

SINS WE HAVE SANITIZED



*Sins that have become
acceptable in Christians' lives*

A series by David Legge

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Sins We Have Sanitized - Chapter 1

"Mental Sins"

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Thank you for coming this evening. It's good to have you with us, and gathered around God's Word. It's a privilege for me to be taking this part over the next number of weeks, and I would value your prayers for it, as the Lord has laid upon my heart a title for these next four studies: 'Sins We Have Sanitized' - and I'll explain that a little bit later. The one that I want to take up tonight is: 'Mental Sins'. Next Thursday night, God willing, we'll be looking at 'Verbal Sins'. The following Thursday we'll be looking at 'Spiritual', or we could call it 'Religious Sins'. Then on the final night, in the will of the Lord, we'll be looking at 'Cultural Sins' - and that might intrigue you a little bit, and it's intriguing me as well, so come along and see what the Lord has to say.

Now let me say, before I enter into anything tonight, that - and I don't want to be dramatic here - but God has led me to these messages. The message in particular tonight is one that I have suffered deeply for in the spiritual realm. Now, I'm not going to enter in any more than that, save to say that I believe that this is a message that the devil wants to hinder getting forth, the reason being that it will - I hope and trust - be a liberating message for many of the folk here tonight. It's something that is fundamental to our Christian lives, and yet it is something that most children of God are completely ignorant to - and that is the realm of the mind.

I want to do a general introduction first of all on this theme, 'Sins We Have Sanitized', and then we're going to look more specifically at a couple of verses, and then many verses throughout the scriptures. But we'll turn first of all to Psalm 139 verse 23: *"Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts"*. We'll turn then to Romans 12, please, you might want to put a marker in Psalm 139 - Romans 12 verse 1: *"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"*. Now this is the verse that I want to get at: *"And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God"*.

'Sins We Have Sanitized' - you may not know what the word 'sanitized' means, but if you were to look up any reliable dictionary you would find a definition something like this: it is to make more acceptable by the removing of that which is unpleasant or undesirable in features. To make more acceptable by removing unpleasant aspects or undesirable features - and I feel that this is what we have done, as Christians, regarding certain sins. Tonight we will look at the mental sins, then we'll look at verbal sins, we'll look at religious or spiritual sins and cultural sins. There are certain sins that we, as Christians, have grown to become acceptable with. They are in our lives, and we are comfortable with that.

Now there may be several reasons why that has happened, one major reason, I believe, is this: these sins we have sanitized are usually internal sins, rather than external. Now, of course, every sin originates internally. I think that could be proven if you went through them all. Some of those sins that originate in embryo internally, in the mind and in the heart, will manifest themselves externally eventually in our actions - yet there are a group of sins that begin internally and stay internal, and because of that they are less obvious. I believe that the

most dangerous sins are the internal sins. They are most dangerous because they exist undetected, often times, almost anonymous in nature because others cannot see them, and we could very easily grow comfortable with inhabiting them. You could call them 'secret sins'. You could say that they are undercover within our being, and yet these sins are dangerous - because often times they dominate believers' lives...yet externally our lives may appear to be blameless.

Everything might seem to be going well for us as Christians, and we come to all the meetings, and we look right, and we talk right, and our lives are not tainted with the 'big sins', as we call them, the obvious sins that we abhor as Christians and the Bible condemns. I think, to a large extent, the church has exacerbated this problem, because often the church focuses on the external life of the Christian, rather than the internal. Now that's for obvious reasons, of course, because it's easier to police our external lives, it's easier to spot when we're doing something externally wrong and when we're doing external things right. So it's easier to judge the external life of the believer, and the antithesis of that is: it's easier to rectify it. When you see something that's wrong externally in yourself or in another, it's easier to put it right.

Now there is one group of people in the New Testament that warns us against this great danger of concentrating on externals at the expense of internals, and that is the Pharisees. They were all correct in their externals, and yet those externals, the Lord Jesus said, were no real indication of spiritual health. You remember in Matthew 23:25 the Lord said: 'Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess'. Internally they were a mess, externally things were right - and the tragedy is that we, as believers, can do the same. We can learn to live with sins that we have sanitized. Worse, at times we can even attempt to legitimise these sins; or, even worse still, we learn to cherish them, love them, and they become the pet sins of our private worlds.

It was Billy Sunday, the great evangelist, who said: 'One reason why sin flourishes is that it is treated like a cream puff instead of a rattlesnake'. He was right, wasn't he? We don't realise the seriousness of sin, to the extent that we learn to live with it, and even legitimise it, and even cherish it. It's like having a beautiful meal, and maybe going into the lounge afterwards and there's still a bit of that steak, or whatever it was you were eating, stuck in your teeth - and with your tongue you hoke it out, and start to roll that little titbit over again and again, and you get the taste. You're tasting something, unknown to other people in the room, and you're savouring it - that's what internal sin is like. Yet there is a deadly element to it, because this secret sin is a secret killer, it's the cancer of the believer's soul. It's deadly for individual fellowship with God, and spiritual growth.

Psalm 66:18 tells us: 'If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me'. First John 1 verse 6: 'If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth'. It's deadly to us individually as Christians, but corporately it has an adverse effect on the church of Jesus Christ locally and universally. Achan's sin, you remember in the Old Testament, of stealing the treasure and hiding it and Babylonish garments - it affected the whole congregation, and it estranged God's people from the presence of God and the blessing of God. Now this is what we are saying now: our inner worlds, as Christians, can be so removed from what we claim to be, what we should be, what we could be, that perhaps the enemy has deceived us into actually thinking that our inner lives are normal! We have come to sanitize internal sins, and that is fatal - it is fatal.

Years ago in pastoral ministry I had a number of folk who were very ill with asbestosis. Now

asbestos was valued years ago as a great source of insulation, until they discovered that one speck of the stuff inhaled would be deadly. It could lie dormant for 40 or 50 years before manifesting any problems. I remember very vividly visiting a man called Fred in the congregation in the Iron Hall, and he had just been diagnosed that this was his problem for breathlessness and fluid on the lungs. I went up to visit him in the City Hospital, and I sat down and talked with him about how years ago now - 40 years ago - he was an electrician in the shipyard. He said to me: 'David, what we used to do as sparks was, we used to climb a ladder behind men that were called 'drillers'. They would drill through asbestos pipes, and we were going to do all the electrical stuff after them, after they drilled the holes. But as they were drilling the holes, we were standing behind them on the ladder, and the dust of the asbestos would just cover us'. There were men that worked with it, and they called them 'the snowmen', because from the top of their head to the tip of their toe they were covered in asbestos dust. When they had some spare time, which I'm told they used to have quite a bit of in the shipyard, they would have taken balls of the stuff and played snowball fights. There were some men that would have licked their finger - and it was held in barrels - and they would have licked their finger, poked their finger into the barrel, took it out, and then licked their finger again and ate the stuff! Of course, this was always the bravado that 'there's nothing to be afraid of' - well, I buried Fred a year later. My uncle died of it, my grandfather probably had it when he died. In fact, I'm led to believe that anyone who worked in the shipyard, even if it didn't manifest itself, had it in one form or another. Now all of science and industry know the dangers, but it's too late for those that are dead, and there's no hope of cure for the living who harbour it - they don't know how to be any different.

That's like many a Christian, now we're talking about Christians tonight - they realise the dangers of these in sins, but they don't know how to change, they don't know how to be any different, so they've learned to live with it - and maybe even come to justify it, and just say: 'Well, that's the way I am. I'm a bit of a worrier. I'm melancholic, that's my personality, my nature', or, 'I'm a bit of a talker, I'm a chatterbox. So, verbal sins, that's just my personality'. Now let me say very categorically, and I'll labour this later on, it has got nothing to do with your personality! It's got nothing to do with your disposition! If we're talking about sin, and that's what we are talking about tonight, sin is sin is sin! Christ died to free you from sin, and it is your right to be free of it - externally or internally!

Now, perhaps I would go as far as to say: the greatest of internal sins is in the area of the mind, mental sins - that's what we're dealing with tonight. If you look at Psalm 139, you will see that that seems to be indicated in what David is saying at least, verse 23: 'Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts'. He's asking God to know his thoughts, I think, because he didn't know them himself! We know from Jeremiah 17 and verse 9 that the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, who can know it? The heart is synonymous there, in a sense, with the mind. We don't know our own minds! So David is coming and crying to God: 'O, that I would know my mind, my thoughts, they're so elusive at times, unpredictable - in fact, they're an open cesspit of vileness and iniquity!'. Is that the way you feel about your mind? God has been really speaking to me and convicting me, because that's the way my mind is at times.

Now, when we come to Romans 12, into the New Testament era, and verse 2 we see that Paul is exhorting believers to be renewed, not conformed to this world, but transformed by the renewing of their mind. So we can't know our thoughts, they're so unpredictable and elusive; and yet, when we come into the New Testament, something has happened whereby we can renew our minds. Now, look at verse 1 first of all. It has to be said that, whilst Paul exhorts believers by the mercies of God to present their bodies a living sacrifice, most

believers don't even get to that point. They are saved and stuck - is that you? You'll never have victory in the Christian life if you've never completely given yourself up to God as a living sacrifice. Yet there are few people who get to verse 1, but there are fewer people who ever get to verse 2, the renewed mind.

Do you have a renewed mind? Have I a renewed mind? Do I even know what a renewed mind is? This is a real challenge to me, as I have looked into this in great depth: do I even understand how I'm made up? Oh yes, we talk so much about God, and that's right - we should think more about God and Christ than ourselves - but we don't even understand how we are made up as human beings: body, soul and spirit; mind, intellect, emotion, volition. Do we understand what these things are, and the differences and the emphasis of Scripture regarding them? How can we ever learn to be whole, and know what it is to overcome, if we don't even understand what we're like? It's like trying to walk, and not knowing that you put one foot in front of the other! It's a challenge, isn't it? Is your mind renewed?

The New Testament - now listen carefully - teaches that it is possible to have new life and a new heart, without a new head. New life, a new heart, without a new head! Many possess new life, they are saved, they're born again - and yet they still carry around with them old heads. You might be confused about what I'm saying, well let me ask you a question: have you ever been utterly pure in your heart regarding motive or sincerity of something that you were going to do, but though your heart was right, in the right place we would say, your mind was all confused? Have you ever been like that? We're all like that at times. Let me say to you tonight - and we're going to touch on things here tonight that will be very sensitive, but I believe they are intrinsic and fundamental to you knowing victory in your inner life, particularly in the mind - listen carefully, if you know anything about the cross, you need to know this: Christ died for the whole man, the whole man, body, soul, spirit! Salvation is an eternal salvation, salvation for your past, but also for your present and your future - but let's not overlook the present! Now I'm asking you the question tonight, Christian, as God has seared it upon my heart: is your mind saved? Is your mind saved? Have you ever been asked that before? In Ephesians 6 and verse 17 Paul tells us to put on the armour of God, and he says this: 'Take the helmet of salvation' - salvation for the head, the mind!

Now we're going to look at two things tonight: first of all, the mind. We're going to look at the mind at creation, before regeneration, before salvation, and then after salvation. Then we're going to look secondly at the renewed mind, and how you can get it. Now, you listen carefully, because at this moment there might never have been a more important message for you, my friend. I feel in my spirit, and have done right throughout this day and this week, that this is a message that God wants to get not just to me, but someone else in this meeting who He wants to emancipate, He wants to deliver, He wants to free in the mind.

What was the mind like at creation? Well, Genesis tells us that man was created in the image of God, and God stood back on His great work of creation art, and He said: 'It's good'. God's mind was to make a mind in His own image that was perfect, and that was Adam's mind. His mind was to enjoy God and glorify God with his thoughts and his actions that derived therefrom. Now if you go right back to the beginning in the Garden, you will see that the fall happened - Satan fell from heaven - and Satan approached Eve, Satan's first instigated attack came to humankind through what avenue? The mind. It is exactly the same today, he hasn't changed his tactics one bit. Now notice that Eve was not attacked first of all in the heart, not her emotions but her head. Now here is a principal right at the very beginning of the book: the mind is the battleground where Satan contends against the truth - the mind!

If you think of the whole man as a castle, a fortress; and the will and the spirit, the will is what you act with, the spirit is what you relate to God with - that's what the devil wants to get his hands on. Evil spirits strive to capture our will so that we might act wrongly, and our spirit so that we will relate wrongly to God - but if evil spirits are going to capture this castle, they've got to come across an open field. The open field is where the battle is waged for the seizing of man's spirit and will, and that open field before man is his mind. If they're going to capture the castle of man's soul, they must win on the battlefield of the mind - because thoughts are what influence our actions, our will. Thoughts are what influence our relationship with God, that is our spirit. Satan knew at the very beginning of time, and he knows now, that if he can conquer a man's mind, he can conquer the man.

Our mind is the weakest link, and the first temptation to man instigated by Satan came to the mind - and what was the temptation? To take of the tree of what? Knowledge of good and evil! Again the mind is the battleground, and from thereafter every - I think you could prove this - every temptation that has ever come to man has been through the mind. Indeed, every communication that an evil spirit or a satanic influence has made with humankind has been through the organ of the thoughts. Now, please notice a little bit further - and this is going deeper, but it's important - Eve's heart was sinless! Eve's heart was sinless, and yet she received Satan's thoughts. He needed the mind first, before the heart. Now listen, believers, we're talking to ourselves here tonight, to the redeemed: your heart might be right, but that's not enough! God wants your head, and He wants new heads, saved heads!

That's at creation, but come with me now before regeneration. You know that Eve succumbed and Adam succumbed, and when they fell all humanity fell, and we have this depravity that is the ramification of it all. Now before we are saved there are two aspects to our mind that are very obvious. The first we'll call 'the old nature' - what do I mean? Well, I mean that old part of us that has a sin appetite, and wants to indulge in the things of this world - the flesh and the things of Satan. Now, to the Pharisees, who were so concerned about externals, the Lord Jesus said to them: 'Look, forget about externals, you haven't dealt with the internals! For out of the heart, out of the heart, out of that wicked, fallen, sinful nature that all of us have, evil thoughts proceed: murders, adulteries, fornications, theft, false witness, blasphemy'. We have a depraved heart, a nature. The Bible says that carnal, fleshy mind is at enmity with God. So if God's going to save our minds, God has to alter our minds. Now, to an extent, that happens at new birth when we are born again, because when you're saved - what do you do? You repent, and repentance in its original language simply means 'a change of mind'. You change your mind about Christ and God, and about your sin, and you turn to Him for salvation - but listen: the mistake that many make is that they think once they are saved, repentance ends. Yet repentance, a change of mind, is a daily thing - we're to daily take up our cross, we're to daily repent. There is a changing of the mind that is to go on and on and on.

Listen to what Paul says in Ephesians 4:22-23: 'Put off concerning the former conversation', or way of life, 'the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind'. He's talking to believers now, and he's saying: 'Put off your old mind, and be renewed in the spirit of your new mind'. Now listen: if you have an unrenewed mind as a Christian, that means your mind is still operating in old thought patterns that you had before you were saved. Did you hear that? Your mind is still operating in old thought patterns that you had before you were saved - and maybe you wonder from time to time why there is no victory in your Christian life. Have you ever considered that you haven't a renewed mind? Oh, you're saved, and your heart is right, but what about your head, your thought processes? The old nature is still there, and many a believer struggles because they don't realise that they still have this old nature - and if they feed it, it will rise up. The way we feed

it is through our thoughts.

But there's something else that most believers - even if they know that much - they ignore. Before regeneration, not only are our minds subject to the old nature, but our minds are subject to evil spirits. We must not underestimate this aspect. We've already seen in the book of Genesis that evil spirits established, at the very beginning, a deep relationship with the minds of mankind. It has gone on, he is still influencing the minds of unregenerate people. You only need to read 2 Corinthians 4:3-4: 'If the gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world' - that's Satan - 'hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them'. So the Bible says - whatever Christians today think - that Satan, it is Satan who blinds the minds of unconverted people.

He is blinding, we read also that he binds unbelievers and has a great influence on them. In Ephesians 2, listen carefully to these verses, Ephesians 2:2-3: 'Wherein in time past', Paul says to the Ephesians, 'ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air', that is Satan, 'the spirit', now watch the tenses, 'the spirit that now worketh', that now worketh, 'in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation', lifestyle, 'in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others'. Now that basically means that Satan and evil spirits are active, working in the lives of unbelievers - now we're not talking about possession. Possession is a reality, demon possession, but that's not what we're talking about. We're talking about the influence that evil spirits can have on the minds and lives of unbelievers. Timothy was told that in the latter days there will be lying, deceiving spirits - and I think you don't have to look too far to see evidence of this.

Turn with me to 2 Corinthians, please, and chapter 10, for here it is spelt out very clearly for us - 2 Corinthians 10 verses 3-5: 'For though we walk in the flesh', that means physically we live on this earth, 'we do not war after the flesh' - do you know we're in a war? '(For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal', fleshly, 'but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;') Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ'. Now what is this saying? It's saying that we are wrestling with authorities in the spiritual realm, demons and evil spirits that are imposing Satan's authority on people's minds by putting into their thoughts diabolical influences and impulses. They influence other people to rise up against the knowledge of God. Now that's what we're seeing all around us through philosophy, through science, through education, and even through theology. What Paul is saying is that everything that is against the knowledge of God has its origin with evil spirits in the minds of men.

Ephesians 6 comments on this, now I'm going to read it in the Amplified Version because I think it really bears this out. You can read it in your own Bible, and look at the emphasis here, or just listen: 'For we are not wrestling with flesh and blood', the emphasis in the Amplified, '[contending only with physical opponents], but against the despots, against the powers, against [the master spirits who are] the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spirit forces of wickedness in the heavenly (supernatural) sphere'. Master spirits, world rulers, evil spirits! Now most of us haven't got a clue about any of that. Many Christians, it has to be said, deny it, don't even believe in it.

Before regeneration the unconverted man deals with his own nature in the mind and evil spirits in the mind - now let's come to after regeneration. Now it might surprise some of you

for me to say this, but though repentance occurs at new birth, often - and I think every time - the mind is not completely free. None of us are perfect - I hope you don't think that - at salvation, there's a lot of sanctifying to be done, although positionally we are sanctified in Christ - but we are not totally free in our minds from our old nature, our old thought processes that we had when we weren't saved, and we are not totally free in the mind from the influence and the oppression of evil spirits - we're not! If we were, you wouldn't have verses like - turn with me to this - 2 Corinthians 11 verse 3. Now remember that this is a letter addressed to saints, God's people: 'But I fear', Paul says in verse 3, 'lest by any means', notice where he's going now, the very beginning again, 'as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds' - saved minds, at least positionally if not practically - 'your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ'.

