

Romans 12

Sunday 1/10/2010

When we started Romans 12, sometimes when you move down through the chapters and it takes a couple of months to get it all laid out, you forget the original context of the chapter. Romans 12 started with you and me and our bodies being a living sacrifice. He started out by talking about the fact that:

Romans 12:1

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

We talked a lot about the things that we give God. The only thing that God really wants is the only thing that is really going to be the testimony that we need to be to this world, and that is when God gets your body. You are willing to give it to Him for whatever He wants to do with it, and then everything else falls in line.

We have been going through this great chapter, and I told you that when we get down here around verse 9 to the end of the chapter, it starts to deal with the great character qualities of God. These great character qualities of God are really what I call in my own personal life the "reality verses" of life. These are the verses that really help me understand what Christianity really is.

Remember, I talked about pretending, and this is something that we all do. We all have a problem of thinking that we are probably more spiritual than we are. We build ourselves into a mindset that many times is just not reality. I have always found that verses like this force me to look at who I really am versus what I do or how I think. I think they are invaluable for my own personal life, and I am sure they will be invaluable to you.

The absolute importance of you and me, especially where we are at in our church right now with what we are going to try to accomplish in this next phase, in this next level, is to understand from the Bible's standpoint what it really takes to be God's man or God's woman. We talk a lot about that, and we all know people who are great Christians, and some who are not so great, and everything in between. But these principles are what it takes to be God's man.

God's man or God's woman is never about how much of the Bible you know. I have known guys who knew the Bible left and right, and they were some of the biggest scoundrels you ever met in your life. It is not about that. It is about the character qualities of God being in your life and emulating Himself from the inside out through everything that we do. As much as I fall short in my own personal life, I know where the bottom line is.

Let us begin reading in verse 9 again, and we will come down through here and start making some comments about it.

Romans 12:9-21

Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good.

Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another;

Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord;

Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer;

Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality.

Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not.

Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that do weep.

Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits.

Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men.

If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.

Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.

Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.

Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.

Now, Father, we come to You today, and we are mindful of things today that we want to remember as we come to You before we open up the Word of God and really get into this today. First of all, I want to thank You for those that have come today. They have come today, Lord, because in their hearts they want to learn something from You. Lord, I know that I am probably the last person that has anything of any value to say, Lord, to anybody about You. Lord, it is only as You work through me and as You allow the Spirit of God to manifest itself through what I say that these dear people that have come today, Father, in this weather to get something from You, will leave fulfilled.

So, Father, I ask You today first of all to work through me, to take all my inabilities and my frailties and all my things, Lord, that hold me back. Lord, I pray that You will just cover those under the blood and use me, Father, today to minister to Your people. We pray for our boys that are down south, Lord, and pray that You will give them a good day today, that, Lord, as we build leaders in this church, You give us the opportunity for these young men to go and to really learn the practical side of it. Lord, help us to balance it all out. Help the older men, Lord, and ladies to help me with the younger ones. Father, help us this next year to do everything that we need to do to get up to that level that You have us to be to train Your people. We love You. We ask You now to take this time, and we will be careful to give You the honor and the praise in Jesus' name, for His sake we ask it. Amen.

I. The Principle of Iron Sharpening Iron

I want to introduce you to a great verse this morning as we start to come through here, and many of you probably know this verse already. I know a lot of people read it, and they may hear people

use it, but they do not always understand it. It is going to be a verse that we are going to talk about a lot in the next year or so, and it is something that I want to introduce you to today, at least the concept of it, now that we are in Romans chapter 12 and where we are going. It is found in Proverbs chapter 27, and in Proverbs chapter 27, I want you to look at verse 17.

This verse is used a lot, and guys use it, women use it. Most people, as I said, they use it because they know it is a good verse, but they do not always understand what the verse is saying. I want you to not only know the verse, but if you are taking notes or you have this, this is the verse you need to mark in your Bible, especially with where we are going to go here in the next five or six, seven years, if the Lord tarries.

Proverbs 27:17

Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.

That is a great verse, and what it basically is talking about there, and I am going to show you how it works, is that God's people ought to sharpen each other. We ought to rub off the good qualities of God with each other. One of the things about the character qualities that is found in this chapter is that when you put them in your life, you want to give those things to other people by example.

In the ministry, and you want to remember this, the ministry is not about how much you know about the Bible. Now, when we get into these times, I am telling you things that you people, whatever level you are on, need to understand. I wish I had these things somewhere where I could put the things that I want you to remember in red, but I cannot. The bottom line is this: leadership is never about how much you know about the Bible. Leadership in Christianity is you lead by example. You take the principles of the Word of God through the growth process that we start when you come in here and work you through it and bring you up the ladder spiritually, so to speak. As you build the character qualities of God into your life, leaders, men and women, come to the point where their leadership is based on the examples of these principles that they have, and it is very important.

The context or the concept here of "iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend" is a very good principle. What it is simply saying is this: iron in iron, they have the same hardness. When you sharpen something, you have to have something harder than what you are trying to sharpen. In other words, when you get a file, and that file is going to file metal, and you start to file it, and you see the shavings fall on the ground, the reason why that is happening is because the file is a harder metal than what you are trying to file. So the harder metal rubs the softer metal, the pieces fall off, you can shape it any way you want to, but you never really reshape the file. The file will always be the file, and that is not what he is talking about here.

Here, he is talking about that iron sharpeneth iron because it is the same metal. Not one is harder than the other; they both wear equally. What he is saying here is this: you and I are likened to iron in this particular passage here. What he is saying is that when you get around people and you associate with people, we use the expression that we rub off on people or people rub off on you. What Christians ought to do, and this is what Christian leaders have to do, they have to

always be of such that the people they associate with, the people they do things with, the people within the church, or the younger Christians that we have around us, we as older Christians, by our character qualities in our life, need to shape that younger Christian.

Many of you were in this church, and this is this concept in a very basic form. You knew somebody in this church who had something that you did not have as far as God was concerned, and it intrigued your mind to the place that you said, "You know what? I am not really happy. I am not really fulfilled. This person always seems to be happy. They are always talking about loving their church. I do not really love my church. I go here because you have to go to a church." When you come, you find out what is lovable about this place. It is not the building. It is not me. It is the Bible and the Holy Spirit of God that takes the Word of God and helps you. You know what you just did, and some of you were in this church this morning because of that very unfolding of events. In its basic form, they saw your love for God, your exuberance for the things of God, help shape them to get them where they are at today here, and that process continues.

It is an incredible concept that we either shape people for God by how we live our lives, or we are going to shape them for the world. I have seen older Christians in my years in ministry. I have seen older Christians who, they do not even know that this happened probably, who were not really committed get around younger Christians and become friends with them or do things with them. Because of their non-commitment, that younger Christian got a bad example of what Christianity is, and they did not sharpen them; they dulled them. In time, maybe the older Christian stays in church because they have been around for a long time, but they become what the Bible calls a stumbling block for the younger Christians. Those younger Christians stumble over something they see, something that bothers them, or maybe they have a problem in their life that they are dealing with and they have never said anything to anybody about it. But the devil always gets into details, and he will take that very thing in somebody's life that is a Christian who should know better and use it to hurt the younger Christian.

The thing that we have got to remember is the great principle of Romans chapter 14, verse 7. We have not gotten to Romans chapter 14 yet, but when we do, it will be a great time.

Romans 14:7

For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself.

You either shape people for God by the character qualities we have in our lives, or we shape them for the world, or dull them, would be a better way, to the things of God and give them to the world by how we live our lives.

II. The Importance of Role Models and Accountability

A great example of this, and I am sure you all know people when I say this that you can put their picture in this illustration, is a godly man and woman who have been married for 40 or 50 years. You begin to see exactly what this thing is talking about here in this concept. By being married 40 or 50 years and getting through all of the things that they went through in life, the good times

and the bad times, and God being the center of their life and trying to work the thing down, they have sharpened each other.

Sharpening each other means that you simply, when you shape something, you shape it to fit something. The old proverbial, "You cannot put a square peg in a round hole." Well, you can if you take the square peg and make it round, and that is what building Christians is. We have a round hole, and we are square pegs. The Bible makes the square peg so it fits in the hole. That is exactly what happens when you do these things in other people's lives; you fit together. In a husband and wife relationship, the wife's strengths make up for the husband's weaknesses, and then vice versa, the husband's strengths make up for the wife's weaknesses, and they fit together in doing whatever they are going to do in life for God.

That concept, "iron sharpeneth iron," is not a case where you take a harder piece of metal and shape somebody. It is that I am made of iron, and you are made of iron, and when I shape you by our time together, you also shape me. It is not, "Look at me, I am the big hard file who can just make you into anything I want." That is not how it works in life. We have to sharpen each other, and we do that by our countenance. We do that by the people and the situations that we associate with, and that is why it is so important for all of us to understand these great principles.

