

A SERMON THAT HAS ANGERED MANY – EXAMINE YOURSELF

Preached at Grace Community Church in San Antonio, TX (www.gccsatx.com)

(2 Corinthians 13:5 & 1 John)

Paul Washer

I'm going to preach a message tonight that has angered many, many, many churchmen. It has angered many of the older people. It has angered many of the youth. Many of the youth that I've preached this to have become fiercely angry, but the people that have become most angry at hearing this message have been the parents of youth.

I have found that there is something quite amazing among parents that, if they can get some sort of a claim out of their children that they profess faith in Jesus Christ, they seem to hold onto that and it gives them assurance and joy, and it seems that they're bothered any time someone would come and question that claim. It seems we would rather hold onto a false hope than to hear the truth.

There are many people who do not want to hear the truth because it will shake up the false hope they have that they're going to heaven when, indeed, they are not. There are so many people in Christianity—American Christianity—that believe themselves right with God, that believe themselves saved because they were told that by a preacher who should have spent more time studying the Bible and less time preaching.

I hear people all over the world—and especially in this country—tell me that they're saved, and I ask them how do they know that they're saved. Well, because they believe. And no one asked them the second question: How do you know that you believe?

If we were to dismiss this congregation tonight and send everyone out to every part of this city, we would find out that the great majority of the people in this city believe that they believe. And we know that's not true. If we were to go to taverns and crack houses tonight, if we were to go to casinos anywhere in this world, we would find people who believe that they believe. And the question is—how can we be sure that we believe when so many people say they believe and we know they don't.

In America, we have combined two doctrines, and we have lost both of them. There are two very important doctrines in the Christian faith. The first one is commonly called—a name I do not like but I will use here tonight—the security of the believer, that every person who has truly believed in Jesus Christ is born again and they are secure. The very God who saved them will keep them saved—security of the believer.

But there's another doctrine which we do not hear much about. It's not just the doctrine of security, but the doctrine of assurance. It is true that every true believer is kept by the power of God. That's the doctrine of security, but the doctrine of assurance is this: How can you be assured that you're a true believer? How can you know that you are a true believer?

I've had people tell me, "Well, I just know that I know." I tell them there's a way that seems right unto men. It leads to death.

I've had people tell me, "Well, I know in my heart of hearts that I am saved." The Bible says that the heart is deceitfully wicked. It goes beyond knowledge in its wickedness. So, do you really want to trust a mind that is faulty? Do you really want to trust a heart that can be wicked?

I've even had people tell me, "Well, I know I'm saved because the preacher told me I'm saved." Since when did men have such authority? And, then, the worst of all—"I know I'm saved because I have walked with God." My dear friends, let me tell you this, if you are not walking with God now, you can have no assurance that you have ever been saved.

We're not teaching here tonight that, if you walk with God and you're saved and then you stop walking with God, you lose your salvation. What we're telling you is this—we have assurance that we have come to know Him not just because one time we repented, but we are continuing to repent today. It is not just that at one time we believed, but that we are continuing to believe today. It is not just that one time we walked with Him; we continue to walk with Him today because He who began a good work will finish it.

It says in 2nd Corinthians, chapter 13, verse 5, Paul had come to a church, many of them professing Christ, many of them walking in carnality, and he doesn't ask them—he doesn't say to them, "Let me ask you something. When was the time that you first asked Jesus Christ into your heart?" He didn't even refer to their conversion experience. He goes right to present tense and he says this: *Test yourselves*—in verse 5—*to see if you are in the faith. Examine yourselves. Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you unless indeed you fail the test.*

If I see someone who, let's say, for three or four years seems to have walked with God, loved the saints, endeavored to pray, to know the Word, to congregate with other believers, and all of such, and then they begin to fall away gradually. They begin to walk away. They begin to allow the world and sin and other things into their life. They begin to enjoy the fellowship of the wicked. I don't go to them and tell them, "You know you're a Christian and you need to avoid backsliding."

I go to them and say, "You have made the good profession. You have declared among many that you are a believer, but now you are beginning to live like an unbeliever. It is very, very possible you never knew Him, that up until this point, it has all been a very deceiving work of the flesh, because, if a work of God does not continue, it never was a work of God.

Now what does Paul say to this person? He says, *Test yourselves. Test yourselves.* Take a test. Let me tell you something, my dear friends. Heaven and hell, eternity and death may not be very much a reality to you, but it most certainly is to this preacher. I could care less whether or not your bank account is balanced or you have self-esteem. My only thing—the only thing that might keep me up this evening and steal sleep from my eyes is the fact that many of you will die and go to hell.

Test yourself! This is not just some whimsical thing. This is not just something to worry about for a day. We're talking about eternity. Is it well with your soul? If you test yourselves in the light of Scripture, will you be found whole and complete, born again, kept by the power of God? It's time to take a test and stop relying on your emotions and stop relying on what everyone is telling you and stop comparing yourself to other people who call themselves Christians, because the great majority of people in America who call themselves Christians are lost.

Some leaders in the Southern Baptist Convention have said this: If we take seriously what the Bible says about Christianity, we would have to say that less than 10 to 15 percent of all our membership is even saved. And don't think that just applies to Southern Baptists. It applies to you all.

He said test yourself. Examine yourself. Not just some light examination. Not just hear the words of this preacher and walk out there and allow Satan to steal the Word of God from your heart. While you're here and while Christ is present and while the Word is preached, examine yourself. It is a deadly thing. Sin waits outside this door. It is crouching and its desire is to have you. While you are here and Christ is present, examine yourself.

