dignity rested in his strict adherence to British dress, they looked up to the British because of the way they dressed and their habits. So Taylor's actions not only deeply shocked his British people at home, but it was shocking to the Chinese. He had gone native, and as far as the British were concerned he had lost all credibility, he lost some support, and many even went to the extent of labelling him as a traitor to the Empire. But he set all of his liberty aside and became enslaved to their customs in order to win them - now that is vision! I'm not sure how you apply those type of principles to our modern-day age, but I'm asking you: do we? I think we don't!

Do we see them with Christ's eyes? One of the most impressive hymns in my life has been the one that goes like this, I learnt in a young people's circle several years ago. Just listen to the words:

'With a soul blood-bought and a heart aglow,
 Redeemed of the Lord and free,
 I ask as I pass down the busy street,
 Is it only a crowd I see?
 Do I lift my eyes with a careless gaze,
 That pierces no deep-down woe?
 Have I naught to give to the teeming throng,
 Of the wealth of the love I know?

As I read in the Gospel story oft,
 Of the Christ who this earth once trod,
 I fancy I see His look on the crowd,
 That look of the Son of God.
 He saw not a number in might or strength,
 But a shepherd-less flock distressed,
 And the sight of those wearied, fainting sheep
 Brought grief to His loving breast.

Dear Lord, I ask for the eyes that see
 Deep down to the world's sore need,
 I ask for a love that holds not back,
 But pours out itself indeed.
 I want the passionate power of prayer
 That yearns for the great crowd's soul,
 I want to go 'mong the fainting sheep
 And tell them my Lord makes whole'.

And here's the chorus:

'Let me look on the crowd as my Saviour did,
Till my eyes with tears grow dim,
Let me look till I pity the wandering sheep,
And love them for love of Him'.

Do we love them with Christ's heart? Do we see them with Christ's eyes? Thirdly and finally, do we touch them with Christ's scars? Yes, in a sense I'm talking about what Paul says when he said: 'We preach Christ crucified', that is the only thing that will win people. I don't believe a message is a gospel message unless the cross is uplifted high. That's not chiefly what I'm thinking about, I'm thinking about what Paul said in Colossians 1:24. He rejoiced in his sufferings for the Colossians, and he filled up 'that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church'. Now it's that little statement, Paul claimed that he was filling up that which was behind - or, as another translation puts it, that which was lacking in the afflictions of Christ. Now if we misunderstood that, we would almost think that he was denigrating the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ, but that's not Paul's point. There is nothing lacking in the redemption of our Lord Jesus Christ, there is nothing incomplete in His salvation, but what Paul is saying is this: 'These people whom I'm ministering to, they've never seen Christ dying on the cross. I can preach to them about it, but they have never had in a direct sense the love of Christ communicated to them as the people around the cross saw it that day'. You might say, 'Who has?' - but you're missing the point! What Paul is saying is: what is lacking in the gospel is that there should be a living personification of the love of Christ shown to men and women who are lost, and in that sense Paul was saying, 'I am filling up that lack in that through my sufferings, through my sacrifice, I am communicating sacrificial love, the very dying love of Jesus to those who are lost'.

Here's the question to us today: what is it costing us to win the lost? Do we touch the lost with Christ's scars? Not just preaching the cross, but living the cross. Here's the question: how much time does it cost us to win the lost? How much money does it cost us to win the lost? We can build buildings, we can do all sorts of things, but how much are we giving to win the lost? How much energy does it cost us? How much sleep does it cost us? How much food does it cost us? How much inconvenience does it cost us? How much sweat, blood, tears does it cost us to win the lost? Paul says: 'I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus'!

True love is always costly, and I would say it's a worthless love if it doesn't cost anything. The heartbeat of God is to save men and women, and when His heartbeat is echoed in our souls we will hear the cry of the lost, we will love them, and we will lay aside our lives for them - and they will be touched with the sacrifice that we express in love for them. We have compassion on a child that dies, and whenever on the television screen we see that little coffin, our hearts break. We have compassion for the dead pet dog that lies in the middle of the road, but what compassion have we for the lost? Have we compassion enough to hear the cry of the damned? Can I ask you a question that I ask myself continually: David, do you really believe that the world is perishing?

Charles Peace was a wicked criminal who was sentenced to death. On the morning of his execution the clergyman led him out of the cell and began reading the liturgy to him. He tapped the clergyman on the shoulder and asked him: 'Do you believe what you're reading?', and he said 'Oh, yes, yes, I believe it'. He said: 'If I believed what you believe, I would crawl on my hands and knees across broken glass to the four corners of the world to warn people'. There is the law of the watchman, and there are consequences for us if we do not take the gospel - but what I want you to think of this morning is the consequences to the lost.

Can I finish this morning with a story from Hudson Taylor's life again? Nee Yung Fa was a Ningbo cotton dealer in China, he was converted under Hudson Taylor's preaching, but he had also been a leader before that

in a reformed Buddhist sect which would have nothing to do with idolatry, but was seeking the living way and the truth. At the end of Hudson's sermon, Nee stood up in his place and turned to address the audience and said these words: 'I have long searched for the truth as my father did before me, and I have travelled far but I haven't found it. I found no rest in Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, but I do find rest in what I have heard tonight. From now on I believe in Jesus'. He was converted and followed the Lord with all his heart. Nee took Hudson Taylor to a meeting of the sect he had formerly led, and he was allowed to explain the reason for his change of faith to them. Taylor was impressed by the clarity and energy with which he gave his testimony. Then all of a sudden, another member of the group was converted, and both he and Nee were baptised. Then Nee asked Hudson Taylor, the great pioneer missionary, a very difficult question: 'How long has the gospel been known in England?'. Nee asked Hudson Taylor: 'How long has the gospel been known in England?'. 'For several hundred years', replied Hudson Taylor in an embarrassed tone, vaguely. 'What!', exclaimed Nee, 'And you have only come to preach to us now? My father sought after the truth for more than 20 years and died without finding it! Why didn't you come sooner!'. Hudson Taylor writes, 'That was a difficult question to answer'.

Let's stop playing church and going through the motions, wearing the right clothes, saying the right words, and waken up to the fact that people are lost and dying - and from our perspective there's one reason for it: how shall they hear without a preacher? Who shall go? Who will tell them?

Lord Jesus, give us Thy heart of compassion for the lost. Give us Thine eyes to see them, tear-filled eyes that have vision to go the lengths that others have gone to save some. Give us Christ's scars that we may touch, in evident love demonstrated before them, the lost with the sacrifice of our efforts, to make the sacrifice of Jesus a reality to them. Lord, we are miserable, we are poor and blind and naked, give us this heart we pray, Lord Jesus Christ, or we die. Amen.

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Back To Basics – Chapter 10

"The Church"

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Our subject this morning is 'The Church'. Now, we could spend the whole morning answering the question alone: 'What is the church?'. In its most purest form the answer would come, the Greek word 'ecclesia', which we translate in English 'church' simply means 'called out ones', or 'assembly' - that is what the church is: a group of people who have been called out by God unto salvation, and who comprise a group, a body of people called the 'ecclesia', or the 'church'. Now we read this morning in Acts chapter 2 that the church was born at Pentecost, it had a beginning, but to be in the church you too need to have a beginning in Christ, you need to be born again. Acts chapter 2 tells us of the beginning of the church, and John chapter 3 tells us of the beginning of the new birth: 'Except a man is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God', and he certainly cannot be a member of the church. In fact, 1 Corinthians 12 tells us: 'For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body', that one body being the church, that one Spirit being the Spirit which we are baptised into at the moment of our conversion in the new birth - being born again of the Spirit of God.

So it's quite plain from scripture, from those very elementary texts that I've shared with you, but we could spend all morning studying many many more - it's very plain and clear that you cannot, yes, you ought not be a member of the church if you are not saved. Now, of course, you cannot be, in its purest sense, a member of the church without being a Christian. But of course there are many churches in our land, and denominations and persuasions, and they admit people into their membership who are not Christian, and that is clearly unbiblical. It's not my job this morning to hammer any system or any denomination, or any persuasion or inclination, but let me say this: the church is more than a denomination, the church is more than an ecclesiastical system, and the church is more than a building. We meet in a building, yes, and in our generation and society that has come to be known as 'the church', but that is incorrect - the church is a group of people who are 'living stones', you and I, people who are born-again who make up God's building, a group of people.

Now there are many names that are given to the church, but we must distinguish between two aspects in the church. There is the universal church, that is the invisible body in the sense that you don't know how many there are, you don't know how far across the globe it spans, but it's every single believer in Christ that makes up His whole body - those who are in Christ on the earth, and even those who are in Christ in heaven. That is the universal church. But that universal church, which is the spiritual reality that we are all one in that we've just been singing about, finds its practical expression and manifestation in the local church - if you like, the place that we're meeting today, the place where many groups of believers right across our city and land are meeting in as we speak, the local assembly.

Now both of those expressions of the church have been described in many metaphors throughout the scripture, especially in the New Testament where we find it. It's described as 'the body', whose head is Christ - no other head, no pope, no potentate, no Archbishop, just the Lord Jesus Christ, the church's one foundation. He is the head of the body, but we are the members. Then in another place it's described as a building, as I've already said, Peter says 'living stones' make up this building. It is a house, or a household of faith, it is the bride to the Lord Jesus Christ who is the Bridegroom; it's described in Hebrews as a city; it's described as a flock of sheep. In Ephesians it's described as 'the new man', which tells us that that it's

something other than Israel of the Old Testament, this is a mystery to the Old Testament believers, but it's been revealed to us in the New Testament time. In the book of the Revelation the church is described as a lampstand.

Its organisation is very simple, according to the New Testament it's led by elders, it's served by deacons, it's comprised by members. It has two ordinances: simply the Lord's Supper and baptism, that have been left with us by our Lord - the only two commands that we've been given to obey in that ordinance sense. Its purpose, we could give it as being five-fold: 1) to glorify God; 2) to evangelise those that do not know God; 3) to produce holy Christians, sanctification in the life of the believer; 4) to care for its own, those who are in need; and 5) to do good in this world, to be a testimony in our charity towards others outside of Christ.

Now I think you can say right in our introduction, that résumé and summary very briefly of what the church means in the New Testament alone, that the church has a great place of prominence in the holy Scriptures. I say it again: the church has a great place of prominence within the Bible. But I would also say that that is a prominence that is not reflected in the priorities of modern day Christians of our age. I would go further to say that the doctrine of the church has been progressively weakened in evangelicalism today. Whereas in years gone by, when people were saved they followed the apostolic order of automatically being baptised and then joining a local church, it doesn't seem to be the norm today. Today we often get the impression that a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ is all that really matters, and anything after that is a bonus. Our generation, I think, has given rise and birth to a phenomenon that has never ever been seen in any other church age or era, and it's simply this: church-less Christians, church-less Christians - people who think that it's possible to be committed to Christ on the one hand, but not committed to Christ's church.

Now whilst it is the most important thing in the world to be related to Jesus Christ by grace through faith, that does not minimise the role of Christ's church in the life of the believer, or indeed the role of the believer in the life of Christ's church. I ask you today first and foremost, the most important question: are you saved? Maybe you claim to be a member of a church and you're not born-again, well you're not a member of God's church - you might be a member of the Presbyterian Church, or the Methodist Church, or the Church of Ireland, or another church; you may even be a member of the Brethren or the Iron Hall - but you're not a member of Christ's church if you're not saved. I ask you again: are you a member of the church because you're born again, and you're not baptised? You're in disobedience to the Lord: He commands every believer to be baptised.

But this morning we're looking at the next step after belief and baptism, and that is being added to the local church. The opposition and argumentation against this practice comes in various shapes and forms. There are those who think: 'Well, if you belong to the invisible church universal, the body of Christ, isn't that not enough? You've been saved and you've been added to His universal body, what's the need to sign a dotted line?'. Well, first of all there is no signing of a dotted line, and it's not like joining a club - church fellowship is simply acknowledging to the oversight and leadership of that assembly that you want to be underneath their discipline, being added to the church. But there is more in the Scriptures than just simply the church universal, because as you read the epistles you find that Paul often writes to the church that is in Ephesus, to the church that is in Corinth, and if there weren't tangible real people that belong to those churches, and you looked at them and said 'They belong to that assembly and were under the leadership of the elders', it would be a nonsense to talk about a church anywhere!

There are others who say: 'Well, I don't recognise the leadership of a certain church, or maybe I don't recognise the doctrines and practices of that particular church', yet the amazing thing is they come anyway and won't join! They come to that church, but they won't commit themselves - and that's very strange, at least I think it is. Then there are others who believe they're so perfect that they won't go anywhere, and they're meeting in little houses all over our land in twos and threes because there's no church good enough for them!

They have the truth and the truth alone! Then there are those, and I think perhaps these are in the majority, who don't want accountability - they don't want to put themselves under the authority and the discipline of an oversight or of other believers in a membership, because there is sin in their life, or there's something in their past or their present that they're wanting to hide - and they don't want any difficult questions asked.

Now I say: I have no sympathy with any of those positions at all, because I see them as against Scripture. One position I do have sympathy with, though it is still a false position to hold, is those who have been hurt in other assemblies. Because of that you never want to, as you see it, be in a vulnerable position again - I sympathise and empathise with you, but nevertheless that is still not a grounds for disobeying the Lord's command, because what you are seemingly protecting yourself from - the greater loss to you is what you're losing by not being fully implemented into a fellowship of Jesus Christ. Cyprian, the church father, put it like this: 'People who are not in membership within an assembly, they have God as their Father, but they reject the church as their mother, and as a result they are incomplete and stunted'. There is no such thing in the New Testament scripture as a church-less Christian, and here is an indisputable fact that I will not argue because it's very black-and-white within God's word: you cannot be a fully rounded or a mature Christian if you think you can exist without full commitment and participation in the church.

Now the question posed to us today in our particular situation is: why has there been a downward trend in the light of how people view their commitment to the local church? Well, there are many many answers could be given to that question. In general there is a lack of commitment in society today, you can't get people to commit to anything! There's a lack of accountability and respect for authority, and we see that in many realms and many levels of our society and in our civilisation today. There's a lack of loyalty in general. There is a rise in individualism - people think that they need no one else, 'Every man is an island, I can survive on my own even as a Christian'. There has also been, in the last 20, 30, 40 years, in our society an eroding of communities in general. The neighbourhood has disappeared as it was known years ago, and communities in general have suffered - none less than the community of the church of Jesus Christ. But I think added to that there is a bad testimony of churches. A lot of people, even Christians, don't want to belong to certain churches because they have a bad testimony - and though we will put fault at the door of people who won't join churches, we also need to take some of the responsibility ourselves that perhaps we are not the church that we ought to be for people to want to join us. Maybe there's not a respected leadership that people want to aspire to; maybe at times there is not the clear teaching that ought to come in churches from God's word - but I think perhaps the biggest reason why church is in ill-repute today is plain, clear, black and white: apathy, selfish apathy.