This is again why I tell you all the time about how important role models are. I read Jason Whitlock's column here, I think it was the week before. I do not have any love for Jason Whitlock; I like to read what he says sometimes. I do not have to like somebody or agree with him to necessarily learn something from him. He was talking about role models in sports and how that we might as well get our mindset that there are no more role models in sports. You take a guy that is 20, 21, 22 and give him 80 million dollars a year, and he can buy whatever he wants, and he gets spoiled because he gets the adoration of the world. All of those things do not make very good role models.

He said something, and obviously I do not think Jason Whitlock is a Christian; I mean, I do not know him, but I would think that he would be. But what he said was very Christian in what he said, a biblical principle. He said, "We need to quit looking to the world for role models, and we need to start being role models ourselves, parents role models for their kids." I cannot think of a better piece of advice for any church than that the older Christians, through the principles of the Word of God, start being aware of the younger Christians around them and make sure that through the principles of the Word of God and what we say and what we do, that we are the role models for the younger Christians coming up. Instead of making them dull by some of the things that we allow to go on in our lives, we only look at them as sharpening them.

I have told you this before: I have one simple philosophy in my life that I would put across the board, and I think it is a very good one. It would be good for anybody, certainly any leader in this church. My philosophy of life is simply this: I try to leave people better than I find them. That may just be a cheerful smile and a hello and a pat on the back. When I see school safety guards, and I am running someplace and out there and they are getting the kids across, I will stop and walk over to them and I will say to them, "You know what? You probably do not hear this very

often, but I want you to know I appreciate what you do." I want to leave people better than I found them.

I was eating a couple of weeks ago up at Mr. Goodcents in Lee's Summit, and I love their Penny Club sandwiches. I am sitting over there, and I am eating my food, and this couple comes in to get their food, and they are over on the other side. A young couple, nice-looking couple, and he reaches across and takes her hand, and they bow their head and they ask the blessing on the food. You do not see that very often today, and that really impressed me. So I finished my food, and I walked over to them on the way out, and I said, "I do not mean to disrupt your meal, but I want you to know, I said, I want to tell you that that was a real testimony and a blessing to me. You do not find that in very many couples today." I said, "I do not want to interrupt your meal, but I want to tell you that is a good testimony, and praise the Lord for that." They were shocked that somebody would come over. I promise you this: the rest of that day, and probably maybe for a long time in their life, they will never forget the fact that some stranger came over and told them what a blessing it was in the world that we live in to see a young couple pray over their food.

Always want to leave people better than you find them, and it is easy to do. It is not hard. The problem is, we are not looking around for where to do it. Many times, it will become the very opening. I did not pursue it that day because I did not feel led by the Spirit of God to do it. I felt like all God wanted me to do is go over and just tell them what I thought. But what an opening that could have been if I could have said, "I am a pastor." I was not going to say that because you had to see me. I had about four days' growth of beard, had a pair of camouflage on. They would have thought, "Oh, you must be in the church of the wilderness," or something like that. So I am careful how I present myself. But anyway, that is not what God wanted me to do.

There are always openings and things like that. You are going to find a time that you encourage somebody, and it is like somebody who has got the flu, and you know how you get the flu, and you get that big hard lump down in your stomach, and you know you are going to throw up, it is just a matter of where and when, but you know it is coming. There are a lot of people like that in life, only the problems, the things they are going to throw up, are problems in their life. I have been in situations where you just said one encouraging word to somebody, and it is all over. They are just waiting for somebody to give them an open door, and those are the things that when you get these principles in your life, these are the things that really, really are important. That is why the importance of role models in everything that we do.

I have one for everything I do in the Bible because I believe the Bible is the final authority. I do not believe I should be doing one thing as far as my ministry is concerned that I do not find the principle of the model somewhere in the Word of God. Now, in a major case, it does not mean that you put the bathrooms on the left side or the right side. I am talking about in the major issues of ministry. By the same standard, we as God's people, as older Christians, and some of you ones who have been here just for three or four years who are moving up this ladder, the thing that you have got to look at is the introduction to this verse that "iron sharpeneth iron," and you are going to sharpen somebody's countenance for God, or you are going to make them dull. That is the key.

Witnessing for God or being a testimony is not tough. Many times, we think we have got to preach some sermon or get on MySpace or YourFace or UglyFace or whatever it is and put something out. No, it is just simply looking to leave somebody better than you find them, that the character qualities that you have of God in you sharpen other people and always leave them better than you find them.

In the Bible, I do not even have to tell you this, the whole Bible from Genesis to Revelation is about a wise man and a foolish man. When the Bible says, "iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend," all through the Bible you find there are wise men and there are foolish men.

Proverbs 13:20

He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed.

Why? Because wise men that you hang out with, in this case wise in the Bible, will sharpen your countenance. It says the rest of that verse simply says, "but a companion of fools shall be destroyed." Why? Because a fool is going to take the edge off of you, and you will not be as sharp as you would be if you are hanging out with somebody who is following the principles of the Word of God.

1 Corinthians 15:33

Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners.

You hang out with people who are constantly negative. You hang out with people who are constantly complaining. You hang out with people who never see God in anything but always see the downside of things. That is going to rub off on you. It is going to become a problem in your life, and in time, it is going to dull you just by association. This is why the Bible says in Ephesians chapter 5, verse 11:

Ephesians 5:11

And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.

When you look at that verse in the Bible, it did not say, "Have no fellowship with the workers of darkness," that would be people. It says, "the works of darkness." You have to have contact with unsaved people, but you have to limit yourself. I have seen many a young gal and a young guy in my years in ministry who really had it on, was on top of it, and really wanted to be a witness, and they would get back in some kind of contact with their unsaved friends, and they would get involved in something that they were doing with the purpose of maybe being a testimony. But you can never take your finger off the trigger when you are dealing with unsaved people because the devil will always get into the details. In time, the very people that they got into whatever they were doing with to try to win them to Christ, by association, because they did not know where the line was to draw, they wound up becoming the victims and lost their relationship with God.

Christianity and the ministry, ladies and gentlemen, is not something you can ever just take a ho-hum position on and take for granted. You always have to be sober. You always, and I do not

mean sober you cannot drink, I mean you should not drink, but I do not mean in that sense. I mean sober is understanding the gravity of what you are doing, and then you have to be vigilant. You always have to be looking. I say many, many times, "Look around, look high, look behind, look ahead." That is the key.

You should not keep company with lousy Christians any more than you should keep company with unsaved people. In both cases, you need to pray for them, but you have got to limit your involvement with them because birds of a feather flock together. Water always seeks its own level, and you have got to realize that you have to choose your friends, Christian friends, carefully.

I have seen young ladies make the most drastic, terrible mistake in their life when they found some guy and wound up marrying him. I have heard people tell me this: "Well, you know what? I am done with the bar scene. I am not going back to the bar. I am going to go to church, and I am going to find me a good husband or a good wife in church." Your chances of finding a good husband and wife in church are probably as nil as finding a good husband and wife in the bar. Please do not fall under the assumption that just because some guy goes to church or some gal goes to church that that is the green light to marry them. They might be in the bar right down the road tonight on the night that you think that you see him in church on Sunday. That is not how you do it. Do not ever assume anything. That is why the Bible says, "Prove all things." You give it time.

I have said it many, many times: you do not marry the guy or marry the girl; you marry the Christ that is in the guy or in the girl. Sometimes that takes time to reveal itself, what you are really dealing with. But these are the character qualities of God that ought to get built into your life on Sunday morning, Thursday night, all our times one-on-one in the Bible together that help you and me not only be the example, and remember, examples in the Bible, an example is what you do, but also being an en-sample. An en-sample is not what you do; an en-sample is what you are to other people.

We have a lot that we are going to do here this next year. This next year is going to be an incredible year for our church. I can hardly wait until our men's meeting and our ladies' meeting to get this thing going so that you can begin to see the scope of what I am going to try to accomplish. Adjacent to that, I am going to talk to you about things that you need to bolt onto your life to help make it very successful. My goal in the next eight years in this level is to take every person right now who maybe is on the basic level and get you up to the next or maybe even a level above that. My goal after that is to take the people that are what I call my midline people who have been around for a while, and you are ready to go to the next level. Then obviously, my number one goal, and this is where I am going to go to work this year, my number one goal is to get all of you who have accepted responsibility and are on that father level to get you in the next four, five, six years up to that elder level where you really understand what it means to work with me in this ministry. That is why these principles are so absolutely important. These principles will be the basis of your success or your failure in getting to that level because it is not about what you know about the Bible; it has nothing to do with that. It is about the character qualities of God that you build into your life. I am not minimizing the knowing the

Bible, but I am saying so many times we think because we know the Bible that we are this great Christian, and that is simply not true.