Now this is serious stuff. Yes, Satan blinds unbelievers, but we have got to waken up to the fact that Satan deceives born-again believers! This is after regeneration, we can experience - and will experience if we are truly saved - the onslaught of the enemy in the mind. Let me say this: you'll experience his onslaught there more than anywhere else in your whole man - the mind. Now, this is where it must get personal: how is your mind? Our minds can be teeming with all sorts of uncontrollable thoughts as believers - is that your mind? Do you have uncontrollable thoughts? Do you know that God made us to control our thoughts? It is a lie of the devil to tell any man created in the image of God that he cannot control his thoughts, but maybe you have got beyond that: that you really honestly can't control your thoughts, you've lost all control of it and sovereignty of your mind? How is your mind? How many of us must put their hands up and say: 'I am wracked mentally by anxiety, by anxiousness, by thoughts of worry, unreasonable concern - paralysed by fear!'. Maybe it's thoughts of hatred, thoughts of even rage - incidentally, the Lord Jesus touched on all of those things in His Sermon on the Mount, including lust, thoughts of lust. If you think thoughts of lust, it's adultery - just like the act. If you think thoughts of hate, it's murder - just like the act.

Do you know something about the apostle Paul that I am very encouraged by? Romans chapter 7 - and we haven't got time to look at this - but Romans chapter 7 details how Paul, as a Jew, Pharisee of the Pharisees, Galatians talks about that, as touching the law, external law, blameless. In other words, you couldn't have pointed the finger at Paul and said: 'He did that, he said that, he broke that law'. Yet Paul, in Romans 7, says this: that his life was consumed with lust - that's what he said! You read it when you go home: covetousness and all manner of concupiscence, the Authorised Version says - that's just desire. This is Paul, now, we're talking about, and that was the old flesh, the fallen Adam in him. It affected his mind uncontrollably, the things he didn't want to do and didn't want to think, he found himself thinking and then doing. Is your mind controlled uncontrollably by lust? This is a real problem today, because there's a proliferation of filth everywhere - everywhere!

Without prejudice? We know all about that in our wee land, we'll maybe touch on it when we look at cultural sins. What about envy? Greed? Bitterness? How much bitterness is there in the minds of believers in Ulster in local churches? What about problems in your mind with how you think about God? Maybe you had a cruel father, a distant father, an abusing father, and you've a problem relating to your Heavenly Father? Maybe it's problems in your mind concerning yourself, thoughts about yourself or thoughts about your circumstances? Maybe you've condemning thoughts, compulsive behaviours, personal conflicts with other people, spiritual struggles or even despair in your life - and these thoughts overcome you at times, till you're dominated by them and they control your emotions and eventually are manifest in actions!

Now listen, believers tonight, and this is a message that has gone right through me like a fire! Be warned! Be warned! Guard your mind! What you allow into your mind has ramifications! We need to know this. Proverbs 23:7 says: 'For as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he'. Alfred Gibbs put it like this: 'You are not what you think you are, but what you think, you are'. In other words, the content of a man or a woman's mind is an index to their character. It doesn't matter what you're like on the outside, or what I'm like! The wisest man said: 'Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life'. You see, the mind - this is why the devil wants it, remember that battlefield before the great fortress of the will and the spirit - the mind is the spring from which all our behaviour flows. If you can control the source, you can control the stream that flows from it - and the devil wants our minds!

Our old flesh, if it gets hold of our minds, or our minds are not renewed, will control us too. Romans 8:5-6 says: 'For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally', fleshly, 'minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace'. In other words, what Paul is saying is: whatever the mind sets itself on is what that man will walk after. Are you getting it? Don't think that the things you think about don't matter because nobody sees! Here's a law - now there are some laws of the mind, and we haven't got time to go into them all tonight, but here's one, and please remember this: if you adopt a pattern of thought - if you adopt a pattern of thought - it will eventually manifest itself in your emotions and your behaviour, that's a law of God's word. If you adopt a thought pattern it will eventually manifest itself in your emotions or behaviour, if it's there unchecked.

So, you see how serious it is what we let into our minds - what could be more serious? Sow a thought, reap an act; sow an act, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny. Let me ask you this question, this is the question God is asking you tonight: how is your mind? How is your mind? Is your mind frenzied? Is your mind disturbed? Is your mind wrecked? Is your mind broken? Believer, I'm talking to you: it could be that you have an unrenewed mind, you're still working in the old thought patterns of an old nature - or it could be, and I believe it is for many believers, that your mind has been deceived by evil spirits. Now here's another law, and you'll not hear this too often, evil spirits are operating in the minds of believers - but they can only operate if we give them the opportunity of doing it by giving them ground. Did you hear that? God created man as the sovereign of his own mind, and even with the fall man still can have control over his thoughts. Now, admittedly, sometimes unconsciously he opens his mind to things that are harmful, and the devil gets a foothold. Sometimes he does it consciously by pushing open doorways to danger and dabbling in the things of the occult and other ungodly and wicked and more seemingly benign things than that. Yet the devil and evil spirits can only have an influence if we give them an opportunity.

You say: 'Well, that's okay, I've never done that'. Maybe I'm wrong in saying this, but I don't think there is anybody here tonight that has never done that. All of us have given the devil ground, all of us, at some time in our life. This is where it's serious, I'm asking you tonight: have you given the devil ground? You have a problem with your mind, don't you? Now come on, you've a problem with your mind - some of these things I have mentioned have touched right on the button for you. Can you think of the time when you gave the devil ground, or the times when you did? Listen to me: I have been wracked by impurity of mind, and I know exactly the times when I gave the devil the ground, I know exactly. What about you?

If you don't know anything about this, and the mind, and the spirits, and all this stuff - how will you ever have victory? Your cry should be, as my cry is: 'O, search me and try me, and

know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting'.

'Search all my thoughts, the secret springs,
The motives that control,
The chambers where polluted things
Hold empire o'er the soul'.

Is your cry tonight, saved and all that you are, maybe even given over to God as far as you'd thought you were: 'Lord, cleanse my mind'?

Let us deal finally with the renewed mind. You see, not only can a mind be free from the power of the flesh - and many believers still have fleshly minds, carnal minds - but the mind can be delivered from the power of darkness. But, you know, neither of those things are essentially a renewed mind - what am I talking about? Well, those are negative aspects - you don't think in the flesh any more, you don't think according to evil spirits any more - but a renewed mind is positive to God, it is a mind that is completely cooperating with the Holy Spirit of the Living God. Romans 12 verse 2, don't miss this: 'Be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove', there's always a purpose, 'that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God'. You're not in the good, and acceptable, perfect, will of God - and you know it because you're not living with a renewed mind! Sure you're not?

Now, here are the steps to the renewed mind, you listen very carefully - and if you've got pen and paper, you write it down, if you don't have paper write it on your hand - if you don't...I don't know...just try and get it into your brain, or get somebody to write it down for you, but don't miss this. Now, before I give you these steps, I've done an acrostic of them - A, B, C, D, so that you can try and remember them - but before we even look at them, listen carefully: you've got to recognize, you've got to face that your mind is not normal. I don't care who you are, it's not the way it was at creation, it can't be. Maybe you've been saved, but you still have an old thought pattern of the flesh, so you need a renewed mind. Or maybe, because of the things that you've opened up in your life to Satan and evil spirits, your mind is not even normal to you the way it used to be. Now that's important: can you remember - now this is what I'm getting at - can you remember a time when you didn't think the way you're thinking now? Can you? Can you remember a time when these things didn't plague you, when things were going well? Well, that's a sign that things are not right just now. You've got to get to that point before we go on any further - there's no use listening any more if you can't get to that point, and I've got to that point even this very week.

Now here is the A, the first thing you need to do for a renewed mind is to apply the power of the cross to your mind. Oh, we all know what it is to, 'Just as I am without one plea, but that Thy blood was shed for me', but we've got half a gospel, or even a third of a gospel. We believe God can save us from the past sins, and even save us from hell, but we don't believe God can save us from a depraved mind - and He can, and He will if we come to Calvary and realise, as Romans 6:11 says, 'We are dead to sin!' Now listen, this is a lesson that most Christians never get to: that when Christ died, my old nature died. I'm alive to God, dead to sin and alive to God!

You see, let me put it more specifically, you see your old thought patterns that control you and plague you? They have been put to death with Christ on His cross, they have been, they have been! There is no power any longer in them! Now the problem is: you're not reckoning

them as dead, effectively you're trying to breathe new life into a corpse! But they are dead, and the devil wants to lie to you and have you believe, 'O, they're alive, they are still alive and well, sure you know what wracked your mind and coursed through your thoughts this very day' - that is a lie of the devil, they died with Christ and were buried with Christ, and when He rose again from the dead He left them behind Him. You are free! You are! You don't need to get free, you are free! Maybe faith is the problem here: you're not reckoning it so, you're not believing what God has said, what God has done:

'By faith, for my cleansing I see Thy blood flow
Now wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow'.

By faith! Apply the power of the cross to your mind - I know you've applied it to your soul in a sense, and your eternity, and your sins, but have you ever applied it to your mind? That's what you need to do, that's the A. Second, B, believe the truth of God and not the lies of the devil. Believe the truth of God and not the lies of the devil! Jesus said: 'Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free' - that's what He said, if you have a problem with that, you go to Him, and you contradict Him. What that is simply saying is: you believe what God says. Now the devil will tell you - he is a liar from the beginning, he lied about God, he lied about the Garden in the mind, and he'll lie to you every day of your living life if you believe him - but you've got to believe God, not the lies of the devil. Can you imagine it's like every day to your mind there are two postmen come. One is the devil, and one is God's Holy Spirit. The devil has a parcel of lies, and the Holy Spirit has the Book of God. It's as simple as this now, if you're in Christ, it's: which parcel you're going to receive, and which you're going to refuse. Now, you see, the devil would even tell you: 'Ach, it's not as simple as that' - you listen now, you listen: it is as simple as believing God's word over the lies of the devil. You've got to choose the truth, you've got to choose it! That's why you've got a helmet of salvation, it's got to affect our minds - and the only offensive weapon we have in the armour of God is the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, the truth of God.

Are you believing what God says about you, are you? Or what the devil tells you? Or what other people say about you? Or what your past says about you? Or what God says about you? Do you know what would be a good exercise? Go through the whole of the New Testament and find out what you are in God and in Christ, and you just flow those scriptures over your mind and believe the truth. Here's the third thing, C - apply the power of the cross to your mind; two, believe the truth of God not the lies of the devil - three, control your mind. Control your mind! You say: 'I can't control my mind!' - well, listen, if you apply the power of the cross to your mind, and you believe God's word, you can control your mind. What I mean by controlling it is: taking authority over it! Why? Now listen, this is the truth: it's your mind! It doesn't belong to the devil, it's your mind! Remember: it's only with permission that anything harmful will come into your mind.

Now turn back please, this is important, to 2 Corinthians chapter 10. If you mark your Bible, mark these verses - 2 Corinthians 10 and verse 5 now. You study those verses in private, because those are phenomenal words: '[But we are to cast] down imaginations', there's the thoughts, that's what the devil works in, 'imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself', verse 5 of 2 Corinthians 10, 'that exalts itself against the knowledge of God', now mark, double, treble underline this, 'and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ'. 'Bringing into captivity', do you know what that means? Arrest the thoughts in your mind, and drag them - even if it's kicking and screaming - into the presence of Jesus Christ, into His light, whatever they are.

Now that means, practically, that when those things flood your mind - have you ever, by the way, had things come into your mind, just as a flash, and you think: 'Where did that come from?', and it appals you, even in your most holy moments, even blasphemous thoughts, perverted thoughts? They come from the devil, they come from the devil. But when those come, and even the thoughts from your own flesh, you arrest them! Say: 'You're not going there! By the authority of Jesus Christ and the power of the blood, I bring you into the presence of Jesus', and confess it to the Lord! Use the word of God, that dagger that you have, whatever one is most appropriate for that moment - but you have got power, don't believe the devil, you've got power over your mind! Arrest those thoughts, every thought that comes in, you can analyse it, and expose it, and dispose of it if it's not godly and it's not Christlike.

You say, 'Oh boy, that's a bit of a hassle. I've already enough trouble with my mind, without having to think about everything that comes into my mind'. Listen, we are in a war here, this is a war! This is the problem: we don't believe it's a war! These spirits are real, and our flesh is real, and if we're not going to live up to it, we're going to lose out in eternity. Control your mind. Fourthly and finally - one, apply the power of the cross to your mind; two, believe the truth of God not the lies of the devil; three, control your mind - four, dedicate your mind to truth. Dedicate your mind to truth! There's work to be done, you've got to be proactive in renewal.

Let me give you three ways this is practically done. One, how to dedicate your mind to truth, there is a negative aspect: do not allow your mind to be passive. Do you know what passive means? Lying back and letting things happen to you and to your mind, rather than you making things happen and being in control, and deciding what happens. Now it's obvious, as far as the old nature is concerned, that you should not feed your old nature in your mind. Now you've got to apply that as far as you can, we haven't got time to speak about that - but listen: your mind must never be blanked, never empty your mind! Churches are hosting yoga classes, people clearing their mind for the devil to come in, subliminal messaging tapes. My friend, you don't blank your mind, it becomes the prey to evil spirits. Don't have a lazy mind: daydreaming can be very dangerous, and I know that, because we can allow unchecked thoughts to flow through our mind. But wait till I tell you something: you can mindlessly digest hours of television, and do you know what you're doing? Do you know what I'm doing? I'm letting the thoughts of scriptwriters and producers and godless men enter my mind, and once they're in there I can't get those pictures out. Now, you can call it the 'devil's horns' if you like - and I watch TV, don't think I'm setting myself up above everybody else - but let me tell you something: the devil has used it, damnably, damnably, and we are ignorant of it!

Don't have a lazy mind, you've got to be ruthless! If this is mattering, and it ought to matter, do not allow your mind to be passive. Secondly: wash your mind with the word. Dedicate your mind to truth, wash your mind with the word. Read, study, meditate, memorise - do you read your Bible? Do you read your Bible? You haven't got a hope if you don't read your Bible! Thirdly: choose to think good thoughts. Choose to think good thoughts, and claim God's peace - it's yours, it's your blood right in Christ. Choose to think good thoughts.

Turn with me, and this is what I close with, to Philipians chapter 4 please, Philipians 4 verse 6: 'Be careful for nothing', or anxious for nothing, 'but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God' - is that what you long for tonight? - 'the peace of God which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are

pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things'.

What is the greatest commandment? 'Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind'. How's your mind? How's your mind? Is it saved? A.T. Pierson said of C.H. Spurgeon: 'Of all the mind he had, and all the chance God gave him, he made the most'. Of all the mind he had, and all the chance God gave him, he made the most. Can we bow our heads please? In Luke chapter 4 and verse 18 Jesus said, listen carefully now my dear friend, Jesus said: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor', now listen, 'he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised'. The Lord Jesus has given this message for you tonight, for you! He wants to set you free, what are you going to do? Oh, come to the cross and apply that power, believe God's word and not the devil's lies, take control of your mind and your life in the power of Christ, and determine to think good thoughts and claim God's peace.

Oh Lord Jesus, Lord Jesus, I don't think I have ever been as glad to get a message off my mind and off my chest - but, Lord, You're going to do something tonight in some poor soul, Christian, saved soul's mind that hasn't known what is going on in their heads until now. Lord, heal them and set the prisoner free, set us all free Lord, for Your glory. Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - January 2009
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Sins We Have Sanitized - Chapter 2

"Verbal Sins"

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Well, good evening to you all again, and thank you to our brother Bertie. It's a privilege to be with you again to bring God's word. I want you to turn with me to the book of James, please, for the reading of scripture - James chapter 3. Now you will remember that - well, I hope you remember anyway - that we have taken a title for these four Thursday nights I'm with you, and it is 'Sins We Have Sanitized'. We started off last Thursday night looking at 'Mental Sins', and we're not going to cover any of that ground again. Tonight we're looking at 'Verbal Sins', and in subsequent evenings - I'm not sure in which order - we'll be looking at 'Spiritual Sins' and 'Cultural Sins'.

But tonight we're looking at 'Verbal Sins', and you probably could have guessed the portion of Scripture that we would read from - James 3. Verse 1: *"My brethren, be not many masters", or teachers, "knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation. For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body. Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth. Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh",* and we'll end our reading at verse 12, and I'd ask you to keep a marker, please, in that portion of Scripture. We will be looking at other passages of Scripture tonight, but we want to concentrate on James in particular.

I did explain last Thursday night what our title means, 'Sins We Have Sanitized' - and to sanitize something is just to make it more acceptable. We highlighted this great fact that was in the church of Jesus Christ - but particularly within the personal lives of God's people, in the West at least - many sins have become accepted in their lives. We did also highlight the fact that these tend to be internal sins rather than external and, that being the case, they are more dangerous because they are harder to detect - they are hidden sins, less obvious. Yet we also noted that that matters very little to God, because secret sin on earth is open scandal in heaven. Sin is sin to God, irrespective of whether it is hidden or not.

Now we concentrated last week on the mind, and we did say that all sins starts, in embryo is conceived, in the mind. We're looking tonight at verbal sins, but verbal sins have a special relationship with the mind as well. If you consider it, our words are an expression of our thoughts. Our speech expresses what is in our minds, and at times also in our emotions, our feelings. We know this from the expressions we use in everyday language: 'Speak your mind',

we will say to a man or a woman; or 'Tell me what's in your heart'; or 'A penny for your thoughts'. All of those things express how our words communicate what is in our mind.

Now the Bible bears that out, for in John chapter 1 the Lord Jesus Christ is described as 'the Word', Greek 'Logos', 'of God'. We know from the whole of the revelation of Scripture that Jesus Christ, as He came into the world, was the express image and the brightness of God's glory. He was communicating the mind of Almighty God so that we can say, 'If you want to know what God is like, look at the Word of God, that is: the Lord Jesus Christ'. He was the Word, and He expressed the mind of God. So 'word' is the way that we communicate our thoughts. To take it a step further: word is also a way that we implant our thoughts in the minds of others.

I was always taught: 'Coughs and sneezes spread diseases', and words infect minds with thoughts. Words and expressions spread thoughts. So if we take what we do with our minds seriously, and what we let into our minds, we need to deal very seriously with words, because words are an expression of the mind. We need to take our speech seriously. Of course, our Lord Jesus taught this in Matthew 12:34, He said: 'Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh'.

Now here are a number of things I want you to note down concerning our speech. The Lord has just said, as I have quoted, that speech reveals what is in the heart. Speech reveals what is in the heart. Our words are like a barometer of our character. You only need to listen to a person for a wee while, talk to them, engage with them, to find out where they are spiritually. Now that might seem simplistic to some of you, but the fact of the matter is: scripture teaches that if a lie or a deception is expressed with the mouth, it is only because there is a lie or a deception in the heart. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.

Now, you see what we're saying right away - it's what we said last week: the heart is the heart of the problem. Not necessarily the things we do, but our heart problem is the intrinsic problem that we have in sinning and before God, and we need to have our hearts changed: we need to be born again. That's why, if you're here tonight and you're not saved, and you're trying to cleanse yourself from the outside in, it's never going to work because the problem is in your heart! You need to be cleansed from the inside out, God needs to give you a new heart, that's why you need to be born again!

