

# The Necessity of Godly Fear

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**Bible Text:** 2 Corinthians 5:11-15

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Please will you turn in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians chapter five. I would like to read from verse 11 through 15.

Paul says:

Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences.

For we do not commend ourselves again to you, but give you opportunity to boast on our behalf, that you may have an answer for those who boast in appearance and not in heart. For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; or if we are of sound mind, it is for you. For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.

The earth grows old like a garment and those who dwell in it will die in like manner, but the Word of God abides forever.

The title of the sermon this morning is, “The Necessity of Godly Fear.” Paul is speaking to the Church in Corinth. We must remember that. These are believers that he is aiming his message at. And, thus, in the preceding section we saw him reminding the believers that they would give account of their lives that they lived as Christians. They were going to give account of these lives that they lived.

If you missed last week’s sermon, please make an effort to listen to it on SermonAudio as it is connected to today’s sermon and it was titled, “True Spirituality.” And this connection is obvious in the way Paul starts verse 11. He says, “Therefore, in the light of all that I have just said,” which we covered last week, “in the light of all that, therefore, this is how you are to act. This is how you are to behave. And in the light of all those things, therefore,” Paul says, “we persuade men.”

What truth is he trying to persuade them about? He is trying to persuade the believers that they will be asked to give account of their lives to the Lord. That is why am I going

to persuade you because you are going to give an account of your life that you have lived as a Christian.

Believers are not free agents. They are not a law unto themselves. They do not exist in order to satisfy their own desires and their own wills. They have not been created and saved so that they can pursue the latest existential experience, the latest wow, the latest feeling that gives them excitement. That is not why they exist. Rather, Paul argues, “We exist for the Lord and Christ will evaluate all we do in the body by this standard. You are mine. You belong to me. I am going to check this out. And therefore,” Paul says in verse 11, “Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.”

So having established the fact that every believer is going to have what he has done in the body evaluated by Christ Paul says, “Therefore, knowing the terror of the Lord we persuade men.” The terror of fear Paul is talking about here is not that of eternal damnation, but rather the fear that should dwell in the hearts of God’s children, the fear that we read about in the Psalm this morning together. That is the fear of God that Paul is talking about. This is a reverential awe, a holy respect for the Lord.

In Proverbs we learn of the fear that Paul has in mind when we read, “The fear of the Lord is to hate evil; pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverse mouth I hate.” The fear of the Lord is to hate evil. That is Proverbs chapter eight and verse 13.

And, again, in Proverbs chapter 16 and verse six it says, “In mercy and truth atonement is provided for iniquity and by the fear of the Lord one departs from evil.”

It is having reverential fear for the Lord that enables us to depart from evil. Those who sin with impunity have no fear of the Lord. The writer to the Hebrews exhorts us to serve the Lord acceptably with reverence and godly fear. That concept of godly fear is throughout the Scriptures and it is a vital concept, a vital aspect of our living for Christ’s glory.

So Paul, knowing this fear personally, this great reverence and awe for God, desired others to have it so that it would impact their own lives for God’s glory. “I want you to fear the Lord as well,” he is saying.

There has to be a balance to the truth that exhorts us to come boldly before the throne of God and to cry, “Abba, Father.” Yes, the Lord is our daddy and we need to know the real comfort of being embraced in his arms and feel the security and the comfort of being fully accepted by him, but the danger is that familiarity, this coming in with this into the daddy’s presence can breed contempt. Familiarity breeds contempt. It can give us an attitude that God is not the God of the Bible. It is that our sense of being fully accepted in the Beloved and being an heir to God’s throne can remove the reverential fear and awe that we ought to have for him.

Some only want to think about God as a buddy and ignore the fact that he is also a consuming fire. And the writer to the Hebrews is speaking to believers there. "Remember, he is a consuming fire."

Paul was anxious to persuade believers to embrace the reality that a healthy fear of the Lord is a necessity to effective and victorious Christian living. The sinful heart even that remaining sin in the believer's heart, but the sinful heart wants to fashion a world where there are no consequences for sin and self serving.