A simple rule for you to follow next year, put into play this year, if you are in a growing process where you are on any level in here, and I have already picked several guys that I am going to do this with, and I will change them throughout the course of the year so I do not just have the same ones. But here is what you need to do because we need to begin to be role models to each other. The thing that has been missing to this point in our ministry, and it is just, we have got to get to one point before we can get to the next one. The thing that is missing right now in our ministry: we have all accepted responsibility, and you have done really well. But the next step after you learn responsibility is accountability, because responsibility without learning accountability will never work for you. This is where we are at right now. You have learned responsibility well. I cannot fault anybody at all. Even some of you basic people who have just come in the last six months, you astound me of what God has done in your life in such a short time, and I look at your commitment.

That is one of the great advantages of me spending time one-on-one with people. You lay out to me. My schedule has just been absolutely packed since New Year's Eve of people coming in to me and sitting down and saying, "Hey, you know what? I am not sure what level I am on, or I know I am on this level, or I know I am here, but the bottom line is this: tell me, tell me right now, I do not want to wait till then, tell me right now what I can be doing to get myself ready to get to that point because I want to get to that level in my life." It just overwhelms me, and yet I understand that that is exactly what happens when God is in the middle of things and gets a hold of your heart.

I am telling you, a simple rule for you to follow next year in the growth process is begin to hang out with men and women who emulate these character qualities. Find your men and women in this church who in their personal lives have these character qualities, and nobody is perfect, but have these qualities of character, and let them help shape you. Let them help sharpen you. Let them help put you on the cutting edge of this ministry and this walk with God. Let them find somebody who has the quality, and if you are not sure, ask me. You say, "Hey, you know, this is so-and-so, and I really like him or I really like her, and you know, would this be somebody that would help me get to that point in my life?" I will be honest with you. I mean, I will not trash the person. If they are, I will say they are the greatest thing in the world, go for it. If they are not, I will just put my arm around you and say, "Have you ever seen the sunset in Lake Okeechobee in Florida? It is the most magnificent thing you have ever seen in your life. Check it out sometime. Have a nice day." Find people within this church in this next year who will help shape you.

Accountability is something we all need. There has never been a Christian ever walked on this planet that does not need accountability in everything that they do. The problem is, we do not like accountability by human nature of who we are. We do not like accountability. You know why some people do not go to church at all, and yet you hear all the time, "Well, I do not think you have to be a Christian to go to church." No, obviously that is true, but I will tell you this: you have got to go to church to be everything God wants you to be. I have never understood why somebody could say, "Well, I am saved, but I do not go to church," when the Bible says that

Christ loved the church and died for it. You think if He loved it and died for it, it might be important for you.

The bottom line is this: you know why they do not do that? It has nothing to do with the building or big or small. You know why they do that? They do that because they know going to a church offers up some form of accountability, and we do not want to be accountable. That is why your kids, when they hit teenage, that is why they have a problem. The first thing they challenge is authority. Challenging authority is accountability, and we are all that same way. I do not care how spiritual you think you are or how spiritual I think I am, there is never a time in my life when I am faced with something that I know I have to do because it is right, but I do not really want to do it, that I do not grease you out of just a little bit. But then you have been around long enough, you know that that is the best way, so you just do it anyhow. But you will never get to the point in your life where you are happy with doing everything right until we get our glorified bodies. That is why you have got to keep growing. That is why the accountability factor of you keeping me accountable and I will keep you accountable, and we work together with the principles of the Word of God, it absolutely will make the difference between New Year's this year for you and New Year's next year for you. That is the case, that is the key.

When you come over with me one-on-one, I know you think this, I know you think, somebody has even said this, some of you apologize for coming over with me because you think you waste my time, and you have said this many, many times, many of you. You have said, "You know what? I do not think my questions are that important, and there is probably somebody else that could probably take my spot that needs it more than I do." That is simply not true. The bottom line is this: I have never in my life got to the point, and God help me that I never do, where I think that I am sitting there with all the answers and going to help you. How many of you that have been over to my house, and Marion knows this is true, how many times, Marion, have you sat there and you come up with questions, and I went over there and got my pen and wrote things in there that you brought up to me that I did not see? A number of you, Joe, it happens to Joe Alder too when we get on time. All of you, my mind fails me for everybody's face and name, but there is not a time, and maybe I do not write it down on the spot, but I remember it and write it down later.

I will tell you something: there have been, and I have never told you this, there have been missing parts to my sermon that I did not have that I got after you left because of something you said. That is iron sharpening iron. I am not the great iron file who cannot be shaped. We shape each other, and you come over and sit down with me, and you think, "Well, Bob is shaping me." Hey, you are shaping me as I am shaping you. There is not a time on Thursday night that we do not ask the questions. I have made myself accountable to the Bible. I probably should not give you this secret. You know how I have made myself even more accountable to the Word of God? Most pastors will not do this, and I do not know why, but they just will not. I found this: I do appointments on a weekly basis. On a heavy week, I will probably do maybe 25 or 30 people a week, counting all together, sometimes more, sometimes less. That is 20, 25 hours a week.

You realize that many of you come in with issues. Some of you come in with things you are dealing with in ministry. Some of you come in because you are studying the Bible. Put it this

way: if I spend an hour a week with you, and I have, let us just say, 20 people, let us say I have 20 people who come in and see me, and every person is studying a different book of the Bible. You see what that does for me? Not only do I have my own time in the Bible, but because of you, I am now in 20 other books in the Bible that I would not be in, but because you are in them, I have to be in them, and it keeps me fresh because of where you are at. You know what I have done? I never told you that. You know what I have done in my mind? I have made myself accountable to you in our one-on-one. You think you made yourself accountable to me? It is a two-way street. I will teach you; you teach me. Why? Iron sharpeneth iron, and I am better for it because of our time together, because you shape me, you sharpen me by me sharpening you. That is the concept we must develop in this church if we are going to get to that next level, and we have it ready to go. It is absolutely ready to go.

III. Blessing Persecutors (Romans 12:14)

With that in mind, let us look at some more of these great truths for us to live by, and we will pick it up in verse 14. That is where we stopped last time. Here is what he says:

Romans 12:14

Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not.

This is a reality verse. I told you on New Year's Eve that when you move up through ministry and you learn the principles and you apply them, and you get people that you work with and help, and you sit down with people, and those of you who are doing that actively with me, I know you know what I am about to say because we talk about it all the time. But you know what that great verse in Ecclesiastes chapter 1, verse 18 says?

Ecclesiastes 1:18

For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.

When you start to deal with the ministry and deal with people, there are always some hard things you have got to deal with. There will be things that I would not like to know, but when you start to work with people, you have got to work through them. I say to myself sometimes, "I have enough problems in my own life. How in the world am I going to walk this person through this?" But the bottom line is, I am not; God is going to do it.

The thing you have got to realize and understand is a key: when you grow in the Word of God and you start to be used in ministry, you are going to learn a lot of things. The shades are going to come off your eyes. You are going to see the reality of the world and the flesh and the devil and the destructive force that it does in people's lives. I think one of the hardest things you have got to deal with in dealing with ministry is the people that you know exactly what they need, you know how easy it is to fix their problem, and yet you know you do not have a snowball's chance in fixing it because they are not going to do what they need to do. That is the most frustrating thing in the ministry because you cannot be in a ministry without loving people, and you cannot be in a ministry loving people without wanting to help people and wanting to see them do what is right. But the reality you better figure out is not everybody is going to do what is right.

In dealing with people, there are two great lessons you have got to learn. The last two I was kidding you about, these two I am serious about. One of them is in the Bible, and the other one is, yes, I can give you almost 40 years' experience in the ministry, and the quicker you learn these two lessons, the better off you are going to be.

1. The first lesson is in 1 Timothy chapter 3, verse 12, and it simply says: 1 Timothy 3:12

Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. You are going to come to the place where you get persecution in your life for one or two reasons. You get it in your life because you did something stupid, and now you are paying the price tag for it, or simply because you want to do what is right with God. To do what is right with God, you have got to open yourself up, and when you open yourself up, you are vulnerable, and these are things you have to learn. You learn it by understanding the first lesson: "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."

