

I. Review of Fellowship and Relationship

As you know, we have been coming through this chapter, as we have been coming through the whole book of 2 Corinthians, focusing on ministry. We are getting ready for what we want to do after the first of the year: opening up a ministry here, basically a people ministry where we train a number of people to be able to really work and help people even more than we already have. We have a number of people who truly work through the ministry here and do a superb job, and we want to keep adding to that. This is part of your growth process, getting you to the place where ultimately ministry becomes the baseline of your life. The ministry we know now is working with people.

You remember the first week we examined this chapter, I told you that the bottom line of fellowship with God has to be with truth. That was the first week we talked about that fellowship and its lowest common denominator; the baseline is our fellowship with truth. When it starts with that, and the truth of God's Word is in our lives, then we have that fellowship. I talked about that truth as the single most important aspect of God and the Word of God. Without truth, everything about God and His Word is just pretty much like everything else in life. It is not worth the paper that it is written on. So, truth is absolutely important.

Then you remember the second week, I showed you the ten things that we as Christians need to be in fellowship with, once we start our fellowship with truth, and as you develop it and grow. We talked about those: in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in prisons, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings. I showed you in that particular section that the key word there is the word "in." These are the things we need to be in fellowship with.

Then the third week, which was last week, I showed you in the third section nine areas by which you maintain, keep, and develop your fellowship. It is one thing to have a fellowship with God. It is something else to have a foolproof system in your life so that you never lose that fellowship. Yes, we are to stay in fellowship through these things, but the nine things I gave you last week are the nine things by which we maintain that fellowship.

You remember I used the example of how you develop a relationship in dating. When you want to find a spouse, you have to go where single people are. You meet people through work, through church, or through your social endeavors. You find somebody, and maybe somebody, if you are a gal, somebody asks you out. If you are a guy, you ask the lady out, and you wind up getting married. All relationships start that way. My point was this: if you do not ever take that relationship past that first date, if you do not ever develop it, cultivate it, if you do not ever bring that thing to the point where you truly pursue it in developing it, nothing ever comes of that.

I told you that the three vital areas were:

1. Lordship: a person has to be saved.
2. Fellowship: the things that you do together and in relationships.

3. Relationship: how relationships build it.

I also showed you that when you do get married, if you ever get married, those three areas are the same key three areas. They just take on a little different perspective. Lordship means that you are both saved and you both have your own personal relationship with the Lord. Fellowship is the fact that you have your time in the Word of God with each other and you do things together. Then, of course, relationship. There is no fellowship or relationship in marriage without those three areas. Those are the key three groupings of things that you have to develop in your life. When you keep developing those things, and through the relationship you develop the fellowship, it just keeps on going.

I told you also that in your relationship with Christ, it is the same thing. Christ is the bridegroom, we are the bride. The earthly aspect of marriage, we know from Ephesians chapter 5, is nothing more than a picture of the heavenly one that we are all headed to when the Lord comes back. I showed you that the same three areas—lordship, fellowship, and relationship—are the key to not only having a relationship with truth, then having fellowship with the things of the Lord, but then through the relationship maintaining that fellowship and developing that relationship.

Your life with Christ as a Christian should be a steady process of growth. Maybe some of you grow faster than others, maybe some of you get places quicker than others. It does not really matter as long as you are growing and you are going in the right direction. The thing that you never want to do is to stand still with the Lord or move backwards. You always want to be moving forward.

II. The Christian Life as a Paradox of Contrast

Today I want to look at the end result of everything that we have talked about. When you begin to build a relationship and fellowship with truth, and you take that and you develop your fellowship with God, and then through that you have a relationship, and by those relationship things you continue to maintain your faith and grow in the Lord and have all the things that God wants you to do, there is an end result that happens in your life. If you are saved here this morning, every child of God ought to have this as the goal that you want to get to. Fortunately, most of God's people never do.

I want to show you the direct result of your fellowship, and then your relationship, and then through your Lordship, what it will produce in your life. This is where you truly become effective for Christ in ministry. But again, it is a development process. It is something that no two people will ever get the same at the same time. But it has to be in your life. You have to come to the place where you continue to grow and you develop yourself and get these things in your life.