"There are no consequences for what I do. I can live with impunity. I can do what I want when I want however I want and there will be no consequences."

Paul says, "No, brethren, you must fear the Lord. We live in his world and real respect for God's truth and holiness is an integral part of how his kingdom operates. If you do not fear him, we have problems."

Paul was not talking about the conversion of unbelievers here, but rather about the persuading believers about their need to fear the Lord. We must fear the Lord in this way.

The second half of verse 11 is translated by one commentator as, "What we are is plain to God and I hope it is also plain to your consciences." What we are is plain. Paul is saying, "We persuade me to fear God. This is how we live our lives. And what we are is plain." There is no shadiness with Paul's words or life, no double meanings, no ulterior motives, no slight of hand, no slippery words that have two meanings so people can be misled by the words and while they are hoping to give one meaning and knowing the truth is something in the opposite direction. Paul's plain words reflected his obvious motive.

Everything tied up with Paul, his motives, his actions, his words, everything was tied up in one. "All of this was plain to God, Paul says. "This is all a clear picture before him, the way I live my life, everything is clear and plain in God's sight."

Everyone's life, including Paul's, is open to the gaze of the Lord. And Paul was confident that his life was pleasing to the Lord. This included all the different aspects that made up his ministry to the believer's in Corinth and especially his letters to them. He wanted them to realize that everything he was doing to them, his actions and his words, his letters, every word he spoke to them was plain in God's sight. He wanted them to embrace that and realize that. It was vital in Paul's mind that the Corinthians embraced Paul's life and words as a consistent revelation of God's truth. Paul hoped that his ministry as it confronted the minds of the Corinthians would find confirmation in their consciences as being the inescapable truth of God. He needed them to see that.

Why? Because one needs to be able to recognize or identify the truth if one is going to be persuaded to do it.

You see, if Paul's life and teaching was regarded as contradictory and untrustworthy, then the Corinthians would not be persuaded by his instruction. If I think Paul is an idiot

I do not receive the words that come from his mouth. Paul argued, however, that everything about his ministry was transparent to and approved by God. And it was because of this that Paul assumed the Corinthians consciences bore witness to this truth.

“I am clear before God and therefore I know I am clear before you. That was bold. This was not. “I know that you know that this is the truth.”

It is the truth that persuades and the truth is obvious to those who have been made alive from the dead, obvious in the sense that when they are confronted by the truth they know it is to be the truth. God’s truth is recognized as being good and just and perfect and reasonable and righteous.

What were Paul’s enemies trying to do? They were trying to undermine Paul.

Why were they trying to undermine Paul? So they could mislead the Corinthians.

How would they mislead the Corinthians? By bringing another word, another truth so called so that the Corinthians would turn their eyes away from the truth that Paul spoke and reject that truth because they reject Paul and fix their eyes on the minds of these men who wanted to mislead them.

A very good plan, still used in our day.

Once they could get the Corinthians to doubt the legitimacy of Paul’s ministry and teaching, they could manipulate the Corinthians in any way they pleased. The same strategy continues in our day, too, where the truth that God has revealed is somehow undermined by people who wish to exert their own ideas upon others.

Why does somebody come and want to trash the Bible? Because they want to manipulate you and take your mind captive to their ideas. They want to present another truth as opposed to this truth.

People continue to attack Paul in our day in this exact same way. In fact, you can pay a lot of money to attend seminaries that pride themselves on their ability to destroy the student’s trust in the authority and accuracy of Paul’s words. That is a fact. It is happening all the time. And you could actually earn a Ph.D. for innovative ways of trashing the credibility of Paul and then you could walk around with a doctor in front of your name and get the accolades and the praises of the world because you are Dr. So-and-so, because you have been able to trash the authority and the credibility of the apostle Paul. That is reality.