2. Then you learn the second lesson, which is just a lesson of experience for me, but it is very important, and it is simply this: in ministry, no good deed will go unpunished. You are going to get clobbered if you do what is right. You are going to wonder sometimes why you are getting it when you are trying to do, and all you are trying to do is help people. I have often thought of the Lord Jesus Christ. Here is the only man on planet Earth. You can find a lot of fault with me because I am just a human being. Somebody wants to cast fault at me, it is easy, just like they can cast fault at you. But take Jesus. Here is a man who all of His life never did one thing to hurt anybody, and yet nobody wanted anything to do with Him, and everybody was out there nailing Him. Why? Because of that verse, and you want to see the principle at work that no good deed will go unpunished. How about when He healed the blind guy, and they come back and said He did it on the Sabbath day? Every time He did something good, there was somebody out there that found something wrong with it, and they clobbered Him. Get used to that. That is the way it is when you are in ministry, and you better learn this early. One of the ways the devil will try to discourage you is by the people who persecute you. We learned this, or I guess we went over it again, on New Year's Eve. Remember when I took you back to Ezra and Nehemiah, and I showed you in one place they are building the temple, picture your body. You have a place they are building a church, building a wall, picture the church. But in both cases, once they started at work, what happened? The adversaries came after them. I am just telling you, if you are going to get into ministry and you are going to get to this next level this year, or get start to work toward that, to the father, to the elder, or you are going to start coming up the other levels, and hey, I am going to take everybody who wants to do something for God and get you there wherever you are at right now, if you want to. But the process, these are the things that you have to learn: Your walk with God will not be built on how much you know about the Bible, rather the character qualities that you start putting into your life. There will be a price to pay for it. There will be a price to pay for it, but that is just the way it goes, and you just have to deal with that.

Now, verse 21 at the end of the chapter simply says this, and this is good advice for us. It tells us to overcome evil with good. There are a lot of aspects to the ministry I want to teach you in the next five or six years. I am not going to be in a hurry about it, but I want you to learn them, and I

know that everybody will not learn them. I am asking God to simply do this: I am asking God in our church, and I have been praying this for almost a year, but now it is almost a reality. I have been asking God to give me out of this church any man or woman, no matter if you just got saved, if you just came into the church, it does not matter. You may be just starting discipleship, I do not care. I do not care where you are at. I will take you as long as you have got the heart to be God's man and God's woman, and you want that in your life. That is all I ask for.

I am asking God in these next four or five years to give me out of this church the men and women who simply will say to me, "Bob, I do not care what level," or "Bob, I want to get to this level," or "This is where I am at. I do not know where I am at. I do not care where I am at. I just want to do what is right," and to let me have them and then to build these principles of accountability into us on whatever level we are at and where we are going. If we will do that, we will leave this church in good state when I have to give it up and the next guy has to take it over, and that is my goal.

There are many aspects of the ministry, but one of the things that I am going to teach you in time is to speak the Christian language. If you were going to be a missionary and you were going to Africa, China, India, they would take you to mission school someplace, and they would put you in time, they would put you into a language school because if you are going to be a Chinese missionary, do you not think you have got to learn to speak Chinese? If you are going to Germany, do you not think you have got to speak German? Well, do not ever deceive yourself that in the Christian realm in America, that Christianity has its own language. One of the things that you have to do in ministry is be able to understand what is really being said because many times they are saying one thing, but you have to interpret it in basic of the principles.

Let me give you for instance, in the book of Proverbs, it covers all these, and we will get into them in time. Proverbs chapter 26, verse 19 is a great principle, and it throws out the principle, and this is an easy one to understand. He says, I think that, I mean, this is not a verbatim quote on it, but he says, "When a man wants to deceive his neighbor, he will do something and then he will come back and say, 'Oh, I was just in sport.'" Let me interpret that for you. You do not like your neighbor or some Christian, you do something to hurt them or you say something to hurt them, and then when you get caught on the carpet, what do you do? "Oh, I am just kidding." You have got to learn to interpret the Christian language. It is part of learning the dialect of understanding what people are saying, what they say.

I used to love Sherlock Holmes. I did not know what a value it was because back then they said a lot of principles that were true in life that are based on the Bible that you do not find today. A lot of things that go on. I will never forget in his movie, **Scandal in Bohemia**, which was done in 1938, Sherlock Holmes said to Dr. Watson, a classic line, he says, "Dr. Watson, you must learn to observe." He says, "You see, but you must learn to observe because the two are not the same." I thought about that years later, and I said, "He must have been a preacher," because that is exactly what you have got to do in ministry. We all see, but you have got to learn to observe. Observation is not the same as seeing. You can see something, but when you understand the biblical principles, you observe what you see. I am telling you, there is a Christian dialect out there that in time you have to learn, just like a missionary going to Africa has to learn Swahili.

I will give you an example. People, and I have seen this all my life, people get mad at God. They have an issue with God. They are not man enough or woman enough to deal with the issue, so like you and me, we all do this, they want to blame it on somebody else so they do not have to feel any accountability. So what do they do? They get mad at the church. They will get mad at you and they will get mad at me, and they will say something like this, "Why, that church is not for me anymore. I am going to a church. I am not going back there. They this, they that, that." You hear that and you say, "Wow, they are not going to church anymore. They are going to find another church." The problem is, when you observe it, six months later, they are not going to any church. Oh, they may go every once in a while. There is no Sunday night service, no Wednesday night service. Come on, let me translate that. Let me take it from the Christian language and put it into the Christian dialect: "I do not want to go to any church, but I am not man enough or woman enough to say that, so I am going to find some other buddy I can blame it on and say I am going to another church," but then just simply off the scenes, never go to another church. You do not just see, you observe. You do not listen to what people say; you observe what they do. That is how you learn the Christian dialect, and boy, if you are ever going to be in ministry, that is exactly what you need to do. You have got to learn to translate what people are saying and put it into the context of what they are really doing.

He says basically that we are to bless them that persecute you, bless and curse not. I have got to tell you that is not the easiest thing to do sometimes. Jesus did it in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Stephen did it in Acts chapter 7. But one of the greatest failures in the Bible of it is over in Acts chapter 23, verses 2 and 3. The Apostle Paul, he failed miserably, at least one time anyhow. You cannot blame him for it. But you know what happened? They got him over there in Acts chapter 23, and the Roman governors all got him, and the high priest hit man comes up, and the high priest asked Paul a question, and Paul gives him an answer. He did not like what the guy did. He walks up and hauls off and hits him right in the mouth. Now, what did Paul do? He said, "Bless you, my son." He said, "You know what? I just wrote this a while back, bless those that bless thee and curse those that curse thee." No, that is wrong. "Bless those that bless thee and bless those that curse thee." That is not what he said. You know what he did? He looked at him with a snarl in his face, and he said, "God smite you, you whited wall." You know what that means? You know what a whited wall is? Jesus used the example back in Matthew in the Sermon on the Mount describing the Pharisees. A whited wall is a wall that has been washed over white that is dirty underneath. He is saying to him, "God smite you." He did not make it; he failed. It is hard sometimes. Christ did it, Stephen did it, and we should always try to do it, but I will tell you right now, it is not always going to work. If Paul failed, and he was the greatest Christian that ever lived, that certainly does not put you and me in a good state, but we always have got to try, and when we fail, we have to do the best we can to make it up, to make it right.

Personally for me, I think the greatest example of this that shows the cause and effect of why we should always try to do it is found in a principle, in a story, a church history of William Tyndale. If you are going to start Bible or church history, you will know him in a while. William Tyndale did the second English translation, and he did that around 1492, by the time Columbus was sailing the ocean blue. He comes after a guy by the name of Wycliffe, and all the way back in about 1380 to 1390, you find that Wycliffe took and produced the first English translation. This

guy comes on the scene, Tyndale, and he produces the second one. Believe it or not, Wycliffe escapes the Roman Catholic Church's wrath all of his life and dies at an old age. It was not so lucky for Tyndale. They hated his Bible. His Bible got more circulation than Wycliffe's, and finally the Roman Catholic Church got him. They got him because he lived in England, and during that time, Henry VIII was the king of England, and England was pro-Roman Catholic, and they hated this guy. They hated him. So what they did is they set a trap for him, and they got him. They put him in a dungeon, they gave him a quick trial, and they sentenced him to death. It shows you the anger that they had.

I will show you the great extremes they go to. Remember I told you how that Wycliffe, the Catholic Church never killed him, and he died an old man. The Catholic Church hated him and his English translation so much, you know what they did? 80 years after he was dead, they dug up his body and burned him at the stake. That will show him, will it not? You have got to be insane with rage to do something like that. The guy was dead 80 years, and he is still a stench in your mouth to the extent that you have got to go find his grave, dig him up because you hate him so bad, and then burn him at the stake like he is going to feel it.