R. Kent Hughes, in a book that I have been reading recently, writes this: 'Church attendance is infected with a malaise of conditional loyalty which has produced an army of ecclesiastical hitchhikers. The hitchhiker's thumb says, 'You buy the car, pay for repairs and the upkeep and insurance, fill the car with gas, and I'll ride with you - but if you have an accident, you're on your own! I'll probably sue you! And so it is with the credo of so many of today's church attenders. It is the thumb of the hitchhiker. You go to the meetings, you serve on the board and the committees, you grapple with the issues and do the work of the church, and pay the bills; and I'll come along for the ride - but if things don't suit me I'll criticise, I'll complain and probably bail out. My thumb is always out for a better ride" - the spiritual hitchhiker. They're here this morning in this meeting. You have applied - we'll maybe hear it from Bill Freel at Easter - a consumer attitude to the church of Jesus Christ. You take what you want and leave what you don't want. It is, as someone has called it, the 'McDonald-isation' of the church, where you cherry-pick - the 'McChristian' mentality where you come and consume, perhaps give little or nothing back, and then go away and criticise everything that you've seen and heard. You come and you fill your spiritual appetite in this place, yet perhaps you're a hitchhiker - like some who attend one church for its preaching, then they send their children to a second church because it has a dynamic youth programme, and then they go to the third church themselves because they have house-groups that they like. I'm not decrying any of those things on their own, but the problem is: that does no good for

one individual church, whatever that church may be. Church hitchhikers don't help the church, because they are effectively taking the church for a ride.

Vance Havner called them 'church tramps'. He spoke to one who had already belonged to three different denominations, and this man said to his pastor: 'I'm getting ready to make another move'. 'Well', replied the pastor, 'it does no harm to change the labels on an empty bottle'. The fact of the matter is: commitment to everything, and especially the church today amongst Christians, is at an all-time low ebb. We have got to waken up to the fact, you have got to waken up to the fact - because I think I'm quite committed already! - that commitment is vital in many many areas of life. It's vital to the family, it's vital to marriage, it's vital to your friendships, it's vital to employment, it's vital to your studies, and it is vital to the church. None of those things will flourish without commitment! The greatest example, perhaps, is marriage: you can't produce the security and the satisfaction and the growth that is promised in marriage unless you're committed. That's why people living together, they don't really enjoy it in the full sense of the commitment of marriage. Now commitment has its good times and its bad times - and you that are married will know that - but the fact of the matter is: your marriage will never grow into the greatest fulfilment unless you are committed.

Some people say to me: 'You don't have to go to a particular church to be a Christian'. Well, you don't have to go home to be married, but you'll find out after not too long that if you don't go home you'll not have a great relationship with your husband or your wife. If you don't attend and commit to a church you cannot have a great relationship with the Lord Jesus. Hebrews 10:25 is very clear on the matter: 'Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching' - our version today could be: 'and all the less as we see the day approaching'. For as we come nearer the second return of the Lord Jesus Christ, we see that people are less committed to what we have known in the past as 'the church', which only reflects a lack of commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

Now in Acts chapter 2, the proof of the reality of those 3000 or so soul's conversion on Pentecost was their continued commitment to the church of Jesus Christ - you can't argue with that! That is what the apostle uses as an evidence of how he knew that those 3000 people were saved: 'They continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers' - as the Amplified says: 'They steadfastly persevered, and devoted themselves constantly' to those things. What were they? The apostles' doctrine, that is the oral inspired teaching of the apostles that was later written down, and that is - we must say, and every Christian will say 'Amen' to this - the foundation of all of our faith in Christ. But here's the question: do you read it? Do you study it? Are you in the place where it is studied, in your local assembly? For you're not continuing steadfastly if you're not met with God's people to look to the apostles' doctrine and see what saith the Scriptures. Then they continued in fellowship, literally the word means 'partnership' or 'sharing'. This was another sign of their new life in Christ, they wanted to be with the people of God, they wanted to share things in common with the people of God; and there was a sense in this of being separated from the world and being with the Christians.

Now baptism is a picture of that, that's why you need to be baptised: to say that you don't belong to the world any more, but you belong to the church - but do you want, do you long to be with God's people in fellowship? I'm not talking about your clique that meets for coffee on a Sunday night, I'm talking about the church - fellowship. Thirdly, the Breaking of Bread, now obviously, although there were love feasts in the early church this refers, I believe, to the Lord's Supper. In Acts 20 verse 7 we find that the practice came into being that on the first day of the week, they met together and remembered the Lord - there's a subject! Are you remembering the Lord this morning? Do you remember the Lord every Lord's day morning? At least, do you remember the Lord as often as you can remember the Lord? I tell you: it is a shame and disgrace that that room up there is not filled, and we're not down here. I'm not going to water down my words this morning: it is a shame and disgrace! Jesus Christ, the Son of God, bled for you - and you can't get out of

your bed, some of you, that's the bottom line. Then we ask why people aren't being saved, why there's no blessing, why God's not moving, why there's all the problems.

Then fourthly, the fourth principal practice of the early church was prayers - that simply meant that they expressed complete dependence upon the Lord. You see, if you're depending on the Lord you'll be praying in private, but you'll be praying with the people of God. We pray at the prayer meeting, do you? I'll be honest, and I don't want to come across as 'thran' - and you know what that is - but I get fed up at times. Can I open my heart to you this morning? I just get fed up, fed up with the excuses, fed up with the nonsense, when you could be there - if you wanted to be there you would be there. In verse 43 this was the result: 'Fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles'. In other words, there was a manifestation of power, and awe came upon the church because the Spirit of God was evident: their hearts were hushed, their lives were subdued, because it was evident that God was there! I'm not saying that if you do these four things that will happen, but I'm telling you this: if you don't do any of these things, you can be sure it'll not happen.

Well, the question is simply: how committed are you to these things? How committed are you to the Monday evening Bible study? To the Thursday evening prayer meeting? How committed are you to the Breaking of Bread? How committed are you to fellowship? Vance Havner said some mighty words, and on this subject of commitment he said: 'Some church members tell us that they will be absent in body but present in spirit, one has a spooky feeling preaching to ghosts. Then there are those who are present in body but absent in spirit, and I'm not sure which crowd I'd rather preach to'.

Let me ask you a couple of questions: are you committed to regular attendance? Now listen, attendance doesn't make you a spiritual giant, don't misunderstand what I'm saying. It does not fulfil all the spiritual principles in your life just to go to meetings. But I'm telling you this: you will not grow if you don't go and meet with God's people. Do you have a plan to attend, or is it just 'Well, if I'm free I'll go'? Do you actually schedule it? You schedule your work, you schedule your holidays, you schedule your plans of every shape and form. The rest of your dairy - I say to you today - ought to bow to the commitment of what goes on in your church. But sadly, church is fitted around everything else, and I'm talking about your employment - and I know things are harder today than they have always been - and I'm talking about where you live, do you choose your house, young people, because it's cheaper or because it's nearer to your church? I know there's a dilemma in those things, but where are your priorities in that matter alone?

Are you committed to attendance? Secondly, are you committed to discipline? People say: 'Look, you don't have to join the church, I mean where do you find that in the Bible, a membership roll?'. You don't find a membership roll, but I'll tell you what you do find: you find in the book of Hebrews that you're to submit to the authority of overseers. You can't submit to the authority of the overseers here if you go to another church one Sunday, and another church a different Sunday, and you don't really know where you belong, and the elders of all those churches don't know if you belong to them or not - it's simply saying: 'I want to belong to you'. Now if you haven't done that, you're not going to be disciplined - and I'm not talking about getting a smack. Discipline is more than simply getting a smack and a reprimand, discipline is help, discipline is someone putting their arm around you - discipleship, helping you grow; when you've got problems, being there for you. We mightn't do it the way we ought to do it, but if you don't seek it how will you ever find it? Actively placing yourself under the help and discipline of others.

Are you committed to discipline? Are you committed to participation? I'm talking about participation of your time; participation of your talents, the gifts to God has given to the church, are you pouring them into the church to the glory of God? Are you committed to giving? Our Treasurer does not disclose, thank the Lord, what people give in this church - but it's just as well for you! Are you committed to giving, not just to the church but to missions and to the work of God? These are commitments that are in the New Testament - but

where are they today in the so-called New Testament church? In other words, what the word of God is saying is that the church must be at the very centre of the life of a Christian. But sadly, as A. J. Gordon illustrates, the average church is often like a congested lung - only a few cells are doing the breathing, and there's usually a faithful nucleus surrounded by a mass of nominal Christians pulling it all down.

Now I know what people will say in their heart and in their head: 'Well, I'm not happy with this church' - do you think I'm happy with everything in this church? Is anybody happy with everything in any church? The question is this - there is no perfect church, and I'll tell you if some of you joined it, it would surely be the last day it was perfect - but the question that is before all of us is this: what are we doing about it? The church isn't perfect, everything isn't right, but what are you doing about it? Are you praying about it? Are you working to help it? Or are you griping and moaning and gossiping and complaining to hinder it?

I often think of William Cowper's hymn when I think of gossips and moans and grippers:

Have you no words? Ah, think again,
Words flow apace when you complain,
And fill your fellow-creature's ear
With the sad tale of all your care.

Were half the breath thus vainly spent
To heaven in supplication sent,
Your cheerful song would oftener be,
"Hear what the Lord has done for me".

You know I'm not psychic, I'm not a prophet, or the son of a prophet; but I can tell, you know, sometimes when we're singing these choruses in the morning, those of you who are gossiping. Ask yourself the question: what kind of church would my church be if every member was just like me? Do you know what some of the churches would be, maybe this one? A museum - you've had your day, you're a spectator, you're watching the game but you're not taking part. Or maybe it would be a hairdressers - 'How come?', you say - well, maybe splitting hairs in four different ways, that's all we spend our time doing. Would it be a service station, where you come to get filled, but it's a place where you don't expend any energy? Would it be a sleeping carriage, where you don't want to, as a passenger, be disturbed from your comfort? Maybe it would be a refrigerator, where it's so cold for unbelievers to come in, that any new arrivals are driven away. Old Nicholson used to say: 'Some churches, if you brought a bucket of milk in, it would be ice cream before the meeting was over'.

Now friends, these are serious questions: what is church meant to be? What are you making church? Jim Elliot said: 'Wherever you are, be all there' - wherever you are, be all there - 'Live to the hilt every situation you believe to be the will of God'. There's a lot of questions here this morning, here's the next one: is it the will of God for you to be here? Is it the will of God for you to be here in the Iron Hall? Well, if it is, you've got to give your all to it - it's as simple as that. Is it not the will of God for you to be here? What are you doing here then? Your absence would be a blessed subtraction to the rest of us and to yourself, if you're not in God's will - contradictory. An old preacher said to his audience: 'Some folks think they hurt the church when they get mad and quit, but they're all wrong about that. It never hurts the tree for the dried up apples to fall off'.

Where is your commitment? Don't give me all the excuses, I've heard them all and I don't want to hear any more. If it's God's will for you to be here, you've to put your hand to the plough with all your might; if it's not, get out! It's as simple as that. Where is the commitment?

I'll finish with this story. It was told by Billy Graham originally, many many years ago, and when it was first quoted from a letter written by an American college student who had been converted to communism in Mexico, it really shook the church. The message today could be the language of terrorists or political extremists, but the purpose of the letter was to explain to his fiancée why he was breaking off the engagement. You might have heard it before, but it speaks about commitment, this man's commitment to communism. 'We communists', he said, 'have a high casualty rate. We are the ones who get shot and hung, and lynched and tarred, and feathered and jailed, and slandered and ridiculed, and fired from our jobs and in every other way made as uncomfortable as possible. A certain percentage of us get killed or imprisoned. We live in virtual poverty. We turn back to the party every penny that we make, what is absolutely necessary to keep us alive, that is all we keep back. We communists don't have the time or the money for many movies, concerts, T-bone steaks or decent homes or new cars. We have been described as fanatics. We are fanatics. Our lives are dominated by one great overshadowing fact: the struggle for world communism. We communists have a philosophy of life which no amount of money could buy. We have a cause to fight for, a definite purpose in life. We subordinate our petty personal selves into a great movement of humanity. And if our personal lives seem hard, or our egos appear to suffer through subordination to the party, then we are adequately compensated by the thought that each of us, in his small way, is contributing to something new and true for a better mankind. There is one thing which I am dead earnest about, and that is the Communist cause. It is my life, my business, my religion, my hobby, my sweetheart, my wife and my mistress, my bread and my meat. I work at it in the daytime and dream of it at night. Its hold on me grows, not lessens, as time goes on. Therefore, I cannot carry on a friendship, a love affair or even a conversation without relating to it this force which drives and guides my life. I evaluate people by it, books, ideas and actions according to how they affect the Communist cause and by their attitude toward it. I have already been in jail because of my ideals and, if necessary, I'm ready to go before the firing squad'.

Sooner or later believers have to realise that it must be everything or nothing. The Lord cannot be satisfied with half a human life, half-hearted allegiance, divided loyalties - He's either worth everything, or He's worth nothing! You choose. Henry Drummond said: 'Above all things, do not touch Christianity unless you're willing to seek the kingdom first. I promise you a miserable existence if you seek it second'. First or second? Not Christ first and the church second, no - it's His church.

Now listen to me: my intention is not to annoy people in what I've shared this morning - but if you're annoyed that's good if that sorrow leads you to repentance, and if you've a heart submissive and meek before God you'll know that what I have said from God's word today is right, and you will put your life in line to it. If you've any other objection to that, that's your problem, you're out of sync with God's word and you have to set your life in order.

Father, we pray that Thy people will be enabled to have grace to bow the stiffnecked 'I', to bow the head and die, beholding Him on Calvary who bowed His head for me. Lord, break our stubbornness, melt our hearts, flush out the dross and the rubbish we pray, and do something in our lives and in this fellowship that has never been seen before. For Jesus' sake we pray, Amen.

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Back To Basics – Chapter 11

"Discernment"

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First Thessalonians 5 verses 21 and 22, just two verses for our reading this morning as we consider the subject of 'Discernment'. Do remember that we've been going through a series now for several weeks, this is, believe it or not, the eleventh week of our 'Back to Basics' series looking at the ABCs of the Christian life, and things that we ought to learn very early in our Christian experience - but, I would hasten to add, and hopefully have been hammering it home each week, things that we need to constantly remember as Christians and remind ourselves of. We looked at 'The Morning Watch', we looked at the subject of 'Temptation', 'The Fruit of the Spirit', 'The Fullness of the Spirit', 'Obedience', 'Love for the Lord', 'Love for Others', 'Love for Lost', and in the last week of the study we looked at 'The Church'. This morning we're looking at a subject which I feel is so important in our world today, particularly in the church, of 'Discernment'.