So many times in South America, working in the Andes Mountains, I would have to cross footbridges—gorges that you almost couldn't see to the bottom. Test the ropes. Test the wood. Is this a sound bridge? Examine it carefully. Why? You get out in the middle of that thing, it breaks, you're dead. In the same way, that salvation that you hold onto, that you trust in, it might be like a horse's hair. When you swing out into eternity, many of you are going to swing out on nothing stronger than a horse's hair and when the fires of hell blast up, you'll wither and you'll fall.

Examine yourself. Take the Word of God and what the Word of God says about a true Christian, and examine yourself in light of it. And if you fall short of the test, repent and believe. Throw yourself upon the mercy of God. Cry out to Him until a work is done. And that's another thing, isn't it? A whole other sermon. Until a work is done.

This silly Christianity in America. "Repeat these words after me." No, you might have to wait upon God. You might have to cry out to Him until the work is done—a true work, a finished work, a complete work.

How can we take a test? How can we test our life? How can you test yourself tonight to see whether or not you truly are a Christian? We just have to go to the Word of God to do that. Go to 1st John chapter 5.

First John chapter 5, verse 13. John gives us the reason in his Gospel. In John chapter 20, verse 31, he tells us why he writes his Gospel. He writes his Gospel so that men might believe that Jesus is the Son of God, that He's the Christ, that they might have eternal life. Why does he write his epistle? He tells us here in 1st John chapter 5, verse 13: *These things—this epistle—I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God—those of you who profess Christ—why?—that you may know that you have eternal life.*

You want to know whether or not you're born again? Read the book of 1st John, because the book of 1st John is made up of a series of tests, and we're going to take those tests this evening. And I pray to God that God gives you ears to hear.

And I want to tell you something and I want to make it very, very clear. Do not listen to your heart. Listen to the Word of God. Do not listen to what your daddy says about your salvation. Do not listen to what your mother says about your salvation. Listen to the Word of God. Compare what you know about your secret life.

Now, what did I say that for? So many of you young people, you have your parents so deceived it's unbelievable, because externally you conform to their law, but it's not your law. It's not in your heart. And in the secret place, you know who you are. And then some of you who are not children, but adults, teenagers that are older that are out in the world, you go out there. You know who you are. Your mom and dad, they do not know. Some of you adults, church members do not know, but when you are out there by yourself, that's the person I want you to compare to the Word of God tonight. Not the one in here that looks pretty, not the one in here that's got religious makeup on. No. The one out there when no one is looking. You take that person and compare him tonight to the Word of God and see if he stands. See if he stands.

You say, "Brother Paul, you seem quite intense tonight." How would you expect me to be if a train—a slow-moving train was going across our path and to see my little boy just inches from the wheel. Would you expect for me to whisper in his ear, "Back up, boy." Would you expect for me just to not even make a commotion, but kind of motion with my hand? Or would you expect me to scream out, "No-o-o-o-o-o!" How would you expect me to preach about these things? Let's take that secret life of yours and compare it to the Word of God.

First John chapter 1, verse 5. *This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.*

What does that mean? As in all the writings of John, he leaves things open. He leaves things open. I believe that, as you look through this text, you will find out that there are two things John is saying. First of all, whenever we're talking about light, and we see this in John chapter 3, we're talking about holiness, righteousness. God is a holy God. He is a righteous God, has no sin, no flaw, no shadow, no speck of immorality in Him. God cannot be tempted. You can be tempted because there's still an element of evil in you that is drawn to evil. God has no evil in Him. Evil cannot draw Him. He disdains it. He despises it. He's holy.

But that's not, I think, John's primary meaning here. John is dealing with a group of false teachers who basically are telling everybody that God is a very dark and shadowy and hidden figure, and that knowledge about God is esoteric. It is hidden and dark and only some people know it. And I believe that John is contradicting these false prophets and he is saying this, and you listen very carefully. This is what he is saying. He's saying God is Light. And he means this: God has revealed to us who He is and He has revealed to us His will. He has made it very clear.

Now, let me just say something about how that would change everything in America if the media truly believed that. What kind of God do we have in America? What is the god of the politician in America? It's this kind of god—it's a god you can pray to, but you cannot define who he is. It's a god you can talk about in a political speech, but you cannot define what his will is. And that's a good god to have. Why? Because you're no longer accountable to a god like that. You don't know who he is and you don't know what he wants, so you just do whatever your carnal, wicked heart wants to do. That's a very convenient god, and that's the kind of god some supposed Christians have.

But John counters that and he says this: No, my friend, God has told you exactly who He is and God has told you exactly what He requires of thee, old man. He's not a hidden god. Now, learning that, let's go to the next verse.

He says this: *If we say that we have fellowship with Him. . . .* What does that mean? If we say that we are saved is exactly what it means. If we say that we know Him, if we say that we abide in Him. For so many years in America, because of a certain seminary that has propagated this, we have been taught and led to believe that 1st John is talking about the difference between a Christian who walks in communion with God or a Christian that does not walk in communion with God. They take this text to mean that, if we say that we know Him, if we say that we know Him, if we say that we know Him and yet walk in darkness, we're just a confused Christian. That's not what this text means.

What this text is saying is this: *If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.* If we say that we are a Christian and yet we walk in darkness, we are lying. Now, I know what's going to happen in your heart right now. "Yeah, but you don't know my heart, Brother Paul. I know that I know that I know that I'm saved."