Well, they took William Tyndale, and they put him in prison. They gave him a quick trial, and then they executed him. Again, the Roman Catholic Church is just never satisfied with killing you once; they want to kill you twice. They burned him at the stake, but before they burned him at the stake, they strangled him. I am not sure what the stake part of it was or why they burned him, but they strangled him. They put him in this big, they put him in this big setting, this big guy, and strangling back then was not just choking the chicken. They tied you up to a pole like this and tied you to a pole like this with your hands behind your back, and then they put a leather strap behind it, and back here that guy put his foot up on that pole like that and just pulled your neck until your eyeballs popped. They did it in public, and it was heard and testified that as they were choking the life out of him, they heard him cry out, "Oh, dear God, please, Lord, open the King of England's eyes."

75 years later, God answered that prayer. He took Henry VIII off the throne, put James I on the throne, and 75 years later, it was the King of England, James I, who gave the official decree to dump the Catholic Bible and to put the King James Bible for all of England. God did that. That old boy was praying a blessing on the very king that was killing him, and God honored it. I have often wondered what I would be praying if that was my situation. What would you be praying? We would probably be praying, "Oh God, get me out of here." We would probably be saying, "Hey, I will tell you, they want to know who, you want to know, you want to know the other Christians? I will tell you where they are all at. I got their name, phone number, during my computer right here. Let me have you give me the password, just do not kill me." He did not care about himself. He did not care about whatever was happening to him. He cared about one thing: getting the Word of God to his nation. Wow, what a great example. I have never forgotten that. I read that probably almost 40 years ago, and it stays with me to this day. You never know. Here was a guy who had every right to curse the people that were persecuting him, who were taking a stand against the truth and were against everything that God was doing, but instead he blessed

him, and he asked God to take that same nation that was choking his life out and to give them the Bible, and God did.

IV. Rejoicing and Weeping (Romans 12:15)

Romans 12:15

Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that do weep.

Now, this is almost as hard as the last one. You see why these are the reality. My honest desire when I am in this section is to get through this as fast as we can, but we cannot. I am with you, "Get along, little doggy, get along." I am ready to go. I am sure if you have been saved for any length of time, and I do not mean to throw water on you new Christians, but you have got to learn it sooner or later. This is why I am telling you to find the right role models and hook up with that, and iron sharpeneth iron and all that. But I will tell you something: God's people are the most jealous, envious people you are ever going to meet in your life. I have seen it all my life. If there is ever a fake side to us, it is right here. Something happens good to somebody, and we get that smug attitude because we think it should have happened to us. That is all the time; it is called covetousness. That is in the Bible.

I am telling you, in looking at leaders and training leaders, I never look at the surface, brother. I am always looking at what goes on behind the surface, underneath the surface, behind the scenes. You know why we get this way, other than the fact that it is obvious that we are out of fellowship with God and quit growing? I will tell you why: because we are not content with what we have and who we are right now.

1 Timothy 6:6

But godliness with contentment is great gain.

You know where we get into trouble with covetousness? When we are not satisfied with what we have. You know why we are not satisfied with what we have? It is a two-part deal. We are not satisfied with what we have because we are not really satisfied with who we are, so we want more. I had a guy one time, he told me, and I know this guy, we are good friends, and he was serious about it. I really believe it. He said, "You know what?" He said, "If I win the lottery," I think it was 92 million dollars, he said, "If I win the lottery, I am going to give you 20 million dollars for your church." I thought that was a good idea. We will talk about that in a second. He comes to the place where he says, "I will give you 20 million dollars."

You see, contentment has to be with where we have and what we have got right now. I mean, I have seen people, you get excited about when somebody needs something, and you need it too, and God gives it to them, but He does not give it to you. You know how tough that is? I was just talking to you as a human being today. You need a car, your car is on the blink, and you have a friend that needs a car, maybe their car is not as bad as your car, and somebody comes over and says, "Here, I got this nice car. We do not drive it anymore. God put it in my heart to give it to you. Here it is." And you are sitting there saying, "Praise the Lord. Yeah, yeah. Well, Lord, I needed a car too, and mine is not as good as theirs. Now what is the deal with that?" Hey, rejoice

with them that do rejoice. You and I have got to get to the place in our life that when we are content with what we have and who we are, that you can rejoice with anybody and whatever happens, even if you do not have it or you need it, because you know what? You are confident in the fact that God is taking care of you, and no matter in fact you did not get it, you know that He is going to take care of everything that you need. That is contentment.

The Bible says over there in 1 Timothy again, in 6:8:

1 Timothy 6:8

And having food and raiment let us be therewith content.

We live in a situation where I have seen it happen. I have seen people put themselves in financial ruin because of the fact that they have got to have a house like somebody else, and if they do not have a bigger house, they think that there is some status symbol. I have seen people that if a gal went out and bought this, that somebody else says, "I have got to go out and buy the same thing," like they are keeping up with something. The truth of the matter is that problem with us is the reason why we cannot rejoice, because we are not content with what we have, and we are not content with what we have because of the fact that we are just not satisfied with who we are.

Then it says the next part of that verse, keep that in mind about the 98 million dollars, I am going to tell you a good story about here in a minute. Then it says, "weep with them that do weep." Now, one of the things that you are going to find dealing with people is a lot of heartache, a lot of deep water. I have people come in, some of you are sitting in this room, you know when you came in, you were just about under the water. You just about had as much of it as you could take, and your whole life was upside down. You had all kinds of problems, and the greatest testimony today is the fact that God is real, is the fact that you are here this morning.

I had a little sweetheart girl Thursday night in Bible study, one of our visitors, wanted me to explain how I could, how do you know that God was real? I mean, how is God always there? How do you explain that concept? Obviously, I took an easy route because I did not want her, I did not want her to, you know, I wanted to be very careful how I dealt with it because there is a good chance I am going to get to work with her here in the next couple of weeks, and I did not want to give her one of my smart aleck answers that I would give maybe somebody else, not really smart aleck, but I wanted to be very careful with what I said. But you know how I know that God is real? Now, I do not care how He started, where He was, where He was before the beginning, and all those things, that does not bother me. All I care about is that He is real. I do not care where He has been. I just want to know that He is real. You know how I know He is real? I know He is real because I have seen Him in your life and in my life. I do not need proof, "Where did God come from?" I just want to worry about where God is at now. Is He where I want to be with Him now?

The reason I know it is true, some of you remember how it was when you came in the first time you walked in here. Your life was upside down. You had so many issues and so many problems. I remember some of you telling me you thought you would never get through it. Well, you did. You did. You did. You know why? Because of the fact that He got you through it. But you know

what? You are going to meet people like that. Some of you, God is going to put you in a scenario and put you at work with somebody or put you at school with somebody or put you somewhere with somebody that has got the deepest problems they have, and they have got the weight of the world on their shoulders. Sometimes the only thing that you can do that will do all the thing in the world is to sit down, act interested, and listen to where they are at and try to be their friend.

Compassion for each other. People go through a lot of tough times. I think the worst thing of it is an aggressive example is in the death of a loved one. I love doing funerals much more than I do weddings, especially when it is funerals for saved people. I have the greatest time doing funerals. I get more done in a funeral than any other public expression of what I do out publicly, and to me, there is nothing greater than an opportunity at that time. But there are some tough ones. There are some tough ones. I do not do funerals for people that I do not know or I do not know that have. I mean, there have been people called me and said, "Hey, my father died or my aunt died, would you do the funeral?" And I would say, "You know what?" I said, "I do not mean to be cruel about it," I said, "But you know what? If you just pay him another hundred dollars, they have got a guy on staff there that will say everything you want to say." I am not good at getting up and telling something that is not true. I mean, I do real good at it one-on-one, but I do not do very good at it when it is public. I just have a tough time getting up and talking about somebody's life with Christ and how much they love God when everybody in that room knows that is not true. I just cannot do it. What do I say? I do not have to do those kind.

I preached unsaved funerals before. I told you the story years ago about a friend of mine that used to pastor with, he was blind. I used to drive him around because obviously he could not drive. This guy was not ashamed of the fact he was blind. In fact, the first day I met him, he said, "Let us get this out of the way. I am blind. I know it. I have dealt with it. I am fine with it." I found out in time he saw more being blind than most people could see with their eyeballs. But he was a great guy, and I love him to this day. I got on the elevator with him. I always have fun with him. I got on the elevator one time with him, and he does not know who is on the elevator or not. So we are on the elevator, just me and him, but he does not know, and I kind of make it like there is somebody else on there, and I, and we are going up the thing, and he is sitting there, and I, I said, "That is just, ma'am," I said, "Do you mind if I say something to you?" I said, "I know I do not know you, but I said, you know what? Honest to goodness, ma'am, you are the ugliest woman I have ever seen in my life." He showed it. He says, "Oh, there is nobody else on this elevator." I used to have fun with him.