These are our two verses today, 1 Thessalonians 5:21-22, Paul says: 'Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil'. Let's read that again: 'Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil'.

Some of you may have heard of the magazine 'Christianity Today'. Several years ago it was recorded in an article in 'Christianity Today' how the town of Richardson in Texas, in the United States, was talking about the worldly ways of the First Unitarian Church of Richardson, Texas. The reason being, one Sunday morning Pastor William Nicholls invited Diana King - who was a Unitarian from Fort Worth, Texas - to take part in the service. Now it's not the alarm at the fact that a female was taking part in this service, but the fact that as she did so, Miss King - who happened to have the profession of being an exotic erotic dancer at a Dallas night club - by the end of her contribution to the morning service was completely and absolutely naked. The congregation of 200 adults and children watched in fascinated silence, as she shed her clothes in time to the recorded music. Now the Pastor, William Nicholls said: 'The dance fit very well into our service and no-one complained'. He went on to say that he '...didn't think anyone was aroused, but I don't consider the erotic aspect of the dance wrong, after all that's the way we were conceived'. Miss King herself said it was something that she'd wanted to do for a long, long time; and that she would like to conduct classes for the women church members. 'I would like', she said, 'to do a sermon using the exotic dance and members of the congregation could join me if they liked'.

Now that might seem astounding to most of you - I hope, at least, it does - and I would like to think that most of you are saying: 'Well, it's easy to discern that that type of stuff is wrong in the church of Jesus Christ'. Perhaps you're even saying: 'All bad things come from America, that would never ever happen here. I could never conceive of such a thing taking place in our land'. Well can I warn you, before we go on any further in this message on discernment, that big journeys begin with small steps, big journeys begin with small steps - and 'Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall', because anything is possible. We know that anything is possible in the world, but anything is possible in the church - and we do well to remind ourselves that the church is only made up of depraved sinners, some of whom may well be saved by grace, but we're sinners nevertheless.

You only need to pan around the ecclesiastical scene very very quickly and casually in the 21st-century to see the situation that the nominal church finds itself in in this modern age. Look at the Anglican Communion regarding their dilemma over homosexuality, and you can see very very clearly how low the so-called church can go when it loses the skill of discernment. Why is there a dilemma? Are the Scriptures not clear on the subject of homosexuality? Of course the Scriptures are, so why has the church departed? They have lost the skill, if they ever had it, of discernment. If ever there was a need for discernment among Christians, I believe it is today - because the church is not only threatened from without by a plethora of doctrinal variations from world religions and confusing cults that we were considering not so long ago in our Monday evening Bible study, but in more recent years the church, as it has always been, has been threatened from within very forcibly within its own ranks.

We have within the church a consumerist Christianity - that's what Bill Freeland was addressing us about over the Easter season - or, as I put it in our study on the church, the 'McDonaldisation' of the church where we're giving the world what they want in the church rather than giving them what the Bible says they need. Many in the church are confused, and this is the question that faces all of us: how do you know, in this day and age, what is of God, what is not of God, what is right, what is wrong, what is spiritual, what is carnal? Especially, I would have to add, when you consider that some of the people who espouse these new ideas have good motives and are good people. The answer is very simple, and it is the subject of our study this morning: we need, more than ever, discernment. We need to be able to discern what is right and wrong, and the word of God speaks of discernment as the skill of being able to separate divine truth from false error. Paul spoke of it in 1 Thessalonians 5, our reading: 'Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil'.

Joseph Stowell of Moody Bible Institute defined discernment like this: 'Discernment in scripture is the skill that enables us to differentiate, it is the ability to see issues clearly. We desperately need to cultivate this spiritual skill that will enable us to know right from wrong. We must be prepared to distinguish light from darkness, truth from error, best from better, righteousness from unrighteousness, purity from defilement, and principles from pragmatics'. My question to all of us, and to the church at large from this pulpit in particular is: do we need to again learn to discern? Have we lost, as a church, have we lost as individual Christians, the gift of discernment?

The musicians of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra were once asked the question to name the most effective conductor of all time, and the answer came back to a man: 'Arturo Toscanini'. He won hands down, and when one instrumentalist was asked the reason why he should be the greatest of all, the instrumentalist said: 'Well, he could anticipate when you were about to make a mistake, and keep you from making it'. He didn't correct you after you made the mistake, he anticipated them and corrected it before - in other words, he had the gift of discernment. Now, you might have a musical talent, or even the gift of perfect pitch, but discernment does not have to be like that. Now some people might be born again with a certain amount of discernment more than others, but the fact of the matter is that discernment, according to the word of God, can be taught. It can be learned, it can be practised and developed. So I hope you're all sitting at the edge of your seats in this world of confusion, especially in the church, and you're just waiting to find out: 'How can I learn this gift of discernment? I want to know, out of all these things that you've mentioned and many more, how to know what's right, how to know what's wrong, how can I learn to discern?'.

Well, if you take Paul's verse, if we're going to try and prove all things, you have to prove all things by measuring those things against a standard. There must be a standard of measurement, or a standard of judgment, if you're going to prove something. There must be a place where we can find the answers to put an 'X' or to put a tick beside all these grey areas, so-called. The answer is very simple - I hope you've got it, you've probably answered your own question! Where do we learn to discern? We learn to discern in the word of God. The old Latin name for the word of God is 'canon', the canon of Scripture. You may not know this,

but the word 'canon' means 'measuring stick' - and that's simply what the word of God is to be for us, a measuring standard whereby we weigh up everything not only in the world, but the things that enter into the church.

So right away, look at what we're saying: these things that I have mentioned, and many many other things that face us in our modern Christian environment, ought not to be left up to personal taste to judge whether they are right or wrong. Neither ought they to be left up to the mindset of the age, which is a relativistic mindset and attitude that says: 'Well, you do your thing and I'll do mine. I mean, if that works for you, it doesn't work for me' - and you put it down to being old-fashioned, sometimes we are, or you put it down to taste, but it's not a matter of right or wrong - that is the spirit of the age, the spirit of relativism, that you cannot know what is true or what is error, that you cannot know what is right and what is wrong. 'You have a right, I have a right; you have a wrong, I have a wrong' - but God's word is clear that there is a rule of truth, that there is a standard of doctrine, that there is a measurement of all practice, and that is the word of God. Jesus said: 'Thy word is truth'. He spoke to His disciples and He told them: 'Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free'. The sad reason that discernment is lacking in the church today is because there is a famine of the word of God in the church.

I don't know whether you've noticed this, but I certainly have: Christians don't seem to talk about the Bible at least as much as they did in the past bygone era. When you go for supper, or when you go out for tea, or when you meet a believer on the street, very rarely now do you get a conversation about the Bible, let alone a mention of the name of the Lord Jesus. A pastor was lamenting with me recently, not so recently, a couple of years ago in fact, how young men in Bible College no longer sit down and flick through the pages of Scripture and argue over doctrine. Now you might think that at times an argument is more heat than light, and that's correct - but we've got to the stage where people just don't even care what's right doctrine and what's wrong, never mind getting to the stage of getting all hot up about it and arguing. 'Take it or leave it' is the attitude. Someone once came to a pastor at the end of a meeting in which he disagreed about absolutely everything that the pastor said, and he said: 'Look, I don't believe what you believe, but at least you believe something!'. The old saying is true, isn't it? 'If you don't stand for something, you'll fall for everything'. The church, modern, today is falling for everything that comes along its path - and individual Christians are doing the same.

Now we don't want to be painted as purely negative, but you can hardly get a Christian today to say something negative about anything in the church. Jesus says: 'Woe to you when all men speak well of you'. Paul says: 'Prove all things, judge all things; hold fast to that which is good, and abstain from all that is evil'.

Now I'm going to leave you with two things this morning that are general points that we should abstain from in discernment in this modern age, and it will help you to learn to discern in the future. The first is this: we must abstain from all worldly attitudes. We must abstain from all worldly attitudes. Relativism is one that we've mentioned already, and there are others. Materialism is a worldly attitude that we should shun. But what I want to bring to your attention out of the many possibilities that we consider under the title of 'worldly attitudes' is the worldly attitude to biblical interpretation. We must abstain from worldly interpretation of the Scriptures.

What am I talking about? Well, a poll on Protestant clergy several years ago, which was taken by McCall's magazine, reported on 300 Protestant clergymen. It read like this, I quote: 'A considerable number of them rejected altogether the idea of a personal God'. I quote them: 'God', they said, 'was the ground of being. He is the force of life. God is the principle of love, He is ultimate reality...', and so forth. The article continues: 'The majority of the youngest group of clergy could not say to have believed in the virgin birth of Christ, or even to regard the traditional view of the Lord Jesus as divine, as most Protestants were brought up to believe'. We have got to a stage in the church that, whether audibly or secretly, people are not believing in

the tenets of the word of God - and all under the title of intellectualism. 'We have advanced, we have evolved, we have got to the stage where we just can't believe the fairytales of the Bible any more'.

Martin Luther, who was a great scholar, I add - and I'm not being anti-intellectual in this sermon this morning, far from it - but Martin Luther had many fears, even at the very beginning of the Reformation, but one of his fears was this, I quote him: 'I am much afraid that the universities will prove to be the great gates of hell unless they diligently labour to explain the holy scriptures and to engrave them upon the hearts of youth. I advise no-one to place his or her child where the scriptures do not reign paramount. Every institution' - and I believe Martin Luther includes the church of Jesus Christ of his day and today under the title 'institution' - 'Every institution where men are not unceasingly occupied with the word of God must become corrupt'. It is inevitable! When we stop in our intellectual grappling with philosophy and issues and theology, when we stop labouring to explain the Holy Scriptures, Luther says, and to engrave them upon the hearts of our youth, we're on the road to nowhere and to extinction!

Yet today the prevailing attitude among many evangelicals is: doctrine divides. 'Let's not get bogged down in doctrine, don't be so negative, we want to unite the church of Jesus Christ'. But can I tell you something that may be a revelation to a lot of people today? Our greatest enemy in the church is not drugs, it is not drink, it is not pornography, it is not idolatry, it is not Romanism, it is not the charismatic movement - all these things in themselves are deeply harmful, but the greatest enemy to the church is false doctrine. Maybe even the greatest enemy to us is weak doctrine. R. C. Lensky, a pastor and a theologian and commentator, said: 'The worst forms of wickedness consist of perversions of the truth, spiritual lies, although today many look upon these forms with indifference and regard them as harmless'. What is he saying? He's saying the worst type of wickedness that you could ever find could be dressed up in a collar and a cassock! The worst wickedness on the face of this earth could be called by the name 'Pastor', or could be found in a paperback.

This is what God's word is saying: we must beware of having the truth and twisting the truth to suit the fashions and the fads, the trends and the tastes of the age. This is what the church is doing today. They're applying relativistic thinking and evaluation upon the word of God. They're saying: 'This is cultural, that is cultural, this applies today, that doesn't apply today', they are cherry-picking the word of God. Even so-called evangelical conservative churches are subconsciously bowing to what the majority does in the church, rather than what the Scriptures teach. If ever there was a clarion call that needs to be heard by the church, it is that of Jude: 'Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ'.

We are to contend, defend, fight for the faith - yet many today are indifferent about separating divine truth from error, because they lack a practical use of the word of God in order to exercise true discernment. That's why Timothy says, 2 Timothy 3: 'All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works' - in order that you would not be ashamed, that you should know the truth, and stand up for the truth in boldness. I believe weak doctrine is one primary reason for the lack of discernment in the church today. I warn you: abstain from the worldly attitude regarding scriptural interpretation. As the old quip once said: 'If God says it, I believe it, and that settles it'.

The second pointer for you is: abstain from worldly methods. Abstain from worldly attitudes, but also abstain from worldly methods. John MacArthur, preacher and teacher, said this: 'The church has spawned a preoccupation with image and influence as the key to its evangelisation'. Let me repeat that: 'The church has spawned a preoccupation with image and influence as the key to evangelisation'. He goes on: 'Churches

today believe they must win the lost by winning their favour. It is no longer teaching the biblical doctrines of sin, hell, repentance and the cross - why? Because those would offend the lost and make them feel uncomfortable. Instead it markets itself as a benevolent non-threatening agency, whose primary goal is to achieve prestige, popularity and intellectual acceptance among the lost. Its premise is: 'if they like us, they'll like our Jesus'. If they like us, they'll like our Jesus - but what we need to realise, if we would only know God's word, is that God does not need us to commend His Son to the world. If we would just present His Son uncompromisingly with zeal and purity, in truth and power, the good aspects of His message along with the bad, people would be drawn savingly to the Saviour.

Corinth was a church that desired intellectual recognition in its day. Corinth was a church that applied worldly thinking and values to the things of God. Corinth was a church in its age that craved respectability. Paul had to tell them that they were carnal and not spiritual, and he asked them: 'Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching', or by the foolishness of that which was preached, 'to save them that believe'. As John MacArthur concludes today, and I think he's right, that we have a church filled with baby Christians. Do you know what baby Christians are? If you ever know what a toddler is like, you'll know as they're learning to crawl, and going everywhere, that anything and everything on the floor is lifted and shoved into its mouth. Christians indiscriminately and undiscerningly are taking and assimilating and digesting everything in this world that comes with the name 'Christian' on it, without asking a question. Paul told the Corinthians, who were the same, 'Oh, that I could feed you with meat, but I have to feed you with milk because you're a babe'.

I want to leave you this morning with five ways to learn to discern, and they're found in a book by John MacArthur - and I know I've mentioned him several times this morning, but I would have to say that he's about the only man in the popular Christian element of things who is writing on this subject today, which says a lot even of itself. Five ways that we can learn to discern. Here's the first: you need to desire it, you need to want it. Some Christians don't want to discern, they think it's negative, they think it's unimportant, they think you just have to love everybody and that's enough. But do you even this morning, as a Christian, have a desire to discern that which is truth and that which is error?

Here's the second thing: you need to ask for it. You need to ask the Lord to show you, through the Holy Spirit, in His word, what is right and what is wrong. Solomon came to the Lord and said: 'Give, therefore, Thy servant an understanding heart to judge Thy people, that I may discern between good and bad. For who is able to judge this so great a people?'. He needed help, and I'll tell you: it's not knowledge of God's word that causes you to discern, it is a spiritual knowledge where the pages of this book are illuminated to you both practically and spiritually by the Holy Spirit. You need to pray for that.