Nevertheless, speech is a great problem, an inner problem that becomes externalised. It seems to have been a severe problem for the Christians that James was writing to. If you look in chapter 1:26, you see this where he says: 'If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth', controls, 'not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain' - that's serious, isn't it? If you can't control your tongue, your religion is empty, it's vacuous, it's meaningless. In chapter 4 verse 1, we see there was a lot of strife and fighting among these believers: 'From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?'. They were devouring one another with their words! Verse 11 of chapter 4 again: 'Speak not evil one of another' - they are obviously doing it, otherwise James wouldn't have needed to censure it. But the greatest portion that deals with the tongue is, of course, chapter 3 that we read together.

Now we're going to look at this verse by verse to glean what God's Spirit is saying to us concerning our speech. Verse 1 reads: 'My brethren, be not many masters', or 'let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation'. Now we've seen from the words of the Lord Jesus, 'Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks',

that speech reveals what's in the heart. Now the Lord is saying here in verse 1 that speech will be severely judged. Some people have a lust for the limelight, would you believe that? There are a lot of people that would love to get up into the pulpit and pontificate. Sometimes even when you are gifted of God, and you're young and green behind the ears - as I can remember not too long ago, maybe I still am! - it's the romance of preaching and doing God's work that captivates your heart, rather than the wrestling that is involved in it, and the great awesome responsibility of standing before men and women and representing God and delivering God's word! That's what we have here in verse 1: our speech will be severely judged! James is saying to a lot of people who like the sound of their own voice: 'Don't you be desiring to be a lot of teachers, because you'll be judged more severely than anyone else'.

The pulpit is not for those who like the sound of their own voice - and I have to confess to you that I shudder when I think of what I have said in the past from the pulpit, the true as well as the false. I shudder when I consider, at times, the way I said it - because I will be judged more severely than any of you that have never mounted a pulpit. I think it was a Quaker proverb that went like this: 'Of your unspoken words you are the master, of your spoken words the servant, and of your written words the slave'. Speech will be severely judged, whether you're a preacher or not, it will be judged!

We'll move into verse 2, there's something for everyone here: 'For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body'. Here's another principle: speech is a sign of self-control. Speech is a sign of whether or not you can control yourself. Whether or not you can control yourself, James says, hinges on whether or not you can control your tongue, your words. Now one of the fruit of the Spirit is expressed in one of these characteristics, which is: self-control - now that's not moderation, that is being able to control yourself. If you want to know if you have the fruit of the Spirit, specifically self-control, ask yourself: 'How do I control my words?'.

A loose tongue, James says, betrays a loose life. That's what he's talking about in verse 2: discipline, self-discipline - a person who speaks thoughtlessly and carelessly lives that way. Now we have a saying, and it's even preached, and I think I have preached it: actions speak louder than words. It's one you could marry very well with book of James, but it's not always true. Actions don't always speak louder than words. The fact of the matter is, we can be very deceptive in our outward appearance - we learned that from the Pharisees last week, and by the fact that these are hidden sins that we're speaking of specifically. Our actions can deceive, and yet there is a great test of our discipline in the words, the speech that we use. If you want to test - not anybody, you should be testing yourself, whether or not you have self-control or not - observe your conversation for about half an hour.

I remember years ago when tape recorders were all the rage, its CDs now, for a laugh sometimes on Sunday night at supper somebody would hide one, and press record, and then play it back after a while. Everybody was embarrassed at what they were talking about, and maybe the emptiness of their conversation - but you can know very quickly from talking with anyone for about 20 minutes to half an hour, whether or not they are self-controlled. When a person speaks they are known, this is the seriousness of our words! There is nothing that reveals a person more than their words. So speech is a sign of self-control, verse 2 says.

Move on to verse 3 through to verse 6, we'll not read them just yet, but together they tell us that speech should never ever be underestimated. Now he gives us illustrations for this, and he compares the tongue to three things. First of all, verse 3, 'Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body' - a horse's

bridle. Then verse 4, he compares the tongue to a ship's rudder that turns that ship wherever the pilot wishes. Then in verse 5, he compares the tongue to a small fire. Now take the first two, the bridle and the rudder: they need a master. Because - they are small, granted - they have a great influence, they need someone to control them, to discipline them. He's teaching us that the tongue needs to be mastered. Taking this fire illustration in verse 6, he tells us the reason why it must be mastered: because 'the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature', or as the margin says, 'the whole wheel of nature; and it is set on fire of hell'.

Now, what does that mean? Well, we saw last week that we all have been born with an old sinful nature. The tongue has the power, like a fire, to ignite those works of the flesh in our own sinful nature. For instance: temper, hate - they are of the flesh, they are of the wheel and course of nature, and they are set on fire by the tongue. Someone says something to you, and all of a sudden your heckles get up. Do you see it? Thinking of it more corporately, how many times has strife been stirred up in a church, in a community, in a country because of words that were spoken? Oh, we cannot underestimate words, James tells us.

Years ago in the Atlanta Journal there was this article, and it went like this - listen carefully, see if you can identify who is speaking: 'I am more deadly than the screaming shell of a howitzer' - a howitzer is a big American cannon. 'I win without killing. I tear down homes, break hearts, and wreck lives. I travel on the wings of the wind. No innocence is strong enough to intimidate me, no purity pure enough to daunt me. I have no regard for truth, no respect for justice, no mercy for the defenseless. My victims are as numerous as the sands of the sea and often as innocent. I never forget and seldom forgive. My name is Gossip'. Never underestimate, James says, the significance of our speech and what our tongues can do.

Now, are you getting a picture of the seriousness of this issue, verbal sins? Jesus says speech reveals what's in the heart. James says speech will be severely judged. James says again, speech is a sign of self-control - if you can't control your tongue, you can't control yourself. Again in verses 3 to 6, speech should never ever be underestimated.

There's something more that he reveals to us. Verses 7 and 8: 'Every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison'. Now listen carefully, this is the only answer for speech: speech must be crucified! Put to death! There is no remedy for it! It's like our old sinful flesh: you can't redeem the flesh, you can't save the flesh, it must be put to death - that's why the Lord Jesus Christ died, because we cannot overcome sin, so He had to put them to death that we might reckon them dead by faith, and be alive unto God through His eternal life in us. Are you experiencing that tonight? Even as a believer, my friend, you need to get to grips with this - and I feel this is one of the biggest obstacles to people getting victory in the Christian life, to maturity in their spiritual experience: they have never reckoned themselves to be dead with Christ. They are dead, it's a fact, as we saw last week: we are free from oppressive thoughts, we are free from the old man, we are free from the fire of the tongue - but many of us are not living in the experience of that, because we have never reckoned it so by faith.

You see what James is saying: this old tongue, it can't be tamed. It can't be tempered! You can't bite your tongue enough! It must die! Romans 6:11 says that we have died with Christ and we're alive to God. Now, my friend, just like last week we applied the power of the cross to our minds: you've got to apply the power of the cross to your tongues. Dead to the evil tongue, and alive to the praises and truth of God - is that your experience? There's no other

answer, no other answer. You've got to come to Calvary's cross, there's no other answer for sin - full stop - but Calvary's precious blood. Speech can only be crucified.

He goes on in verses 9 and 10: 'Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude', or likeness, 'of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be'. What a statement! These things ought not so to be! Speech, James is now saying, is often double-tongued, double-tongued. It shows you the wickedness of it: it's duplicitous, it's fork-tongued, literally two-faced - that's the way our tongues are! The tongue was never created to in the one breath praise God, and in the next breath curse man - and yet that is what our tongues do continually: curse a man who is made in the image of the God that we've just been praising!

He goes on with his illustrations in verse 11 to say: 'Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?'. He's saying that the nature of water reveals the source of the fountain it comes from. Verse 12: 'Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs?'. He's now furthering this illustration a wee bit more, and he's saying that the kind of fruit shows the type of a tree. So what he's saying is, now listen carefully, we're always talking about the fruit of our lives being our works - and I know that this book in James talks about that - but here in chapter 3 he's saying: our fruit is our words. Our fruit is our words.

What James is implying here is that if God has put His life in us - right? Here is the image he is using - and we have been ingrafted into the Vine, we have God's life flowing through our being, if there are living waters of God's Holy Spirit springing up in us, we should not be producing bad fruit, and we should not be sending forth bitter water - we'll produce the right fruit, godly fruit, godly words, and sweet water; praise unto God and not cursing of men. Well, how are your words? How are my words?

You know, there's a great deal of verbal sin in the lives of God's people, and I'm going to cover quite a number of them tonight in the time that we have left. The first two are those that I'm going to spend the most time on. The first of these verbal sins are untrue words, untrue words. Now we need to turn to Ephesians, please - and put that marker in James, we might need it - Ephesians 4 is another important passage to do with our speech, Ephesians 4. In Ephesians 4 and verse 25, Paul again writing to Christians says: 'Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another'. Paul is speaking about untrue words, there's to be no lying. We are to be true with our brothers and sisters in Christ, and indeed transparent with everyone on the face of the earth.

Now, when you think about it, that is spiritually logical. Almighty God - and I use that title of God advisedly - Almighty God cannot, cannot, lie; and He doesn't allow us to either. Now we must not dumb down lying. We do this continually, 'Oh, it was only a wee white lie', or 'They're only fibs'. The secretary tells somebody on the phoneline that the boss isn't in, and he's sitting in front of her. The child tells the rent man at the door, 'Oh, mummy and daddy aren't in', and they're up the stairs hiding behind the bed. We don't consider these things to be lies, we have a very narrow definition of lying that the Bible does not recognize. Oh yes, lying is bearing false witness and telling a barefaced lie as we would call it, but the Bible's definition is far broader. Here's a number of untrue words that the Bible speaks of: being double-tongued - incidentally, last week we were thinking of the mind, and James talks about a double-minded man. You can be sure of this: if you're a double-minded man, you'll have a double-tongue. It will express doubly in your words. Disingenuous statements: saying one thing to one person at one particular time, and then saying a completely different thing to

another person at another period of time. Or double-tongued could be just telling a person what they want to hear when you know they want to hear it. Do we do that? Sure we do. Double-tongued, the Bible calls that lying.

Broken promises. Don't think that a lot of the church believes any more that when a man and a woman stand before God and enter into a promise with each other and God - the Bible calls it a covenant - that they are giving their word. Divorce is rampant within the church of Jesus Christ, and I don't minimise the pain that it causes in many a home and many a heart, but the fact of the matter is: we need to remember that, when we stood there at the front of that church, we gave our word - we gave our word. What about vows to God that we make? I feel deeply convicted, because I can remember times when I came out of meetings, I remember times when I wrote declarations and signed my name to them and dated them, and yet I've gone back on them time after time again! That's lying! Ecclesiastes says: 'When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay'. Never you feel under pressure to come out of a meeting and consecrate, or write on any dotted line to give anything to God, if you're not meaning it. It would be better you didn't do it, as did it and didn't mean it.

Do you remember what happened Ananias and Sapphira in Acts chapter 5? They lied to the Holy Spirit, and they were struck down - and if God was doing that kind of thing today in our churches, there'd be hardly any members left! Broken promises, the Bible says it's lying. The Bible calls flattery lying. Now, don't think that encouragement - I think there's a lot of Christians, and we preachers (feel sorry for us here now!), I think a lot of Christians think encouragement is flattery - no it's not! We need encouragement, every believer needs encouragement, we all do. But flattery is excessive compliments, and here's the crux of it: it is excessive compliments to keep well in with someone you're giving them to - that's the heart of flattery. You want to get on their good side! Someone has said: 'Flattery goes to the head, criticism to the heart - that's good, but I would change it to say this, 'Flattery goes to the head, encouragement to the heart'. If you want to know the difference between encouragement and flattery: encouragement bolsters the heart and spirit of a man in the work of the Lord, but flattery blows his head up so he can be on your side. Do we engage in flattery? We all have an urge, don't we, to have people like us. Yet so often that verges into sin, the sin of lying, flattery.

Here's another one: exaggeration, you know what exaggeration is. Now maybe someone will come to me and say: 'Now, the Lord Jesus exaggerated in some of His parables, and some of His stories', and you'd be right because the Lord Jesus used a literary mechanism called hyperbole. Hyperbole simply means that it's a type of exaggeration to create an emphasis. You remember He said: 'It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to go into the kingdom of heaven'. He says it's better that you cut your hand off, than it cause you to sin; or pluck your eye out, than it cause you to sin. What He's doing is, He's being radical and exaggerating in this way to create an emphasis - but that is different than the exaggeration we're talking about that the Bible calls lying, because this type of exaggeration sets yourself up in a better light. It's personal now, it's not for the benefit of somebody else, it's for you. We Christians, particularly Christian workers, are experts at it: we exaggerate the number of people who have been saved, the amount of blessing in our own ministries. We exaggerate at times, I exaggerate my walk with God, we walk about with a holy aura and a halo around our heads. We want people to think great of us, and we exaggerate what we really are on our knees, what we really are in our hearts - and, you know, it's lying! It's lying.

It's very similar to inaccuracy, which is also lying. Getting the facts wrong and the figures wrong, and when we know they're wrong, just letting them stay wrong. That's very connected to another lie the Bible speaks of, which is embellishing facts with your own interpretations - do you know what that is? Well, it's the old game 'Chinese Whispers', it's exactly the same thing: where we add a little bit on to a story. It might be our interpretation, it might be our desire of what we would like to see come out of the situation, and before you know it: when it reaches the last person in the line, the story is unrecognizable! The Bible calls that lying, and it's no laughing matter either because spiritual death, much spiritual death has been created among God's people and in Christian assemblies by people embellishing the facts, putting their own interpretations on facts and creating fallacy. I'll tell you this: you see when this kind of thing enters into an assembly? It is nigh on impossible to unite God's people! There's nothing worse than God's people feeling they are being lied to.

That's why the Lord Jesus - surely, is it not - when we think of what untrue words can be: double-tongued, broken promises, flattery, exaggeration, inaccuracy, embellishing...that's why He said you should forget about oath taking. Didn't He teach that in the Sermon on the Mount? We shouldn't need oaths, the Lord Jesus is saying, because if we're telling the truth they are pointless. He reiterates it, by the way, in James chapter 5 and verse 12: 'But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yes be yes; and your no, no; lest ye fall into condemnation'. I'm not getting into this tonight, but I don't believe that means that you're not to take an oath in the court of law. I believe the Lord Jesus was put under oath, and God Himself put Himself under oath - so that's not what's being spoken of here. What the Lord is getting, and what James is reiterating, is: your words should be enough. You shouldn't be running around saying: 'Oh, I swear on my granny's grave', and all this nonsense - your 'Yea', yea, and your 'Nay, nay! Someone put it well: 'Oaths are of no use anyway, because a good man doesn't need one, and a bad man doesn't heed one!'. Just tell the truth.

Boy, this is all connecting - and I didn't really mean it to connect in a sense. Satan, in John 8:44 the Lord calls him 'the father of lies'. He wants his children to go out and spread those lies, because he needs those lies on which to build his kingdom and upset the kingdom of God - every thought and piece of knowledge that exalts itself against the knowledge of God. He wants to sow his seeds of lies. Now, my friend, God forbid that you or I as a Christian should do the devil's work - and, I'll tell you, the devil's work is being advanced, and his kingdom is being stretched from shore to shore, by believing Christians. Now listen, if you're not long saved: as soon as we're saved, as soon as we can, we've got to learn to resist lies - whether they're spoken lies that we're talking about tonight, or unspoken lies that we were thinking about last week, accusations of the devil. We must refrain from both of them, we must refrain from speaking inaccurately, we must refrain from either adding to the facts or taking away from the truth. Any untruthfulness, any lies, any hypocrisy that remains in our lives is a ground for Satan to attack.

Remember we said last week: any thoughts that we allow to come into our mind, from whatever source, to feed our old nature or to exploit the influence of evil spirits; we'll pay for it in our mind, and we'll give ground to the devil. It's the same with our words: if we don't learn to bridle the tongue, to crucify it and let God's Spirit liberate it, we're in trouble and the devil will use our mouths! We need to learn to speak before God - that means to speak the truth, nothing more, nothing less; to speak objectively the facts, not subjectively what I feel about them. Am I splitting hairs? If I am, the Bible is splitting hairs. If I am, you're all right the way you are, if you're double-tongued, you've broken promises, you've flattered, you

exaggerate, you're inaccurate, you embellish the facts.

That's only the first one! Verbal sins: untrue words - that's the most obvious, isn't it? Here's a second one here in Ephesians 4:29, the first part: 'Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good' - no corrupt communication. Now that word 'corrupt' simply means 'worthless', something unfit for use - we would call it 'empty talk'. The Lord Jesus had something to say about that in Matthew 12:36, now listen carefully, He said: 'Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment'. Did you hear that? Every idle word, we'll stand before God and give account to Him - idle talk, empty chatter, it's sin! The Lord is saying we ought to confess it as sin, we ought to put it away. Now mark this: the issue here is not the truth of the words that we engage in idle chatter with, the issue is whether or not we should say them - so it's different than untrue words.

You see the truth can be idly spoken, do you understand what I'm getting at? What I'm saying is: to tell the truth doesn't always shame the devil. You see the way these things get into our heads, and mess us up? To tell the truth if it's harmful, if it doesn't edify, if it pulls others down and exalts yourself - which is the reason why we do it anyway - it does the devil's work. Telling the truth does the devil's work at times. Someone has said: 'Whatever we speak must be according to facts, but not all facts should be spoken'. Do we ask ourselves: 'Well, this might be true about so-and-so, but is it helpful to them? Is it edifying to them and the person that I'm relating it to?'. Do you know what 1 Corinthians 13 says: 'Love rejoiceth not in iniquity', it doesn't take pleasure in other people's stumbling! But the Lord says that all idle words, whether they're true or false will be repeated verbatim in God's holy presence one day! Do you think words are serious now?

Do you know what some of the greatest type of worthless words are? Gossip. You know, gossip can be true as well as untrue. William MacDonald quotes Bill Gothard in one of his books as he defines, or tries to define, gossip - he says: 'It is sharing information with someone who is neither part of the problem or its solution', that's good. Sharing information with someone who is neither part of the problem or of its solution...or', he goes on, 'talking in a derogatory manner about someone who is absent. Gossip puts its victim in an unfavourable light' - do you know why that is? To put 'me' in a favourable light. 'It says things that are not kind, edifying, or necessary. It is badmouthing a person behind his back, rather than confronting him face-to-face. It is a form', he says, 'of character assassination'. Now that's serious! You could be taken to a court of law for doing that, you know - character assassination, libel it is called.