I could care less, again, about your heart. Because that's not what John said. John says, if we say that we have fellowship with God, that we are a Christian and yet we walk in the darkness, we are a liar. Now, what does it mean to walk in the darkness? Well, first of all, you need to understand what darkness is. It's the opposite of light. If we say we are a Christian and yet we walk—now what does it mean *to walk—peripateo*—to walk around; a style of life. If we say we are a Christian and yet our style of life contradicts everything God has told us about Himself and contradicts God's will, we're a liar. That's what it means. That's what this text is saying. It's as clear as a bell.

Now, listen to me. Listen to me. I'm going to tell you again. Look at this, in verse 6. *If we say that we have fellowship with Him*—if we say that we are Christian and yet we walk—we lead a style of life—in the darkness, we lead a style of life that contradicts the attributes and the nature of God, what God has told us about Himself, our style of life reflects nothing of God's character, and our style of life totally contradicts what God has said to be His will, then we are a liar when we say we are a Christian.

We've got to understand this. Do you have ears? You've got to understand it. There are so many people walking around. You can see them. It is like a fog over their heads. That is why religion is so dangerous. All these silly little boys out here preaching that, if you repeat a prayer,

you're going to heaven and the moment they pronounce that upon a person, it is like a fog comes over them. But it's time to cut through that fog with a deeper, greater light. And that is the Word of God.

My dear friend, listen to me. John is saying that, if you say you're a Christian and yet your style of life, the way you are, does not reflect His character and the things you do go against His will as a style of life, he's telling you you are a liar when you say you're a Christian.

Now, let's go on. Here's the next test. Verse 8. *If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

Now, he said, if we say we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. There have been strains of Christianity or marginal Christianity down through the history of the church that believed in sinless perfection. Well, the Bible doesn't teach that. The Bible teaches that even the most mature, the most godly Christian is still susceptible to sin.

What this is teaching us is this. One of the greatest evidences that a person has truly been born again, that a person is truly a child of God is that they will be sensitive to the sin in their life and they will be led to repentance and confession of that sin.

Isn't it amazing—and most pastors, when I preach this, they smile. They know exactly what I'm talking about. Whenever I'm preaching in a church and there is a move of God and a move of God with regard to sin, I find it amazing that, when people start breaking and in American churches somebody is coming forward and praying, I think it is quite amazing that it is always the most godly, most devoted, most spiritual people coming forward, weeping over their sin and it is always the most carnal, godless, hateful, spiteful, wicked church members that sit back there, cold as a stone, as though they were perfect. What you are seeing is the difference between the lost and the saved in the congregation.

A true Christian is sensitive to sin. Sensitive to sin. Sensitive to sin. Let me ask you a question. When was the last time you wept over your sin? That's frightening. When was the last time you were broken over your sin? That's frightening. Some of you don't even know what I'm talking about. When we are a child of God, God guards us. He talks about his jealous love for Israel. Is it not greater for the church? Does God guard you?

I can remember my great love for books in seminary, and I went to the bookstore there in seminary to buy a book with a friend of mine, and there were only two volumes left. There were two and there were two of us. I pulled out the first volume, and I love books, and there was a little tear on one of the pages. I swapped books with him. I gave him that book and pulled out the other one. We go to the counter. We buy our books. I go home the whole time as though I had murdered a man—as though I had murdered a man.

And, finally, praying, having to call him up, saying, "I've got to talk to you."

"Well, what is it? You can tell me over the phone."

“No, I can’t tell you over the phone. I have got to meet you face to face.” And then go before him, weeping, and ask forgiveness. Why? Because I’m pious? No. Because God guards his children. I see Christians, and it’s amazing to me. . . .”Brother Paul, come and preach for us. We want revival.” And yet, before they come to the meetings and after the meetings they go home and sit in front of a television and watch all that filth. And they’re not even sensitive to the sin of it.

Are you sensitive to sin? Does it lead you to confession? Now, let me ask you, some of you here, here’s something you need to understand. Just recently a man that I know was found in grievous, grievous sin, and someone said, “How did a man like him fall into sin?”

And I said, “He didn’t fall into sin. No man falls into sin. He slid there like everyone else.”

Let me ask you—because some of you may be Christians and you need to hear a warning. Are you sliding into sin? Are you starting to do things now, gradually, gradually, that you would not have thought of doing a month ago? And little by little by little, you know what’s going to happen? You keep going, and it’ll be evidence you’re lost. If God pulls you back, it’ll be evidence you’re saved.

You say, “Oh, Brother Paul, but you don’t know me.” I don’t need to know you. I know the Word of God, and I know it’s the same for every individual. Are you sensitive to sin? I want to read a passage to you just quickly. Just listen. It’s one of my--to me it’s one of the most blessed passages in all of Scripture. Let me ask you, is this your attitude? Has it ever been your attitude?

God says, *For my hand made all these things, thus all these things came into being, declares the Lord, but to this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit and trembles at my word.* Do you tremble at His Word or do you look for loopholes around it? Do you excuse your sin? Do you avoid the Word now because you know it’s going to talk to you and talk about you? People come to me all the time and say, “Brother Paul, I have a new relationship with God.”

And I go to 1st John, chapter 1, verse 8. I say, “Do you have a new relationship with sin? Because, if you don’t have a new relationship with sin, you don’t have a new relationship with God.” Are you sensitive to sin?

Now, third test. It’s found in verse 3 of chapter 2. *By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments.* Now, listen to this. *The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.* Now, let’s look at this test—by this we know that we have come to know Him. You know, in America—I tell you what, I was talking to a Scotsman awhile back in Peru, and he said, “You Americans, your theology is 3,000 miles wide and a half inch deep.” He’s right.