But it is no different to what is going on here in this letter that is happening. We trash Paul so that we can give you another gospel. We trash Paul so that we can give you another way of living. And people pride themselves on being a law unto themselves.

We are told that the simplicity of the truth is too unsophisticated for the times we live in. This is how many people think and often it is how we think, too.

”Well, I want something a bit more sophisticated. This dustiness of this truth, these words, they just don’t...they don’t carry the weight that they should.”

This is how many people think. It is, I have said many times, the truth is inescapable and this is because our consciences recognize it and agree that it is true. Thus, Paul was not nervous that the Corinthians wouldn’t recognize his words as truth, but rather was assured that they knew them to be truth. We are to imitate Paul and uphold the truth knowing that is obvious to every man’s conscience. It is because the truth is obvious and inescapable that those who are in rebellion against it have to try and suppress that truth in unrighteousness. That is what Romans one is telling us in those verses 18 through 20. It is a clear picture.

It is because of the inescapable nature of the truth that they have to suppress it in order to continue in their rebellion. And that is what everybody does who is rebelling against the truth. They have to suppress it. They have to attempt to hold it down in unrighteousness.

I would like to read those verses, Romans 1:18-20. “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.” Ok. These men are suppressing it. And this is what Paul explains. He says, “Because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them.” They know it. They cannot escape it. There it is. That is the truth. We are talking about rebellious people and yet they know the truth of God. “For since the creation of the world,” Paul continues, “God’s invisible attributes are clearly seen being understood by the things that are made even his eternal power and Godhead so that they are without excuse.”

You tell me the unbeliever doesn’t understand the eternal nature of God’s power and Godhead? He knows it. And that is why he suppresses it in his unrighteousness because he does not want to bow his heart to that fact.

But it is inescapable and this is Paul’s point here as well. Truth is inescapable. And Paul says, “What I have proclaimed, the life I have lived has been in the truth and it is open before God and therefore I know it is open before your consciences.” You can deny it with your mouth, but your conscience knows it is true.

We, too, need to be persuaded by the truth and God’s Word is truth. It is these words persevered for us as Scripture that reveal God’s will to us. It is these words that show us how to glorify the Lord and live in the ways that are pleasing to him. May we embrace and bow to the simplicity of this truth as our whole life comes into line with what our consciences know to be true. We know what is right and wrong according to God’s Word. “And vital to having godly fear,” Paul says, “is having a healthy respect for the authority and trustworthiness of God’s Word.”

If we are going to have godly fear we have got to have something to fear. We have got to have a standard that keeps us accountable. Having God fear for the Lord and doing his will are closely tied together.

Thus Paul says in verse 12, “Thus we do not commend ourselves again to you, but give you opportunity to boast on our behalf that you may have an answer for those who boast in appearance and not in heart.”

See, Paul is not trying to commend himself or those who he worked with. Rather he was appealing to the inescapable nature of truth and integrity and comparing his ministry and this truth and integrity with the ministry of those who were opposing him in Corinth. Paul’s point is that since God’s truth is known to every man’s conscience it would be easy to discern between those who prided themselves in the outward show rather than in a changed heart. So he has got these two camps. Here are these people. They pride themselves in outward externals. And Paul says, “And they reject the fact of a changed heart that you can see and you can taste and you can feel,” the Spirit of God moving in the heart of a person as opposed to these externals, the external words, the external actions. And Paul is contrasting those two things.

You see, the Corinthians’ faith was being undermined by teachers that had come in to their midst. These teachers were attacking everything about Paul. They were attacking his credentials. They were attacking his appearance. They were attacking his ability. Everything about him they could attack they attacked. Everything came under fire. They, on the other hand, were quick to present their letters of commendation and point to external things that legitimized them. Paul argues that the simplicity of the truth and the Corinthians’ consciences should see these external appearances for what they were. They were imitations. They were pretense.