Now we Christians are great at this here, we sanitize this thing, we make it acceptable, and we disguise it at a prayer meeting! 'I'm only sharing this information for prayer, but I've got some awful news' - that can be gossip. Or we protect ourselves, we're good at that, covering our own back: 'I'm going to tell you this, but I'm sharing it in confidence'. Now, we've all done that - it's not always wrong to do that, by the way, but if you're doing that to get a kick that you haven't fallen and someone else has, you're in trouble. I'll tell you something else: you'll have to have a good memory, you'll have to remember all the people you told in confidence. There were two women on one occasion - and this could have happened in East Belfast, but it didn't - they were heard talking to one another. One woman said: 'Tilly told me you told her that secret I told you not to tell her'. 'Oh, she's a mean thing! I told Tilly not to tell you I told her'. 'Well, I told Tilly I wouldn't tell you she told me, so don't tell her I did!'. Did you understand that? No, you didn't! Because you can't - and that's the way it gets, we get into a tangle and into knots, and we don't know where the truth is any more, and we don't know

where confidence is any more, or trust any more!

There's a Turkish proverb goes like this: 'Who gossips to you will gossip of you' - that's a good one to learn. Now, don't misunderstand me: leaders in the church, elders, and God's men need to discuss matters of discipline at times and concern about believers - but it's always intended to help, or at least it should be, it's never to tear down - and that's not gossip. Put it this way: has somebody ever started to converse with you about someone else, and began to tell you a juicy bit of gossip, and then they stopped and they said, 'No, I'm not going to go on, because that wouldn't be edifying'. Has that ever happened to you? Put your hand up if that's ever happened to you - it hasn't happened to many! Yet that's what we need, that's what we need more of! Why is it not happening? I'll tell you why: because the problem is not just our tongues, it's our ears; not just our speaking, but our hearing - because if there was no demand for gossip, there would be no supply. If we knew how to listen, we would know how to talk, and there would be less gossip and fewer lies. The trouble is: many of us are willing to listen - worse, many of us want to listen - even worse, many of us have a lust to listen! Many of these small fires, as James puts it, engulf assemblies around our province and world - and if these things were only put out when they were a small fire, they would have done little to no damage, but they weren't. People fanned the flames - not by their gossip necessarily, but by their listening!

Now, how do you kill gossip? How to listen to what other people say? Well, here's three things, and it will kill gossip dead. One: ask for the source of the information. Now you do this, if you've got the guts, and you need the guts to do it. Somebody starts relaying something to you, and you say: 'Hold on a wee minute, can I ask you where you got that information?'. Usually the reply will be: 'Oh, well, I couldn't tell you that! I received it in confidence, and I told them I wouldn't tell anybody who told me'. Yet in 1 Corinthians chapter 1 verse 11 Paul said concerning the strife that was in Corinth: 'It hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you'. He named the source of his information, so it wasn't gossip.

Something else you can do secondly is: ask permission to quote the person who is telling you it - that's a sure one to kill it in its tracks. 'Oh, no, no, no! Please don't do that, because that would be my friendship over with them! - if they were a friend, some friend! We're all doing this. Or, if those two things don't work, or you don't feel predisposed to do them: just don't listen! You can do that! Change the subject, or tell them that you're not going to listen to rubbish! Oh, dear, dear, dear, that's not very gracious, is it? That's rude, maybe - well, I ask you: what is more rude? What is more rude? William Marshall says that if nobody ever listened to gossip, if nobody listened to gossip, no one would ever tell it. Make the audience deaf, and you make the gossipier dumb - that's profound, and yet maybe that's where we are falling. He who speaks lies sows, but he who listens to them reaps - and that's often where the most trouble is done.

Do you know something: to turn a deaf ear is biblical, it is biblical. Psalm 38 verses 13 and 14, listen to it: 'But I, as a deaf man, heard not; and I was as a dumb man that openeth not his mouth. Thus I was as a man that heareth not, and in whose mouth are no reproofs'. Did you ever think it a blessing to be deaf and dumb? Not literally, but spiritually, it is. I'll show you better than that - and it might surprise you - turn with me to Isaiah please, chapter 42. Now if you know anything about Isaiah, you'll know that he depicts the Servant of Jehovah, prophetically he's pointing to the Lord Jesus Christ - the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah 53 is the Suffering Servant. Now here we have the Servant of the Lord again, so it's looking prophetically at Christ - chapter 42 verse 19 - now, look what it says about our Lord Jesus

Christ, you never saw Him like this before: 'Who is blind, but my servant? or deaf, as my messenger that I sent? who is blind as he that is perfect, and blind as the LORD'S servant?'

Now the Lord is our example, we sang about that at the beginning of our meeting: He had no guile in His mouth. When He was reviled, bless His holy name, He reviled not again. 'Never man spake like this man', they said of Him - but when He was on the earth He turned a deaf ear to many a word. 'Who is blind, but my servant? Or deaf, as my messenger that I have sent?'. So the Lord Jesus resisted the temptation to hear that which He ought not to have heard, and I'm asking ourselves tonight: are we as deaf as the Lord Jesus?

That's only two: untrue words and worthless words - but quickly, and I'm going to race through these so follow with me: evil words, evil words. First Peter 3, look at it quickly, 1 Peter 3 verse 9 - untrue words, worthless words, evil words: 'Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing. For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it. For the eyes of the Lord', that's the motivation for it, God sees the righteous, 'and his ears are open unto their prayers', and, indeed, all their words, 'but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil'. Evil words, have you ever heard a believer say: 'Ach, I gave them back as good as they gave me' - evil words. 'Ach, that's the only language they understand!' - evil words. You know, believers, we don't say the four letter words that the world does, but do you know what we do - and I am convicted of this - we substitute those words. We don't say, 'Oh my God', we say, 'Oh my gosh'. We don't say 'Jesus Christ' as an oath, we say 'Jeepers Creepers', or 'Crikey' - and that's a substitute. It's hard - you try and get yourself out of it, I'll tell you it's hard. 'My goodness', what goodness is there but God? Evil words.

Something else: unedifying words. Turn back to Ephesians 4 now, verse 29 again but the next part of it: 'Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying' - so we are to edify. Now we saw last week from Philippians 4 that we are to think good thoughts. Now if we are to think good thoughts, and we communicate our thoughts with our words, that means we ought to speak good words - edifying words to build up, not to pull down. Are you speaking unedifying words?

What about inappropriate words? Another verbal sin, inappropriate words, is found in the last part of verse 29 here: 'To the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers' - another rendition of this puts it like this, 'According to the need of the moment'. To edify in your words is to speak according to the need of the moment. So often, we would say, we put our foot in it - open our mouth and put our foot in it - we say the wrong words at the wrong moment because we don't put our brain into gear, our mind before our mouth. Have you ever heard people say: 'I know exactly how you feel'? You don't know exactly how anybody feels, neither do I! 'Time heals', huh, time heals? Proverbs 25 and verse 11: 'A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver' - that's a great gift, but it's not really a gift, it's something we can get from God - to say the right thing at the right time, rather than the wrong thing at the wrong time. What about inappropriate words, inappropriate words - that's the same thing, really, isn't it?

Ungracious words, Colossians 4 and verse 6: 'Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man'. Are we ungracious in our words? It was said of the Lord Jesus: 'All bare witness of him, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth' - not sharp words, not cutting words, not cruelly

sarcastic words. Our words, Colossians says, are to be seasoned with salt - you know what salt does? It hinders corruption, our conversation ought to hinder corruption, not help it in the minds of other people. Salt also makes you thirsty - and our conversation, our words, ought to make men and women and boys and girls thirsty for God, thirsty for Christ, thirsty for righteousness! So often there are ungracious words on our tongues.

Another one: impure words. Ephesians 5 this time, turn over to Ephesians 5 verses 3 to 4 - we're nearly finished, Ephesians 5:3-4: 'But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks'. Impure words: you see, the man whose heart cannot be pure has a tongue that cannot be clean. Do you see the connection? The more we as believers freely talk about sin, the more familiar we become with it, the less serious it seems to us, and we cease to be horrified with the things that we are continually talking about - and if we're ever mentioning sin, we should be mentioning it in such a light as to create a loathsomeness of it in the minds and hearts of other people. Impure words, let it not even be mentioned among you.

Irreverent words - yes, irreverent words in believers' mouths. Talking lightly, disrespectfully, of holy things. Making puns and jokes upon the Scriptures. Now there's a place for humour, and a lot of Christians could do with a good dose of it! But we must not be irreverent to God, to God's holy word, to sacred things. Irreverent words, and finally multiplied words - Proverbs 10:19: 'In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise'. The more we talk, the more we are prone to sin. It was Washington Irvine who said: 'The tongue is the only tool that grows sharper with constant use'. Do you know something? This might be news to some of us: you don't have to comment on everything! You don't have to have an opinion on everything! You don't have to always say your piece - Ecclesiastes 5 says: 'Let your words be few'. So, not only let your words be true, let your words be few!

Verbal sins: untrue words, double-tongued, broken promises, flattery, exaggeration, inaccuracy, embellishment, oaths, worthless words (including gossip), evil words, unedifying words, inappropriate words, ungracious words, impure words, irreverent words, multiplied words - is it any wonder that Jeremiah Burroughs, the puritan, in his book 'The Exceeding Sinfulness of Sin', says: 'It is a rare thing to use the tongue well'. James teaches that loose tongues belong to loose people. Now listen carefully: he or she who is untrue, he or she who carries idle tales, he or she who speaks carelessly is not much use in the hand of God, but is of infinite use to the devil himself. Do you not exclaim with me, and with Isaiah the prophet: 'Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips' - and, oh to God that, like him, an angelic figure would take a bloodied coal from off the altar of Calvary's offering and touch my lips with holy fire, and cleanse me of this tongue of death. We cannot tame it, but God can by the power of the blood and by the unction of the Spirit!

Will we say to God tonight: 'Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips'? Will we take the power of Calvary and apply it to our words, and take control of our tongues by the power of the Holy Spirit, for 'the heart of the wise teaches his mouth'?

Let us pray. How are your words? Now listen: if there's a soul in this place tonight who doesn't think that any of this applies to them, my dear friend, you are deluded - absolutely, completely and utterly deluded! As the poet said:

'If your lips would keep from slips,

Five things observe with care:
To whom you speak, of whom you speak,
And how, and when, and where'.

Are you convicted of those things? To whom you speak? Of whom you speak? And how, and when, and where? There's only one answer: your tongue must die with the rest of you, and get down before the cross. Reckon yourself dead with Christ and alive to God, and your speech will be transformed.

Oh God, oh God, I confess all of these sins tonight, every single one of them. I have been guilty of them all. Lord, there is so much of it that I can't even remember the half of it, or one percentage of it. But Lord, forgive - and Lord, may we not only have renewed minds in the inner man, but may we have renewed speech that expresses from our minds the thoughts of God after Him, rather than the thoughts of our old nature, or echoing, like parrots, the thoughts of the devil himself and spreading his lies and his kingdom. Lord, deliver us, Your people are overwrought by these sins! We can never have Your blessing if we are double-tongued and double-minded. Oh God, help us, Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - January 2009
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Sins We Have Sanitized - Chapter 3

"Spiritual Sins"

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Well, thank you again to brother Bertie, it's good to be here this evening. We have been looking each week at this subject 'Sins We Have Sanitized' and, if you haven't been with us in previous weeks, we took this title for the reason that the word 'sanitized' simply means 'to be made acceptable', more acceptable. We've been hitting sins, really, in the areas of Christian lives that we have learned to live with as believers. These have been, of course, internal sins - we saw that these are the more dangerous ones, because they tend to be hidden and secret - but we highlighted this great fact that secret sin on earth is open scandal in heaven. Secret sin is no less serious sin to Almighty God - in fact, it could be more serious because of its hidden nature and the hypocritical manner in which we engage in it.

Now, if you were with us two Thursday nights ago, we looked at 'Mental Sins'. We concentrated particularly on the whole area of the mind. Last week we looked at 'Verbal Sins', and we took the subject of the tongue, our speech, our words. We saw, you remember, that the word expresses the thought, and that's how we manifest and actualise our thoughts: by expressing them in words. We can infect the minds of other people and spread our thoughts in this manner, by the words that we speak - but we'll not say any more about that tonight. I have two more subjects: 'Spiritual Sins', or 'Religious Sins' we could call that, that's what we're going to deal with tonight. Next week, in the will of the Lord, we'll look at 'Cultural Sins' - and you might not know what I'm getting at by that title, but come back next week, in the will of the Lord, and you'll find out.

We're going to turn to Galatians, the book of Galatians please, and we're not going to read the scriptures just yet, at least from Galatians - but I want you to have this passage open, because this is where we'll be dealing with in the Bible mainly, although we'll be looking at several other scriptures and we want to let the word of God do the work tonight.

Hosea's prophecy chapter 4 and verse 6 says: 'My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge', and you may remember that on a previous night I highlighted the fact that Christian people and people in general do not understand the anatomy of the whole man. I don't speak of the physical anatomy only, although that is part of it, but more so the spiritual anatomy of how we are made up as human beings, created in the image of God. Now I did touch on the fact that I believe the Bible teaches, and I think it's reasonably clear, that man is a trichotomy - that means he is made up of three entities. We're going to look at that now.

Turn with me to 1 Thessalonians chapter 5 and verse 23: 'The very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole', now watch these words, 'spirit and soul and body' - spirit and soul and body, three aspects of the man - 'be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ'. Now not everybody agrees with this, some see the man made up as soul and body alone, but I think that verse would indicate that there are three aspects to the man. Another verse, just to hammer this home, Hebrews 4 and verse 12, and in reference to the word of God the writer is telling us how it affects the man, and he says: 'For the word of God is quick', living, 'and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the

thoughts and intents of the heart'. Now the joints and the marrow in the bone are very hard, at times, to separate - but we know they are two separate things. The soul and the spirit, at times, are very difficult to separate in Scripture and in practice, and yet they are spoken of here as two separate, or at least distinct, entities.

So what we are saying is: the man, you, are made up of body, soul and spirit. Now we've got to spend a bit of time on this if we're going to understand what we're going to say tonight about spiritual or religious sins. The body is the part of us that is world-conscious. The soul is the part of us that is self-conscious. The spirit is the part of us that is God-conscious. Now, come with me on this: the body, world-conscious. It is how we relate to the physical world, we do it through 'eye-gate', through 'ear-gate', through 'nose-gate', through 'mouth-gate', and through the gate of feeling. The five senses: sight, sound, smell, taste, touch - that's how the body relates to the external world around us. The soul, however, is self-conscious. It is the seat of the personality, if you like, and it is made up also of three aspects: the mind, the emotion, the will - what we think with, what we feel with, and what we act with - that is what makes up the soul. Then there is the spirit, and this is the God-conscious part of us that worships God, that is able to have communion with God, to know God and indeed contain God. When we are born again, I believe that this is the holy of holies of the man, this is the part where God relates to us and indwells us - the spirit.

Now come with me right back to the beginning till we see this, to Genesis chapter 2 please, and verse 7: 'And the LORD', that is, Jehovah, 'God formed man of the dust of the ground' - now there is the body, God formed our bodies from the dust of the ground. Now that means that the same essential elements that are found in the flesh of men and women, and the flesh of beasts and animals, is found in the soil of this planet - that's what that verse is telling us. Now years ago scientists would have said that's a lot of nonsense, but this is something that has been discovered in recent times, modern times anyway, as fact: that we are essentially made up, as human beings in our flesh, the same way as animals are in their flesh, in the same makeup as the soil of the ground - nitrogen, oxygen, calcium, etc. Yet God's word declared it before scientists discovered it. This is our bodies: made of the dust of the earth.

But there's more than just flesh involved in the human being: 'The LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life'. Now that word 'breathe' in Hebrew, which of course the Old Testament is written in, is the same Hebrew word that means 'spirit' - God breathed spirit into the nostrils. Then finally we see that it says, 'and man became a living soul' - there is the word 'soul'. Now, if you turn back a chapter, you will see in chapter 1 verse 24: 'God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so'. Now the expression there 'living creature', the word for 'living', 'life', is the same word for 'living soul' as we find in chapter 2 and verse 7. So this life is the same thing that the animals have - but of course we know, and have believed, that there's a difference between animals and mankind. What is this difference if animals essentially have 'soul', 'life' as God gave it, and 'flesh' as God gave to man as well? Well the answer is found in the fact that in verse 26 of chapter 1 we see: 'God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness'. The beasts of the field were not made after the image and likeness of God, and there is a distinct difference: God gave life from a distance to all of creation and all of the beasts of the field, but when He came and breathed life into Adam, He did it very intimately, directly, through his nostrils gave his spirit - and it was when He gave his spirit that he became a living soul. What we're talking about is spiritual life, He did not give that to the animals, He gave it to man.

Proverbs 20 and verse 27 bears this idea of the spirit out, I think, where it says: 'The spirit of

man is the candle', or the lamp, 'of the LORD, searching all the inward parts of the belly', the inward parts of the man. So it was when God breathed his spirit into the flesh of Adam that he became a living soul. Now I hope you're following with me, because this is important. So what we're saying is really: the soul, it serves as a linchpin, if you like, between the body and the spirit. If the spirit is the part that we relate to God with, and the body is the part that we relate to this world with, in order for the spirit - the part relating to God - to influence the body, the soul has to bring them together like a linchpin. I was driving to another meeting last night, and I just said to the Lord: 'Lord, I want You to give me an illustration to try and make this clearer in people's minds, because this is difficult'. Right away I just got this idea of, remember years ago - I don't remember, of course - but there were phone operators. You didn't just pick the phone up and dial a number, and you got right through to the person receiving the call - you had to go through the operator. You first of all called the operator, and then the operator would join the caller and the recipient and they would be able to converse. Well, the operator is like the soul, the caller is like God who wants to communicate with mankind and affect man's body, and the body is like the recipient of the caller - but the operator is the one who brings the two together. Now that's the way man was created, and that's what God wants to do in the redeemed and renewed man - but we all know what happened, the great tragedy of the fall.

Now when the fall happened in the Garden of Eden, man's spirit died, his spirit died - the part that relates to God! Now when we talk about death in the Scripture, 'death' does not mean 'cease to exist', death never means that in the Scripture! What death speaks of in the Bible is separation, and when man died in the Garden of Eden his spirit was separated from God, and he couldn't relate to God any more. Now, you know what happened then? Once the spirit went out of action, the soul became completely related to the body, to the physical, and effectively the soul and the body united together in what the Bible calls 'flesh'. Flesh is not just the body, flesh in the Bible is the body and soul related together - and we read that this 'flesh' is directly opposed to 'spirit'. Are you still with me? Some of you are giving me some blank looks, but this is important - hang in there!

Turn with me to Galatians 5 and verse 17 - I venture to say that many people have never really got to grips with this, and it's so important - Galatians 5 and verse 17. Remember what we're saying: the spirit died, no longer was man related to God, or could relate to God, and the soul joins onto the flesh. Verse 17 of Galatians 5: 'For the flesh lusts', or strives 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'. So the flesh, that is the soul joined to the body now, it is against everything that is of God and everything that is of God's given Spirit. What the flesh does is, it makes itself the centre of man. Remember that the soul is made of the mind, the emotion and the will, and that expresses itself now through the body - and it elevates self-will over God's will.