Thirdly you need to observe it. Not only desire it, not only ask for it, but you need to observe it. That is a challenge to us all: people should be able to learn how to discern through your discernment. The elders of this church, the deacons, the members, you should be a help to all of us who are trying to learn to discern by the stance that you take for truth. But if the fact is told, some of you are stumbling blocks when it comes to this matter of discernment.

Fourthly, you need to follow the Holy Spirit. I've already mentioned that through the Word. You need to follow His inclinations, His leadings, His wooings, His winnings. You need to be totally surrendered to Him, and filled by Him. Fifthly, you need to know the word of God. You can't discern if you don't know God's word. There's a passage of Scripture that never fails to astound me, and it's found in Acts 17 - you don't need to turn to it - but it's about when the great apostle Paul came to Berea. Boy, it's hard to get good speakers sometimes nowadays - but imagine if you got the apostle Paul! We'd all be sitting at his feet, we'd all be drinking in what he says. Imagine him, writing 13, 14 epistles in the New Testament - here he is speaking to

us, what does it say about the Bereans? It says: 'They searched diligently the Scriptures to see if the things that Paul was telling them were so'. The only word that mattered to the Bereans was the word of God.

Second Timothy tells us to study to show ourselves approved under God, to be diligent. I have written in one of my Bibles this little saying, it goes like this: 'Test all things by the word of God. Weigh all ministers, all doctrines, or colleges, all churches, all books, all theories, weigh them by the weight of the word of God'. That is the only way to learn discernment, and I warn you in this modern age: abstain from wordly attitudes as a whole, but particularly to the interpretation of God's word; and abstain from worldly methods in our evangelism and in our worship. Only then, when we study to show ourselves approved unto God, a workman and workwoman that rightly divides the word of truth - only then will we not be like Belshazzar, weighed and found wanting beside the word of God.

One of the basic fundamental truths of the word of God is that there are only two types of people in this world: truth and error regarding salvation can be summed up in those that are saved and those who are lost. You could be sitting here this morning, and you've been listening to everything I've said, and maybe a lot of it has been Double-Dutch to you - but here's something that you can lay hold of: if you're not saved you're in error. If you've never been converted, you're lost - and if you died this morning you be lost forever in hell. The only way to be saved is to accept God's truth, the Son of God, the Lord Jesus. You can't get more simple than that, the children in the backroom are learning that, and some of them - praise God - are even grasping it! Have you grasped it? Jesus is the truth, He is the way and the life, no man comes to the Father but by Him. You either have it or you don't, there's no middle ground, there's no grey area, there's no bit of both: saved or lost, truth or error. It's all in this book, and I challenge you - I have some John's gospel's here and I'll take them to the door - you read it and find that in this book you will have words of life and truth, because this book testifies of Jesus.

Our Father, we find within Thy word always this combination of truth and life. Our Saviour was filled with grace and truth, and Lord, may that combination be found in us and we found to be like Christ as we stand for truth. Like our Saviour, if men hate us, as they will, and revile us and say all manner of evil against us falsely, that we will follow Him - taking up our cross, losing our lives in this world for the sake of the next, that we may find it again. Lord, this is an age, if ever there was one, to be called out and stand out for Christ, to nail our colours to the mast of truth, and to be counted as one - though it bring reproach - who believes this book, who preaches the blood of the Lord Jesus as the only way to God. In this age of confusion may we as a people, here in the Iron Hall and individually, may we be a people who will stand on the Rock of truth - and whatever storms may blow, that our house will be found still to stand, and having done all with the armour of God upon us to still stand. Amen.

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Back To Basics - Chapter 12

"Assurance"

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We're turning to 1 John chapter 5, and this is our twelfth study in this Sunday morning series entitled 'Back to Basics', looking at the ABCs of the Christian life, elementary truths that we ought to know from babes in Christ when we first come to faith, but also we've found - I hope you have at least - things we need to constantly remind ourselves of as we grow older in the Christian life. This morning we're looking at 'Assurance', which might seem strange to you - but it is not, it's probably one of the most common questions that any preacher or evangelist or Sunday School teacher is asked: 'I don't feel saved', or 'How can I know that I am saved?'. It is often a nagging problem that's in the heart of many believers who have been saved for many years, or at least professed faith in Christ for many years - but are afraid, almost, to ask it. So we're going to look at it this morning in some detail, so bear with me in the time that we have before us.

The one verse that we want to look at as a springboard is 1 John 5 verse 13: "These things", John says, the things that he has written in this book, "have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God".

Now that verse not only proves that it is possible to have the assurance of your salvation, but it also insinuates that it is also possible to be saved and not know for sure - otherwise, why would John be writing to a group of believers in Ephesus, saying: 'I'm writing that you might know for sure that you have eternal life'? It's possible to be saved and not possess full assurance. If I can be personal for a moment or two this morning, I was brought up in this church and sent along to Sunday School - and like, I'm sure, some of you who were brought up in Christian homes, you can remember many times when you asked the Lord Jesus into your heart, as the saying goes. I look back to perhaps a date, the 3rd November 1984, after Sunday School in the Iron Hall, when I came home I asked the Lord Jesus to save me. I'm not sure if that's the date or not that the Lord Jesus did that eternal work, but I do know this: for many years after that event, particularly in my teenage years, I doubted my salvation and could not get assurance of it. I went to school in the centre of town, and as many of you will know in the centre of Belfast there are several evangelical bookshops - at the time there were three in particular that I frequented - and I went there almost every day, at least a couple of times in the week, looking for books or booklets, or something - now mark this - something that would tell me that I was saved. I had not that assurance. I believe I was saved, but I lacked the assurance of my salvation.

Now some people here this morning might be in the same predicament, and that may be for a number of reasons. Sometimes people are under very solid, sound, strong preaching - and the preacher pummels forth the high ideals of God's word, and I hope that that happens in this church, and we make no apology for it - but one of the unfortunate offshoots of that is that some believers who are struggling in their faith can feel: 'Because I can't reach the standard of the pulpit, I mustn't be saved'. Now that doesn't mean we dilute the standard of what comes forth from the pulpit, but it does mean that we have to be sensitive to those who perhaps have these doubts already in their hearts. Other people just simply can't grasp the idea of forgiveness of sins, or the grace of God, they don't comprehend the gospel: how the slate can be just wiped clean, they think that they have to do something more, or perhaps they have to feel something.

Other people don't know the exact moment of their salvation, the time, the date - some people say: 'I was there when it happened and that's how I know' - but some people can't remember when it happened, especially those brought up in Christian homes. Sometimes I'm guilty, I would have to say, in my Gospel preaching of maybe referring that you need to know a time or a date - but some people don't know, or at least can't remember, a time or a date. They have an assurance that they're saved, but they don't know when it happened. In fact, one very well-known biblical scholar and preacher said: 'I can't remember the moment that I was saved. I don't know when I passed from death unto life, but I know I did. I don't know a time when I didn't believe. I never went through a time of rebelling openly and flagrantly against God. I had a car accident when I was a freshman in college, but I can't say that was the time of my salvation. I remember praying a prayer with my father on the steps of a church in Indiana when he was holding a revival meeting, his sermon convicted me because I had done some things that week that were not right. I don't know whether that's the moment I passed from death unto life. There were times as a little child when I prayed prayers. There were times as a teen-ager when I went to camp, I remember as a fourteen-year-old going forward and throwing a pinecone in a fire, teary-eyed and wanting to make my life right with God. I don't know when I passed from death unto life, I know I did, but I don't look for a past event to make it real, I look for a present pattern of life'.

Now please remember that statement, because it will bear out in our study this morning as we go through - he says: 'I don't look for a past event to make my salvation real, I look for a present pattern of life to prove it is real'. It's not a past event of what happened when we were saved, the past event that really matters is the death of Christ on the cross, His resurrection, and the fact that we are trusting in that then and now that makes the difference. We would have to say that although some are saved and lack assurance, some have a particular point in time in their past when they feel they've got saved, and they have a false assurance. Did you hear me? They can remember a past event, but the reality of a present righteousness is absent from their life.

But then there are others who feel sin strongly in their hearts, they don't see that they've really entered into the new nature, they have problems with temptations and struggles and so on; and they feel: 'How can I really be saved?' - they doubt their assurance because of the presence of sin within their life. So I want to say first of all in introduction, to make the premise clear: it is possible to be truly saved and not have the assurance of it, that is possible. Also it is possible to have an assurance and not be truly saved. It is possible to have a profession and to have no assurance of that profession, because you're not truly saved. Did you hear me? It is possible to be truly saved, but lack assurance. It is possible to not be truly saved and have assurance. And it is possible to have simply a profession and wonder why you don't have assurance, because you weren't saved in the first place. Now if that isn't enough to let you know why it is so important to discern what condition you're in, I don't know what is able to do that. It's so important to discern, to make sure of your assurance.

On July 1937 the aviatrix, Amelia Earhart, and her flight companion Lt Cdr Fred Noonan vanished from the vicinity of Howland Island in the South Pacific Ocean. They were attempting an around the world flight trip in a twin-engined Lockheed aircraft. In her last radio contact with a United States naval vessel, Miss Earhart transmitted this very terse message: 'Position doubtful'. Position doubtful! Now undoubtedly she knew the approximate position of her craft, but because she didn't know the precise position both she and her companion were lost and went to their deaths.

Need I say how important it is that you have the assurance of your salvation and, if you've never hitherto done so, that you make sure this morning in this very meeting? Let me share three things with you: one, you can know for sure; two, you ought to know for sure; and three, how to know for sure. Now I'm going to take time to deal with these this morning. First of all: you can know for sure. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that you can't know for sure. At the Council of Trent, it declared roundly, I quote: 'A believer's assurance of

the pardon of sins is a vain and ungodly confidence'. They call it the sin of presumption, to think that you can know that you're going to heaven one day. Protestantism has a school of thought called Arminianism, of which I am not a member I'm glad to say - that's not telling you what member I am of which camp! - but it teaches that the free will of man is more important in salvation than the sovereignty of God. In other words, the salvation of your soul rests more with yourself than it does with God. They generally believe that the most one can enjoy is the assurance of salvation at any given moment. Let me explain that: that means that you can only know now whether you're saved or not, you can't say 'I'll be saved in a year's time, or ten years time', that's presumption as well - you can only know by the way you're living your life at present, through the internal witness of the Holy Spirit, a life lived apart from voluntary sin, that you're saved here and now. So the responsibility of your salvation in Arminianism is with you, and with what you're doing now.

Now we ask the question this morning: what is the truth? The church of Rome says you can't know, Arminianism in Protestantism says you can only know for the moment whether you're saved or not, you can't know in the end. What is the truth? Well, a very casual examination of the Bible shows that assurance of salvation can be known - you can know for sure! The assurance of salvation is both an objective and a subjective assurance. Now what am I talking about? I want to explain all this as I go along. To be objective means it's external from you, it's something that is literal, that can be looked to, that can give you the assurance of your salvation - and we'll look at what that is. Then the subjective assurance is a personal internal thing, where you have a conviction that you're saved. Now one is more important - or I should say, not more important, but comes before the other in the matter of assurance of salvation - but assurance is widely taught throughout the whole Scriptures but especially, of course, in the New Testament.

Paul plainly teaches in the book of Romans, if you turn to chapter 8 for a moment, that the Spirit of adoption, God's Holy Spirit adopts us and produces the assurance of sonship in our hearts. Romans 8 and verse 15: 'For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ'. The Spirit of God is within us crying, because we are adopted as sons, Abba, Father to our Father God. You find that in Galatians 4 and verse 6 as well - and that, if you like, is partly a subjective assurance of salvation. God's Spirit witnesses with your spirit that you're a child of God. But that is upon the virtue of the purpose and work of God through Jesus Christ, look at Romans 8 till I show you this - if you look at verses 29 to 30 you see that election is mentioned, God calling us is mentioned, justification is mentioned and glorification. So whatever this sense of God's Spirit witnessing with our spirit in our hearts is, this subjective experience, it is based on something that is external from us, something objective - what is it? That God, before the world began, called you and elected you. He chose you in Christ before the foundation of the world, and upon that choosing He called you in this life, He justified you because of what Jesus did on the cross and through His resurrection, and one-day He's going to glorify you when you enter into eternity.

You see it in these verses, just so that you know I'm not making it up, verse 29 of chapter 8: 'For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified'. So it's clear, the objective purpose of God was to save you, and through Christ He has done that; and then we get a witness in our spirit at salvation and after, that we belong to God, we are adopted as sons. Paul goes on to say in verses 38 to 39 that he is convinced that nothing can separate the believer in that relationship. Look at it: 'I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord'.

So he's saying that the Christian can possess full certainty that God has saved them, upon the authority of what Christ did at Calvary, but way back even before when He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world - that's objective, external to us. But internal and personal to us, after our conversion, is the witness of the Spirit with us that we are God's - and we cry from our hearts 'Abba, Father'. He goes on to say in 2 Timothy chapter 1 that we can be sure that God will bring our salvation to completion - 2 Timothy chapter 1 and verse 12, he says: 'I am not ashamed: for I know', we sang it, 'whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day'. He says the same in Philippians and chapter 1 verse 6: 'Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ'.

So he says in Colossians again that the Christian ought to possess an assured understanding. In 1 Thessalonians he said we ought to have a full conviction that we are saved. Now John in his writings, particularly the epistle of 1 John, likewise writes that the basis of the scriptural testimony to Christ's saving work in the believer is the only certainty that we possess eternal life - in other words, that the Lord Jesus Christ died for us. He says that in 1 John 5:24, the Lord Jesus quoted; he said it in our reading this morning, 1 John 5:13: 'These things are written', the word of God, even his gospel writings were written, 'that we might know that we have eternal life'. Moreover, one who is saved has the fruit of the Spirit in his life, we see that from 1 John as well, the testimony of the Holy Spirit in his heart - we'll not take time to look at the verses - and this is an added evidence that we belong to the Lord, it gives us the assurance that we are saved.

The book of Hebrews, which I believe Paul wrote, concurs that the Christian can have the full assurance of hope and the full assurance of faith - so there's no doubt, I think, as far as I'm concerned, and I hope you too as you see these Scriptures today, that you can know for sure that you're saved. The primary basis for the assurance of salvation is the word of God. God has said that He has chosen us in Christ, Jesus died for us on Calvary, rose again for our justification; we have believed on Him in this life, and if we have truly believed, we can be sure upon the authority of what God's word says that we are saved. The secondary evidence of that that we find in the Scriptures is the internal convictions, the outward manifestations of the Spirit from our life when we have believed in the word of God.