You see, the truth Paul proclaimed and the life he lived which was a manifestation of the truth, when you compared it to the words and the lives of those who opposed Paul it was blatantly obvious that they were imitations. “You didn’t have to look deeply,” he says, “to see that my life and the words I proclaim is the truth and theirs is an imitation.” Paul says that it is not hard to see beneath the veneer of those who rejoice in appearances, but neglect the heart.

We have our emphasis on the appearance, but the heart is far from it.

Paul’s life clearly had the fragrance of Christ because all he did flowed from a heart that was clearly regenerate. We, too, need to take Paul’s warning and exalt the work of Christ that flows from the heart rather than be mesmerized by the glitz and the glamour of appearances. It is easy. Appearances are easy to do. And we have become masters in this age of appearances. We can present that appearance. We can do it in a wonderful way that convinces.

Paul challenges the Corinthians that they needed courage and discernment so that they would withstand those who promoted themselves by outward show. People promote themselves in the name of Christian ministry. They point to their success and their achievements and hold these up as proof of true heart reform spirituality. You mustn't be shocked by this form of dualism in Christian ministry, a dualism that Paul would not tolerate. The possible illustrations of dualism are many in this way. We have this appearance as opposed to the heart. There are many different illustrations you can have. But in order to give you an idea of what I mean let me suggest a few that appear to mesmerize us.

Academic credentials, they mesmerize us. They really do. They wow us. Do people use degrees as an external covering to hide the lack of true reformation in their hearts? Sign up for a seminary course. Indeed, they do.

According to Paul we ought not to be intimidated by academic credentials since the truth is simple and the fruit of heart, motivated faith, is obvious to those who have eyes to see it. You can see the heart is connected to the truth of God.

It is not hard to tell the difference between humility and arrogance, between true self denial and the appearance of self denial, between someone who is truly serving others and someone who is really serving themselves in the name of Christ. We are mesmerized by academic credentials.

We are also mesmerized by eloquence. This means we are tempted to evaluate ministries by external things and ignore heart issues. For an example someone might be a dynamic preacher and able to hold vast crowds spellbound in his oratory abilities, but be a proud person. He might have a bad temper. He might have no decent relationship with his family, but he is holding these crowds spellbound and we judge that as a successful ministry. Those are external appearances.

Paul is opposed to those kinds of things. He says, "Can you not identify what is truly coming from the heart?"

But in this world we exalt and we lift up those external things. What is focused upon, however, is the size of the crowd that is drawn and that becomes the proof of spirituality. Paul says that true spirituality is easily distinguished from mere external appearances. And we ought not to be deceived by those who boast in appearances and not in the heart. It is loving Christ with our whole heart that Paul wants us to persuade people to do. And when people do do that the religion they manifest is simple. It is dusty. It is selfless. It is transparent to both man and God. It is not self promoting with hidden agendas, but self denying with clear evidence of seeking the benefit of others above oneself.

It would have been difficult to see how Paul's words and life proclaim the same message or struck by the reality of him sacrificing himself for the benefit of others. That was not hard to see. I assure you that it would not have been difficult to see the stark contrast between Paul's true faith and his enemies' self serving appearances. Paul says that is some-

thing that you need to be able to identify. You need to be able to boast in us, in this truth that has been given to you and see their deception.

“For if we are beside ourselves,” he says in verse 13, “it is for God. Or if we are of sound mind it is for you.”

You see, Paul didn't care what people thought of him as long as he was faithful in doing the Lord's will. I believe what he is saying in this verse here, what he is communicating here is I believe his enemies sought to undermine his ministry by saying he was out of his mind. “You are crazy. Paul, you are crazy. You are a madman. How can you listen to that madman? He s a lunatic?”

Thus, Paul responds by saying that, “If this charge is laid to our account when we are doing the Lord's will, then it is for God's sake. You call me crazy when I do the Lord's will? It is for God's sake. I do not care. I am doing his will and so I care not what people say about me. If I am regarded as mad it is for his sake. This is different from what people say trying...I think today there are some who think today that you just be crazy for Christ's sake and the craziness is truly craziness.