Our Gospel here is pathetic. Our evangelism borderlines on heresy. How do you know that you came to know Him? If you go to most pastors in this city right now and you say to them, “I don’t know whether or not I’m saved,” this is the question they’ll ask you: “Was there ever a

point in time in your life when you prayed and asked Jesus to come into your heart?” If you say yes, they’ll go, “Were you sincere?” If you say, “I think so,” they’ll say, “Then you’re saved and you need to stop the devil from bothering you.” There’s not a biblical bone in their brains.

Look what the Bible says. How can you know that you’re saved? How can you know it? Look what he says. *By this we know that we have come to know Him.* Because our heart tells us? Because the preacher tells us? Because we just feel it? Look what he says. *By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments.* And that *keep* there is in present tense, as well as many of the other things here in this text. And what he’s saying is, if we keep on keeping His commandments, we know that we know Him, if we persevere in His commandments, we know that we know Him.

And then he goes on and says, the one who is opposite doesn’t know Him. Now, I want you to look at something for a moment. What does it mean to keep His commandments? Does it mean to walk in sinless perfection? No. Again, it is a style of life. If we were to take your life out and film it every day 24 hours a day, would we see a style of life that desired to know God’s commandments, desired to obey them, was growing in victory in obedience, and was also broken when it didn’t obey, would we see that in your life?

You say, “Well, I’ve kept the commandments before.” You forget what he’s saying. If you keep on keeping ... perseverance. Why perseverance? Because of the promises of God. *He who began a good work in you will finish it,* and if the work isn’t finished, He didn’t do it.

Is your lifestyle marked by a keen interest in God’s commandments and a desire to obey them? Again, someone comes to me and says, “Brother Paul, I have a new relationship with God.”

And I tell them, “Do you have a new relationship with sin? Because, if you don’t have a new relationship with sin, you don’t have a new relationship with God.” And then I ask, “If you’ve got a new relationship with God, well, tell me, do you have a new relationship with His commands? Do you have a new relationship with his Word? Because, if you don’t have a new relationship with His Word, you don’t have a new relationship with him.”

Now look at verse 4. *The one who says, “I have come to know Him,” and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.* If you’ve been in any kind of meetings, especially among people who consider themselves to be super spiritual and vocal about it, I mean, meetings will get going and the preacher will start preaching or the music will get rolling, and someone will jump up and say, “Oh, hallelujah, He’s my Savior. Hallelujah, I know Him.”

That’s exactly what John is talking about right here. The one who jumps up in the middle of the meeting and says “I know I’ve come to know Him,” but does not keep his commandments is a liar. He’s a liar.

Now, again, look at this from the context. John is the apostle of love. Paul was known for his great mind, but I think John was known for his great love, and, yet, this humble, broken apostle is laying down the verdict. You are a liar. It’s an amazing thing, isn’t it.

Now, it goes on. Let's go to another test. Verse 6 of chapter 2. *The one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.* The Christian ought to walk as Jesus walked, and you say, "Brother Paul, you've gone too far now. Who can walk like Jesus walked?"

Let me give you an illustration to try to explain to you what I mean. When I was a little boy, my father was a very big man, very smart man, and like all little boys, I wanted to be just like him. Now, up north, we raised cattle and raised quarterhorses. We'd get big snows and my dad would come into my room at five in the morning, even when I was a little boy, and say, "Paul boy, get up. No rest for the wicked." And when he said, "Get up," you got up.

And we would walk out there in the snow, and the one thing I can always remember doing is—my father would take these big strides and leave these footprints in the snow. Now, I wanted to walk like my dad walked, and so I would try to stretch my legs out and put my foot in his footprint, and I would stretch my legs out. Now, you can imagine, I was stretching out farther than I could ever go. You can imagine I looked ridiculous, and you can imagine I fell down, but you will also know by looking at that picture that the greatest desire in my heart was to walk like he walked. You could tell, looking at that little boy, he wanted to be like his dad even though sometimes he didn't look anything like him.

Let me ask you. What's the greatest desire in your heart? Is your great desire to walk like He walked? To be like He was? Is that your great desire? Are you seeking to put your foot in his footprints? Listen to me, man. Listen to me, woman, because, if you're not, be afraid. A reporter came up to me one time, and he said, "Why are you telling people to be afraid all the time?"

I said, "Because they ought to be afraid." Again, this is the test. This is the exam. If I were to look at your life, if I were to film the whole thing, would I see since the supposed day of your conversion this desire to walk like Him, or do you desire to walk like everybody else? Do you desire to walk like the world and act like the world and talk like the world and fellowship with the world? Do you identify with the world? Or is it Jesus? Is it Jesus?

We're not talking about whether or not you need to rededicate your life tonight. We're talking about whether or not you need to get saved. Now, let's go on.

The next test. Verse 9 of chapter 2. *The one who says he is in the Light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now. The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes.*

Now, *brother* here is not referring to the poor, even though we ought to love the poor. It's not referring to someone of another race. I always thought that was a quite stupid statement anyway because there's no more than one race, folks. It's called *human*. Unless you've got a Martian tucked into your pocket somewhere, there's only one race. We're to love people of all different colors and cultures and all that. We know that. But that's not what he's talking about here.

When he says *brother*, he's talking about believers. If you say that you know God and yet you do not love other believers in a real and practical way and desire fellowship with them, you're lost. Now, let me give you an example. Remember when Jesus said, *I was in prison; you did not visit me. I was hungry; you did not feed me; I was naked; you did not clothe me.* And guys who do prison ministries will always use that verse saying, *We need to go into the prisons.* Well, we need to go into prisons but that verse doesn't really have anything to do with that unless there's Christians in there.