So let me illustrate it to you like this: God's word is like the anchor that holds our vessel secure. It is what is saving us, but the sailor doesn't look to the anchor - the sailor looks to the land to see if the land is moving, to see whether he's static or not. Although we're not saved by internal convictions, or the good works that are in our life - that is very clear, we're saved by the death and resurrection of the Lord, and faith alone in that - the evidence for our own heart's conviction first is God's word, but secondly what gives us assurance is not seeing the land move, and knowing that our lives are in accordance with what God's word says.

We'll look at that in a moment, but let me say categorically first of all: the emphasis in our preaching and in our lives must be upon God's ability to keep us, not on our ability to keep whatever God has given to us. I don't know, sometimes, what a Calvinist is. People talk about these terms and I don't like them, but the Bible teaches us this - and if this is what a Calvinist is, I must be one, don't quote me on that - but if this means that God is holding me rather than me holding God, that's what I believe in. For it is God's own word that secures my soul, it's God's own work on the cross and the resurrection that makes me saved, and it's God's own worth, His own nature - that He does not lie, and He will not turn His back on me - that keeps me.

Samuel Rutherford said: 'Our hope is not hung upon such an untwisted thread as, "I imagine so," or "It is likely," but the cable, the strong rope of our fastened anchor, is the oath and promise of Him who is eternal verity. Our salvation is fastened with God's own hand, and with Christ's own strength, to the strong stake of God's unchanging word'. Alan Redpath tells a story about the wee boy who was kept awake at night because the devil was causing him to doubt and tempting him. He says he opened his Bible at 1 John 5 verse 13, that we read together this morning, 'That ye might know that ye have eternal life', and he shoved it under the bed

and said: 'There it is, you read it yourself!'. That's it, isn't it? God's word has said it, you can know for sure - but secondly, you ought to know for sure.

Why? Well, to be sure of your eternity. If you're not sure of your eternity, you ought to make sure. That's what 2 Peter 1 verse 10 says: 'Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure'. People say: 'Oh you talk about election, you talk about predestination, that means 'Que Sera, Sera' - everything that will be will be' - but why is Peter saying 'make your calling and election sure'? There's a part that you can do about it in knowing that you're saved, by the way that you live and by what you trust in. In 2 Corinthians chapter 13 you have the same sentiment in verse 5, he said: 'Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves'.

Now can I say that here is one of the great mistakes that many evangelists, Sunday School teachers and parents make when they deal with people coming for salvation. On occasions they should be making people doubt their salvation, rather what they do is they make them sure of their salvation by showing them the Scriptures, God's word, when they do not have the internal evidence from God's Spirit in their heart. What am I talking about? Well, many people are told, and I feel I have been guilty of this in the past, 'God's word says, 'If you call upon the name of the Lord you shall be saved' - and you called upon the name of the Lord, didn't you?', 'Yes', 'Well, then you're saved'. Now that is logic, and it is a particular type of logic called a syllogism, and it means this: that you make two true statements, but you come up with a conclusion that is not necessarily true. Let me give you an illustration like this, this is a syllogism: all trains are long, some buses are long, therefore some buses are trains. Did you hear that? All trains are long, some buses are long, therefore some buses are trains. Well, that's plainly error, isn't it? What people do is, they say: 'Jesus says, 'Call upon me and you shall be saved', you called, therefore you're saved' - that is a syllogism, why? Because no one knows, only God, and perhaps that person, if they really called upon God. Have we missed that? No man can give another man the assurance of his salvation, only the word of God and God's Spirit in his heart can do that. I wonder how many people have been sent to hell because a preacher has said: 'You're saved because you called on God'.

Now I hope we've cleared that one up. The puritans would have said: 'We are to be tested and then trusted'. Our salvation should be tested and then trusted. You don't know if you're truly saved until you're tested. The truth of assurance is the award of tested and proven faith that the Holy Spirit gives, not a human counsellor can give. In case you think this is some hyper-Calvinism - that I detest, I hasten to add - R.A. Torrey said this: 'Many workers, in dealing with others, make the great mistake of trying to press them to the point of saying they know they are saved before it is clear that they are saved'. You ought to know, you ought to know you're saved because there's many people that have faith, but their faith has never been tested and they mightn't be saved at all.

Let me give you, quickly, a number of other reasons why you ought to know: because it brings love and praise for God out of your heart to the Father for your salvation - if you haven't assurance you can't give that. If you haven't assurance, you haven't the joy that you need to take you through life's turmoils and difficulties, and mundane duties. If you don't have assurance, you'll not be as zealous in the work of the Lord, and in obedience towards Him as you ought to. Assurance gives you victory over temptation. Assurance makes you content even though you have little in this world, and even though perhaps you're going through very adverse suffering. Assurance pacifies a troubled conscience - even when you feel guilty, when you know you're saved, you know that Christ's blood has cleansed you and made you righteous and justified before God. Finally, and by no means least, it takes away the fear of death. To have assurance is to know that it's to be absent from the body, and present with the Lord.

So, it's the most important thing to know for your eternity, and for your present, and for your service and life as a Christian. During the first part of the construction of the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco that some

of you have seen and driven over, there was no safety devices used and 23 men fell to their deaths. In the last part of the project a large net that cost \$100,000 was employed, and at least 10 men fell - all were saved. Here's the interesting insight: 25% extra work was accomplished by those men because they were working in an environment that was safe. You need to know it.

Latimer, who was burned at the stake, said to Ridley who was burned at the stake: 'When I live in a settled and steadfast assurance about the state of my soul, methinks I'm as bold as a lion, I can laugh at all trouble, no affliction daunts me; but when I am eclipsed by my comforts, I am of so fearful a spirit that I could run into a very mouse hole' - and they could not burn at the stake for Christ if they didn't have their assurance of salvation! You can have it, you ought to have it for your eternity and for your now.

But thirdly, let me leave you in the time that is left with how to know for sure. Well, it's obvious, as we've seen already, that you're not to trust in your feelings. Those can be an evidence that you're saved of God and bring assurance into your life, but they're not the foundation and the basis of our faith. The foundation and basis of our faith is what the word of God says: that Christ died for our sins, and rose again according to the Scriptures. We need to remember that. A captain in a liner never anchors his ship by fastening the anchor inside the boat, he always throws the anchor outside the boat. It is that objective truth that our salvation is rooted and grounded upon. How do I know I'm saved? First and foremost, because God has said that you're saved if you believe and trust in Him. Now the authenticity of that is another thing, but just like you say: 'How do I know I'm married?', well, the minister said so - you know you're saved because God said so, if you're truly trusting.

'How do I know I'm truly trusting?', you say. Well, the basis and primary reason for our assurance is the word of God - that objective evidence that we are saved. But what outflows from that is: if we are truly saved, there will be subjective evidence in our life. Now it mightn't come right away, but what outflows from that is: if we are truly saved, there will be subjective evidence in our life - now it mightn't come right away, and it mightn't come all of a sudden altogether, but it must be there. Jonathan Edwards, that great theologian of revival, probably the greatest theologian that America has ever known, said: 'As the principle evidence of life is motion, so the principle evidence of saving grace is holy practice'. We've got away from this, and the teaching, if there's any teaching in the book of 1 John it is this: this is how you will know a Christian, this is how you will know you're saved - 1 John 5:13, 'These things are written unto you that you might know'.

Now once we move on from the fact that God says if you believe through faith alone in Him you're saved, how do we know that my saving faith has been an effectual one, that I'm really saved? John gives us - and here are the tests, these are taken from a series of three sermons that a man preached, and I took them out, nothing else, and put them down as eleven tests of how we can have the assurance of our salvation - and they're all found in 1 John. Note them down if you wish, and we're going to take time to go through them very quickly.

Here's the first test: are you enjoying fellowship with Christ in God? First John chapter 1 and verse 3: 'That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ'. Are you enjoying fellowship with Christ and with God? I'm not saying that if you're not presently having fellowship with Him, that you're not saved, but I am saying that you can't have any assurance of salvation if you're not doing this. One sign that you're truly saved is a desire to be with God, to commune with God - I know you don't do it as much as you should, I don't either, but the desire ought to be there.

Secondly: are you sensitive to sin in your life? First John chapter 1 and verse 5: 'This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in

the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin'. Are you sensitive to sin in your life? Or can you go on living a life of sin, and it doesn't matter to you, and yet you call yourself a Christian? That is an utter impossibility - you're not a Christian, and certainly if you're living in present sin you will never have the assurance of your salvation.

Here's the third question: are you obedient to God's word? That is the pattern of your life: obedience. Chapter 2 and verse 3: 'Hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him'. How can you tell a true Christian? 'Oh, he shows you a time and a date when he asked the Lord into his heart, when he prayed 'Just as I am', or where he stuck his hand up' - that is nonsense. A true Christian is to be known externally by others through obedience. You can have obedience and not be saved, but John says if you are saved you'll have obedience. John Newton who wrote that hymn 'Amazing Grace' that we were singing at the beginning of our meeting, said: 'If David had come to me in his adultery, and talked to me of his assurance, I should have despised his speech'. What about that? The puritan Thomas Brooks said: 'Assurance is the daughter of holiness'. Sinclair Ferguson said: 'High degrees of true assurance cannot be enjoyed by those who persist in low levels of obedience'. High degrees of assurance are not enjoyed by those who live at low levels of obedience! Now I'm not saying that if you're not obedient at this present time, you're not saved; but what I am saying is this: sin in the life of a believer cancels out assurance. If you're looking for assurance but you're sinning, you're not going to get it - neither should you have it.

Four: do you reject the world? That is the world system, everything that is in the world, do you reject it? Verse 15 of chapter 2: 'Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever'. Do you love the world, Christian? Young person? The things of the world, the fads and fashions of the world, and you wonder why you don't feel saved - there's your answer!

Five: do you love Christ and eagerly wait for His return? Chapter 3 verses 1-3: 'Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us...', he talks about the change that will happen to us at the coming of the Lord, and in verse 3, 'Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure'. Are you waiting, are you watching? Are you living for now, and because you're living without eternity's values in view, you don't have an assurance of salvation in your heart?

Well, number six, coming out of number two: do you see a decreasing pattern of sin in your life? Is sin decreasing in your life? This is so important, because if we're saved there's meant to be a progression, and you can only have assurance of your salvation if there is a decreasing pattern of sin in your life. Verse 5 of chapter 3: 'ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin. Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him. Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous'. Now none of us are what we should be, none of us are what we ought to be, but at least if we're saved the only way you can have assurance that you are saved is if you are continually progressing, and there is a decreasing in your sin.

Number seven: do you love other Christians? Chapter 2 verse 9 tells us clearly, if you look back to it: 'He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now'. Is it a revelation to you that if you have malice or hate in your heart towards another brother or sister in Christ, you do not have the assurance of your salvation? Now that's staggering, but that's God's word. There are some of you in here and you've got that right now, and you'll sing like a good'n 'Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine' - not according to 1

John 2 verse 9. I'm not saying you're not saved, but I'm saying you can't hold within your heart the assurance of your salvation if you hate your brother in your heart.

Number eight: do you experience answered prayer? Chapter 3 and verse 22: 'Whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight'. The same is found in chapter 5 verse 14 - have you ever received an answered prayer in your life? There's nothing that assures you more of your salvation than when God does great things for you through answered prayer, you know He's listening.

Number nine: do you experience the ministry of the Holy Spirit in your life? First John 4 and verse 13: 'Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit'.

Number ten: can you discern between spiritual truth and error? He talks in chapter 4 verse 1, 2 and 3, how we know whether a spirit is of God or not - and that is a mark of a child of God, that you're able to discern what is truth, false Christianity and true Christianity, those that are truly saved and preaching a saving message, and those that are not.

And then eleventh, I finish with: have you been rejected for your faith somewhere along the way? Have you been rejected for your faith? Chapter 3 and verse 13: 'Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you'.

Can I go over these again? You can only know assurance of your salvation - how to know it? Here it is: are you enjoying fellowship with Christ in God? Are you sensitive to sin in your life? Are you obedient to God? Do you reject the world? Do you love Christ and eagerly wait for His return? Do you see a decreasing pattern of sin in your life? Do you love other Christians? Do you experience answered prayer? Do you experience the ministry of the Holy Spirit? Can you discern between spiritual truth and error? Have you been rejected for your faith? These things don't save you, these things show you that you're saved - and we've lost that! 'Call on the name of the Lord and you will be saved' - one verse, that's the basis, but the assurance comes in the life. As Jonathan Edwards has said: 'True salvation always produces an abiding change of nature in a true convert; therefore, wherever a confession of conversion is not accompanied by a holiness of life, it must be understood that the individual concerned is not a Christian'.

Does that bother you? It bothers me. It ought to bother you. I'm free to talk with any of you this morning who are concerned about your salvation and assurance of it. I have some booklets here: 'Pardon for Sin and Assurance of Peace with God'. You can take that with you - but settle the matter, you can be saved and just not have the assurance. You might have assurance, and you're not saved. You might have a profession and wonder why you don't have assurance, and it may be because you were never saved in the beginning. Well, I beg of you this morning: make sure. Young, middle-aged, old, it doesn't matter: if you have any doubt, why not sort the matter out this morning? But please don't go without being sure, oh dear, is there anything more important than that?

Lord, help us this morning. We've looked at the honesty of Thy truth, and may people honestly apply it to their lives - whoever they are, whatever they be. For in the end, on that last day when we stand before Thee, all that will matter then is that we are saved. We'll know it then but, oh, that we would know it now through Thy word and the testimony and witness of the Spirit in our life and from our life. Grant that to some souls today, we pray, thanking Thee for those that have it, in Jesus' name, Amen.

Back To Basics - Chapter 13

"Worship"

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Now if you care to turn to John chapter 4 again, we begin our study this morning in this 'Back to Basics' series, looking at the ABCs of the Christian life - things we ought to learn early on in our faith when we first are converted to Christ, and also things that we ought to be continually reminded of as we go through our lives, no matter how long our pilgrimage and testimony of Christ may be. It's good for us to remind ourselves of these things continually. We're looking this morning at the subject of 'Worship'. That may seem strange to include in such a series, but you will see hopefully this morning that it's far from strange, in fact it perhaps ought to be one of the first thing that we consider in such a study as 'Back to Basics'.

We're going to see this morning the answer to the question: what is it? What is worship? The answer to the question: why is it so important, if it is important at all? And how can we know how to do it? And of course, to do it correctly, that must mean to do it biblically. All these questions inevitably arise when we address this subject of 'Worship' - but what is it to worship God? If you take the word 'worship' in our English language, it tells us a tale of what worship is. When you consider that it is made up of two Anglo-Saxon words that really mean, put together 'worth-ship' - worth-ship, or 'worthiness'. Worship is bringing the praise due to something or someone who is worthy of it, who shows worthiness of praise and worship.