I do not know if you remember this or not, this has been a long time ago, but if you go to Chiefs Stadium, you cannot take a thermos in there. You know that? You know why you cannot? Because about '78, '79, somebody got killed with a thermos. Somebody hit him over the head and killed him with a thermos, so that is how they went. Anyway, this guy did that funeral, and it was the guy was a biker, and we went to the funeral, and it was in that case when we were standing there, it was the roughest crowd I ever been in my life, and I thought to myself, "This would be a good place to be blind." So I walk him up to the thing, and I sit him down, and I said, "The pulpit was right in front. You just got to stand up." He was really good at it, and I went down and sat down there, and I am thinking to myself, and he walks up to the pulpit, he is going to preach this

guy's funeral. Now, I do not to this day know how he got there. There was some connection there, but they asked him to preach the funeral, and this old boy, he never spared any words, and he could hear, you know, people were crying, weeping, and around the thing. We both knew that this guy was unsaved. This guy was a partier, he was a drinker, he was a biker. I mean, as far as anybody could tell. This guy got up there, and I am sitting down in the front row, over to the side, and he gets up, and he is quiet for a moment, and he just does not say anything for a few moments, and the crowd settles down, and then comes that dead silence that you know, like, "Why are you not speaking? Is he going to speak? Can he speak?" Sometimes that is a great thing to use.

He just simply opened by saying this: "Folks," he says, "I hear a lot of crying out there today." He says, "Let me tell you some things that a blind man can see." He says, "I hear a lot of crying out there today, and I would say this: if these tears would have been shed by people on their knees praying for this young man when he was growing up, we probably would not be having this funeral today." I am thinking, "We are going to get out of here and get killed." I mean, I cannot even run because I cannot leave him, and he cannot run, he will be tripping all over the place. We are dead in the water. He preached the greatest funeral I ever heard for an unsaved man, one of the greatest funerals I ever heard in my life. I could never surpass it. It was absolutely the greatest thing, and even in that, he gave, he gave me, he gave the comfort, not where this guy was at in eternity because everybody knew he was lost, but he gave the comfort that if you are lost, God can do something for you. He basically said, "We cannot do anything for this kid. He has already made his choice, and he is in heaven or he is in hell based on that choice," where everybody knew what that choice was. But then he brought it right back and laid the thing out. Those are tough.

There are some tough times. When I preach a funeral for a saved person or even an unsaved person, the greatest text I have ever found, and you have heard me do it if you have been to any of my funerals, is Ecclesiastes chapter 7. If I preach, and these are tough, you have to preach a little baby boy. I preach a lot of little babies, little kids. I preached the funeral one time of a little boy that was six or seven years old that his daddy bought him a mini bike or something for his birthday, and four days later the kid was out working on it. Daddy got out in the car and did not see it and backed out and killed the little kid with his own car. Oh, what a tragic time that was. I will tell you what, those are the rough ones.

If I deal with an adult that is saved or lost, I usually do Ecclesiastes chapter 7. I have never found, to be honest, I have never found a better verse for doing a funeral for a little baby than Isaiah 57. I have never found a better verse that if you take your time and walk your way through it, that because everybody is asking the question, "Why?" and "How?" I have heard them, I have seen anger at those things because they think that God is unjust because God, and these are the things, listen to me now, these are the things you have got to learn to diffuse in situations like this because there will be a time down the line where some of you will do a funeral. Weddings are easy. Everybody says, "I do." They go out and get drunk, and you are on your way home. It is fine. Funerals are another whole world, and there are times when you have to rejoice like a wedding, but you have to weep. You have to be there.

When I am done doing a funeral, if you notice how I do it, most pastors just go sit down or some walk out the back. I never do that. When I am done, and I always tell the funeral director because they always ask, "Well, what are you going to do?" They want you to set the service, and I just basically say, "Here is what I am going to do. You play this song, this song. I will get up and do my thing, and when I am done, I am going to walk over and I am going to stand by the head of that casket, and I am going to stand right there. That will be the sign, and I am finished." You know why I do that? Because everybody files by. The reason why I do that is because after everybody goes, that family comes up, and that family many times, it is heartbreaking. There have been times when we have just, when I have known them and I loved them, and they were part of my ministry, that we just put our arms around each other and cried and cried and cried.

There are some times, even when as good as a preacher that you may be, and there are times that even though the Bible is the great comfort and we know that, but there are times in situations like that where there is nothing to say. There are times in situations like that where all you can do is hold them and cry with them. Those are things you have got to learn. These are the character qualities. These are the things.

I remember one time I had a boy that was a good kid, and he lost a little baby. That little baby lived about four or five months after it was born, and it died. It devastated the family, first kid they ever had. I remember that when they did that funeral, that little white casket and that little baby in there. Boy, there is nothing, nothing worse than just a small little casket and that little baby in there. The hardest, roughest time of my life is I had a young gal who was probably, when she grew up in my ministry, she used to come on the bus, and she got saved, little Robin, remember Robin? She used to come with Robin, and I, and she had a baby, and the baby died. The baby died at birth. So I went up to see her, and this is the saddest one of the two in my ministry. There are two times in my life that have absolutely devastated me that I have never gotten over it, and to this day I dream about it, I think about it, and it will never leave me.

I went up to see her, and that baby was dead, and this little girl wanted a baby so bad, and she said, and I am standing, I am trying to comfort her, and she says, "Would you like to see some pictures of my baby?" And I am thinking, "Did the baby live for a while?" No, no. You know what the pictures were? The pictures were her, they dressed up that little dead baby in a little red thing, and she held that in her arms while they took pictures. I have never seen a more sadder picture of a mother's face where it basically cried out and said, "I got a baby, but it is dead." It was the most devastating thing. What do you say? What words? You know me with the Bible, but in a time like that, what verse do you pull out? "All things work together for good to them that love God." Now that is true, but that is not what they need. No, no. There is a time, and all you can do is hold them and cry. Yes, you rejoice with the ones that rejoice, but you have to weep with the ones that weep, and this is where it has become so important in people's lives to be there for them.

I have sat there many times when somebody has said to me, "Why, Bob, why is this?" I remember I was sitting there with a family one time that lost that little baby boy, and at the end, the funeral director was going to come in and going to take that little casket and put it down in that hole, and the dad said, "No, I will do it." He says, "Come on, Bob." And he picked up that

little white casket, and he walked over with tears streaming down his face, and he put that casket down in the hole and patted that little casket and then stood back and said, "Okay, now you can cover it up." I went back to the house, and I sat down with him and his wife, and he asked me, he says, "Bob, why do things like that happen?" I did not yet know Isaiah 57; that was pretty early in my ministry. But God gave me something I never forgot. I said, "I do not know." I said, "I really do not know, but let me tell you what I do know. We do not know it all right now, but you know what? I found a number of years ago in Psalms 56, verse 8, the Bible says that God has a bottle for our tears.

Psalms 56:8

Thou tellest my wanderings: put thou my tears into thy bottle: are they not in thy book?

Now, why would God want a bottle for our tears? What is the point of having a bottle that our tears get put into? I told him, "You know what the point is? Because right now those tears run down our face, and we do not know why. So God collects them in a bottle, and one of these days, He will open that bottle, and we get up there with Him, and He will drop those tears out, and every one that falls down, He will explain what He was doing and what He did it for. We just have got to hold on to the bottle right now." Sometimes that is all you can do. Sometimes it is all you can do.

V. Unity and Humility (Romans 12:16)

Now look at verse 16. He says:

Romans 12:16

Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits.

This great principle is based on how you treat people, and it also hits on the great number one key to any church, and that is unity. Everybody on the same page. This great principle is based on how you treat people. There should be no preference. There should be no politics. Churches are filled with cliques. In reality, there should only be two cliques in any church. I do not really like the word "clique," but everybody uses the term, so for association. Churches are filled with cliques, but a real Bible church ought to only have two cliques in it.

- 1.) Clique number one ought to be everybody who understands what is going on and have the pastor's heart involved in ministry.
- 2.) Clique number two ought to be everybody who is not.

The job of any pastor is to keep the second clique to the lowest number you can. But that is the way it should work. Unfortunately, in most Baptist churches, it does not work that way. You know the political hierarchy that goes on. How many times over the years I have seen the political games that go on with pastors and their people? Most of you, the thing that I love about most of you is that when you came in and got saved in this church, and you have been in this church for any length of time, most of you do not understand the real Baptist world out there.

You will understand the politics because there is no politics here. Everything here is on merit of what you do with the Bible, and many of you have been saved from that, and that is a good thing.