Maybe I'm not making this clear, let me give the illustration again. Remember the operator? The soul, and the operator is meant to be there to bring the caller, God who gave the spirit, to the recipient, the body, to influence man in every area of his life. Now the line has gone dead as far as the spirit is concerned, the caller, and so it's as if the operator and the recipient just carry on the conversation together - do you understand? Self-centred, flesh-centred. Now, we're familiar with this to a certain extent, because if you look at Galatians 5 we've heard about the works of the flesh, haven't we? Galatians 5, look at verse 19, and I'm going to read this in the Amplified Version, which just brings it out a wee bit more, but you follow your version there: 'Now the doings (practices)', the works, 'of the flesh are clear (obvious): they are immorality, impurity, indecency, and Idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger (ill

temper), selfishness, divisions (dissensions), party spirit (factions, sects with peculiar opinions, heresies), Envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like'. Now that expresses the works of the flesh, but here is the problem where we are concerned as believers: often we understand the works of the flesh only to be the lusts of the human body - is that how you have understood the works of the flesh? But the fact of the matter is: the flesh isn't just the body, the flesh includes the soul, and therefore the flesh speaks of the works of the soul as well.

Now we touched on it two weeks ago that every sin, everything we do in our bodies, starts with a thought conceived in the mind - so that's clear, isn't it? The body is not alone in itself, sins are conceived in the mind, and often they move down to the emotions, and then they're carried out through the will via the body. So don't just think of the works of the flesh as having something to do with the lusts of the human body, it's got more than that, it's got to do with the soul. But let me take you on a step further, because the works of the flesh comprise of two types of works: one is unrighteousness, that we've just read about here in chapter 5; but this might be a revelation to you tonight, the other type of work of the flesh is self-righteousness. There are unrighteous works, but self-righteous works are also included in the works of the flesh. You see flesh does not just produce defiling sins, but flesh can produce commendable morals, good living, even religious acts.

Now maybe that changes how you read verse 17 of Galatians 5 now: 'For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh' - and if you knew a bit about the context of this church at Galatia, you would realise that it was a spiritual dispute, a religious dispute that was going on. Now we all accept, as Christians, do we not, that we must rid ourselves of defiling sins of the body - but what about defiling sins of the soul? They are no less sinful in God's eyes, and yet we know so little about them - maybe you don't even know what they are. Well, these sins of the flesh, in the body sense, are sins of unrighteousness, but the sins of the soul can be self-righteous.

What am I saying? Well, I believe the Bible is saying - now listen carefully - flesh can do good things, did you hear that? I don't mean 'good' as in 'holy in the sight of God', but what I mean by 'good' is 'moral' things, 'right' things, 'religious' things can be done through the soul - but they can be done as self-centred things, motivated by self rather than motivated by the Spirit, that is the Holy Spirit, residing in your spirit. Are you with me? Well, a great example of this in the New Testament are the Pharisees. I read a book recently on the Pharisees that really opened my mind a great deal, and the author points out among many other things that, theologically speaking, the Pharisees were orthodox, and their orthodoxy was affirmed by the Lord Jesus Himself. We read in Matthew 23:2, the Lord said: 'The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe', He affirmed them. We see in Matthew 22 and Luke 10 that He actually agreed with their emphasis as regards the law, they were the ones who testified, 'We're to love the Lord our God with everything that we are and everything that we have, and we are to love our neighbour as ourselves' - He was in complete agreement with them.

Merrill Tenney, the Bible scholar, says of our Lord: 'He was more nearly in accord with the Pharisees theologically than with any other religious sect in Judaism' - that's interesting, isn't it? Then when we turn to the apostle Paul, and we get to the Acts of the Apostles, we see in Acts 23 that there was a dispute between the Sadducees and the Pharisees, and the apostle Paul sided theologically with the Pharisees. Now the author of this book points out that it was a righteous goal that the Pharisees had, they were a lay-movement of men who desired to bring every facet of life into subjection to the Torah, the Old Testament Jewish law. Was that

not a worthy goal? The writer argues, and I'm quoting from him, listen carefully: 'The Pharisees received such harsh treatment from Jesus not because they were so far from the truth, but because they were so close - so near and yet so far!'. Now this is how the author applies it, and I think he's correct: 'Indeed the Pharisees, more than any other group at the time of Jesus, were like us who are conservative Christians'. He goes on: 'Perhaps God placed Pharisees so prominently in the Bible to produce a clear picture of', mark this, 'a religion that can produce righteous behaviour, but not righteous hearts'.

Now that type of religion, or spirituality, overemphasises externals at the expense of internals - where you do everything right to the naked eye, but the heart has all manner of sin and iniquity in it that no one can see! We need to challenge ourselves tonight: is that my spiritual life? This author testifies of his own experience, and I'm quoting him, he says: 'It was easy for my Christianity to become like a favourite suit that I stepped into, rather than an inner cultivated relationship with the living God. Even back then', he says, 'I noticed the paradox that the winners of Bible contests were seldom those who applied God's word to their lives - well-meaning Christians with mountains of Bible knowledge, coupled with molehills of knowing God' - that's devastating! That was the Pharisees, if you don't believe me - John 3: 'There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews', a Pharisee, 'who came to Jesus by night' - you're not going to tell me he was a bad man? He was a good man, he was a moral man, in a sense he was a spiritual man - and we need to face this: people can naturally be kind, and be patient, and compassionate. Now please stay with me here, I'm not going into false doctrine - we sometimes go to extremes where, when we talk about man's depravity, we think that everything that a man does in every aspect has to the most depraved extreme possible - and it clearly is not the case. The Lord even said: 'Ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children'. Yet here is Nicodemus, a good, moral, upstanding, religious man - and what does the Lord Jesus say to him? Listen now, John 3:6: 'That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again'.

Now what we are hitting on tonight, the flesh, is essentially the explanation for religion in this whole world. We're getting right to the nub of it. Let me say that religions of this world, whatever religion you want to name, oh they have bad influences, and the atheist and agnostic will point the finger and say that religion is the cause of all our problems and all the wars on this planet - and I'm not sure that he's wrong! But there are a lot of good influences that religion has in this world, now you can't deny that. Religion can have good influences, but you've got to understand that there is a Satanic principle behind religion, and that is that Satan is willing to allow overtly immoral aspects of our flesh, our human lusts of the body, to die, if only he can make the good part, the moral part of our flesh remain. You see, the devil can use our good flesh to extend his kingdom from shore to shore.

Are you with me here? Are you? It's important that you are. Now listen, we are the ones, aren't we, that preach: 'You can't be saved by the flesh' - aren't we the ones? You can't be saved by the law, you can't earn your salvation, it's by grace - and we can rhyme all the verses out from Romans and even Galatians where we are here, but we make the Galatian mistake - what is that? We know that we have to begin in the Spirit - you must be born again - but we go on and try to live the life of the Spirit in the flesh, and it can't be done! Now look at Galatians 3 and verse 3, he calls these Galatians - as he might well call us tonight - 'foolish', 'bewitched', verse 3: 'Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?'. They had descended into this error mainly because of false teachers who were trying to drag them back into the rules, laws, and rituals of Judaism - but they had descended into this error of doing good by the flesh. Now the whole book of Galatians teaches

that the righteous acts of the flesh are worlds apart from the fruit of the Spirit.

I wonder have you discovered this? If we were to turn to Philippians 3 and verse 3, Paul said - now Paul in that passage tells he was a Pharisee of the Pharisees, as touching the law he was blameless, that means outwardly, externally, you couldn't have pointed a finger and said: 'Paul, you slipped up there'. Imagine that! Yet he says in Philippians 3 verse 3: 'I put no confidence in the flesh', and he goes on to say that 'If anybody could put confidence in the flesh, it's me, because I lived, by righteous acts, almost a perfect life externally'. Yet he says: 'I don't put confidence in that!'. Now, you're asking: 'Well, what's the difference here? What's the difference between righteous acts in the flesh, and living by the Spirit?'. Here's the difference: when we do right things in the flesh, self is always at the centre of the activity, self is always a motivation.

Now I thought of the English language, the words that are prefixed with the word 'self'. 'Selfish', when we are selfish in how we exercise our faith. 'Self-assured', are we ever self-assured in our confessions? 'Self-conscious', that is a negative one, where we allow our self-consciousness to keep us silent when we should speak, when we don't stand up for our faith, when we won't pray in the prayer meeting because, 'Well, I'm not that personality', etc. Or the opposite to that is 'self-confidence', when we are confident in ourselves; or 'self-esteem', we esteem ourselves more highly than we ought. We're 'self-satisfied', we get a kick out of who we are, what we do. We are 'self-willed', we're driven people, by our ambitions and aspirations. We're 'self-sufficient', we're 'self-supported', we think we have everything we need and we don't look to anyone outside ourselves, even God, for anything else - and we can be 'self-gratified', we get kicks out of what we do, even for God.

All of this has the centre to it of 'self', and that's the flesh, which is the opposite of trusting in the Spirit which knows nothing of self. Let me put this on flesh for a moment: it's whenever we rely on our human wisdom, rather than God - that means when we've spent more time planning and arranging, rather than waiting on God, we are operating in the flesh not the Spirit. When we emphasise learning and education over spiritual development, we are leaning on the flesh. When preachers spend more time getting an outline for their sermon than unction from the Holy Spirit, we're leaning on the flesh. When I spend more time in the study preparing than I do praying, I'm leaning on the flesh. We have all got to learn this: that the soul, with the body, is flesh; but flesh can never impart spiritual life, or spiritual hope, or spiritual well-being - that which is born of the flesh is flesh.

I hope you're getting the message tonight and understanding this. You might say: 'Well, how do I know if I've been trying to live my Christian life in the flesh?'. Well, I'm going to ask you two questions, and these are diagnostic questions by which you can tell whether you've been trying to live your Christian life according to the flesh. The first is this: have you a sense of your utter impossibility to please God in the flesh? Do you have a sense of the utter impossibility of you pleasing God in the flesh? You see the flesh, the good aspect, moral aspect of the flesh never ever declares its weakness. It never ever says: 'I'm useless' - actually the opposite, it derives a certain kudos, a buzz of fulfilment and satisfaction, from achieving religious things - because the problem with self-righteousness is, indeed, the mother of all sins: pride.

Now in Matthew chapter 19 there's a wonderful illustration of this, there is a rich young ruler who comes to the Lord Jesus Christ, and he wants to inherit eternal life. There's a little clue as to his spiritual problem, because he addresses the Lord Jesus - who he didn't realise was God's Son - as 'Good Master'. The Lord has to rebuke him, knowing that he didn't know He

was divine, He says: 'Why call thou me good? there is none good but God'. You see this man had a concept of humanity, that it could rise religiously to perfection in morality, by the flesh - and the Lord had to cut him down right away. 'What must I do?', he says, 'What must I do?', and he had this belief in his mind that there was something he could do, that the Lord would send him away with a wee formula and he would go, and he would inherit eternal life. The Lord says: 'Have you kept the commandments?'. He thought he had, and he probably had externally, because the commandments that are mentioned are those towards our fellow man, and he probably was like the apostle Paul: from his youth he had kept them. Yet he didn't realise the depravity of his heart, and do you know what the Lord Jesus did? He touched the idolatry of his flesh - not only did this man think he was rich in morals, but he was rich in money, and those were his gods. The Lord said: 'You've got to let go of the flesh', that's what He's saying, you'll never be saved if you don't let go of that! Now we know that as evangelicals, you can't be saved by the law. If you don't believe this, follow on with me in that passage - what happened? He couldn't let go of his riches, which was a symptom of his self-righteousness, and I'll show you that a little bit later. He went away sad, and the Lord looked upon him, loving him, and then the Lord turns to the disciples and teaches them that it is a hard thing for a rich man to get into the kingdom of heaven - but whatever is impossible with men is possible with God!

I've heard preachers preaching on the rich young ruler, and they don't even go to that verse - and that's the punchline! What the Lord wanted this young man to do was to fall at His feet, and say: 'I can't, but You can!'. Or, if I could put it another way, the Lord's intent with the rich young ruler was to get a good man lost - that's what He wanted - by placing His divine finger on the area of his selfish idolatry, morality, and money. You can see it right through the whole gospels, those who admitted they were sick, those who admitted they were blind, impoverished, impotent, those were the ones He lavished His grace on - but it was those who couldn't admit it that He goaded to brokenness.

Now, oh yes, we can preach the gospel on that one, can't we? You'll never earn your salvation, you've got to come as you are as a sinner to Jesus - but how do we go on to live our Christian lives? We often go on in the flesh and its pride! I think it was Andrew Murray who said: 'Pride must die in you or nothing of heaven can live in you'. Now this is the reason why so many are cast down in the Christian life, now listen carefully for this applies to some of you, perhaps; this is the reason, or could be, why there is no victory in your Christian life; why you have experienced, since you were born again, a spiritual roller coaster. You're trying to live the Christian life in the flesh, and it cannot be done, and you don't realise! Listen, this is God's word to you tonight: you don't realise God doesn't want you to try! God doesn't want you to try, He wants you to die! It's the reason why so many are cast down, because they are trying, and they have never come to the point of saying: 'Lord, this is impossible!', and that's the reason some of them jack it in - that's right! 'This is impossible', and they don't realise that when they get to that stage, that's the very knife-edge, the watershed of where the victory will come, if they would only come to the feet of Jesus and say: 'Lord, it's impossible - but what's impossible with men, what's impossible with the flesh is not impossible with You' - that's it! That's how you were saved, wasn't it? Not by earning it, or achieving it, but by admitting your bankruptcy spiritually, and that's how you will go on in the Christian life.

Are you cast down tonight? Is that where you need to get? I'll tell you, I don't know how many times I've got to that, even today: 'Lord, this Christian life is impossible, and that's why I don't want to live it, I want You to live it through me'. Do you understand? But it's not only the reason why so many people are cast down, it can also be the reason why so many people are puffed up - the flesh, the good flesh! Can I say this to you, and this is heavily on my

heart: I think this is the great sin of conservative evangelicalism - pride, being puffed up. That author that I mentioned earlier says these words: 'We must face the scourge of self-righteousness, and its cousin, contempt for others'. Do we have contempt for others, other believers, non-believers? Really what I'm saying is: are we looking down our noses at others? Do we do this in regard to doctrines that we don't believe in, or practices that we don't engage in? What we are really saying is: contempt for others is a telltale sign of hidden self-righteousness. One of the reasons why we can be puffed up in pride is because our religious experience is derived from the flesh.

Turn with me to Luke 18, for this is exactly what this parable is teaching, the parable of the sinner, the publican, and the Pharisee. In verse 11 of Luke 18: 'The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess'. Now note that he recited his religious acts, and they were good acts, but they were all motivated by the self to show that he was a cut above the rest. But it was a broken man, verse 13: 'The publican, standing afar off', because of his own uncleanness, 'would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you', our Lord said, 'this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted'.

The broken man went down justified, do you know that this is the lesson not only in Luke 18 but in Luke 15? Turn back to Luke 15, it's no wonder sometimes people say we only preach half a gospel, half the time we don't get these passages in the right context - I'm not saying they can't be applied evangelistically, but you look again. How many times have you heard this passage preached on, and the punchline is left out? What punchline? Verse 25, forget about the prodigal now for a moment, here's the one the Lord wants you to see: 'His elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard musick and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him. And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found'.

The Lord wants you to see the elder brother. Who is he? He is a critical spirit that emanates from a self-righteous heart, he's like the Pharisees - that's the point the Lord is making. The sinners were coming, the harlots were coming, the publicans were coming, and the Pharisees who have got a lot of things right were looking down their noses, and their hearts were still cold because their self-righteousness was in the flesh. Now let me ask you a question tonight: do you know what legalism is? It's thinking, if I could put it crudely, thinking you're in tick with God because of the things you do. Now it doesn't mean some of the things we do are good, it doesn't even mean some of the things that we do in the spirit are right and are according to obedience, but never you once get it into your head that God is more well-pleased with you than another because of something you're doing. Oh, obedience is always the organ of revelation and getting to know God more and more, but everything is by grace, everything must be by the Spirit - and here is the great issue of the prodigal son: is legalism

any better than lawlessness? That's the point! The young man goes into the far country, wine, women and song; and the elder brother, he never left, he never disobeyed his father's commands, he never did any of those things, but there were no parties for him because his heart was a funeral!

Dear friends tonight, do we look down our noses at others? Now listen carefully to what I'm saying, because you know I'm not a modernist, I think you would know that about me by now - but because you do certain things, and maybe they're right things to do, right practices, right ordinances, do you see if you or I should ever look down our noses at another who doesn't do those things? That is proof positive that I'm doing them in the flesh - that's devastating for me! Hammer the things from the pulpit, and you can do it in the flesh! I've done it. Dear friends, there are consequences in doing good things in the flesh, do you know what the first one is? You never ever come to spiritual maturity, you never ever do. You can never come to spiritual maturity without dealing with the flesh, without dealing with the self - it won't happen no matter how many good actions you do externally.

Here's another consequence, and it's even worse - and this is what the Galatians needed to see - believers who habitually maintain the attitude of the flesh, the good flesh, are actually allowing a foothold that the enemy one day will exploit. Because the flesh, just as the mind is Satan's battleground, the flesh is Satan's workshop; and he's wanting to use the good flesh to eventually manifest the bad flesh - for that which is flesh is flesh. Do you see what I'm saying? There is a warning here, and it's a principal, listen: if you serve, or try to serve, the Lord in the flesh, the good flesh, inevitably the evil flesh will show itself. Oh, that you would get this tonight - I know it's hard to follow, maybe, at times, but really it's elementary, and it's quite simple at the core.

The Galatians were encouraged, you see, by these Judaisers to glory in the flesh. Look at chapter 6 of Galatians verse 12: 'As many as desire to make a fair shew in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised', they're wanting Gentiles to be circumcised. This is a Jewish rite, and it was right for a time, but it's not right any more! Then in chapter 5, look at verse 15, they were trying to do good things - now listen - good things in the power of the flesh, and eventually the bad flesh was starting to show itself, verse 15: 'But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another'. Do you see it? Then he goes into the list of the works of the flesh, and he's telling them that if you try to be spiritual through the flesh, the old bad flesh will come to the fore.

They didn't realise that as long as they attempted to serve God with their brains, serve God with their ideas, serve God with their talents, serve God with their strength, they would inevitably serve the lusts of their body. If they didn't forbid the flesh from doing good in the flesh, they could not prevent it from doing evil through the flesh - have you learnt that tonight? Oh to God, that you learn that - this is why religious people nearly go nuts, because it doesn't work! It can't work! We are able to tell the poor religionist that, whoever they are, before they're converted - and yet we fall into the same trap after we're converted, and we're up and down like a yo-yo, and we don't know why we've no joy, why we've no victory...because it's in the flesh.