Now there are several Greek words in the New Testament that describe worship, but one is 'proskeneo', which means 'to kiss the hand' - it is the picture of the slave, perhaps, paying homage to his master. When he enters into the presence of his lord, this is an act, a mark of reverence and respect that also implies affection - to kiss his hand, to greet him in such a way. Now, if you're familiar at all with the Scriptures, you will know that worship is an overarching theme of all from Genesis to the book of Revelation. When God gave the ten commandments, in the first and second commandment - although they were prohibitions to worship one God, the true and living God, and not to bow down to any other idols - there is intrinsic, inferred within that, to worship the true and living God; that's why we ought not to bow down to idols. It is a call to worship, to worship the one true extant God, the God of heaven, the God of creation. As we go through the Old Testament we see that the book of Exodus, where the ten commandments are enshrined, has 27 chapters devoted to the construction of the tabernacle, which was the forerunner to the temple, which was a structure in which the people of God, Israel, worshipped God. Twenty-seven chapters are devoted to its construction and to the worship that would go on in it and around it.

When we move from Exodus to the next book, Leviticus, we see that it amounts basically to 27 chapters of liturgical manual as to how the priests should worship in that tabernacle. So 27 chapters of Exodus regarding the construction and the worship that would go on in the tabernacle, and in Leviticus 27 liturgical chapters on how to worship. Then we come to the book of Psalms - and we're excluding an awful lot of other writings in the Old Testament - but if you know anything about the Psalms, you will know that basically, to put it very bluntly, they are 150 chapters of the Jewish hymnal. It is the Old Testament hymnbook. The hymn books that we have been singing from this morning, well, the Psalms are God-breathed hymns given to the Old Testament, and I would say also the New Testament people, some of them at least, wherewith to worship the Lord.

Then we come to the New Testament and we find that the theme and the trend is exactly the same; that worship is given number one priority in the life of the child of God, and in the life and existence of the church of God. None less than in our reading, John 4, when the Lord Jesus spoke to this woman and said: 'The hour cometh', verse 23, 'and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him'. Right at the beginning in the Gospel ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, He is laying down this foundational principle that God desires worship above all else. The Old Testament has testified to that fact, when the Lord Jesus Christ comes in His earthly ministry on the scene, His message is the same - uncontradicted and in continuity: God desires worship.

You remember Matthew chapter 4, when the Lord Jesus was in the wilderness being tested of the devil, and the devil invited Him to bow down and worship him. The Lord Jesus said in chapter 4 and verse 10: 'It is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve'. Later on we find, when He encounters Mary and Martha in their home in Bethany, Martha is encumbered about much serving, and the Lord Jesus elaborates on this theme of worship, and He says in Luke 10 verse 41 and 42: 'Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her' - and, of course, Mary was at the feet of the Lord Jesus in worship and in wonder.

The Lord Jesus is saying not only is worship the greatest priority, and ought to be number one in the life of the believer and the church, but it is given ultimate priority even over service. We, as children of God, ought to be worshippers before workers, Jesus says. The King ought to come before the King's business. Of course we see this right throughout the epistles after the Gospels. There are numerous practical guidelines as to how the church of Jesus Christ ought to worship, and how that worship ought to be conducted decently and in order. So I think you see that the whole gamut of Scripture is agreed: the number one occupation of a child of God, for us as a Christian, and corporately the church of the Lord Jesus, is to worship. Genesis tells us that is why we've been born; the whole Old Testament and New Testament tell us that it is the greatest and highest function of the human soul; and we're told specifically through the gospel message that the new birth makes us able to worship the Lord as we ought, in spirit and in truth.

Worship is not a part of the Christian life, worship is the Christian life! So, I'm asking you as an individual, and the Iron Hall as an assembly: what place does worship occupy in your life today? How are you as a worshipper? A. W. Tozer, who was a prophetic voice in the church many years ago, and has spoken into many situations even in our present-day, though he being dead yet speaketh, said this on the subject of worship: 'I say that the greatest tragedy in the world today is that God has made man in His image, and made him to worship Him, made him to play the harp of worship before the face of God day and night; but he has failed God and dropped the harp - it lies voiceless at his feet'. He goes on to say: 'Worship acceptable to God is the missing crown jewel in evangelical Christianity'. That inspired him to write a book: 'Whatever Happened to Worship?'. Though worship, perhaps, might be in the church in the West today the most talked about subject, it has to be - I feel - the least experienced practice of the modern church: true worship.

We hear of 'worship leaders', 'worship bands', 'worship books', 'worship songs', 'worship albums', 'worship actions', even 'worship classes' - but we need to ask ourselves today in the light of God's word: are all of these things worship? Thomas Carlyle, that man of God, put a definition of worship like this: 'Worship is transcendent wonder'. When you're caught up with God to such an extent that you almost feel you're in His very presence: transcendent wonder at His attributes, His nature, His person. We find it in Isaiah 6: 'In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the LORD', Isaiah testified, 'high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple'. He heard the cherubim and seraphim cry: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, the whole earth is filled with His glory'. That is a picture of the worship that was due to God in His very temple, the course of heaven, and it is a picture of a high experience, a transcendent experience.

It would have to be said that the present trends in the church today are not of the 'holier than thou' type, but of the 'trendier than thou' type. I have to say it, that there is an attempt not to stretch for the highest point in worship in our churches, but to strike some low point that accommodates the most immature and carnal among us. When we look around, we see that programs in churches today are often geared to satisfying sight, sound and sense, rather than the spirit. You see, our society at large, secularly speaking, is a man-centred one - it has always been such. Particularly the 21st-century has become a pleasure-crazed society. As one author has put it, and it's the title of his book, we are 'Amusing Ourselves to Death'. This pleasure-centred, man-centred culture has influenced and infiltrated the church.

The ultimate question that faces us today is not only: 'What is true worship?', but we find the definition of true worship when we ask a further question - who is worship for? Who is worship for? Is worship to satisfy me, or is it to satisfy God? Now let me say, of course, that if it satisfies God it will certainly satisfy you - but what is our goal? Is our goal to be self-satisfied, or is our goal to bring praise and glory, and delight and blessing to the heart of God? It's not that our needs are unimportant, don't misunderstand what I'm saying today, but what it does mean is that our focus should not be on ourselves, and if our focus is continually God-ward, all our needs will be met as we are lost in wonder, love and praise of Him. But when we see worship services increasingly becoming more entertainment focused, when we hear worship songs increasingly using the words 'I', 'me', and 'mine', rather than 'Thou', 'Thee', and 'Thy' - what are we to conclude? When preaching becomes directed more to the topics of our felt needs, rather than textual exposition of what God has declared we need and we must have?

If this is where we have moved, in any shape or form, we've become more man-centred, it will cease to be worship - and eventually our doctrine and our practice will be corrupted. Our question at the end of worship services ought not to be: 'What did you think of the service?', our question ought to be in our own individual hearts, 'What did God think of the service?'. We need a reformation and a revival in true spiritual worship, in spirit and according to truth.

Now let's answer first of all what worship is and what worship is not. First of all: worship is God-centred. We've led up to that: it is God-centred. A missionary called Robert Kennedy on one occasion visited the Amazon, and he conversed with a Brazilian Indian who had recently come to faith in Christ, but he didn't know him. He asked him this question: 'What do you most like to do?'. Kennedy expected the answer: 'Hunting with bows and arrows', or 'canoeing', or something like that; but the Indian answered, 'Being occupied with God'. He said to the translator: 'Ask him again, something has perhaps been lost in translation', but the same answer came back, 'Being occupied with God'. That's a tremendous definition of what true worship is. Tozer put it like this: 'We are called as Christians to an everlasting contemplation and preoccupation with God. True worship seeks union with its beloved, and an active effort to close the gap between the heart and the God it adores' - preoccupied with God!

Now let me dissect this for a moment, because if you are preoccupied with God in your worship, you will be oblivious and unconscious to whom? To yourself! Geoffrey Thomas, that Welsh Baptist, put it like this: 'In true worship men have little thought of the means of worship, their thoughts are upon God. True worship is characterised by self-effacement, and is lacking in any self-consciousness'. When you get beyond the debate of what's right and what's wrong, to an extent, in the how of worship, and you get to the point of the Who of worship, that you're so taken up with God, preoccupied with Him, that you forget about yourself and perhaps even forget about those around you - caught up with God. It is God-centred.

Here secondly in our reading we find that it is in spirit and truth. Now what does it mean to worship in truth? Well, first of all, in truth regarding the object of our worship. Worship must be adoring contemplation of the true and the living God, as He has revealed Himself in the Lord Jesus Christ and in His Holy Word, Scripture. We ought not to worship anyone other than the God of the word, and how He has revealed Him in

the incarnate Word, the Lord Jesus. So the object of our worship must be true, that's why people worshipping false gods around our world, whether they be Allah or whoever, they are not worshipping the one true and living God because Allah is not the God of the Bible. Added to that is also the act of worship, we ought to worship God in our act according to truth. To worship God in truth is to worship God as He has commanded us to worship. He doesn't just tell us to worship Him, but He actually lays down for us specifically in the New Testament, how to worship Him. The better informed we are of the Scriptures - i.e. of the truth - the better able we will be to enter into worship.

One thing I would encourage you to do, if you want to learn how to worship God more in private and in public, is to saturate yourself with the word of God. Eat up passages like Genesis 1 or Psalm 139: 'Lord, thou hast searched me and known me'; Psalm 23 'The Lord is my shepherd'; John 7; John 17; Romans 1 through to 3; Revelation chapter 19 - passages that are saturated with praise and worship of God. When we fill ourselves with God's truth, it will overflow! I used to think at times that God was worshipped in some mystical type of vacuum, that you just sat and waited on God, and thought about and contemplated God in yourself, and somehow you would sense God round about you. God does not reveal Himself independent of His revelation, God has revealed Himself in His word, in the written word, in the incarnate Word. If you want to get to know God, if you want to know what He's like in order to worship Him, get into the word - for there you will worship Him in truth.

What does it mean to worship Him in spirit? Well, carnal men are content with the act of worship, like the Pharisees, the outward form of prayer, alms-giving and fasting - and yet they have no internal desire for communion with God. I'm talking about really knowing God. That is why the Lord Jesus called the Pharisees hypocrites: the outward form, but no inward reality. Stephen Charnock, the puritan, put it like this: 'Without the heart it is no worship, it is a stage-play, it is an acting a part without being that person really, it is a playing the hypocrite'. Another put it like this: 'To worship God in spirit is to worship Him from the inside out'. Has your worship this morning been just external? Has it been true worship, according to God's word? Both in the God that you're, in your spirit, coming to and prostrating yourself before; and in your act: is it truthful as you practise your worship? Is it in spirit? You could have everything truthful in the external, but not be worshipping God from the inside out. Our worship must be according to spirit and according to truth.

Now let's ask a second question: when do we worship? Someone has said: 'If you worship on Sunday, what do you do on Monday?' - that's a good question. But the question that precedes that, I would say, is: what do you even do on Sunday? Do you worship God even on the Lord's Day? The old story is told about the man who dreamed an angel escorted him to church, and there he saw the organist and the pianist playing vigorously, the choir singing and musicians playing their instruments with great gusto - but the man never heard a sound. He turned to his angelic escort, after seeing the congregation singing but hearing no sound, seeing the minister rise to speak but his speech muted as his lips moved - no volume at all. In amazement he said to the angel: 'What's the reason for this? What's the explanation of not hearing a thing?', and the angel just replied: 'Well, that's the way it sounds to us in heaven' - that's the way it sounds to us in heaven. 'You hear nothing because there is nothing to hear. These are people engaged in the form of worship, but their thoughts are on other things, their hearts are far away'.

I'm just asking the question of myself and of you today, as we consider worship: how do we sing these great hymns? Do we mouth them, perhaps because we've memorised them, but does our heart enter into the truths of them? How do we pray? How do I preach? How do you listen? Is it in a worshipful attitude? J.C. Ryle, that Bishop of Liverpool, put it like this: 'We must take our whole heart to the house of God, and worship and hear like those who listen to the reading of a will'. Sometimes we pay as much attention to the hymns and to the prayers as the little boy who thought the gospel refrain 'Gladly the cross I bear' was about a bear with cross-eyes, 'Gladly the cross-eyed bear'. The fact of the matter is, God's word says: 'I will sing with spirit, and I will sing with understanding also' - worship with understanding and with spirit. Do we do that?

I'm not talking about emotion now, and our emotions should enter into it surely, but that is not what spiritual worship is. Singing is not worship, shouting is not worship, but we can worship in our singing, we can worship in our shouting - worship is in the spirit.

A distinguished explorer on one occasion was sent for a couple of years into the jungle, and he met some savages in the upper Amazon, and he attempted one day to teach them a lesson. He took them on a surging march for two days at extraordinary speed through the jungle. All went well for about two days, and then on the third day he got up that morning and the natives were all sitting around on their haunches looking very solemn. The chief simply explained to the explorer: 'They're waiting for their souls to catch up with their bodies'. He took them so fast! They're waiting for their souls to catch up with their bodies! My question is: have our spirits caught up with our souls? Have our spirits caught up with our prayers, all our expressions of biblical worship, whatever they may be - have our spirits been in them?

An expressive woman once entered a liturgical service, that is those who read their service and worship out of a book, and as the minister preached and become so caught up with his message, she exclaimed: 'Praise the Lord!'. A fellow a few people down the pew leaned over and whispered: 'Excuse me, but we don't praise the Lord in the Lutheran church'. A man further down the pew said: 'Yes, we do, it's on page number 19'. Now we laugh at that, and we often criticise those who worship the Lord through liturgy - but have we become formal in our worship? We can have our unwritten liturgy that we rhyme off to God, and it's as far from worship as the deadest service in existence in Christendom! As Vance Havner put it: 'Some of our services start at 11 o'clock sharp, and end at 12 o'clock dull'.

Worship does not need to be dull to be deep. In fact, if we are worshipping God through the word, and through the spirit, it will be the most exciting, exhilarating experience that we will know upon the earth. It's not just public worship, it is private worship. If we don't worship God seven days of the week, it is arguable whether we worship Him one day of the week on a Sunday. Our public worship far from excuses us from our secret worship. Matthew Henry put it like this: 'Where we have a tent, God must have an altar; where we have a house, He must have a church in it'. Do you worship God in the morning? Going back to our first study on 'The Morning Watch' - do you worship God as a family? It doesn't matter how long or how short it is, do you come and acknowledge God? Do you make a tent, a tabernacle, a church in your home to the Lord?

The reason why it's so important is that worship alone, of all the activities of believers, will continue in heaven and will occupy the host in glory forever, and they will rest not day or night saying, 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of Hosts'. You'll not evangelise for all eternity, you'll not pray for all eternity, you'll not Bible study for all eternity, but you will worship forever in heaven! Tozer said, 'Any man or woman on this earth who is bored or turned off by worship, is not ready for heaven'. Are you ready for heaven?