What this verse is talking about, and I learned it quite well in Peru and in other third-world countries. In some third-world countries—my friend, listen to me—you get thrown into jail, you will starve to death unless every day somebody from the outside brings you food. You will. They do not provide food for you. You will die. Now, let's say that someone is thrown in prison, not for being an assassin or a thief, but they're thrown in prison in the time of the apostles for being a Christian. They're locked away in there. Now, they're going to die, they're going to starve to death unless somebody else brings them food. Now, that presents a problem because the authorities know anybody that brings this guy food has to be a Christian. And so the one who goes to take him food is in danger of being thrown in prison himself. That's what Jesus is talking about—a love so great that you would risk your own life to care for other brothers and sisters in Christ.

Now, listen to me. Do you love to be with people who love to be with and talk about and worship and serve God? Or would you rather be with people who have nothing to do with God? Because you are demonstrating what you are. Like I said, I was raised on a farm. You do not see the chickens over there having a good time with the pigs. Chickens hang with chickens. Pigs do their own thing. It's their nature. You say, "Well, I'm a believer but, man, all my friends are, you know, they're. . . ." Yeah, I know. They're lost.

Do you love other Christians? "Well, I, you know, I, I come to church."

Big deal. The devil comes to church. What do you do when you get here? What do you do outside it? Because the church isn't this tent. It's not that building, it's the people. How many Christians are you serving? How many Christians are you reading the Bible with? How many Christians are you praying for? How many Christians are you loving? How many

I've got a dear friend in my church back home, and he know I'm here in Texas for a little while. He's adopted my mother. He's cleaning up her place; he's mowing her yard; he's doing all sort of things. Why? She's a believer, and because of the will of God, her son's being sent to Texas so he is taking over. That's what I mean. That's what I mean.

I've had both my hips replaced because my bones are degenerating. You know how they got replaced? I was a missionary. I didn't have a dime. How am I going to get implants? How am I going to be operated on? A man in Austin, Texas—Steven Whitlock, III—a young guy, 32 years old, but a brilliant man. He walks into his Sunday school class one day at a church there in Austin, Texas. He hears people praying about a missionary who can hardly walk up in the Andes Mountains.

He goes, “Give me his name.” He called me. He said, “Come. Come to Austin. I’m getting the ticket. I’m getting the doctors. I’m getting everything. Your hips are taken care of.” That’s what I’m talking about. I was walking through the jungles one time, high jungles, in *Departamento Amazonas* in Peru during the war with the *Sendero Luminoso*. We were in a place the military wouldn’t go, and we were lost—me and another brother. And we were traveling through the night in the darkness. We had smuggled ourselves up there in the back of grain trucks, and we were going to preach in the place because the believers were just depressed and torn apart and didn’t know what to do and everyone’s making fun of them. We knew we had to go in there.

So we would get lost, and we’re going through the jungle and, finally, we come upon this village. We walk in there. We don’t know where to go. We don’t know where to spend the night. We know that the terrorists can be absolutely everywhere. We know we could be a dead man, and Paco walks up to this person out on the streets, like almost midnight, and he goes, “*¡Hermanos por acá,*”—Are there brothers through here? And someone said, “That old lady over there”—an old Nazarene woman. We knock on the door, and I said, “*Soy pastor.*”

She grabs both of us, pulls us in, shuts the door behind us, sticks us down in the basement, goes out, kills a chicken, fries up some yucca, everything you can imagine. She’s feeding us. She’s taking care of us. She’s housing us. Could she get in trouble? Yes, she could.

And then you say, “Oh, I’m a Christian because I go to church.” You’ve got to be kidding me. That’s love? To you? You need a new definition.

You say, “Brother Paul, you’re using satire.” Read the prophets. They did the same. Some of this Christianity floating around America is worthy of making fun of, and it ought to be exposed. Do you love the people of God? You know, who are you with? Someone asked me, “How did you know—young guys always ask me, “How did you know that Charo, your wife, was the woman for you?”

I said, “Real easy. I wanted to be with her.”

“How’d you know you loved her?”

“I just wanted to be with her.”

How do you know you love them? You just want to be with them and talk about Jesus. Talk about Jesus. Do you love?

Now, let’s go on. There’s much more here, but we need to continue on. I want to go through another test. Chapter 2, verse 15. *Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*

What is the world? Everything in this fallen age that contradicts the attributes and will of God. Everything that does not come forth from God and goes back to God in worship. That’s the world. You say, “Well, I love secular music.” Let me just share something with you. I don’t

care. I'm not going there. This is what I'm going to tell you. It doesn't matter to me whether it's secular or Christian. My question is—what's being said in those words? Because if what's being said in those words contradicts the will of God, you're violating His will, and you're loving it.

And the adults here are probably going, "Amen." Okay, let's talk about your television. You watch things. You expect God to move? You love those. You love their jokes, their off-color jokes, their humor. You find yourself laughing in wickedness. And then you want God to move in your family and move in your life. Do you love the world? My dear friends, yesterday I was nine years old; today I am 43. Tomorrow I will be 90. Life is a vapor. It is fleeting. Everything will die. All will pass away. We are to love the things of God, the things that are eternal, and one of the signs of a Christian is that they are not entrapped or enslaved to the things of this present evil age, but they are set free to see Christ in His glory and follow Him and follow hard after him. Christ!