I have a story of, I believe it was a man in South Africa, a friend of mine told me this story. He was in the circles of this business. He was a very high top executive who had got caught up in this absolute nonsense of this laughing and barking. I don't know if you heard about it here. I'm sure you did. But there was this spiritual movement where people would just laugh. They would go into the church service and everyone would just fall down laughing and just laugh and laugh and laugh. And this was the movement of the Spirit. And then it turned to barking. People would literally be in the pews barking.

And this was...and this top executive in a board meeting started barking at his fellow board members, barking at them. And he was doing this because the Spirit was moving him to do that and he was doing it and he was being a fool for Christ and he was quite happy to be a fool for Christ. Where he was a fool—full stop! That is not the foolishness that Paul is talking about.

He says, “If you think I am out of mind, it is for God's sake. It is for God's sake. As I proclaim the truth and you call me foolish and mad that is for God's sake. I don't care what you call me because I know I am doing God's will and I don't care how crazy you think I am. I know the Lord's will and I know what he wants me to do and by his grace I am going to do it and give myself to it. And if you call me mad, that's fine. So be it.”

You see what is on Paul's mind are actions that are clearly godly. You don't make sense of the thinking of this world and so when a godly man acts in a godly way it doesn't make sense to the thinking of this world. And they do think he is crazy.

Think of Eric Liddell from the story *The Chariots of Fire*, based...the fulness based on his life. This man, the future before him of sporting glory and riches was amazing. There he was, this incredible person, incredible athlete and he walked away from that and became



a missionary to China and ended up being martyred in China. Now, isn't that foolish? Isn't he a mad man? Why would he forsake something?

You see, in that sense he would respond as Paul responded. "If I am a lunatic for Christ so be it. Then it is for him. If you think I have lost my mind, if I am out of mind, so be it. It is for Christ."

And the world will look upon us when we live our lives with zeal and determination and single minded focus for the kingdom and they will look upon us and say, "You are out of your mind. You are crazy."

And Paul says, "And so be it. Then it is for God's sake."

The second part of the verse is that if Paul and his fellow preachers are of sound mind then it is for the Corinthians. What he means is that their consciences should confirm the truth of his ministry and, thus, embrace what he says.

"We are all going to stand before the judgment seat of Christ," Paul says. It is because of this fact that Paul has given himself to persuading believers to live for God's glory.

Now, vital to knowing what it means to live for God's glory is bowing to every word from God's mouth. It is God who alone has revealed how we are to glorify him. So Paul was an essential channel for knowing what God's will was. And, thus, he wanted the Corinthians, if they received his word then they would know what God's will was. Thus, Paul wanted the Corinthians to embrace his instruction to them because it was only by bowing to his teaching that they would fear the Lord and that is do his will.

So Paul says that if the Corinthians reject the suggestion that he is mad or out of his mind and come to the conclusion that he is speaking in his right mind, then it is for their benefit.

How so? Well, if Paul is saying the truth and if what he is saying is received as the truth then you bow your heart to it and therefore it is for your benefit. That is the point he is making in that.

And, thus, to do what Paul says demonstrates reverence and fear for the Lord. To fear the Lord is to do his will and to do his will is to be found doing good in the body when brought before the judgment seat of Christ which we looked at last week.

Have you done good in the body?

How do I know...how do you know you are doing good in the body? If you bow your will to God's Word. If we do not believe this is the authoritative Word of God we will not bow to it.

For example, if you think Paul was some kind of male chauvinist, then you will reject his instructions with respect to God's ordained structure for the order in the family, the Church and the state when it comes to male female responsibilities and designation. If Paul is a lunatic, if he is just a chauvinist, if he has just got this male ego thing, then you are going to reject his instruction on this matter, that he is undermined, that his word is rejected. So if you think of Paul as a little bit flaky on this subject then you will not bow your heart to his words, but rather explain them away. Thus, you will not fear God with respect to such matters which means you will not live your life in the body that will be glorifying to God. You will live your life in the body in a way that is bad rather than the way that it is good. It is as simple as that.