Finally we answer the question: how do we worship? When do we worship? Not just on the Lord's day, but every day of our lives, even in our homes. But how do we worship? Well I've given you the obvious answer: it is God-centred and it's in spirit and truth, but let me give you five or six little pointers to help you in your worship. One: we ought to worship, according to the Scriptures at least, with reverence. One person has put it like this: 'Reverence is essential to worship'. Whilst we must never get to a point of worshipping God in formality, or in liturgy, at the same time I cannot understand the fad in evangelicalism today of how God can be worshipped casually. I think 'casualty' today in our modern age is going to be the greatest casualty to us as believers when it comes to worship. Reverence must be our attitude and the overarching theme of everything that we bring to God in our worship - why? Because Christ is in our midst. I ask you today: if the Lord Jesus in His risen glorified form walked through the doors this morning into our midst, bodily, actually, visually - what would you do? Christ is in our midst, He walks among us, the glowing lampstand of His churches, He treads our aisles, He sits beside us in the pew, He searches every heart looking for those who

worship Him truly in spirit and in truth. We see right throughout the Bible record that everyone who encountered this holy God, their experience was almost uniform: they fell at His feet as dead. They were trembling, quaking in terror before the Most High God! They were frightened, they were humbled, they disintegrated, they certainly were never bored, and they certainly were not casual in the presence of Almighty God - we must worship with reverence!

Secondly, we must worship with discipline. Worship doesn't just happen, though we can have instances of spontaneous worship, it is a daily discipline that needs to be formed in all our lives. That's why it's a private exercise, not just a public one. I could go into more detail in that, but get 'The Morning Watch' tape and listen to it, but it's something that we have to prepare. There ought to be preparation to worship, public worship - don't just roll out of your bed and come to church, at least have some time with the Lord! Even preparation in the pew, someone has said: 'If you want to talk, talk to God' - that's what we're here for. We have to discipline ourselves in our own home life, and as Spurgeon put it so well: 'We ought to wash our faces everyday with a bath of praise'.

Reverence, discipline, preparation - fourthly: expectancy. Sometimes worship is perceived as boring, tedious, burdensome, and I have to subscribe that sometimes that is the aura that it gives. We communicate at times that it ought to be boring and long-faced. Tozer put it like this in his great work: 'There is more healing joy in five minutes of worship than there is in five nights of revelry' - because worship renews the spirit, just like rest renews the body. If worship is worship, it will change us, it will revive us, it will quicken and renew us, and that's why when we come to worship privately and publicly, we ought to be expecting God to touch our lives, to change us!

Reverence, discipline, preparation, expectancy - and then almost finally, penultimately, maturity. You see, it's only when we begin to worship that we begin to grow. If you're not worshipping you can't be growing, because you become like what you adore and idolise. If you study God and truly worship Him, you'll be taken up in a holy ecstasy, but your worship will end with a holy obedience. You will become like the One that you adore. He who does not worship will never be holy - it's as simple as that.

Then finally, we are to worship with completeness, worship with completeness. 'Fill Thou my life, O Lord my God, in every part with praise'. Saint Augustine said, 'A Christian should be a hallelujah from head to toe'. It's not just about time, it's not about words, it's not just about spirit, it's about everything: 'I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your expected worship'.

Your attitude to God, especially as we come to Him in worship, is the true monitor of your spirituality. Did you hear that? Your attitude to God as you come to worship privately or publicly, is the true monitor of your spirituality. Worship is that which you give to your interest, worship is that which you give your highest enthusiasm to, and your devotion to, and I trust that it is given solely to God. As a tear magnifies your grief, as laughter magnifies your humour, as a smile magnifies your joy: worship magnifies God.

Can I ask you two questions as I finish: Will you all commit yourselves to the discipline of daily worship? Secondly: Will you put actual worship into your acts of worship?

'That I may love Thee too, O Lord,
Almighty as Thou art,
For Thou hast stooped to ask of me
The love of my poor heart'.

It is amazing to us, Lord, that You should receive worship from people as we. Lord, to bring each Lord's day, and through the week in our homes, from our hearts worship to Thee - may it be in spirit and in truth, may it be God-centred, may it be disciplined, may it be revered, expectant, prepared, complete. Whatever we do, whether we eat or drink, may we do it to the glory of God - and fill Thou our lives, O Lord our God, in every part with praise. Teach us to worship: for this reason You made us, for this reason You redeemed us. Help us as we seek to worship Thee. Amen.

Transcribed by: Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - April 2005
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Back To Basics - Chapter 14

"Warfare"

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We're considering this morning the subject of 'Warfare'. If you're a newcomer to us in the Iron Hall today, we've been going through these Lord's Day mornings a series entitled 'Back to Basics', looking at the ABC's of the Christian life - things that we need to learn early, and things that we need to continue to remember as we go through our Christian pilgrimage. We're looking this morning at 'Warfare', because the Christian life essentially is a battle, and the Christian essentially is a soldier in that battle. Paul said to Timothy in his second epistle: 'Endure hardness as a soldier of Jesus Christ'. We are soldiers, or at least we are meant to be soldiers in the army of the Lord.

Now warfare is not a very popular subject in our day and age, specifically in our society - and at present the unpopularity of the war in Iraq threatens to eject Labour from government and the Prime Minister from his seat. War is unpopular, and I think there seems to have developed a similar aversion to warfare in the church of Jesus Christ. An observer on the sidelines of the battlefield where the church is meant to be encamped in battle would be forgiven for thinking that the battle is won, or that the battle is over, or maybe that there isn't even a battle on at all. But the Scripture is very clear that there is a battle raging, and this is how the Bible describes the Christian experience, as being an experience of warfare. Sadly today the church seems to have sanitised itself. It has gone a long way to popularise its message; it no longer sees itself as an army but an institution; it has replaced the fight with fun; it has substituted entertainment for artillery; it has substituted comfort for the conflict. It would have to be said that those on the sidelines, the observers of our war, perhaps see us as clowns in a circus rather than gladiators in an amphitheatre fighting for the cause of God today in our world.

But however the focus of Christendom today has changed, the Bible has not changed. The Bible tells us that we still have an enemy. The Scriptures teach that we have a Commander in our headquarters of heaven. We as Christians are actually soldiers, fighting not for victory but in the victory of our King of Kings - and the Bible portion that we read today tells us that we also have an armour that we are told to put on. Now before we look at this Christian armour today I want to ask a very elementary question: have you got a fight on your hands? A personal question: have you got a fight on your hands? For some reason in this life, I don't care or want to know what it is in particular, but if you are Christian in the Christian battle with Christ as your Commander, one thing is certain: you will have a fight on your hands.

The sad fact is that many have retired from the battlefield. It's very easy to tell whether you've got a fight on your hands or not, or whether you're in the battle. There are few contrasts greater than that between war and peace, and you'll know if people, or principalities, or powers are fighting against you. Every Christian is a soldier, but it seems to me that there are at least three types of soldiers in the Christian army. First of all there is the coward, the one who runs away from battle. Then there is the casualty, the one who has been injured in battle. And then there is the conqueror, the one we all should aspire to be. Now, effectively speaking, Paul says that we are all conquerors through Him that loved us. Roman 8 tells us: 'Though we are killed all the day long, though we face manifold temptations and trials and tribulations, we are more than conquerors through Him that has loved us'. But though that may be the fact, the experience of many Christians is far from that of triumph. Many are, as the United States Army would put it, 'AWOL' - Absent WithOut Leave.

Cowardly, they have left the battlefield for one reason or another. Others are injured, they have taken a battering, a beating in the battle of some kind, and they're just ready to give up and to give in.

We're asking today from Ephesians 6: is there a rallying cry for battle-bruised and shellshocked Christian soldiers? For those who are in the battle, and feel that the Christian battle is overwhelming them, or the battle with this world and the system of it - is there a strategy for victory, a method of success, and if there is, what is it? Praise God, I have the privilege of announcing to you from God's word today: yes, there is a strategy for success, and Ephesians 6 is exactly what it is. But before we look at the individual pieces of armour, there's one thing that we need to learn right away before we start to put this armour on. First and foremost: we must know who our enemy is. Verses 11 and 12 outline for us the type of enemy that we have, the devil, the methods and wiles of the devil: 'We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places'. You will know that an Intelligence Corps is extremely important in the fighting of any war, you've got to have information about your enemy. Paul said: 'We ought not to be ignorant of his devices', his wiles - the word is 'methodias', it means his methods, his stratagems, his deceitful plans and ploys and plots. One of them that Paul outlined in 2 Corinthians 11 is to masquerade as an angel of light, even as a supposed minister of the gospel of Christ.

So it is very hard to observe the devil, to find him out, especially when the fact is that he dresses up as ministers of Christ on occasion. Verse 12 literally speaks of evil spirits, these principalities and powers, spiritual beings in the heavenly places. Many scholars, and I believe they're right, say that this is a hierarchy of disciplined chain of command, a bit like that which is reflected in the hierarchy of angelic beings. You've heard of cherubim and seraphim, and archangels and ordinary angels - well, this is a similar chain of command, only it's in the kingdom of darkness. Satan has all these emissaries all over the globe working his wiles, particularly in the life of the Christian soldier - that is what we are up against. He has had millennia of experience in tackling and overcoming the children of God.

Imagine studying mathematics for 100 years - I found it a chore studying it for about 14 years or so in school, I'm sure some of you are the same - but imagine studying it for 100 years. Imagine for 1000 years reading the theories of Einstein or Newton - well, Satan has had thousands upon thousands of years studying humanity in detail, looking at the human disciplines, how we are made up, how we work. His prime motive is to subvert our race through the study of how he can overcome us. We only see flesh and blood. We look around us at countries and nations, we see rulers, hostile world systems, kings and potentates and presidents, but what we don't see is what is behind it. We don't wrestle against these things, that's why a Christian's chief role is not to be in politics - although I don't rule it out - the fact of the matter is that Satan is whom we wrestle against, Satan and his spiritual emissaries.

Now you will know I hope, at least, that Satan is not omnipresent - he can't be everywhere at once. He is not omnipotent, that means he doesn't have all power. He is not all knowing and omniscient, so he has to have a network in order to find out things about us, in order to work his influence, darkly speaking, over this whole globe. He has that, verse 12, this is the way he effects change throughout our globe. He can't be everywhere at once, so he has these spiritual beings working his will. Luther faced it in the Reformation, and he wrote that great hymn: 'A mighty fortress is our God', and one of the verses goes like this:

For still our ancient foe
Doth seek to work us woe.
His craft and power are great,
And armed with cruel fate
On earth is not his equal'.

This is our enemy, second to none apart from God. Are you defeated by him? It would be easy to be such. Are you a coward who has run away from the battle? You find the devil too great, or what is expected of you as a Christian too strong, and you have run to the world like Demas who forsook Paul 'having loved this present world'. Maybe you're not a coward, but you're a casualty, you have been injured. You've taken Satan on face-to-face and come off the worst. Martin Luther once doubted the goodness of God, and he wrote these words: 'For more than a week I was close to the gates of death and hell' - have you ever felt like that? That God has forsaken you, that you're in dire trouble and darkness, you're in the thick of the battle, you're even contemplating running from the battle - well, you need to hear this message from God's word, here it is: 'Put on the whole armour of God, and then you will be able to stand'.

It strikes me that many do not even know that there's a battle on. The nature of this armour, I believe, shows us the type of battle that is raging. Look down at it. First of all I want you to see from verse 14 that it is a battle for the man. Verse 14 describes to us: 'Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth'. This is the belt of truth, commonly called. But what I believe this tells us is that Satan's battle is for the whole man. This belt was worn by a Roman soldier, and incidentally Paul was in prison as he writes this epistle looking at a representation, a physical personality with this armour on him. He sees around the Roman soldier's waist this belt. You see, a Roman soldier commonly wore a long flowing robe, and that was not conducive to battle. Therefore whenever the battle started to rage he would tuck up under his belt this robe in order to allow him to run and fight. If you like, the tucking up of the robe into the belt was the prelude for battle. When he tightened his belt, he was ready to fight - a bit like pulling your socks up in the football match or tightening your boots, you're ready to go.

Paul likens this belt to the belt of truth. This belt, according to the Roman soldier, girt up other pieces of the armour. The breastplate would be set in place, the sword would be fitted into this belt, and his robe would be tucked under it - so it had many uses. If you like, it bound together all of the armour for this Roman soldier. Paul's thought is, spiritually speaking, that there's no point in using any of the pieces of armour like the sword or the shield if your life is not bound up in the truth of God. In other words, if I could put it like this, there's no point in using God's truth, if it be the sword of the spirit, the word of God, there's no point holding it in your right hand if God's truth does not hold you.

Now it should be no revelation to you that Satan is interested in the whole man, body, soul and spirit. He wants to corrupt all of our nature. But it is the same with God: God is also interested in the whole man. Of course, you know that Satan's desire is to continually counterfeit God's methods. E.M. Bounds says in his great book 'Power through Prayer': 'Men are God's method. The church is looking for better methods, but God is looking for better men'. In the same way as God is looking for men to do His bidding, Satan also wants the whole man - he wants to influence and control the whole of our being, and that is why in this armour there is not an inch that is exposed, not an inch of the body that is open to attack except the back. That is a warning to all of us who are cowards.

The fact that this armour covers all of the man speaks especially, I think, in this piece of armour, the belt of truth, of how in the battle it is a Christian's testimony that is under attack. The devil is interested in undermining your testimony, he wants to loosen the belt of truth upon your life so that your whole armour and your whole soldiership should fall to pieces before his wiles.

Now the preferred channel of attack on the man begins with the mind. The battle is a battle for the whole man, but I want you to notice secondly in verse 17 that this is where he starts the battle: the mind - 'Take the helmet of salvation'. This was a bronze helmet with leather attachments, there were bands to protect the forehead and plates, bronze plates to protect the cheeks, and it extended protracted down the back of the neck to protect the vitals around our brain and so on and blood vessels. This was to protect the most important organ that any man has, because the deadliest wounds in battle would come toward the head. You see, a

soldier - you would have to be a good one mind you, but it is quite possible - is able to fight on with the loss of a limb. If he loses an arm, or perhaps loses a leg, but he cannot go on if he loses his head. It is the head that Satan attacks first. How Satan attacks the minds, not only of all humanity, but particularly the mind of believers!