I was preaching at a university thing about a year and a half ago, and I noticed that everyone was seated and it was about two minutes before it was all to begin. All of a sudden at a side door in the auditorium, probably a group of 30, 40 beautiful girls come walking in and just kind of walked down the front there and sat down in all the seats. I mean, it was designed for them to showcase what they were. I looked at all of them, and I said, "Young women," I said, "let me give you a little bit of advice. I can see. I'm a man. Many of you are very, very, very, very beautiful. One day all of you are going to be terribly, terribly ugly."

It's true. To the wind with your money. To the wind with your beauty. To the wind with your wealth. It will not remain. The only thing that remains is the glories of Christ. Death is a present reality. You say, "Oh, how do you know? You're not that old."

My brother died. My father died in my arms. I preached the funeral of my sister. I know about death. And I know that it could come to some of you before I finish snapping these fingers. You say, "Brother Paul, you're trying to scare me." You have discerned correctly.

Love the world? You love to listen to the very things that nailed your supposed Master to the tree? Come off of it, man. Become a hellion, give yourself to demons, run wild, but don't come in here saying you're a believer and playing that game. You want to dance with the devil, then dance all night long, but don't come in here dancing with Christ for a moment and then go back out there and share your love. We're talking about loyalty. Love the world that nailed Christ to a tree?

Many of you, just by professing faith in Christ, you crucify again the Son of God. You need to realize something. This is the Christ. This is the Son of God. This is the Lord of Glory. Isn't it amazing that we're going to have believers from China, believers from Northern Nigeria that have died as martyrs, dragged through the desert behind camels, some of them skinned alive, but they would not deny Jesus. And here's all these American Christians standing beside them that couldn't even find enough of anything inside them to even attend church on Sunday morning. Does anybody have a problem with that?

One man can be skinned alive and not deny Christ, and the other denies him in the smallest of things. And yet, they're all born again? I think not, my friend. I think not. Do you love the world? Look at verse 16. *For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the [boastful] pride of life. . . .* It is not from the Father, but from the world.

Sometimes I'll get seminary students, and they've all got this great idea that they're going to go out and do something for God. So, I'll stand before them and I'll say, "Okay, I want everybody to breathe in." They all breathe in. I say, "Breathe out." They breathe out. I say, "Theologically, from where did that breath come?"

They say, "From God."

I say, "Okay, you can't breathe on your own. Now, what are you going to do for God?" The lust of the flesh, the pride of body. We live today basically in the Roman Empire; can't you see that? We have around us an empire of flesh and muscle and beauty and hair, and it will all rot in the tomb. Rot in the tomb. The wealth and the glamour and the glitter and all the things in which people are investing their lives will all rot, but the one who does the will of God will abide forever.

I look at my life right now. I'm middle-aged, and I think sometimes back. I think what if I was not a Christian. What would be my attitude now? Think about it. I'm 43. The days of my strength are over. The days of my beauty—they're over. The days of wonder and dreams about what my life is going to be—they're over. What's left for me? Just to grow older, more tired, and die. And yet, here I am now, a Christian. What does it mean? By God's grace, 22 years have not been wasted. In a meager, trifling sort of way, maybe, but truly in a way, they have been given to Christ and now the years ahead of me.

And you know what? I'm a boy of God. You're not a man of God till you're about 65. I see men of God still alive and those that have gone on before me. I listen to those old men at 85 and 90, barely can stand up in a pulpit and begin to speak and just glory all around them. And I say, "Lord, is that's what's waiting me?"

I hear about the saints that are about to cross over and their eyes fly open and they just cry out, "Glory, glory!" Lord, is that waiting for me? It's going to get better. Just going to get better. You say, "Well, your candle's going to be put out." Yes, my candle's going to be put out only because the sun's coming up. This world is passing away and I can tell you biblically that, if you're living for it, you're an absolute fool. But the one who does the will of God abides forever. And for those of you who are young, oh, what a precious opportunity now to serve the Lord. Now to serve Him.

Many that were called and used mightily of God were called as children in the Bible. Don't you see that? How old was this Samuel when he began to hear the voice of God? You say, "Oh, I must wait." No, you must not wait. Seek Him now. Seek Him hard. If you seek Him hard, he will let Himself be found by you.

It goes on. Verse 19. *They went out from us, but they were not really of us, for, if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out so that it would be shown that they all are not of us.*

Now, this does not mean, if someone leaves our church and goes to another, that they're not a Christian; that's not what that means. What it's talking about is this. The true Christian who has entered into Biblical historical Christianity and then leaves, might go into some new stuff, new Christianity, new teachings—they're rampant; they're everywhere; every wind is offered—leaves what is known as basic historic Christianity to go follow after some new stuff that has very little to do with Scripture and nothing to do with Biblical history. They've gone out from us. They don't remain in the body. Or someone who comes in and they might be with the group, you know, with the church, with the fellowship, with the congregation for six months or a year and then they depart and they stay departed and they don't go to another fellowship. What does that mean? They went out from us. And what is it showing? They never were of us. Because once you're in Christianity, you stay in Christianity because He who brought you in keeps you in. It wasn't Noah who shut that door behind himself on that boat. It was God.

I hear so many people that will say, "Oh, if I just make it to heaven, I'll be secure. If I just make it to heaven, I'll be secure." Knowing that, then where was the devil when he fell? It's not heaven that's going to make you secure, my friend. It's being in Christ that makes you secure.