Paul says to the Corinthians, "If you think I am in my right mind, then it is for your good, because you will respect and bow to my teaching." It is very simple, is it not?

Many glory in their own wisdom and that wisdom charges Paul with not being in his right mind. Such people are wise in their own eyes. They have the praises of men, but they know nothing about the fear of God.

Whom do you fear? What do you fear? To fear God is to do his will, to do the simple dusty words that are revealed to us through his servants like Paul and other such feeble, though obedient servants. Godly fear requires a sure word from God and we have that Word. It is the Scripture. We have no other sure foundation upon which to stand. We have no other source of light. If we are not going to live according to these words then we don't fear the Lord. And don't be deceived by those who try to convince you otherwise.

Paul was anxious to persuade people to fear the Lord because he knew he will give an account as we all will give an account of what we have done in the body.

And finally he says, "For the love of Christ compels us because we judge thus, that if one died for all then all died and he died for all that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for him who died for them and rose again."

I do not believe Paul wants to give a lesson here or a teaching on the substitutionary death and atonement of Christ. This is a vital doctrine, the substitutionary atonement of Christ. It is a vital doctrine. It is something that has been fully and adequately taught already by Paul and the Corinthians knew it. This wonderful and vital doctrine about Christ's substitution for us is clearly expounded in Romans five and six and other passages and I refer to those chapters if you need to refresh your mind as to what is the substitutionary atonement. I don't believe Paul is giving a lesson on that at this point. And I believe if we stop and digress now to say, "Well, let's focus upon the substitutionary atonement of Christ," at this point, we miss the flow of what Paul is doing.

What Paul is doing here in 2 Corinthians is taking this doctrine, this wonderful doctrine of the substitutionary atonement of Christ and applying it to the Corinthians' lives in the context of what he is teaching them about giving account for what is done in their bodies. Doing what is good in their bodies entails fearing the Lord and carrying out his whole

will by bringing every thought captive to the mind of Christ. What Paul is showing them and us are the practical implications of this wonderful doctrine of substitutionary atonement. And, thus, I remind you the necessity and also the earthiness of sound doctrine. It is necessary and it is earthy in its content. Godly Christianity requires sound doctrine and sound doctrine will result in practical Christian living. If you have got sound doctrine so called that is not practically related to living the life then they have missed true sound doctrine. Doctrine and life are inseparable.

And too many times we have seminaries teaching where you have got this so called incredible purity of doctrine and yet the application to life is so far removed that you cannot identify the Christian nature and the Christian attitude of even how these truths are presented.

But it is vital that we have sound doctrine. But I believe Paul's point is to move from this principle of sound doctrine onto a practical application. And that is what he is doing in these two verses.

Firstly, it is obvious that Paul is referring to Christ's elect when he says, "If one died for all then all died." You see this death being talked about, the fact that all died, this death is referring...it is clearly identifying with those who have died in Christ. The all who died here are those who have died in Christ. So one died for all, the same all. Therefore all died.

Who are the all that died? Those who died in Christ because it is those people who live. You see if we do not understand that verse in this way then we are going to get universalism because Christ died for all, every person, and therefore all died, the same quarter of people, therefore the whole world is saved, therefore go and live how you want. It doesn't really matter. Christ really died for you. You have really died for him in him and therefore you are saved. Everybody is saved just on that fact. And, believe me, there is doctrines that teach that. That is not what that verse is teaching. The Bible does not teach universal salvation.

The focus in Paul's words here is upon those people who are God's children. He died for all these and these all died. And Paul wants to emphasize that. I don't want to spend time on proving that point. I think it is very clear in those verses if you just read them slowly.

Now Paul says, "Christ's love compels us." His love is most supremely demonstrated by him sacrificing himself for the benefit of others and the glory of the father. This is what compels Paul, Christ's love, his example, his demonstration of love, his manifestation of love.