Now listen please: the best way to keep from sinning, any type of sin, is not to do even any good in the flesh. Have you heard me right? The best way to keep from sinning whatsoever is not to do any good in yourself. Now you're saying, I know: 'Now hold on a minute, I know I mustn't do any bad, now you're telling me not to do any good? What is there left to do?' - nothing! Nothing, just die, just die. Death is the answer - do you think I'm making all this up?

Look at Galatians 2, look at this now, Paul is telling them, 'Look, if anybody has confidence in the flesh, religious acts done in the good flesh, I have, but that's not what this life is all about. Forget about these old Judaisers, for I', verse 20 of chapter 2, 'am crucified with Christ' - dead! - 'nevertheless I live' - how does he live? - 'yet not I', it is not his old life, it's not his flesh life, even his good flesh, religious life, 'but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh', that means the body, 'I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me'. That's it! Verse 21: 'I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law', if righteousness came by the flesh, 'then Christ is dead in vain'.

Turn with me chapter 6 verse 13: 'For neither they themselves who are circumcised keep the law; but desire to have you circumcised, that they may glory in your flesh. But God forbid that I should glory', in the flesh, that's what he implies, 'save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ' - why Paul, what happened there? - 'by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world'. That's it! Have you got it? Oh we sing: 'My sin, oh the bliss...', leave that for a moment, what about:

'My self, oh the bliss of this glorious thought
My self, not in part' - not just the bad self, but the good self - 'but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!'

Have you got there, my friend? Now, I know I've touched on this every night, but I think believers have lost this somewhere along the line. God doesn't want you to try by the flesh to live the Christian life, and that's why you're failing if you are, and that's why I've failed when I do - because I'm leaning on the flesh. He wants me to die, and let Christ live in me. The only life He's pleased with is Christ's, the only soul that He was ever pleased with was Christ's. Theodore Monod describes the road of his own death to self as it unfolded in his life in a poem, and this is how it goes:

'O the bitter shame and sorrow
That a time could ever be,
When I let the Saviour's pity
Plead in vain, and proudly answered:
All of self, and none of Thee!

Yet He found me: I beheld Him
Bleeding on the accursed tree,
Heard Him pray: Forgive them, Father;
And my wistful heart said faintly:
Some of self and some of Thee!

Day by day His tender mercy,
Healing, helping, full and free:
Sweet and strong, and Oh! so patient,
Brought me lower, while I whispered:
Less of self and more of Thee!

Higher than the highest heaven,
Deeper than the deepest sea;
Lord, Thy love at last hath conquered;

Grant me now my supplication:
None of self and all of Thee!

That's it! That was only the first question, by the way! How do you know if you're trying to live in the flesh? Well, the question was: have you a sense of your utter impossibility of pleasing God in the flesh? Now listen, some of you may have slipped up, and some of you may have slipped up big, but maybe you needed to learn this lesson: you're never going to live the Christian life in your own flesh strength, and that's what you were doing. He is able to keep us from falling. But here's the second answer - it's a question again - how do you know? Have you a sense of your utter dependence on God? A sense of your utter impossibility and inability to live this Christian life, and have you a sense of your utter dependence on God? Andrew Murray said: 'Pride can degrade the highest angels into devils, and it is humility that can raise the fallen flesh and blood to the throne of angels'.

How will you know if you're utterly dependent on God? How will it manifest itself? Well, here's the answer: it will be manifest in waiting on God beneath the shadow of the cross. Jesus said: 'If any man follow me, let him deny himself', surrender, 'and take up his cross', sacrifice, 'and follow me', submission. Your dependence on God will be manifest in a constant reckoning of yourself dead, because you died with Christ on the cross; and a constant waiting on God for His strength and His Spirit. You know John 15, don't you? That's what it's all about: 'Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth', not righteous acts, 'bringeth forth much fruit: for' - let me hear you say it - 'for without me ye can do nothing'.

Where did we lose this? You see, we might be doing good things, we might be - but whatever does not issue from abiding in Christ, that means waiting on God in utter dependence, whatever does not come from that source is invariably of the flesh. Why do so many dedicated, sincere people never experience victory in the Christian life? You're not going to tell me that they're all really bad backsliders and sinners? Many of them are trusting in the flesh, they're trying to make perfect in the flesh what began in the Spirit! It cannot be done! They're substituting the self for the Spirit, and yet the Lord Jesus said: 'The Father seeks worshippers who will worship Him in spirit and according to truth'. He wants to have your spirit as His Temple for His Spirit, that the soul might be able to affect the body by the influence of the Holy Spirit.

Have you a sense of your utter dependence on God? Sure, it's simple really: an utter sense of the impossibility of you ever living the Christian life successfully, and then an utter dependence upon God for living what you cannot do. God wants everyone to come to Him in the spirit of utter dependence, completely submissive to His Spirit, and humbly waiting upon Him. When A. T. Pierson asked George Mueller the question: 'What is the secret of your great work, and the wonderful things that God has done through you?', Mueller looked up for a moment, and then he bowed his head lower and lower until it was almost between his knees. He was silent for a moment or two, and then he said: 'Many years ago there came a day in my life when George Mueller died. As a young man I had a great many ambitions, but there came a day when I died to all these things, and I said, 'Henceforth, Lord Jesus, not my will but Thine', and from that day God began to work in and through me'.

Has there been a day like that in your life, Christian? But it's not just one day, it's every day. Anne Grannis put it well, and with this I close - listen now, listen:

'I want my life so cleared of self
That my dear Lord may come
And set up His own furnishings,
And make my heart His home.

And since I know what this requires,
Each morning while it's still,
I slip into that secret room,
And leave with Him my will' - is that what you do?

He always takes it graciously,
Presenting me with His,
I'm ready then to meet the day
And any task there is.

And this is how my Lord controls
My interests, my ills,
Because we meet at break of day,
For an exchange of wills'.

Let us pray. We can fiddle about with rubbish, but we need God and God alone - God's Spirit. Lord, help us. Help us, Lord, I hope that this message has been in the Spirit. Lord, I trust that it has come in the power and demonstration of the Spirit to some spirit or spirits in this place tonight. Lord, this is what we need. There's no sense asking You to put us to death, You've done that, You've done it! We have to believe it, and get on with it. Lord, we're stuck, help us, give grace, Lord, to take this and claim it as our own tonight, if never we have done it before, in complete fullness, and start walking in the Spirit that we might not fulfil either the bad or the good lusts of the flesh that war against the Spirit. For Christ's sake we pray, Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - January 2009
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Sins We Have Sanitized - Chapter 4

"Cultural Sins"

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Well, thank you again brother Bertie, and thank you for being with us these Thursday nights. It has been an encouragement to have you gathered out with us each evening. We have covered an awful lot of ground - says you: 'Probably too much!' - over the last three weeks. We've gone from the mind, to the mouth, to the flesh, and then we're looking at 'Cultural Sins' tonight. But let me just say to you that I don't want you ever to think at any stage, as we've been looking at these things, that I've been trying to hammer you, or trying to overload you with a burden - because everything that I have spoken to you has been coming from my own heart, a sense of conviction, God's speaking to me about these things.

I remember a preacher on one occasion saying: 'If you preach to your own heart, you'll be sure to hit a few others', and that's what I've been seeking to do. I have to tell you that I believe - I don't know whether brother Bertie experiences this, I'm sure he does, and anybody who preaches God's word or teaches it in any capacity - that God makes you tread the path of the word of God that He lays on your heart. I struggled with my mind in particular that week I spoke on the mind, and I'm sure the mouth wasn't always correct the week I was speaking on the mouth, and I have to tell you - and confession is good for the soul - that I wasn't long home last Thursday night until I was in the flesh, and part of the next day as well. So this is ministry that touches all of our hearts, and I'm no exception. Tonight's, in particular, I think is going to be difficult. It's going to touch many raw nerves, but I believe that it's what God wants me to say, and I have to give it to you tonight.

So I want you to turn with me to Luke's gospel chapter 10 please, Luke's gospel chapter 10 verse 25, and this is what we commonly know as the parable of the Good Samaritan. Now, the more I study God's word - particularly, I would have to say, the parables and the gospels - the more I realise how we have misunderstood a great deal of what is in the New Testament. It is staggering to me, actually, how we take up the wrong end of the stick constantly with many of these accounts of our Lord's life and of His teaching - and this is no exception, the parable of the Good Samaritan.

Verse 25 then: *"And, behold, a certain lawyer", that is Pharisee, of course, someone who was an expert in the Old Testament law, "stood up, and tempted", or tested, "the Lord Jesus, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou? And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself. And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live. But he", now mark this, "willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour? And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and*

brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee. Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise".

I've taken as my heading tonight 'Cultural Sins' but, because of the weight of the burden that I have, I am only going to concentrate on one in particular that I feel is what the Lord would have me speak on, and is what is so needed in our province and in our island at this time - and that is the cultural sin of prejudice. The Good Samaritan is a story that was told by our Lord Jesus Christ to a Pharisee, a lawyer. Now, if you were with us last week, you will recall that these Pharisees were experts in the law. They were theologians, if you like. This was not only a man who was religiously adept and articulate, but he was concerned about the issue of eternal life - and we know there's a lot of religious people and they aren't concerned about that, but this man was: 'What must I do that I might inherit eternal life?'. But this man's problem, as we saw last week, is indeed the problem that many religious people have - verse 29: 'He, willing to justify himself'. He was self-righteous, he was operating in the flesh - do you remember that from last week? The works of the flesh are not just the negative immoral things that we read about in Galatians 5, but the works of the flesh can also be moral things, good things done where the centre of them is self-conscious rather than fruit operating in the Spirit of God.

I haven't got time to go into that tonight, but you must see that he was self-righteous, wanting to justify himself. He was spiritually blind, however. Now, this parable is not the little kind Sunday School story that we think it to be, it is not. Rather it is a violent assault on this man's self-righteous pride. We touched on this last week, that contempt for others, looking down our nose at others - whether it's because they don't have the same doctrine or practice as ourselves - is always a tell-tale sign of hidden self-righteousness, always! It's a sign that we're operating in the flesh, not in the Spirit. We looked at Luke 18, another story, remember the publican and the Pharisee? The Pharisee was thanking God that he wasn't like that other boy.

Now, this is an assault on this man's self-righteous fleshly religious pride. The first thing the Lord does is, he places this Pharisee in the position of the priest, or the Levite, in the story - that's clear. He's putting this man He's speaking to in this story as the priest and the Levite who passed by on the other side. Now the Pharisees, as we see, believed that you love the Lord your God with all you can, and you love your neighbour as yourself - and he probably prided himself in his love for his neighbour, but you've got to understand that the Pharisees had a very narrow definition of who your neighbour was. That's why, willing to justify himself, wanting to make sure he was in there with this commandment, he asked: 'Who is my neighbour?'.

So the Lord puts him in this position of the man who passed by, and the second assault on his self-righteousness was showing us that loving one's neighbour means being able to see human need, having eyes to see human need with compassion, and being blind to seeing the colour of a man's skin, their particular creed, or their social class - that was the second assault! Are you beginning to feel this Pharisee's pain? Further, we see that the Samaritan was willing to get his hands dirty to fix this problem - that means the Samaritan was willing to pay a bit of cost, and feel sacrifice for a stranger.

But the third assault - and this is the greatest blow of all on this man's self-righteous religious

pride - the worst of all for him was that the Lord Jesus made the Samaritan the hero of the story! Now Samaritans were despised by the Jews in the strongest terms, because they were a half-breed in their ancestry, they were lawbreakers, they didn't adhere to the Old Testament law the way the Jews did, and they were unorthodox in our theology, what they believed about God and how to get to Him. Nothing could be more offensive to a Jew than to consider a Samaritan better than a pure bred, law-adhering, squeaky clean Jew. Are you feeling it now?

Let me put you in the picture for a moment, to make it more contemporary to ourselves: you think of a character in your experience who you would consider the lowest of the low, the scum of the earth we would say, and put them in the character of the Samaritan here, and you'll start to feel it a wee bit more. For this is the force of what the Lord Jesus was saying: he wanted this Pharisee to recognize that there are some people who aren't as right as him, who surpass him in good deeds. Now, have we got the ability tonight, in our minds, to contemplate this? Can you recognize that there are some people, and they're not even Christians, and they surpass you in your good deeds? You say: 'Hold on a minute!' - no, don't hold on a minute, this is what the parable is teaching now. You hold on, stick in there, because this is revolutionary to us if we can only get hold of it! What was this an answer to? It was the question of the Pharisee: 'What must I do to inherit eternal life?'. The answer the Lord is bringing to him is: 'Look, if you're going to try to earn eternal life with righteous acts, you're in trouble my boy! Because there are people who don't agree with you, and they're better than you!'.

What the Lord is trying to say to this man is: if you want to inherit eternal life, there is no room for pride. There's no room for 'We have the truth', or 'We are the people', or 'We do this', or 'We don't do that' - the only thing that makes us to differ from others is the grace of God and the Spirit of God. My point tonight out of this parable, in keeping with it, is asking the question: we know what it says about the Pharisee, we know what it says about the Jews, but what does this parable say about us? What does it say about where we are spiritually when other people excel us in the flesh, when we are meant to have the Spirit of the Living God? Now, have you ever understood that parable? Have you? Because that's the only way you can understand it.

Now similarly, turn with me to Matthew chapter 5 verse 44: 'But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you' - I say it very reverently, but it would be a lot easier if those verses and those words were not there - 'That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good', do you know what that means? He is not prejudiced: '...and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect'.

Now, what is the Lord Jesus saying? If we love people like us, if we love people of our kind, if we love people on our side, if we love people of our persuasion - we are no different to the publicans that loved other publicans! But worse than that, worse than that: the parable of the Good Samaritan says that there are many godless people in this world, and they're doing better than we are in the flesh, and we're meant to be in the Spirit! You see, there is a higher standard for the child of God. Look at verse 20 from the same chapter: 'For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven'. Now, how on earth could any of us

exceed the external righteousness of the Pharisees? It's not possible, because it was blameless to a large extent - at least Paul's was, the rich young ruler's was, in all likelihood the man who the Lord spoke the Samaritan parable to, he was externally blameless - but this is the whole point, the Lord Jesus is saying: there needs to be a renovation of the heart! There needs to be a new birth, a righteousness that is of God - and not just judicially, but practically, that will be out-worked in the believer's life. That's why He said: 'Therefore be ye perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect'. That's why the Lord said to Nicodemus, a good, moral, upstanding Pharisee: 'Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God' - there's a higher standard!

We saw last week that that means our flesh has to die, and the Spirit of God must live in us. The fruit of the Spirit is love, it starts with love - and I believe all the other fruit after that are an expression of love. Love is first, and it's no mistake that it's first: love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance; against such there is no law. It is the Christ-life, it is Christ living in us. Can I just repeat this much of last week: we cannot live the Christian life, it is impossible to live the Christian life in ourselves by the flesh. Our flesh must die, it has died with Christ on the cross, but we must reckon it by faith as dead, and we must live the life in the Spirit - there's no other answer! We cannot excel the righteousness of the Pharisees, we can't do it in our flesh, we cannot even excel the righteousness of the Samaritan! It has to be God in you.

Now, here we're getting to the nub of the problem: why is it, then, that the gospel - which is supposed to be the most liberating, loving, gracious force in this world - has often been treasured by some of the most uptight and prejudiced people on the face of the globe? Am I wrong? Now listen: I know we're not to regulate ourselves by how we're perceived by the world. We don't put out vox pox, and send the feelers out, focus groups like the politicians, and start doing what the world tells us to do - don't misunderstand what I'm saying. But neither should we ignore how we are perceived by people outside. If we start ignoring that we'll fall into many a trap. I don't know how many years it is from Robbie Burns, they've all been celebrating it, but wasn't it he who said: 'O, for eyes to see ourselves as others see us'. It's a good thing, at times, to see ourselves the way others see us.

Do you want to hear how someone sees us? He's an academic, and he wrote a book entitled 'Understanding Fundamentalism', and he defines 'fundamentalists' as - now listen carefully - 'an evangelical who is angry about something'. I thought that was good! 'An evangelical who is angry about something' - of course, we're to be angry and sin not, and we should be angry about a lot of things. It's hard to live a godly life in this world and not be angry - we ought to be angry! But this great question is: what are we angry about? What makes us angry? Who makes us angry? And, as far as the world perceives, are we being perceived as angry only?

Another said: 'Evangelicals have tended to rely on the rhetoric of protest, pronouncement, and picketing, rather than on moral persuasion - making a difference with their lives. They are perceived as only interested in turning noses up, mocking, belittling, boycotting'. Francis Schaeffer, the Christian, said: 'You can never share the gospel with someone whom you do not take seriously as a human being, and they will never want to listen to you if your words are not truth and compassion mixed together'. Listen to what he's about to say, this is profound: 'As I push a man off his false balance', and there's nobody saying it's not a false balance he stands on, but 'As as I push a man off his false balance, he must be able to feel that I care about him, otherwise I will only end up destroying him'. I ask you: is there a case to answer? Whatever country we live in, there often is a disparity between what Christians claim to believe, and how they behave towards people who are different than they are.

Now, I know I'm on sensitive ground here, I believe it's God's holy ground. The early church were renowned for their love, and it wasn't just for the fact that they loved one another - although that was the case. Emperor Hadrian in the early second century called a man called Aristides to his palace to have him describe what these Christians were really like, and I'm just quoting what he said: 'They love one another. They never fail to help widows. They save orphans from those who would hurt them. If they have something, they give 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 in the usual sense, but brothers instead through the Holy Spirit of God'. The Emperor Julian the apostate complained, during his short reign from AD 361 to 363, that: 'The impious Galileans', the name for Christians, 'support not only their own poor, but ours as well'. Pagans in the Roman Empire were being supported by the Christians in the early church. Now I'm telling you something: if I lived like that, if we lived like that, Christianity in the 21st century would be infectious, it would be contagious - we would really be light in a dark place, and salt. Salt is not just a preserving influence on the flesh, but salt is something that makes you thirsty - and there would be people thirsty for Christianity, Christ and the Living God, because of our lives if we were like that!

The burden of my heart tonight is that Ireland needs such unconditional love from Bible believing Christians. Did you see the news last night? This reconciliation business in the Europa Hotel? Did you see it, or read about it in the paper, or hear it on the radio, the fiasco that it was? Lord Eams and Denis Bradley writing this report, and victims to get 12,000 pounds each - and the two sides came together in that hotel and, well, it was horrendous; the pain that was obviously there from all our years of violence in the past, the hatred that was vented on one another. Don't misunderstand me, I'm not underestimating anything that people have gone through down through the years. The commentators and politicians were asking the question after this event: has anything really changed? Can anything really change? How can we have healing in our nation? Is there an answer? Is there an answer? Yes! There is an answer! Yes, there is an answer! I'll tell you this much: politics isn't the answer, and it'll never be the answer. Whether you're the fundamentalist Christian neo-conservative right in the United States of America, or whether you're here in Ulster - any Christian that is trying to use politics, or trying to use the legal system to further their faith, is deluded!