It goes on. Another test, verse 22, chapter 2. *Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also.*

The true Christian is going to embrace the fullness of the person of Jesus Christ. Now, many of you are saying, yes, that is true. They are going to believe that Jesus is God in the flesh. Yes, that's true. They're going to believe that God became man, that He was a real man. Yes, that's true, but that's not all it means to embrace the fullness of Christ's person. This silly little stuff going around in America today that you can receive Jesus as Savior and not Lord is absolutely absurd. The fullness of His person you believe in, you receive, you embrace. All of it.

Jesus is Savior. Jesus is Lord. Jesus is Prophet, Priest, and King. Jesus is the only prophet who ever walked on this earth. Jesus is the only King. Jesus is the only true Priest. Jesus is, again, the only true Wise Man. Let me ask you, do you believe that? All right, how much are you going to His Word to find His wisdom? Do you believe He's King? How much are you going to His Word to find His law? Do you believe He's Prophet and He knows about your latter days? Then how much are you going to the Word to settle those latter days through your own obedience?

Now, finally, look in verse 29 of chapter 2. *If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of God.* Now what is righteousness? Everything that conforms. Everything that conforms to the nature and law of God.

Do you practice righteousness? If we were to look at your life, are you practicing God's law? Are you practicing God's wisdom, God's Word, God's precepts? Are you? Is it a practice in

your life, or are you departing from it? Does it have nothing to do—absolutely nothing to do with you?

In Matthew chapter 7, Jesus says, *Depart from me you who practice lawlessness*. That's one of the most terrifying statements in the Bible for American Christianity because basically what He's saying is this: Depart from me those of you who claim to be my disciples and yet you lived as though I never gave you a law to obey. I just described most of what's called *the church* in America today.

“I'm a disciple.” What's your relationship to His Word?

“I know Him.” What's your relationship to His Word?

Are you seeking to know His wisdom, His precepts, His commands, and to practice them? Is it a part of your life? Now, let me tell you something, something—I think legalism is death. Let me tell you that. I think it is. I think it's death. But I want to tell you something. The Bible tells us what we can think about and what we cannot think about. Do you know those commands? And are you practicing them? The Bible tells us what we ought to watch and we should not watch. Do you know those commands? Do you care? Are you practicing them?

The Bible tells us—now, listen to me—the Bible tells us what we can wear and not wear. You say, “Oh boy, here he goes.” No, listen to me. I'm not talking about defining every last—crossing every *T*, dotting every *I*, that you can't wear this. It is telling us this. Whatever you put on your body better be decent. It better be decent and it ought to enhance the beauty God's already given you. I look around today and see what people are wearing, and it reminds me of the Communist countries I've preached in right after their liberation.

One thing about a communist country, the communists come in Eastern Europe filled with all these little brick roads and beautiful little stone houses and everything. The communists come in and tear it all down, put in pavement and these ugly concrete blocks, and make everybody—they take beauty and destroy it. Look at fashion today. Look at it. It's not conformed to the will of God. God wants His people to be beautiful. It's a God that also means modest and decent. But He wants them beautiful. He wants them full of life, full of color. He wants them to be a beautiful people, but what do we see? Grunge, dressed in black, hanging over like this. I mean, it's unbelievable. In a way, I think it's really, really good because, I mean, a man who's godly no longer will have much temptation. The girls are trying to look as ugly as possible. I mean, that's not what God wants.

Let me just—I know I'm kind of—I don't have much time to preach to you, so I'm going to use a shotgun approach here. Girls and guys, let me give you a thing that my wife uses, and it's really, really good. It's this. If your clothing is a frame for your face, it's of God. If your clothing brings attention to your face from which the glory of God should be shining, it's of God. If your clothing is a frame for your body, it is sensual and God hates it.

Now, I know they're kind of pretty broad guidelines, but there they are. It doesn't mean you have to dress like a Puritan and put buckles on your shoes or anything like that, but those are the guidelines. Right there.

Righteousness. And why am I saying this? Because the Bible touches every aspect of our lives. There's something in there for every area of our life, and what we need to do is discover what that is and conform our lives to it. And you say, "Oh, what a burden." You're lost, because the Bible says the commandments of God for a Christian are not a burden; they're a joy. They're a joy.

Verse 3 of chapter 3. *Everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.* Now, look at this. What is it talking about? The hope for the second coming of Jesus Christ. Everybody now reading these *Left Behind* books—the only thing left behind in the *Left Behind* series was the Bible. But everybody's excited. You know—"I believe in the Second Coming." "I believe Jesus is going to come." "I believe in all this stuff." Okay, we'll see whether you believe it or not, because it says in verse 3, *Everyone who has this hope*—what does he do?—*purifies himself, just as he is pure.*

Now, here's something Christian. It's just going to blow your mind. You know, we are told to purify ourselves, and some of you guys need to hear this who are really, really theological. Not only has God sanctified us in Christ; he calls us to strive to be holy. He calls us to purify ourselves. Let me ask you a question. Could I sit down with you right now and you talk to me—we're all alone—you talk to me about the ways in which you are seeking to purify yourself? Can you?

Going into the book of Hebrews, could you sit down with me right now and we could open it up, and I say, "Just share with me how this affects your life." Could you sit down with me right now and explain to me the ways in which you're striving after holiness? Do you see? Do you see? This Bible is not poetry. It's not just little maxims that are cute. It is your life. It is your life. Everyone who has this hope—that hopes in Him—how do we know that we really hope in Him? Because we're seeking to make ourselves pure. We're seeking—we're striving after holiness. We're striving after holiness. We really are. Are you striving after holiness?