Many of you, you do not have to. I will say this because you are not here today. When your wife got saved New Year's Eve, and Barb worked with her, this is the way you want them. How many times have we all worked with people, and you try to win them to Christ, and you open up the Bible, and they say, "Well, what about baptisms? Do I have to be baptized to be saved? What about tongues? Do I speak in tongues? But when a church I came from, he spoke in tongues," or "What about this? What about that?" I have a thousand questions. This little gal, bless her heart, she came in, and Barb started walking her through the principles, and Barb started to talk about discipleship, and the girl said, "What is discipleship?" Barb said, "Well, when you get to a point, you need to pray and ask God." She says, "I have never prayed to God in my life. How do you do that?" She had never been to church in her life before she came that night. Barb told her, she said, "You know, I know you think that this is all a bad thing, but this is the best way to be. We do not have to undo anything to get you saved because you do not know anything other than the fact that you are a sinner. You do not have to work through nothing." That is the best way to find them.

A beauty about our church, and a lot of you new people, you do not know what goes on out there. This church will never be part of a fellowship anytime, anyplace, anywhere. I have seen it over the years where the fellowship just becomes a political organization, just like the Democrats and the Republicans. I have been associated with them all my life, not by choice, but because where I always were, they always were connected with them. Every group of Baptist churches have some kind of fellowship. For our area up here, it is the BBF. Down in Springfield, Missouri, other places it is down in out in West Coast or down in Tennessee or someplace around or in South Carolina. What they are is there are a bunch of churches who get together and they form a little nucleus, and it really becomes a political organization. What they do is they take pastors out there and they make them the president of the fellowship, and then they have a vice president of the fellowship, and then they have in each state key guys who get designated as the pastor of that state that represents the fellowship, and it becomes the Democrats and the Republicans.

Most of you do not know who Parker Daley was. Parker Daley was a great, there is a great preacher, he is not dead yet that I know of, and he ran a church up here called Blue Ridge Baptist Temple, and he retired a number of years ago. I remember in the BBF that Parker was running for the president of BBF, and he wanted to be the president of it, and you know, you do the same thing you do in the Democrats and Republicans. You call your buddies up and you say, "Hey, I am running for president." "Oh, I think you would be a great president. You got my vote. Yeah, we will vote for you." And you get, you get voted in. I remember watching that whole hypocrisy, and I remember this pastor talking to him and saying what a great president he would make, and "Oh yes, you have my support." And then he hung up the phone and he trashed the guy, and he said, "I guarantee you he will never be president." Now, how is God in that? I have such a disdain in my mind and my heart for that kind of Christianity that I cannot even tell you, and if you push the wrong buttons, you will get some words you never heard before connected with it. It drives me crazy.

I have seen rich people get preference. I have seen politicians get preference. I have seen guys that were like a federal judge get preference. I have seen people that were famous. I know an evangelist that I could tell you his name who has got a church now not too far from our place that was the big name in all the world of evangelism about 20 years ago, and everybody wanted to be like this guy, and every pastor, every pastor wanted to have him in his church. There were pastors that would woo him, take him out to eat, have him in to do great revivals in their church, all to try to get this guy in. You know what he did? He took every steak dinner they bought, he took every gift they gave them, and just moved on to the next guy who was going to shower him. You know what they all wanted? They all wanted this great evangelist to be in their church. You know why? Because they wanted to go around the country and say, "So-and-so is a member of our church. Oh man, if he is a member of that church, oh, I want to be a member there." It is a game from beginning to end of trying to, everybody has to be on the same level. It does not matter who you are, where you come from, what your status is, how much money you have. It is absolutely...

I remember years ago, I had a gal in my class, I taught the college and career class then. I had a guy in my class who called me on the phone, and she said, "My father, my mother just died," and she says, "I want to tithe off to the church what I got from her." And I said, "Okay," I said, "What can I do for it?" She said, "Well, how do I do that?" And I said, "Well," I said, "Just write a check and put it into the deal Sunday." And she said, "Well," she says, "It is quite a large check." I said, "Well, it does not matter what it is." And she said, "Well," she says, "I got five hundred thousand dollars." She says, "Okay to put a check in for fifty thousand dollars?" I said, "Yeah, that is what you want to do, put it in. That is how you do it. Put it in, make it out to the church, drop it in the offering." Well, we had staff meeting next week. The pastor in a staff meeting, we are talking about everything going on, and he is always giving me a tough time anyhow, and he says, "Yes," and he says, "We got a check in from one of your crazies, Bob." And I said, and I am still in a blast, "Really? What is that?" He says, "One of your crazies put a check in for fifty thousand dollars. What an idiot." And I said, "Was it so-and-so?" And he said, "Yeah." He had checked, and I said, "Yeah," I said, "She just inherited five hundred thousand dollars at the death of her mother, and she wanted to tithe off." Oh boy, you should have seen his countenance change. "Who is she? How old is she? Is she married? Can we get more money? Oh, call her, have her come in this afternoon." You see, before he did not want to know her. It is amazing what fifty thousand dollars will buy in most churches. All my life I have seen it.

That is why when I started this church, by the grace of God, I made you one promise, and I will tell you what, as long as I am pastor of it, there will never be any politics involved in this church. If you get to do anything, if you get to be anything, it is because you came up the ladder and you earned your way through that book by doing what God has called you to do, not how much money you have given. Kyle and I were talking this last week, and we are talking about a church that built it, and there are several of them around, and we built this incredible facility. We were talking about, I said, "Well, I am sure it is beautiful." Kyle said, "Yeah, man, they have got everything in it, done this, did that, it is all this, all that." I thought to myself, "Wow." I went home that night, and I, you know, I never get envious of those things.

The other day I was driving, I do not know if you saw this or not, but if you are coming east on 70 right past the stadium, if you look back here, there is a beautiful church for sale. You saw it, Joe? It has got a big for sale sign on it, and it looks like it has got a gymnasium behind it, good size church, and it is for sale. I was driving up there, and I looked over there, and just for an instant, just for an instant, I thought to myself, "Man, it would be nice to have that. I wonder what they want for it." And then in the next instant, I thought to myself, "That is the stupidest thing in this world." You know what? I would not trade what I have right here for anything in this world.

There are pastors out there that are sweating bullets today because of the economy the way it is, and they have a building payment of 50,000 a month. 50,000 a month. I know one guy, his church payment is 20,000 a month, and he is sweating bullets right now because of the fact that the economy and his offerings are down, and how it is to do that. This is the value in realizing that you never have your church building in better shape than your people. Hey, you know what? We could leave this place tomorrow, go back to where we were, go back to Steve's warehouse next door if we had to. We could, and not owe anybody a dime. But you see, here it is, folks, learn this, young men: when you shackle yourself into that kind of program, then you have got to cut the shortcut the principle to keep the money coming in. I hope you never think that because this church gets in a financial bind, not that we ever would, that if you have money, and I know you have money, and I like you, if you have money, that I would ever shortcut my preaching so not to offend you so you would not leave so your money stays. But it happens all the time.

I have learned something over the years. Every church is paid for when the people who are in the church believe it is God's program, and it is just that simple. If God always pays for what He orders, and what God ordains, then He sustains, and it is just that simple. It is just that simple. Of course, that is exactly where it is at. I mean, you know what? I have seen them make deacons out of the rich people or give them special favors, and then come to the point where all they wanted to do is get their influence. I have seen their kids get a free pass when they did something wrong, and their common ordinary people's kids get clobbered.

You see, these are things that I learned that I want to teach you. These are things that you cannot go to school and learn. You cannot get these in a book. These are things that you have to go through by experience and the time that it takes to learn it and get it and put the whole thing together to understand what is real and what is not.

I remember one time, this has been years ago, a family in the church, Dad was a deacon, big influential guy, spiritual zero. But he was put to part of deacon because you gave spiritual favors out to get spiritual favor back, and you made somebody a deacon so you could, if you found somebody that was a yes man that would tell you what you wanted to hear and go along what you want to do, you made them a deacon because in those churches the deacons had some kind of say in it. So you always put people in that were going to give you what you wanted in return, you give them what they want. It is how it works, a two-way system.

I remember this guy was a deacon. He did not like me, and I did not like him, and we clashed several times. But his daughter went off to a Christian school, and his daughter was a singer. She

used to sing, and she never got into the real ministry of my college and career class. She was always one of these worldly ones who, because of who her father was, she knew she could do whatever she wanted to do. Never came to Bible study, never did anything. Well, suddenly one Sunday morning, I am sitting in church after my Sunday school class, and she is singing the offering, and I am thinking to myself, "I thought she was in school." I asked a couple of people, and they said, "Well, don't tell anybody, but she got kicked out of school because she was found smoking marijuana." Well, guess what I am thinking is, "What in the world is she doing up singing before the offering, and she just got kicked out of school for running with the wrong crowd and doing marijuana?" But I am not one who gets my information from people. I go right to the source.