Now let me say also: it's not for me to legislate against what you do, or anybody does or doesn't do. I'm not saying you should not be involved in this, that, or the other - that's between you, your conscience, and Almighty God - but please, whatever you do, particularly in this little province of ours, keep in mind certain things. One: political positions may equate themselves with Christian beliefs - i.e. you're against abortion, and some parties are against abortion - but it is impossible, impossible to pin colours of political allegiance onto the gospel or onto the bosom of my Beloved Lord! Well dare anyone do it! We ought never - in the strongest terms I say it - never to politicise, never to racialise, never to nationalise God's gospel. It belongs to nobody only God!

The Lord Jesus never engaged in politics. Now, He certainly spoke to politics, to the issues of the day - and I think we have a prophetic duty to do that - but it was He who said: 'My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence'. That's why His followers, the disciples, did not engage in politics - and we say: 'Well, did they miss a trick?'. I mean, should they have utilised it to get a bit further? Paul the apostle did not engage in the political system. In fact, he heralded that our citizenship is in heaven. We are

pilgrims and strangers, the apostle Peter said, in this earth. This is not, essentially, our eternal home. Whilst we are responsible to obey government, and have a right to use the judicial processes of law, we are not obligated to be part of a political system. We need to remind ourselves - however we are involved in this world - that John says this world system lies in the lap of the wicked one! That is manifest in the manifold corruption that is in the political sphere, it is a system of compromise, decisions are made on the basis of what is expedient rather than what is right.

So what we're saying is: if our chief objective is to further the gospel and the truth of God, there is a question of effectiveness and priorities. Politics, wherever it is, is only like a band aid on a cancer! It is not the answer! The gospel is the answer! Paul says to those who had the gospel, Timothy: 'No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier'. The Lord Himself said: 'Follow me, but let the dead bury the dead', let dead, unregenerate men get on with trivial things - seek first the kingdom of God. My, if the church in Ulster had put as much into seeking God as they have done down through the years in seeking votes, and seeking seats, we might be in a different place tonight.

Is there an answer? Yes, but it's not in politics, and I defy any man to tell me it is - but neither is it in established religion, that's not where you'll find the answer. Now we saw that religion of the flesh does not avail with God. It might have certain good influences in society, I'll give you that, but religion in the flesh - and let me say this, religion in the flesh that poses as Christianity - has only caused more division, and caused more sectarianism, because as we saw last week: the good flesh, even good, righteous acts that are done from the self in the flesh, are a fertile soil for the devil to use our bad flesh, and to bear fruit. Do you remember, I showed you last week in Galatians 5:15, there were Judaisers in that church and they were trying to get them to go back into their Judaism and still believe in Christ, and to adhere to the law and circumcision, the rites and rituals - and what was happening among them? Paul says: 'You're devouring one another!'. The bad flesh was coming out because they were trying to serve God in the good flesh, and you cannot do it.

I say to you, even among true believers, is there not a case to answer here? Now, I know some of you think maybe I'm really heavy-handed - please understand, I mean I'm being led even on the Lord's day to preach, perhaps, on Romans 8 verse 1: 'There is now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus' - because I know that our hearts have been opened and exposed, and are raw to these sins week after week. I want you to understand our position in Christ if we stand in it - but is there not a case for us to answer? Peter says: 'Judgement must begin in the house of God'. Look, if we're not willing to face these issues, how can we expect anything else to happen? If we're not prepared to repent, collective repentance, that in our past we have misrepresented God. If we're not prepared to say, if I'm not prepared to say - and I am prepared to say tonight - that at times I have misrepresented God's grace. I know there's a lot of pain, and the problems of our nation and our land are complex, and I don't even get into any of it tonight in a sense - but just answer me one question, and it's a question that really is burning into my consciousness: why is it that in one of the most evangelical parts of the world, here, generally speaking only half the population has had a sustained gospel witness?

Now, I know there are several factors involved in that, and established religion is no small one - but can we exonerate ourselves from all guilt? Can we? I can't. But it's bigger than the Protestant-Catholic divide, or the Irish-British issue, this is a multicultural issue - we're living now in a multicultural society, where the nations of the world have come to our doorstep.

We're having to face religions and cultures and persuasions that we never have had to before. I'm asking the question - these are cultural sins: is our gospel commission given to us by our Lord inhibited, restricted, hindered by political, religious, racial stereotypes? Now I know it may not be intellectually and emotionally - in other words, we would say that this gospel is for all men, and we would feel that we want all men and women to be saved - but the question I'm asking is practical: have we been inhibited practically in taking the gospel to others who are other than what we think ourselves to have been or be? I have, I'll put my hands up, I have. I'll tell you more: I've been fearful of what the legalists would say.

Do you know what one of the biggest problems in our country is in the church? You get a creak in your neck looking over your shoulder all the time, afraid of what this one will say, and that one, and the other one. You imagine - and this is off the cuff now - imagine you see me tomorrow morning in a coffee shop with a Roman Catholic priest, having a cup of coffee, and then I bow my head and I pray with him. What do you think would go round among the spectators that saw that? What do you think might go round? Am I pushing this too far, am I? What if there was an old tramp in the gutter, and I got down and prayed with him - there wouldn't be a word said about it, would there? We are affected by these things through fear, and we don't even realise it. It's a sign, at times, that we're not even convinced of our own positions - we can't have them challenged, where God's Word says: 'God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind'. Fear of man brings a snare, and we can play safe in our cultural comfort zones - but what good does it do anybody!

I read a story this week in a missionary magazine about an Anglican Vicar in Iraq who left, I think it was, a lovely country garden parish in England to go out to help the suffering persecuted church in Iraq. Now, if we were to take a poll among evangelical Christians in America or even Ulster, what they thought of the war in Iraq - I don't know what the answer would be, but I'll tell you this much: Saddam Hussein, bad and all as he was, he never harmed the Christian church of Jesus Christ the way the rulers of Iraq are doing today. There have been thousands of Christians slaughtered - you'll not hear that on Newsnight, you'll not hear Christian politicians who have pontificated about war telling you that - the country is meant to be liberated! But this Church of England vicar is out there, and he says in this article that it would be far easier to be back in England in the safety: 'We might', he was addressing his congregation when he was saying this, 'We might have to die for our faith, but I remember what an old mentor minister of mine said to me before I left to come here, he said, 'Don't take care, take risks!''.

It was Frederick Sampson who said: 'Love goes beyond safety'. Recently, with the election of President Obama, many people's thoughts have gone to Martin Luther King. I think it's tremendous that there is a black man as President, although his policies leave a lot to be desired, particularly regarding abortion - but Dr Martin Luther King Jr. was accused of being an extremist. Now you may not agree with Dr Martin Luther King's religious beliefs, and I imagine I don't agree with some of them too, or his actions at times both personally and politically, but do you know what his answer was? I'm going to read it to you, and you listen carefully because it's profound. He was accused of being an extremist, and he said: 'Was not Jesus an extremist for love? 'Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you'. Was not Amos an extremist for justice? 'Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever flowing stream'. Was not Paul an extremist for the Christian gospel? 'I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus'. Was not Martin Luther an extremist? 'Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise, so help me God'. Was not John Bunyan an extremist? 'I will stay in jail to the end of my days before I make a butchery of my conscience'. Was not Abraham Lincoln an extremist? 'This

nation cannot survive half slave and half free". Martin Luther King asks the question: 'It's not whether we will be extremist but what kind of extremist will we be. Will we be extremists for hate or will we be extremists for love?'

Then he delivered a powerful call to the church, which rings as true today as it did 40 years ago. He said: 'There was a time when the church was very powerful, in the time when the early Christians rejoiced at being deemed worthy to suffer for what they believed. In those days the church was not merely a thermometer that recorded the ideas and principles of popular opinion; it was a thermostat that transformed the mores of society. But the judgment of God is upon the church as never before. If today's church does not recapture the sacrificial spirit of the early church, it will lose its authenticity, forfeit the loyalty of millions, and be dismissed as an irrelevant social club with no meaning for the twentieth century'. On the 28th of August 1963, Dr King stood before the Lincoln Memorial and gave his most memorable speech: 'I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood. I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character'.

Now listen, whether you agree with his politics or his religious convictions, you cannot decry that he had a great dream. Whether you agree with the ecumenical movement or not - and I don't - they still have a sincere dream to unite divided humanity, but they're trying to do it in the flesh, just as Babel did. Yet the tragedy is: they don't know how to do it. Politics doesn't know how to do it, religion doesn't know how to do it, and the greater tragedy - the greatest tragedy of them all is: we do, but we aren't doing it! I'm not doing it.

In the closing moments, can I turn you to Ephesians chapter 2, this was God's dream - a bad word, really, for God - but God's purpose in the church. Verse 11 of Ephesians 2: 'Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit'.

Verse 15 gives us God's plan for the church, look at it: 'one new man' - a new people, a holy nation, a priesthood free from enmity and united in Christ. Not black churches, Chinese churches - and I know that sometimes that has to happen because of linguistic barriers - but the vision of God was that all peoples be united in one Man that is Christ. Can it happen in Ireland? Yes! Imagine what it was for Jews to accept the Gentiles, do you understand how difficult that was for them? There was a religious divide. The Jews had Jehovah, the true God; the pagans worshipped many gods, polytheism. The Jews had the Bible, the word of God, the Old Testament. The Jews had the promise of Messiah, they didn't. But there were cultural and

social divisions: they were circumcised, they had the food laws, they had purification rites and rituals that were designed to set the Jew apart from other nations to show the Jew the holiness of God; these people had no concept of the holiness of God! There were also racial differences, there was a bloodline in the Jews going right back to Jacob. So there was alienation here more than any alienation in any nation or any prejudicial divide that has existed in creed, colour or race.

So what happened between the alienation of verse 11 and 12 and the reconciliation we read of in verses 19 to 22? They are no more strangers and foreigners, they're fellow citizens, a household of God, together growing into a holy temple - you are builded together, a habitation of God through the Spirit - what happened? What happened? The cross happened! What happened? The resurrection happened! Look at the verses in between: 'But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, he has broken down walls of division, he has abolished enmity in the flesh'. He has made one new man, verse 16, 'that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby'. Christ has preached that to us, that is the message of the gospel, that's God's vision, God's plan: one new man!

Look at chapter 1 and verse 10, again here it is: 'That in the dispensation of the fulness of times God might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him'. Galatians 3 and 28 is more specific when it says: 'There is neither Jew nor Gentile, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ'. I tell you: that's what we need here, that's what we need because our divisions - even in the midst of denominationalism - are an indictment to the unity of the one-man body in Christ!

Mahatma Gandhi was a Hindu, nevertheless he admired Jesus Christ. He often quoted from the Sermon on the Mount. One missionary, E. Stanley Jones, met with Gandhi on one occasion and asked him a question: 'Mr Gandhi, though you quote the words of Christ often, why is it that you appear to so adamantly reject becoming His follower?'. Gandhi replied: 'Oh, I don't reject your Christ, I love your Christ - it's just that so many of your Christians are so unlike your Christ'.

Apparently Gandhi's rejection of Christianity grew out of an incident that happened when he was a young man practising law in South Africa. He had become attracted to the Christian faith, and he had studied the Bible for himself and the teachings of Jesus, and was seriously exploring the possibility of becoming a Christian. So he decided to attend a church and, as he came up the steps of the large church where he intended to go, a white South African elder of the church barred his way at the door: 'Where do you think you're going kaffir?'. The man asked Gandhi in a very belligerent tone where he was going 'kaffir', and Gandhi replied, 'I'd like to attend worship here'. The church elder snarled at him: 'There's no room for kaffirs in this church. Get out of here, or I'll have my assistants throw you down the steps!'. From that moment on Gandhi said he decided, listen now, to adopt what good he found in Christianity, but would never again consider becoming a Christian if it meant being part of the church.

I have a dream that the hurts of our land would be healed by the cool flowing streams of the Spirit of the Living God, over the mountains and through the valleys of our nation, in true revival. But I'm going to tell you more: oh that it would please God, and it may well do, that it would come through the side of our community that has not had the gospel as we have had. What do we do about it? Do you know what I think we should do about it? Do you know what I'm going to do about it? I'm not going to do too much: I'm going to get before God and say,

'Lord, what do you want me to do?'. Because I have no answers, I have no practical answers, how do we break down the barriers? How do we even make a start? But is there a company of people among us here tonight who would covenant to wait upon God, that revival would come to people, even a few miles away from us, that have never known revival in their history, awakening? Will we wait on God to seek a way forward? Because, do you know what God wants? Listen: 'They sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth'.

May God bless His message to every heart. Let us pray: Father, our Father, what can we say without minimising the great complexities of our nation and the nations that have gone through political disturbance, and have violent histories and painful memories? But Lord, we seek a way through, a way forward, we seek only Christ, only the truth. We are fed up with labels, we are fed up with names, we are fed up with tagging things onto the name of Christ - that we are 'Christian', this, that, and the other - when our lives should define us, our love should mark us out. Oh God, forgive me for being content to put the suit on, and stand in safe churches and preach. Lord, I'm afraid, I'm afraid of this burden, I'm afraid of where it can lead - because we see that it takes risks, and it's not safe. But Lord, we need to break free, we need the yoke to be broken. We thank You that there is a bit more openness these days - and yet Lord, just as we saw yesterday, there's so much pain, so much hurt, resentment, prejudice. Lord, if we as Your people think that we are exempt, Lord forgive us. But Lord, help us to allow You to do a new thing, and create this new man in us. Oh that the people in Ireland, that there would be a redeemed people among them, united from every background possible as one new man in Christ; with citizenship in heaven; with one King, King Jesus; with one law, the law of Christ; with one country, a heavenly country whose builder and architect is God. Lord, we believe this is the only answer for Ireland. Have mercy on us, Lord, and open a door effectual, an opening that we might realise Your plan for the glory alone. Let names, creeds, men perish, empires fall - and let Jesus Christ be Lord of all. Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - January 2009
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Sins We Have Sanitized - Chapter 5

"No Condemnation"

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Romans chapter 8 please, is where we want to take God's word from this morning, Romans chapter 8. I really feel before God that this is a message I need to bring to you, especially after the ministry I've been giving on Thursday nights.

Now we're going to have to read some of chapter 7, so Romans chapter 7 verse 24: *"O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin. There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit"* - and we'll finish our reading there at verse 4.

Now after the studies these Thursday nights, if you've been with us, they were entitled 'Sins We Have Sanitised' - sins that have become acceptable in the lives of believers, mainly because they tend to be hidden sins, they are secret sins, they are not sins of the externals but the internals. We hit on four in particular: 'Mental Sins', 'Verbal Sins', 'Religious' or 'Spiritual Sins', and 'Cultural Sins'. I don't know about you, but I feel pretty bad after that series - in the right sense - because we realise how guilty we are as Christians. We might look okay externally, blameless. We might seem to have everything together as Christians because of our attendance to meetings, or our external spiritual activities that we're engaged in. Yet internally our lives can be a mess at times. I don't know whether you have felt bad after any of the Thursday nights - that's why I think we need to turn to this portion, particularly the verse I want to take as my text, chapter 8 verse 1, the first half: 'There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus'.

So I want to preach to you on 'No Condemnation'. C.H. Spurgeon said about Romans chapter 8, he called the truths of it 'golden steppingstones through the slough of despond' - golden steppingstones through the slough of despond! So if you feel yourself sinking into the slough, the bog of despondency because of the sins that are in your life - and I feel that at times, the sins that are in mine - this passage, these are the golden steppingstones to get out of it.

Now between verses 9 to 25 of chapter 7, I think Paul uses over 40 personal pronouns - so he's talking a great deal about himself in chapter 7, and that leads to this great exclamation in verse 24: 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?'. Is that how you feel as a Christian? 'Oh wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from this body of death?'. Now in Paul's day, I'm led to believe that criminals who were convicted guilty of the crime that they were being charged of sometimes had the penalty of dead corpses, dead bodies strapped to their back - and they would have to carry this corpse about wherever they went. Paul is saying: 'That's the way I feel as a Christian. I've been saved, and yet there is this old nature, this old man, that at times rears its ugly head. I feel condemned by God's law because of the things that I want to do, and can't seem to get doing - righteous

things - and yet the things that I don't want to do, the unrighteous things, I end up doing those things'. It's so easy, isn't it, to despair when we find that we have no victory in ourselves.

Well, chapter 8 gives us the answer: that through the Holy Spirit, through the ministry of God's Holy Spirit, we can be - and I'm quoting now, chapter 8 - more than conquerors! That's what you need to hear - and it's not because God has given us a new law, no, we have been given a new life! Life in the Spirit is now our law! So the question has to be asked: why then do so many of us who profess the name of Christ feel like failures in this Christian life? Well, this is what I'm going to labour on in the time that we have now, because I believe there are two possible reasons why you might feel that way. After ministry like Thursday evening's, about sins, maybe you feel a failure? Maybe you don't need to be here on a Thursday night to hear that type of stuff, you already felt like a failure because of something that has happened in your past, or something you're engaged in in the present; or you just have this constant sense of accusation and there's no particular sin that you are conscious of, but you still feel that you're way below the mark as a child of God in your performance.

Well, there are two possible reasons for feeling that way, here's the first: Holy Spirit conviction - Holy Spirit conviction. In other words, you are guilty as charged! So if we're talking about mental sins, verbal sins, sins of the flesh, cultural sins; the Holy Spirit's job before we were saved was to convince us of our sin to get us saved, but His job doesn't change after the new birth - He still goes on putting His finger on things that ought not to be so in our lives, that we might change. We can never ever really get out of the zone of feeling uncomfortable as Christians if we're going to walk with God's Holy Spirit. Judgement must begin at the house of God, and if we expect unconverted, unbelieving sinners to see the conviction of the Holy Spirit, we've got to first be willing and ready to feel it ourselves.

Paul says that if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged - so, in other words, if we would sort out the things that need sorted out in our lives, we wouldn't have the conviction of the Holy Spirit in that particular area. There is another name for this in the New Testament, it's called 'discipline'. Hebrews talks about it, Hebrews 12: 'For whom the Lord loves he chastens, and scourges every son whom he receives' - so if we are sons and daughters of God, just like we chasten earthly children, in the same way God does this toward us. As he goes on to say in Hebrews 12:11: 'Now no chastening for the present seems to be joyous' - who of us as children enjoyed the chastening of our father and mother? 'They are grievous: nevertheless afterward they yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby'. Now, how many times do we hear parents say: 'It's for your own good - it didn't do me any harm, and it will not do you any harm'? Discipline is for the purpose of maturity, of bettering our character and our personality.