It is this concept of love that compels Paul and his fellow workers. The idea is that because of what Christ has done and accomplished they couldn't but sacrifice themselves in his service. Paul willingly faced hardship, ridicule, suffering and death. But his willing-

ness rested upon a theological foundation and Paul tells us what that was. "I am prepared to suffer." And he suffered greatly. But he said, "I am prepared to suffer."

Why? He tells us why. It is theologically based. He says, "We judge thus. When we are united to Christ through faith we don't only share in all the benefits that come to us because of his death, but rather we are so united with him and become so identified with him that in a very real sense, though a mysterious sense, we also died."

Christ died for all. Therefore all died. We all died. [?] They are God's people. We all died and that is the point Paul is making. He wants us to get that into our minds. To be united to Christ is to die. There is no sharing in this life, in his life if we do not partake of his death. But sharing in his death has very practical consequences. To be joined to Christ is to die to self. And this is a very important theological truth that we must grasp.

Paul was not afraid to sacrifice his will and his desires because he knew his will and his desires, in a very real sense, had died when he died with Christ. They did. I have died. It was no longer Paul who lived, but rather it was Christ who lived in him. Christ was living his life through Paul. That is how we are to regard ourselves and why we can regard ourselves as a new creation. I am a new creation when I believe in Christ.

Why? Because I died. I am dead. And now I am a new creation. I am something different to what I was.

Paul had plans and ambitions for his life before he believed in Christ. He had hopes. He had desires. He had plans. But when he believed he died and, thus, all those plans, all those ambitions, everything that associated with him died when he died and that was the end of it. Now the only plans and ambitions were Christ's. And that includes all the sin, all the pain, all the failures, all the suffering, everything that preceded that. That is also gone. That is gone. I am a new creation, a new life and now I am alive to Christ. That is why we can go past pain. That is why we can go past suffering and all these things because we are new to Christ. We do not need to hang on to what my father did to me, what my mother did to me. We can go past that when we believe in Christ and move on into the glory of the kingdom of heaven because we are new. We have been dead and we were buried with Christ and therefore we are new creations. And Paul could walk in the newness of life, in Christ's life which is what we are called to do.

It was no longer Paul or Saul. It was no longer about his comfort. It was no longer about his pleasure, his success, his ambitions. His focus was off of himself because he was dead, dead in a very real way. It is not about Paul's feelings. It is not about our feelings. It is not about us. We are dead. The life we now live is Christ's. And it is Christ's glory and Christ's kingdom that is the focus. It is not about what is fair for me. It is nothing about that. It is not fairness. It is about Christ's kingdom and glory. This is Paul's point.

It is self serving in some manner or form that is always at the root of sin issues and problems, self serving. That is what is at the root. You trace the root. You sit down and evalu-

ate any time there is a problem. It is self serving. It is me. It is my. It is self. That is what is at the center of that. Trace it back and see it.

Blatant selfishness is gratifying yourself no matter what hardships come upon others. And I don't think we need to spend time on that. It is obvious. But there are more subtle manifestations of self serving.

Are we not greatly offended when our rights are ignored or overlooked? Oh, yes. Offended.

“How dare you overlook my rights? How dare you do that?”

How many problems don't come from this demand of rights? Do we not get offended because people don't treat us with the kind of respect we think we deserve?

“Did you see how he looked at me? How dare him? Who does he think he is? Does he not know who I am?”

Our rights, that is what causes the problems. And then the whole feud starts.

“And, little Johnny, let me tell you about that man how he looked at me...”

And we have got the family. Now the family hates that family and...

You see, the dead do not have rights. That is Paul's point. If Christ died for all then all died. Can you get this point, brethren? All died. You are dead. Dead don't have rights and they certainly don't demand their rights. I haven't heard of a dead person demanding a better grave.

“I have rights, you know. I deserve a decent burial.”

Have you ever heard of a dead person saying, “You know, I would prefer that spot over there with the view. I hate this grave over here. It doesn't have a view”?