You know what I did? That Monday, I called Liberty University, and I asked for the dean of students, and I identified myself as a pastor of this church, and I said, "I need to talk to whoever is in charge over the women in your school." She gave me a nice lady. I said, "Nice lady," I said, "My name is Bob Alexander, and I am a pastor up here, and I am in charge of college and career, and I just have a question." I said, "Because I am a little concerned," I said, "And I do not mean to cause a problem or I am not speaking out of turn, but I said, I have got to know how to deal with my end up here." I said, "Is so-and-so a member of your school?" And I said, "Now she is not a member of your school, and here is my point." I said, "I do not really care, but I said this is what I heard, and she was singing a special on Sunday before the offering, and my deal is that I do not care what she did, I am not mad about it, I would do anything in the world to help her, but if that is true, she has no business standing in front of people singing before the offering, okay?" And the lady said, "Well, Pastor Alexander," she said, "Yes, that is exactly what happened." I said, "Well, thank you very much," I said, "I really appreciate it." I said, "I did not want to say something or do something because, you know, I did not want to have my facts, somebody had told me this. I never go on what somebody tells me. I always run it back to the source. Thank you very much. I will deal with it from here.

Now, in my naiveness, and this was a long time ago, this is when my white horse was still alive. Remember the white horse? Big old sucker, and I ride that white horse into every problem, and it would rear back, and make, and do this, smoke come out his nose, big clip-clops on his feet, and I would ride him when I go into a situation. It would not just stop, it would do what real horses do. You would ride in, and boy, and it would turn around, it would just keep turning around like this, and then rear back a while, and it would get, you know, you could look around and just say, "Oh," you know, you had to control him because this horse wanted to solve problems. I shot that horse about 14 years ago, and I found out a great lesson in ministry: guys on white horses, no good deed will go unpunished. So no, I was stupid back then. I had not learned to speak Baptist yet like I am trying to teach you. I had not learned all the ins and outs like I want to teach you, and this was 20 years ago, if it was, maybe more than that now.

Would you not think if I was the pastor and I knew how that information and something like that was happening, now I was not going in and kicked down the door and dragged this girl off the stage by her hair and write "D" on the front of her forehead, "dope," and paraded around? That was my goal. I thought we had a testimony that we wanted to. All the kids knew why she got

kicked out of school. Do you not think that was just a little tough to have her get up there and she is singing before the offering, and this thing? Now, if you had her peeing a cup, she would be in jail.

So you know what I did? I did what I thought I should have done. Oh boy, I went out to the backyard, put my saddle, my silver saddle, put that silver saddle on. Silver is the price of redemption, and put that thing on there, tucked my sword down in there, picture the Word of God, mounted that steed, said, "Fire! I will be back in a little bit. I am going to right wrongs." Oh, I galloped off for the pastor's office all the way down 55th Blue Ridge Cutoff. I could hear the clinkety-clack of them silver cleats on him, that hard surface. That horse was raring to go. He was up for action. I will tell you what, when I got in there, boy, he was raring back. I had to calm him down and tie him off, and I went in there, and I said, "Pastor," I said, "I need to talk to you about something." He said, "Go ahead." I said, "I just, I found this out," I said, "And you need to know," I said, "Because I do not want it to be a problem," I said, "But this gal," told who it was, I told him the whole story. He said, "How did you find that out?" And I said, "Well, I heard a rumor up here, and I said I did not want to go with rumor, and I would not, did not think you would want me to go with rumor, so I confirmed it by calling down Liberty," and I said, "I talked to Mr. So-and-so down there, and she basically told me that that is exactly right." He said, "Okay, I will take care of it." I got a phone call two days later. You know what he did? He called down to Liberty Baptist College and got this woman fired. Yes, your mouth is open, make a caveman homesick. That is what he did. That is what he did. He got her fired. She called me back. Now, how do you think I felt? How do you think the horse felt? I got this woman fired, and all I wanted to do was to do what was right because I thought that pastors did what was right. But because of who her father was, and because of the fact that he was a deacon, because of the fact that he was very influential and gave a lot of money and had a lot of input and had things going for the pastor that he was getting done, that the pastor was using him to do this, this poor woman lost her job, and I felt terrible for it. But I learned a great lesson that day, and I have never forgotten that lesson.

That is why when I built this church, we put this church to God and gave it to Him. I have made a vow before God, and as long as I am pastor, there will never be any politics in this church. Good, rich, poor, in, out, whatever the case may be, everybody has to go by the same principles and the same standards, no matter who you are. That was a tough lesson. Those are the kind of things, ladies and gentlemen, on whatever level you are, you need to learn. There is more to the ministry than getting up and opening your Bible and praying and saying, "Okay, here is what the Bible says." You have to learn, if this church is going to go where it goes, and you are going to be the cement that holds it together when I cannot do it anymore, you have got to learn what I have had to learn. You have got to understand to speak the Christian language. You have got to understand to not just see, but to observe. You have got to understand that things are not always the way they appear, and you have got to realize that it is the character qualities that we need to build. Every one of us, from me down in ministry, it is all about examples. You lead from the top down, and in that chain of command, there is an accountability factor that has to be built in, and these are the things that we are going to learn. These are the things that for those of you who want to go through it and want to be part of the working Bible ministry of this church, and I do

not care if you, I do not care, you can be here for six years, you could have come in just last week, I will take you wherever you are at, and I will help you get to wherever you want to go because that is what is going to make this church this next level: the honesty and the openness of the Word of God, the transparency of it all, that we do this thing by the book, and that there is nothing out there that somebody gets because of the fact that they are the pastor's friend or they give more money here or they do that or they do that. It just comes down to the fact that, ladies and gentlemen, if we are going to do it, we are going to do it right. There is no reason to build a church wrong.

VI. The Future of the Ministry and Training

This is why the thing that we are going to talk about as we come down through this every time we get together, and I am going to do basically two things this year. We will not maybe get it all done, I am not planning to, but just so you understand where I am coming from. We are in Romans. By design, I started Romans when I did because I knew probably that we were going to get to this point and have our New Year's Eve a year and a half ago. So I started Romans to get the base text down. This is why we are spending the enormous time in the book of Romans, unearthing every stone to learn everything we can. Like everything we do, some of you are doing it, some of you are not doing it; it is just the way it is.

Two things:

3. Once we are finished with Romans, we are going to start the book of Second Corinthians because the book of Second Corinthians is the handbook on ministry. I will break it down and explain to you everything you wanted to know about every aspect of ministry is found in the book of Second Corinthians. It might be a little while before we get there because I know we only got a couple chapters left, but I want to make sure we are getting.
4. Then this is an institute. We are getting to the point where now we are going to be done probably this year with our institute on this phase of it, and now we also know that the next phase of institute, which is perfect timing for where we are at, we are going to finish Romans, we just started a new year, we have talked about the accountability, we have talked about iron sharpening iron, we have talked about all the principles we want to put in place. We are taking everybody on whatever level you are at and getting you to the next level where you want to go, all the way up with a mindset to build the elders to get this church functioning on that level and everything that goes along with that. Then the next thing we are going to do when we get in institute, we are going to go through biblical counseling. We are going to come through every problem concept of what you are going to deal with, how you deal with it. See every issue in the Bible of how you deal with issues in people's life and in every problem you are going to deal with, and we will get this thing on its way. It already is.

I just cannot tell you how, and I have got to say this, and I know I am done, I am done, I am done, I better be done right now, I am done. Let me say this: this will mean nothing to most of you; it means everything to me. A couple weeks ago, I had a situation happen in the church of a problem in a family, and I could not get there. I have had several times when this has happened, and I want to say, and this is what I am talking about, this is what I mean when I am talking

about men and women who have my heart for ministry, who are right there and understand what I am doing and how I am doing it. Two of you guys stepped in, and two of you guys did exactly what I would have done if I could have been there. It was not that big a deal. It was not somebody jumping off a cliff someplace or killed somebody. It was something that it was not about what you dealt with; it was the fact that some of you see what I see and are there in touch with what I am in touch with, and when I cannot, I cannot always be there. I try to be, but there is going to be times when things do not allow it to happen, and that is when you guys step up to the plate. I never ask you, I never, God, because of where you are at, picked you up and put you in it, and I am telling you that means more to me than anything else that I could say to you. That tells me this is where we want to go. This is where we want to go, and I know there is a number of you out there. I am not just shaking out these two guys, but there is a number of you out there, men and women, who are in touch with the reality. But I am saying this is with the principles that we are talking about. It was not the fact that you did what you did. It was not the fact that you met the need. It was the fact that you took the principles that I am talking about and applied them into your life and then let God use you where you needed to be used. That is what it takes.