So this is what God does: when we feel bad about sins that are in our lives, by His Spirit He is convicting us - but it's discipline, and you must understand this, it's restorative. It's restorative justice, not punitive justice. Now let me explain that: it's not with the purpose of inflicting punishment upon us, it's not punitive. Praise the Lord Jesus Christ that the Lord Jesus has already dealt with that kind of justice when He died on the cross. He has saved us from our sins, He has borne our sins in His own body on the tree - that's why we are forgiven as believers, justified by faith we have peace with God! That is judicial forgiveness. Now, I hope you understand this: if you're saved, you are forgiven, cleansed - but there is such a thing called 'relational forgiveness'. That means that after we're saved, sometimes sin can come in and inhibit our relationship, our fellowship with God. So, take the parent-child relationship, nothing can change the relationship by blood - they'll always be father-son,

mother-daughter - but sometimes problems enter in, and the relationship can be skewed and inhibited. That's exactly what we're talking about in relational forgiveness, and sometimes when we let sin go for a long time God, the loving Parent that He is, has to come in and discipline us not with the purpose of punishment, but restoration. He wants to restore us to the place from which we have fallen, or ultimately He wants to take us on to a place of maturity that we have not reached yet.

I trust you understand this. It is this relational forgiveness that is spoken of in 1 John: 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness'. Now that verse is spoken to Christians, and it doesn't mean that when we get saved all our sins are not forgiven - no, no, no! They are forgiven judicially but, after we are converted, sometimes sins come in and interrupt our fellowship with God, our relationship, and we need to confess them and have done with them. The Bible teaches that when we do put our hands up and say, 'Guilty as charged!', and we choose to walk in the light as God is light, we have fellowship one with the other, and the blood of Jesus Christ God's Son goes on cleansing us from all sin. Because of that there should be no condemnation, because we are forgiven!

Now let me ask you believer: are you walking in the light? You have judicial forgiveness, but are you celebrating and enjoying relational forgiveness every day, keeping short accounts with God so that if any sin enters in - whatever sin it might be, mental, verbal, spiritual, cultural, or whatever - that you confess it, have done with it, and enjoy no condemnation in Christ Jesus. Neil Anderson, whose books have been a real blessing to me, is a Christian counsellor, and he said these words: 'It has been said that 75% of all mentally disturbed people would be pronounced well if they could only be convinced that they are forgiven. Many seemingly healthy Christians find it difficult to believe that they are really free from condemnation. Some say' - is this you? - 'I know that Jesus died for my sins, and that I am forgiven for the sins I have already committed, but what if I should choose to sin tomorrow?'

Now, insecurity about forgiveness was a great Old Testament problem, because the animal sacrifices that they were prescribed in Judaism were insufficient to atone for sins - but we're not in that dispensation. We look to a different sacrifice: 'Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he', the Lord Jesus Christ, 'entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us'. It's already ours! Have you got it? We sing about the cross, we preach about the cross, but are you living in the good of the cross - that when Christ died once, for all our sins, they were all atoned for? Do you understand this? Let me ask it to you another way: when Christ died on the cross for you, how many of your sins were future? Can anybody answer that? How many? Them all! All of them! There is no condemnation for past sins, okay, but for future sins and for present sins - now, of course, that's not a licence to go out and sin. Should we continue in sin that grace should abound? God forbid! The message of the gospel is that we don't have to sin any longer, but even when we do fall into sin - whilst we may be convicted by the Holy Spirit - if we confess our sins, and repent of our sins, we are not condemned! We might be convicted, but there's no need for us to be condemned!

Now, someone needs to hear that here this morning, I believe. If you are convicted by the Holy Spirit about something in your life, listen: confess it to God, renounce it, repent of it, believe the word of God that you're free in Christ, abide in Him moment by moment kept in His love, and you will know no condemnation!

So one of the reasons why you might be feeling bad is Holy Spirit conviction, but the other is

Satanic condemnation - Satanic condemnation. Now, the devil - in fact, the name 'devil' means 'accuser', 'adversary' - and that is the devil's role within holy Scripture as we see him, he is the accuser of the brethren. Now we learned two Thursday nights ago that the opposite of living in the Spirit - what we're talking about here, keeping short accounts with God, dwelling underneath the shadow of the cross every day, enjoying the cleansing of the blood and the Spirit and the Word - well, the opposite to that is operating in the flesh, trying through yourself to achieve spiritual things, trying to live the Christian life by rules and regulations. It is manifest in living by law - now listen carefully: law condemns us, law - whether it's the Old Testament law, whether it's your little Ten Commandments that are personal to you that you try to abide to in your Christian life - they will always condemn you, always! Do you know why? Verse 3, look, chapter 8: 'For what the law', or indeed any law, 'could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh'.

Now, God's law is perfect, and your law might be pretty good as well - but the weakness was not in the law, the weakness was in our flesh! The law was weak toward our flesh in that we couldn't keep it, we haven't got it in us to keep it! Do you understand this? Therefore living by law gives the devil ammunition to fire at you, do you understand that? If you break a commandment, you fall regarding God's laws or your laws, you're condemned right away - now that's right throughout the New Testament, the law magnifies sin. Paul says it wasn't until he understood the law, that he understood how much sin was in him - it's like a magnifying glass that just blows it all into proportion, as it is in God's eyes. So if we're going to live by laws, we're constantly going to be condemned, and we're giving the devil a foothold in our lives - but what Romans 8 is saying is: 'Since you no longer are under the law, Satan has no longer a basis to accuse you!'.

Are you getting it? So, if you want to be accused, go back into the Old Testament and keep living by law, and make a whole lot of New Testament ones for yourself as well - and don't understand that this is nothing to do with law, it's the Spirit, and it's far far superior than the law. The law is the only basis for accusation. Now here's another inaccurate illustration that you can correct me on afterwards - I haven't been able to ascertain all the facts, but I know this much: if you go over the speed limit in Northern Ireland, you will get a speeding ticket if you're caught...I think that's true! But I think in the Isle of Man, there are either no speed limits on the Isle of Man, or there are different speed limits on the Isle of Man - and one thing is sure: you'll not be able to be convicted in the same way over there for speeding as you are here, why? Because the same law does not apply, and no judge could condemn you as guilty.

It's better in Christ: there is no law in Christ to find us guilty, therefore it's the law of the Spirit - it has set us free from the law of sin and death. 'Why is this?', you say, 'Is this a wiping the slate clean? A brushing of our sin underneath the carpet? It doesn't seem fair!'. It is fair, because what - verse 3 - 'the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh'. He took the curse - cursed is every one that hangs on a tree, and that was the penalty for a lawbreaker. Our Lord Jesus bore it, and bore it for the sins of a transgressing world - He took the rap for the law.

It's been paid. It's not that God has just forgotten about it, or ignored it - it has been judicially dealt with, 'For he has made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him', that's how God can be just and the Justifier of them that believe in Jesus. That's why, if we confess our sins, He is not only faithful, He is just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Now I want you to come with me here in your own personal understanding of this: so the Lord Jesus put away sin, and

as He rose again from the grave the third day and ascended to heaven 40 days later, there was no sin on Him when He went into glory - there couldn't be any. As He entered in there, so we have entered in in Him - and, as God the Father looked on Him:

'Look, ye saints! the sight is glorious:
See the Man of Sorrows now;
From the fight returned victorious,
Every knee to Him shall bow'.

As God looked on Him, and saw His own reflected utter perfection, that is how He sees you and sees me. I'm surprised nobody has fallen off their seat, especially if you're a person who feels bad about how you are as a Christian. Look at this chapter 8 for a moment, this is mighty, verse 33 - why are you feeling bad? Verse 33 says: 'Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifies' - that means there is no charge, there's not even a charge against you. Forget about going to court and being condemned, there's no charge! Why? Because the only One who can bring a charge is the One who is worthy, and that is Christ - and He's not bringing the charge! He has paid the penalty, so there's no charge! Verse 34: 'Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us'. So not only is there no charge, there is no judge! The only one who can judge us is God in the person of His Son, and He's not doing that! He's paid the penalty, He's wiped the slate clean - no charge, no judge!

Look again with me at verse 35: 'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?' - no jailer! There's nobody going to take you down from the testifying box, and incarcerate you and take you to jail. You will never be separated from the love of God - no jailer! Isn't it wonderful? Because the cause for any condemnation - this is the point - has been taken away, it's removed, and even now Christ continues to intercede for us! Are you living in the good of this? You've no reason to feel bad! So many hymns have been inspired by this - too many to mention, but some of them are wonderful:

'When Satan tempts me to despair,
And tells me of the guilt within
Upward I look and see Him there
Who made an end of all my sin.

Because the sinless Saviour died,
My sinful soul is counted free:
And God the just is satisfied
To look on Him and pardon me'.

That's why Revelation 12:11 says: 'They overcame him', not by their keeping of regulations and rules and laws, but 'by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony'. So God is for us, that's what it says, isn't it? Verse 31: 'What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us' - God is for us. That means that any other opposition should be of no consequence. Now, let me ask you a question, the one who is feeling bad here this morning about themselves: if God isn't out to get you, who is? The Bible tells us that before we're saved, Satan blinds us - and if you're not saved, you need to waken up to the fact that the devil has got a blindfold around you, and he is leading you to hell. You need to waken up very fast before you end up there, and the blindfold is taken off. But after we're saved, the devil still wants to work with us - in fact, I think he's more interested in us after we're saved, he

wants to then bind us.

Because we are made free in Christ through the cross, the only way he can achieve a binding of us - now, stay with me - is to deceive us. He is the father of lies, the Lord Jesus said, and in our minds he plants thoughts that exalt themselves against the knowledge of God, and he does this to distort our relationship with God. He can't cease God to be my Father, he can't stop me from being His son now that I'm saved, but what he can do is: accuse me day and night, and say that God is angry with me, God doesn't want me, and I'm no good as a child of God. Do you understand this? He can't do a thing about our position in Christ but, if he can, he can get us to believe that our position isn't true. Are you with me? If he can get us to believe it isn't true, we will live as if it isn't!

We ought not to be ignorant of his devices, this is the way he works, his schemes. One primary strategy towards believers is to distort their relationship with God, and discredit the truth of who I really am in Christ. You see, Satan's lies are aimed at making you think - now, you know who you are, you're a child of God, you're bought with the precious blood of Christ, you mean everything to God - and yet Satan wants you to think: 'Oh, I'm no good! I can't be forgiven for what I've done! Christianity might work for all these religious people round me, but it doesn't work for me'. What he's trying to do is distort your identity in Christ! Condemning thoughts - do you have those? Accusing charges and blames?

Now, listen carefully to what I'm saying: if you have confessed your sin, repented of it, and are seeking to abide in Christ, you cannot know the conviction of the Holy Spirit if you've dealt with your sin in a particular area. So if you are being condemned, it cannot be from God, because He's the One who justifies! No charge! No judge! No jailer!

Turn with me for a moment to Zechariah 3, near the end of your Old Testament, because we need to really labour this. Who does God rebuke? Is God down on you this morning because you messed up, or you're feeling bad? Zechariah 3 - who does God rebuke? Verse 1, Zechariah says: 'He shewed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan', the adversary, the accuser, 'standing at his right hand to resist him' - that's his job. 'And the LORD said unto Satan, The LORD', He uses His own name, 'the LORD rebuke thee, O Satan; even the LORD that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?'. God rebukes Satan, He wants to put Satan down, He wants to build us up. Now He uses discipline at times to do that, and it can be rough as we saw from Hebrews - no chastening for the present time seems to be joyous - nevertheless, He never turns us down, He never condemns us, He never destroys us. Well then, who is trying to destroy our relationship with God? Who is it that is accusing you day and night without ceasing? You know who it is! You know who it is...it's not God.

Now, maybe this is all getting muddled in your head, and I don't want that - so we need to answer a question, and I'm almost finished. We need to answer a question: how do you know the difference between Satan's condemnation and the Holy Spirit's conviction? That's a good question, because both of them will make you feel bad - so how do you know which is which? Well, turn with me to 2 Corinthians chapter 7, and I think this will tie it all together hopefully. Second Corinthians chapter 7 verses 9 and 10: 'Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry', nobody gets a kick out of making people feel bad, 'but that ye sorrowed to repentance' - that was the end result, that made Paul happy, that the sorrow bore fruit in repentance - 'for ye were made sorry after a godly manner', so there's a godly feeling bad, 'that ye might receive damage by us in nothing' - 'I didn't want to do you any harm, I wanted to do you good'. So this is this discipline to maturity: 'For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be

repented of', in other words there is a great change that you don't go back on in your life, 'but the sorrow of the world', the feeling bad that the devil and the world brings, 'works death'.

Now, let me put this even more simply for you to understand, listen carefully: how do you know the difference between Satan's condemnation and the Holy Spirit's conviction? Put simply: if you have repented of a particular sin, the Holy Spirit's conviction for that sin stops. Let me repeat that: if you have repented of a particular sin, you've confessed it, renounced it, repented, the Holy Spirit's conviction stops for that sin - but if you repented for a sin, and you are still feeling condemned, that is the devil! Be under no illusion about it. The difference between those two things is always in the result: God's Holy Spirit only ever makes us feel bad to make us feel good by getting done with our sin, but the devil wants us to feel bad so that we'll become bad, and we'll start to believe we're no longer children of God, we're no longer blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places, and we will lose our identity.

It's inevitable that at times we will feel bad because we're letting the Lord down, and we must for it is the Holy Spirit's work to convict us, and to conform us to the image of His Son - but God wants us to be free from condemnation, to be free from condemning thoughts, condemning feelings! Listen, whoever you are this morning: are you free? Whom the Son sets free shall be free indeed. Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty. Dear friend here, wounded soldier of the Lord, hear His soul-inspiring word: if you have sinned - listen - confess it, repent of it, and be free! If you have confessed and repented, don't let the devil condemn you. Who are you going to believe? Are you going to believe what that wicked, filthy liar and murderer from the beginning says about you? Or are you going to believe what the lovely Lord Jesus Christ testifies? The One who bled every drop of blood for love of you, and is ascended on high and at the right hand of God - He's representing you, He's not ashamed of you, He's not ashamed of you!

Do you understand the difference this can make? Do you know what the effect of this no condemnation understanding is? Listen, you've got to understand this much: what we do does not determine who we are. Listen: what we do does not determine who we are, who we are determines what we do. If you think you're a no good child of God, you'll live like a no good child of God - but when you realise the truth of who you are in Christ, do you know what? It will revolutionise your behaviour, and you will have victory in the Lord Jesus Christ that you have never experienced in your entire life.

Now, answer me the question: we all feel bad, do we not, about letting the Lord down? We need to ascertain where that feeling is coming from: am I genuinely being convicted by the Holy Spirit about something that I have done before God that He is displeased with, and is this the discipline of the Lord to bring you to repentance, and to bring me to a healing in the Spirit? If you have confessed and repented, that conviction will stop - so if you're having the bad feeling, and you've done that, it is the devil and you need to believe God and be free of it today...that's your blood right in Jesus Christ. He died so that you might know that.

Let me close with a brilliant illustration - it's not mine, it's Neil Anderson's - but it brings all this together, and I'm just going to read it to you. Apply it to your own heart. He writes that slavery in the United States was abolished by the 13th Amendment on December 18th 1865. *'How many slaves were there on December 19th 1865? Well, in reality, there should have been none. But many still lived like slaves, because they never learned the truth. Others knew and even believed that they were free but chose to live as they always had.'*

Now listen, he says: *'Now suppose several plantation owners were devastated by the*

Emancipation Proclamation. 'We're ruined!', they said, 'Slavery has been abolished. We've lost the battle to keep our slaves'. But their chief spokesman slyly responded, 'Not necessarily, as long as these people think they're still slaves, the Emancipation Proclamation will have no practical effect. We don't have a legal right over them anymore, but many of them don't know it. Keep your slaves from learning the truth, and your control over them will not even be challenged'.

Once a cotton farmer asked, 'But what if the news spreads?'

'Don't panic', was the reply. 'We have another barrel in our gun. We may not be able to keep them from hearing the news, but we can still keep them from understanding it. They don't call me the 'father of lies' for nothing. We still have the potential to deceive the whole world. Just tell them that they are going to be free, not that they are free already. The truth they heard is just positional truth, not actual truth. Someday they may receive the benefits, but not now.

'But they'll expect me to say that. They won't believe me', came the response.

'Then pick out a few persuasive ones who are convinced that they're still slaves and let them do the talking for you. Remember, most of these free people were born as slaves and have been slaves their whole lives. All we have to do is deceive them so that they still think they're slaves. As long as they continue to do what slaves do, it will not be hard to convince them that they must still be slaves. They will maintain their slave identity because of the things they do. The moment they try to profess that they are no longer slaves, just whisper in their ears, 'How can you even think you are no longer a slave when you are still doing things that slaves do?'

Years later, many had still not heard the wonderful news that they had been freed, so naturally they continued to live the way they had always lived. Some heard the good news but told themselves, 'I'm still living like a slave, doing the same things I have always done. My experience tells me that I must not be free. Everything is the same as before the Proclamation, so it must not be true. I must still be a slave'. So they continued as if they had not received freedom!

Then one day, a former slave heard the good news and received it with great joy. He checked out the validity of the Proclamation and discovered that the highest of all authorities had originated the decree. Not only that, but it personally cost the authority a tremendous price so that slaves could be free. The slave's life was transformed. He reasoned that it would be hypocritical to continue living as a slave, even though his feelings told him he still was. Determined to live by what he knew to be true, his experiences began to change dramatically because he realized' - now get this - 'that his old master had no authority over him any more, and he did not need to be obeyed. He was free, and he gladly served the one who set him free'. That's it!

*'No condemnation now I dread;
 Jesus, and all in Him, is mine;
 Alive in Him, my living Head,
 And clothed in righteousness divine,
 Bold' - are you bold? - 'I approach the eternal throne,
 And claim the crown, through Christ my own'.*

Now listen: this is not a sermon, it's not something to tickle your ears, it's something to

change your life, child of God! It's changing my life, is it changing your life? Get out from under the cloud, this morning, of condemnation, and get up the mountain and see God face-to-face in Christ - and it's that that will revolutionise your Christian victory!

Let's all pray just for a moment, let's pray - have you got it? Have you got it? That's it! Are you there yet? You are there! It's believing that you're there. Christ got you there, it cost Him every drop of blood to get you there - that's where you are! Just believe it and live in the good of it!

Oh Father, we remember when our Lord Jesus stood at that tomb and said: 'Lazarus, come forth!'. When he came forth, he then said: 'Loose him, and let him go'. Lord, sometimes we're like Lazarus with the grave clothes still on. We've got the new life, but we're not letting go - we won't let ourselves go when the Lord is loosing us. Oh Father, just now we pray for those who still believe they are wrapped up, and they're not. Lord, may they be let go now, and never stop going till the day they die again like Lazarus, and until that day when we're glorified in complete likeness to our Lord Jesus when we see Him as He is. Help us now to appreciate all that He has done for us as we remember Him now around this Table. Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - January 2009
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