My mom—she's almost 77, and she raised most of us kids by herself because my dad died. Tough lady. She's Croatian. Her parents came over through Ellis Island. She went through the depression. She's a tough lady. She's from Detroit. It makes her mean. She'll sit there sometimes—I'll be over there. I'll go over to her house, pass by there before I go to the office in the morning, she'll be over the Word. I'll look up at her and she'll just be broken. She was saved when she was ten. She'll look up at me with tears in her eyes and say, "I am just so unholy. I am just—I just found—look at this verse. God's telling me my mouth, my tongue—I spoke out of turn the other night. I've got to go back and ask my sister to forgive me."

I'm going, "Oh, mom."

She says, "Sometime I don't even think I'm saved."

I said, “Mom, this is the evidence that you are.” All these years of walking with Christ and yet, still there, striving to be holy. Yes, resting in the finished work of Christ, yes, but striving to be holy, to be righteous. Everyone who has this hope is going to do that.

Now, he says, verse 4, *Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness*. What does that mean? I’ll tell you what it means. He’s trying to show you how horrible sin is, because we really don’t get it. I love what Watson says in *A BODY OF DIVINITY*. He’s always saying this, he goes, “You have not sinned against an inferior prince. You’ve not sinned against a small mayor from a small village. You have sinned against the Lord of Glory, the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords. You know not what you’ve done.”

Imagine this. Here stands God on the day of creation. He looks at stars that could swallow up a thousand of our suns. He looks at them and He says, “All you stars, move yourself to this place and start in this order and move in a circle, and move exactly as I tell you until I give you another word.” And they all obey him.

He says, “Planets, pick yourself up and whirl. Make this formation at My command until I give you another word.” He looks at mountains and he says, “Be lifted up,” and they obey Him. He tells valleys, “Be cast down,” and they obey Him. He looks at the sea and says, “You will come this far,” and the sea obeys, and then He looks at you and says, “Come.” And you go, “No!”

Look at the horrid, wretchedness of sin, the vulgarity, the prostitution of sin. It is a horrid thing, not something to be trifled with. As I said, it is a beast, and it is waiting at the door, and its desire is to have you. And anyone who practices sin practices outright, open, clenched-fisted rebellion against the Lord of Glory.

Now, it’s here. We all realize that the Bible’s already taught us that believers will sin, but there is a difference between a believer who sins, confesses their sin, and going on to greater holy, being disciplined of the Lord but going on to greater holiness, and someone who just out and out practices sin as a habitual lifestyle.

Verse 5. *You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin*. He appeared to take away the very sin that many people relish and love.

Verse 6. *No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him*. Again, it’s talking about a style of life, of practicing sin. *Little children, make sure no one deceives you*. Now, I’m telling you this. Little children, adults, make sure no one deceives you. Make sure some pastor doesn’t deceive you, make sure your momma doesn’t deceive you, your dad doesn’t deceive you, or some well-meaning carnal Christian does not deceive you. He says, *Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning*.

You practice sin as a habitual lifestyle? You love what you can get away with? My friend, you’re of the devil.

Now, let's go back to verse 12 of the final chapter, chapter 5. The last test. There's many more, but we don't have time this evening. *He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.* My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus. Jesus. You know, it's almost absurd to ask this question. We've actually come to believe in American Christianity that you can be Christian and Jesus not be all the world to you.

Do you love Jesus? What do you think about most? What do you think about most? I know men who love the ministry more than they love Jesus. I know men who love the Bible more than they love Jesus. What do you think about most? Because that's what you love.

Now, my dear friend, listen to me. I've got to make a stop here, correct a few things. There are some struggling believers here tonight that need to realize something. Again, we are not talking about sinless perfection. We are not saying that, if you're a true Christian, Christ will always be at the forefront of your thoughts. We're not saying, if you're a true Christian, you are always going to be practicing righteousness. Again, what we're talking about is a style of life and a struggle. I tell my mother, "Mom, the greatest evidence that you're a Christian is the fact that right now you're in the Word and God's pointing out to you your sin."

The mere fact some of you need to hear this. The mere fact that you struggle with the fact that you don't love Him enough is evidence that you're a believer. The mere fact that you look at your own life and you realize you're not as holy or righteous as you want to be and it bothers you is evidence that you've come to know him. What I'm preaching against tonight is the person who lives in habitual sin, who loves the world and all these different things, or a person sliding in that direction, or a person who just—"Yes, Jesus is a little accessory onto my life." The warning is for that person.

You know, I hear these preachers today and they'll preach and they'll go, "Man, you've got it all." I've heard them give this kind of invitation. "Man, you've got it all. You've got a wonderful, beautiful family; you've got your health; you've got a wonderful job and all these things. You just lack one more thing to make your life complete. You lack Jesus."

Makes me want to vomit. My friend, He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son has nothing. All your wealth, all your health, all your relations, everything you have is dung if Jesus is not Lord and Savior and Passion of your life. He's not an accessory that you add on to an already great life. He is Life. That's why He meant, you know, *You drink my blood, you eat my flesh.* What was He talking about? He's not some accessory. He's the very source of your life. Is he yours? Is he yours?

Let's pray.

Father, we come before You in the name of Your Son. And, Lord, this has been long and hard, but I felt a measure of grace in it, Lord, and I pray, I pray, dear Lord, that You would work in the hearts of people that You would save, that You would convert; and that, Lord, even some of Your people who may have been sliding into the things of the world, that this has been used as discipline to turn them; to others, Lord, who believe themselves saved, that this has been used to show them they are not saved; and to struggling believers, that it has been used to show them

that assuredly they are believers. God, use Your Word to do many more things than what we could ever think or believe. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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