So we have seen a process. You have seen now that the baseline is your fellowship with truth. We now then, through that truth, have seen the fellowship that you have with the things that you are to be in fellowship with. Through that process, you build a relationship with Christ. Now today, once you go through that process, I want to show you what is going to make your Christian life different. I am going to show you today, based on those three sections in this great teaching

chapter, what makes the difference in a Christian's life, or should I say, should make the difference in a Christian's life.

The Christian life should be a paradox. The Christian life should be a mystery. I do not mean the fact that you keep it to yourself and do not tell everybody about it. I am not talking about that. But your life as a Christian should be unexplainable. People should see things different in you. When the world reacts one way to a terrible situation, a Christian should react another way. The difference between how we react is the difference that Christ has made in our lives because people will see that. People watch people who claim to be Christians.

I think the effectiveness of your life and my life in Christ simply, for the most part, comes down to this: only very little about what we say, though telling people and witnessing to people is very important. But I think that has a very little impact on people's choices for Christ. I think the thing that truly impacts people is to see a life in a person that is contrary to everything the way the world goes. I think the contrast between what the world does and what a Christian does, how the world views things and how a Christian views it, how the world responds to something where a Christian responds to it—when it is different, when it is totally, completely, and unexpected—I think that is what people see, and that is what God uses. They come to the conclusion that there is something different about you. Something different about all of us is not what we talk, because we can talk anything.

You know as well as I do, there are some people out there who are great talkers that can sell you anything, anytime, any place, anywhere. The real difference, the bottom line in your life and my life, of what Christ has truly done and changed in our lives, takes place when everything falls apart. Everybody over here is looking and going crazy, and you over here are holding the line because you have the principles and the promises.

I have told you many times that one of the greatest ways to learn the Bible is by contrast. That is an incredible way because the Bible says God is light, the devil is darkness. The Bible basically is built around, from Genesis 1, light versus darkness. Because of that great concept, everything in the Bible that you can learn, at any magnitude, will always be a contrast. It will show you the difference between what right is and what wrong is, what light is and what darkness is. God shows us the things that are different, how they are opposite, and we learn from that.

Simply put, God's way of thinking and looking at things in life is totally different than our way of thinking. That is why contrast is so important in your life and my life, not just in learning the Bible, but the way we live our lives. Because the Bible says in Isaiah 55:8-9, a familiar passage, it basically says God's thoughts are not my thoughts, God's ways are not my ways. The world thinks one way, the world looks at things this way. When a child of God thinks the other way and looks the other way, you know what it forms? It forms a contrast.

When I preach funerals, and I know there are a thousand funeral messages in the Bible you could preach, but when I preach a funeral, almost without exception, I will use what I know to be true to help me. Because when you do funerals, it is always a tough time. I think funerals are probably one of the greatest opportunities to get the Word of God out and to get into people's lives and let the Holy Spirit of God do things. I have had funerals where I have had eight or nine

people raise their hand and they got saved. I had a funeral one time I did for a young gal that died years and years ago, and I got up there, and I was still pretty young, and God was just beating me up to give an invitation. Well, you do not give invitations in funerals. I am up there, and I felt like I said, "I feel like I ought to almost give an invitation today." I do not even know why I said that. The moment I said that, the lady down in the front jumped up, ran over to the organ, and started playing "Just As I Am." She made the decision for me. We must have had five or six people saved that morning at that young girl's funeral.

When I preach a funeral, I try to use what I know. I think that is good advice for all of us. I think we learn a lot of things about the Bible, we learn a lot of things in the Bible, but I think our failure many times is that in situations we do not use what we know. If I know that people are more sensitive at a funeral, if I know that the greatest way to reach somebody is by a contrast, then why would I pick some other domain by which to give them? So I always preach on Ecclesiastes 7:1-3. It is one of the greatest contrasts in the Bible. He starts out by saying that the day of one's death is better than the day of one's birth. Now that is a contrast. That is totally not the way everybody thinks. That is totally not the way the world thinks.

Then he says this, and this is always my text:

Ecclesiastes 7:2-3

It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart.

Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better.

I use that. I build it up, and I bring it along, and I take that verse and basically inject it into the crowd. What I do is I just take that simple contrast. Nobody likes to be in a funeral home. Nobody likes to be here today. Nobody really wants to be here. But yet the Bible says it is better for us to be here today in the house of mourning than the house of feasting. Why is that? Then the rest of the verse: "For this is the end of all men." You are going to die someday. There is no greater time that people think about death, because they do not want to think about it, than when they are forced to go to a funeral and they look at the object lesson in the casket and you preach it. That is a contrast. That is contrast.