“No, you don't have rights.”

“Well, could you get me a more comfortable coffin? You know, after lying here for a while I get a kind of crick right side of my back.”

He doesn't have rights. “No, you don't have rights. You shut up and lie down. You don't have rights.”

Do you know why people are afraid to walk through a grave yard in the middle of the night? I will tell you why. Because that is when all the dead come up and complain about their rights. They come up and chat to one another.

This will be good discussion for the dinner table, by the way, parents.

They come up and chat to one another and complain about the rights that they are not getting.

“You know, they brought me the wrong flowers this week.”

“Oh, you’re lucky. I didn’t even get any flowers.”

“Oh, nobody came to visit my grave this past week.”

“Hey, what about me? I am still waiting for that Jacuzzi. That still hasn’t arrived.”

You know who has the hardest job at the graveyard? It is the kind of warden who overlooks it because he has to get up every night at midnight and come and tell those people, “Shut up. You are dead. Stop complaining.” He has to do that. “You have no basis to complain because you are dead.”

It is a hard truth for many of those dead people to receive. They struggle with it.

But on a serious note we struggle with it as well. In reality we are no less dead in one sense than those bodies in a cemetery.

Paul reasons that if Christ died for all his elect then all the elect died. That is, they died to themselves. They died to their plans. They died to their ambitions. They died to everything that made them who they are. You are dead and therefore now you ought to live for him who died for you and gave himself for you. The life that you live is in him and it is for his glory and for his purposes. It all has to do with Christ.

When there is sin or problems or lack of zeal for the kingdom I guarantee you it can be traced back to some exertion of the self, my will, my pleasures, my desires, my comfort, my...you add on whatever you want to add on. It is always...that is what it is related to.

And Paul says, “No, you are dead. You are dead.”

The opposite of serving God’s kingdom is serving one’s self. When Paul was confronted with things that were unpleasant for his flesh, with things that conflicted with his will and his desire, his response was, “I am dead. I am dead. I am free because I am dead.”

This realization brought everything into perspective. This is not about me. I am no longer my own. Everything I am and have belongs to Christ.

That old Saul with all his rights and hopes and desires and habits and ambitions, they all ceased to exist when I believed in Christ. They are gone. They are dead. They are buried. I am a new man, a new creation with a new ambition, with a new will, with a new desire and it is Christ’s will and Christ’s desire.

All those things of the old soul literally died when he believed in Christ. And because at that point he died and the life that he now lived in Christ lives for Christ's glory.

Paul has shown us the necessity and the effect of godly fear. He had godly fear and this shaped all that he did. His sacrifice and single minded zeal for the Lord's glory, despite the threats to his own life and comfort arose from his theological understanding. That is why he could do it. That is why he persevered. That is why he was giving his life towards this goal. It came from a theological understanding. He knew he would give account to Christ for all that he did in the body and by the fact that he had died and all his own desires, passions and ambitions died at the same time. And, thus, he was released to live totally for the glory of his Savior.

So he would give an account and he was dead. And now I live a life for Christ.

Paul wrote these things so that we might know them, so that we might know how to fear the Lord and that we might live for Christ because we died in him.

So if you believe in Christ, if you trust in him for your salvation know as well that you died with him and you no longer live other than in Christ and as Christ's servant.

Let us pray.

*Father, we thank you for these instructions. We thank you for the true words that Paul has spoken this morning to us. We thank you for the words that exhort us to fear you. We thank you you have given us a sure Word so we might know what you have said, that we have no doubt about that, that indeed it is truth from your mouth. And I pray, Lord, that you would give us hearts that do fear your Word, that we tremble before you, that we bow to every word that you have said. And we know what godly fear looks like.*

*Lord, I pray, too, that we might understand this great truth that indeed we are dead. We died in Christ. And, thus, may we put aside all our own desires and rights and ambitions and plans and that we might live our lives for the glory of your kingdom and the life of Christ as he lives through us and as he glorifies himself through us. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.*