Let me give you one example of this: Satan cannot take away your security in Christ. He cannot take away your identity in the Lord Jesus, but what he can do is he can take away your peace and assurance that accrues from salvation. That is why Paul says you need to put on your head, on your mind, the truths, the knowledge and the assurance of salvation's helmet. That's why Peter says: 'Gird up the loins of your mind', tighten that helmet upon you. That's why Paul says in 2 Corinthians that we are to take captive to the obedience of Jesus Christ all our thoughts. The long and the short of it is: if Satan gets into your mind, he'll take your head off. This is where the Christian battle, I believe, more than anything else, is won or lost: in the mind.

Paul tells us that Eve was deceived through the subtlety of Satan in her mind. He implored the Corinthians that they would not be deceived in the same way. Paul says in Philippians 4:8 that that is why we ought to think on good things. We ought to put good input into our computers in order to have good output coming out in our lives. But though Satan starts with the mind, the mind is the gate to the heart. Though this is a battle for the whole man, and he begins this battle in the mind, it is a battle that he takes - if he gets into the mind - to the heart. Satan's battle is a battle for the heart, because the heart is the vital organ and also around this area where the breastplate is found you have all the vital organs. Verse 14: 'Put on the breastplate of righteousness'. This breastplate is to protect our vitals from the fiery darts of the evil one, these deadly darts that are shot towards the heart.

Satan is the accuser of the brethren, the Scriptures tell us - in fact, that's what his name means 'to throw at', and he continually throws at believers - and if you are one you'll know exactly what I'm talking about - accusations. 'You're not worthy to be called a child of God! You did this, you did that', and he digs up all the dirt, brings out all the skeletons of the past in order to take away our security, our assurance in Christ and our victory. That's why Paul says: not only do we need for our minds the helmet of salvation, to know of assurance what we have and where we are in Christ, but we need this breastplate of Christ's righteousness to realise that it doesn't matter how much Satan throws at me, I stand not in my own righteousness but the righteousness of God in Christ. His breastplate of righteousness is an impregnable covering for the soul, the righteousness of God. Wasn't it Isaiah said that our own righteousnesses are as filthy rags - imagine what a breastplate of filthy rags would be like, it wouldn't serve any purpose at all! But praise God, through the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, His efficacious, propitiatory work on Calvary's cross, we have a breastplate that is not our own - 'I may my great accuser face, and tell him Thou hast died'.

Solomon said in Proverbs 4 to guard your heart: 'Keep thy heart, for out of it are the issues of life'. Christian, do you guard your head with the helmet of salvation? Do you guard your heart with the breastplate of righteousness? Many Christians are wrecked with restless fears and anxieties, troubles, distresses, and the majority of them come from the evil one himself, because he seeks to bind us! He seeks to make us useless in the battle! Maybe you're a coward, or maybe you're a casualty, and you don't realise that you've succumbed to the plan and the scheme of the evil one. Oh, that your mind and heart would be at peace today. Isaiah said: 'Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee'. Paul said: 'Be anxious for nothing, but in all things by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, make your requests known unto God; and the peace of God which passeth all understanding shall rule in your heart and mind through Christ Jesus'.

Well, fourthly: the battle is for the lost. The battle is for the whole man, the battle is for the head, the battle is for the heart, and the battle is for the lost. A Roman soldier wore sandals, but they weren't like Moses' sandals, they were like hobnailed boots that would give the Roman soldier a better footing; and they also

protected him when he was marching along, and perhaps stood in a trap, from getting trapped. They weren't like a flip-flop, they were firm shoes. They had two straps that would be wrapped three or four times around his lower leg. The two thoughts that Paul has in this image of this soldier's shoes is first of all with these hobnailed boots, nailed to the ground with spikes, we are to stand firm in the victory that Christ has given to us. We are not fighting for victory - and this is the key to winning the Christian battle - we are fighting from victory! Christ has accomplished victory on the cross, and through His glorious resurrection, and through His life within us. It's when we stand on that that we win! That's what the devil wants to push us off.

Then the second thought is the readiness to go into enemy territory, and invade with the gospel - this is the thought of the preparation of the gospel of peace. Our feet shod, verse 15, with the preparation of the gospel of peace - a Spanish translation puts it: 'Having your feet shod with a joyful readiness to propagate the gospel of peace'. The reason being, as Paul said in 2 Corinthians, there are millions across our globe that have been blinded by the god of this world, lest the light of the Gospel shines unto them and they believe.

So there is a battle on for lost souls, and we as Christian soldiers are to have a promptness and a readiness to help them. Paul said: 'Beautiful are the feet of them that take the good news, of them that publish peace'. 'Be always ready', Peter said, 'to give an answer to anyone who asks a reason for the hope that is within you'. It is easy to be dull to the condition of the lost in this world today, is it not? I wonder has Satan won the battle in your life and mine concerning our witness to the lost?

Now we must move on, because there are those who know they're in the battle - those first points: the battle for the man, the mind, the heart, and the lost are for those who perhaps doubt they're in a battle - but many of you're in the heat of it, and you know full well that there's a battle being fought, but you don't know how to fight it. These points are for you. These pieces of armour show us that this battle is to be a battle fought first of all by faith. It is a battle to be fought by faith, verse 16: 'Take, above all, the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked'. 'Above all', or 'in addition to', take the shield of faith. The thought here is, this is a very important piece of armour, but it covers all the other pieces of armour, it is literally put above them all in its nature. It will meet all the onslaughts of the evil one.

Now this shield that Paul is talking about is not the small shield that is commonly called in scripture 'the buckler', it is literally 'a door shield'. It's a great oblong shield of about two and a half feet by four feet, and he's telling us to take this great shield of an accomplished warrior, fully fitted soldier, this great shield of our faith - and it alone will be able to quench the fiery darts of the evil one. What a dangerous weapon in ancient warfare a fiery dart was. It was an arrow tipped with pitch and set alight, and the only thing that could extinguish it was this oblong door shield. It was made up of two layers of laminated wood glued together, and then covered with linen and tough leather hide, then it was bound top and bottom with iron, and there was an iron ornament on the front of it. Immediately these fiery darts penetrated it, they were naturally extinguished there and then. Paul is saying that the missiles of the evil one will only be extinguished by your faith.

I hope, perhaps, to take one whole week on the subject of faith in the life of a believer, but this will suffice at least for today: Satan has thousands of flames and darts that will set us alight, and we have to remember that even as Christians we are flammable. We have a sinful human nature, and there are many things that set us alight with lust, our tongue can be set alight from the very fires of hell. We can be set alight through covetousness, envy, strife, malice, hatred, all sorts of passions can well up in response to a dart from Satan. What Paul is saying is: if you want to overcome these things in your life, the only thing that will protect you is the shield of faith.

'What is this shield?', you might say. Well, I believe it's just God - I don't mean 'just' God in a bad sense, I mean it in the sense of that's all that is needed. Abraham was told: 'I am thy shield', the Lord said, 'and thy

exceeding great reward'. This shield of faith is simply faith in God, to believe Him rather than to believe the devil. 'Oh', you say, 'I would never believe the devil'. Do you know why so many believers are in the anxious predicaments of mind and heart that they are? It's because they listen to the devil's lies, rather than listening to God's truth - standing firm in the liberty wherewith Christ has set them free. Jesus said: 'Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free'. John said: 'Whosoever is born of God overcometh the world, and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith'.

'We rest on Thee, our Shield and our Defender,
We go not forth alone against the foe.
Strong in Thy strength, safe in Thy keeping tender'.

Faith is what will give you the victory, and faith in God. Secondly, it is a battle to be fought by the Bible, verse 17: 'Take', not just the helmet of salvation, but 'the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God'. It is a two-edged, cut and thrust sword that is spoken of here that was wielded by the heavily armoured legionary. It's distinct from a broad sword, it's more like a big dagger - but this is the sword of the Lord! This is like Goliath's sword, there is none like it, because this is God's word that has been inspired by His Spirit. This sword is to be used for our defence, it is to be used for our attack, and as a physical sword wears with use, this sword sharpens with use. It is the sword of God's word, or more literally of God's utterance, His spoken word. Most of you will be familiar with John chapter 1, where the word 'logos' is used in Greek for 'the word'. This is not the word in Greek that is used here, it's another word 'rema'. It speaks not of the living word or the written word, it actually speaks of the spoken word. What Paul is saying is, when the enemy comes in like a flood against you, what you ought to do is throw your Bible at him!

Is it the whole Bible? Well, if you get a temptation this afternoon and start reading the whole Bible to him you'll be there for a wee while! Harry Ironside says that the word of God is more like an armoury with many many daggers in it, different daggers, every one powerful, every one two-edged, but every one for a different circumstance and situation - and it takes wisdom and time in God's word to learn which dagger to use for which scenario. You see it in the Lord's life when He was tempted, from Deuteronomy three times: 'It is written, it is written, it is written...' - the appropriate verse for the temptation. At the end of it all, what do we read? 'The devil leaveth Him' - the power of the Bible in this battle.

Let me say that every piece of armour on this soldier speaks of God's word. Where do we get salvation? In the word of God - 'As a child', Timothy was told, 'you have learned salvation from the Holy Scriptures'. The breastplate of righteousness, we learn about righteousness and justification in the Scriptures. Truth is God's word, 'Thy word is truth'. Feet shod with the preparation of the gospel, where is the Gospel found? In the Bible. What are we to have faith in? We're to have faith in God's word. The sword of the Spirit - it all speaks of God's word, and God's word is Christ, Christ is the truth, Christ is our righteousness, Christ is our salvation, Christ is the word of God, Christ is our peace, Christ is our faith, Christ is everything! We get the battle through knowing God's word, and through knowing the word of God the Spirit will reveal Christ to us, and that is when we will have the victory.

I love Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress. There's a character in it called Valiant-for-Truth. He's fighting the devil, he's fighting with the sword of the Lord in his hand, and he says this: 'I fought till my sword did cleave to my hand, and then they were joined together as if a sword grew out of my arm. When the blood ran through my fingers, then I fought with most courage' - in other words, he had fought against sin and resisted unto blood. Fighting with the word of God! If you want to win this battle it's by faith, it's by the Bible, thirdly and finally it's by prayer. Look at verse 18: 'Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints'.

Prayer is, if you like, the energy for this battle. It's the blood flowing through the veins, it's a necessity for every soldier to be in constant communion with headquarters and his Captain and his Commander. It is the breath that the Christian soldier breathes. Without prayer, whoever the Christian is, they will be ineffective and helpless, because prayer brings God into the battle. It is prayer that brings the Almighty onto the field. 'Satan trembles when he sees the weakest saint upon his knees'. Bunyan called this weapon 'all prayer', it's prayer as a way of life - praying always, verse 18, on all occasions. It's a constant communion, it's varied prayer, all kinds of prayer it means. It's Spirit-led prayer, in the Spirit. It's prayer with a watchful disposition, it's a persistent determination, perseverance in prayer. It's a sanctified direction: for all the saints.

I'm finished, but my last word to you is Paul's word: 'Take, take this helmet! Take this breastplate! Take this belt! Take these shoes! Take the shield! Take the sword! Take all prayer!'. You don't need these things, you take them because they're already made with the finished work, and when you take them you will stand as the battle rages - for the battle doesn't belong to you, it belongs to the Lord.

Fainting soldier of the Lord
 Hear His sweet, inspiring word:
 I have conquered all thy foes,
 I have suffered all thy woes.
 Struggling soldier, trust in Me,
 I have overcome for Thee!

Fear not though thy foes be strong,
 Fear not though the strife be long:
 Trust thy glorious Captain's power,
 Watch with Him one little hour.
 Hear Him calling, 'Follow Me,
 I have overcome for thee".

Lord, if there are those who have been cowards in this battle, or casualties, we pray that You will make them more than conquerors as they this day put off the old filthy clothes of unrighteousness and put on the Lord Jesus Christ - Christ who is all in all to us. May every soldier in this place take up the armour and fight for, praise God and His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, we have won. Amen.

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Appendix A:

A note from Pastor Legge on 'The Morning Watch' (Chapter 1)

R. Kent Hughes writes that "Some years ago a young man approached the foreman of a logging crew and asked for a job. 'That depends', replied the foreman, 'Let's see you fell this tree'. The young man stepped forward and skilfully felled a great tree. Impressed, the foreman exclaimed, 'Start Monday!'. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday rolled by, and on Thursday afternoon the foreman approached the young man and said, 'You can pick up your pay check on the way out today'. Startled, he replied, 'I thought you paid on Friday'. 'Normally we do', answered the foreman, 'but we're letting you go today because you've fallen behind. Our daily felling charts show that you've dropped from first place on Monday to last on Wednesday'. 'But I'm a hard worker', the young man objected, 'I arrive first, leave last, and even have worked through my coffee breaks!'. The foreman, sensing the boy's integrity, thought for a minute and then asked, 'Have you been sharpening your axe?'. The young man replied, 'I've been working too hard to take the time'.

Recently I spoke on the necessity of the Morning Watch, meeting with God in the morning to sharpen our spiritual lives. It is the most Biblical of practices and the most Beneficial of practices, but practically how do you do it? Here are some helps that I have gleaned over the years:

Watchman Nee writes...

- a) To rise early, one needs to go to sleep early. Don't burn the candle on both ends.*
- b) Do not set too high a standard for rising early. Take a moderate course. To set too high a standard will produce a bad conscience and we need to maintain a conscience without offence. We do not advocate extremes.*
- c) It is inevitable that one will meet some difficulty in the first few days of early rising. He will love his bed and find it hard to climb out. It takes some time to establish a habit. In the beginning one has to force oneself to rise, but after a while he can get up early without effort. Human nerves are like the tree on the hilltop that bends in the direction of the wind. If it is blown always in one direction, it develops the habit of leaning in that direction. Suppose you have the habit of rising late. It is like having your nerve bent northward. But after you try to rise up early many times, your nerve will begin to turn its direction southward. Then, instead of it being difficult to get up early, you will find it hard to get up late, for you cannot sleep any longer! Until that habit is formed, though, ask God for grace...(and) try it many times; do it again and again. Daily learn to desert your bed and get up early until you have formed the habit of rising early to enjoy the grace of morning communion with God.*

Here is an experiment suggested by Gordon MacDonald in his book 'Ordering Your Private World'...

"After reading an article by a specialist on the subject of sleep, I began to experiment to find out how much sleep I needed. The writer suggested that one can determine his sleep requirements by setting his alarm for a certain hour and rising at that hour for three mornings in a row. Then the alarm should be set ten minutes earlier for the next three days. By so continuing in three-day increments, setting the alarm back ten minutes in each period, one will finally come to a natural fatigue point, where throughout the following day he does not feel properly rested. I tried it, found I could rise much earlier than I had thought, and it added almost two full hours - valuable hours - onto my day".

Why not try it and see how much of your best hours; your morning hours, you can give to the Lord?

Don't miss other booklets of sermons preached by Pastor David Legge, all available free of charge from



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