The end result of our fellowship and our relationship with God should be a contrast that the world cannot miss. What makes you different? It is what makes the world look at you instead of the situation. It is what draws the attention to you and then through you to Christ.

III. Biblical Examples of Contrast

Did you ever notice that everybody in the Bible, you probably never thought about it, I really never thought about it until this week until I started putting this thing together, did you ever notice everybody in the Bible that really had it together was a contrast, had a contrast in their life with the people in the world system? There are hundreds of them obviously, but there are three obvious ones that come to mind.

Paul is the first one. Paul wrote this book and he wrote ten or eleven more if you give him credit for Hebrews. He was loved by many, used today in thousands of sermons across this country. Every Sunday people make reference to the books that he wrote. Yet many in his day hated him, thought him a deceiver, thought him mad, insane. At one point Paul, the beloved apostle, loved by millions, was killed as a heretic. Over there in Acts 26:24, when he stood before King Agrippa in that great presentation where he laid out the gospel, Festus says, "Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad." You see, there was a crowd that loved him. There was a crowd that knew he was God's man. Then there was a crowd that hated him and despised him and wound up killing him. Contrast, contrast.

The next obvious one is Jesus Himself. In His day He was loved by many. Today He is loved by millions. Down through the centuries no other man probably impacted our world and is more loved. We have a hymnal there that has over 500 songs about one man. You could go to a Christian bookstore and probably buy another 100 hymnals that have that many in them and never cross the same song twice. Never has a man impacted and changed the course and the direction of planet Earth more than the Lord Jesus Christ. I say it all the time, and I used to say it when I was a young man preaching, He is the only man in the world who never did anything wrong to anybody. Yet He is a man that most people do not want anything to do with. You know why? Because He represents a contrast. He was loved yet He was hated. He was adored yet He was despised. He too was killed by the people who hated Him. No other man in history has been more loved and yet more hated, I guess, than the Lord Jesus Christ. The only man that I know of in the history of the world that whole nations take a stand against. Some loved Him so much they went to the ends of the earth to serve Him. Some hated Him so much they went to the ends of the earth to kill anybody who did follow Him. That is a contrast.

The third one is obviously the Word of God. No other book on this planet in 7,000 years of man's history has been more loved or probably yet more hated. Somebody said one time years ago, "The Bible is more powerful than any atom bomb that was ever created." Somebody said, "What do you mean? I do not understand that. How could a Bible be more powerful than an atom bomb?" He said, "It is simple. I know of 20 countries right now who outlaw the Word of God. I do not know one country that outlaws an atom bomb." The Bible is powerful.

Here is the problem with you and me. Everybody in that Bible that was worth their salt, that ever did anything for God, that ever amounted to anything, had a contrast. The problem today in churches and Christians' lives is there is no contrast. The Christian world today has blended in with the world. We have blended in with everything the world has. We do not want to offend anybody in our preaching. We have taken the music and we have blended it with the world. We have taken the holy Word of God and blended it with the world. We have taken our church services and made them contemporary and made them one with the world. We have taken our preaching and taken all of the fire and all of the things about preaching about sin and all the negativity that needs to be preached today. We have made it all positive. Instead of being the contrast to the world, there is really no difference today. There is no difference between the world and Christianity today, and sadly, with God's people. So our lives should be that same contrast as Paul, as Christ, and as the Word of God. The right fellowship and building the right

relationship through the right lordship will always produce that contrast that we are going to talk about today.

IV. The Nine Contrasts of Christian Ministry

Let us read our text again in 2 Corinthians chapter 6. We will pick it up where we have always picked it up and we will come down through here. We are going to be focusing on verses 8, 9, and 10 today. But let us go ahead and read what we have read the last couple of weeks.

2 Corinthians 6:4-10

But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses,

In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings;

By pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned,

By the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left,

By honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report: as deceivers, and yet true;

As unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed;

As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.

Now Father, help us today. We love You. We ask You to help us to see this great truth. This is probably one of the greatest chapters in all the Bible for Your people. Understanding that our fellowship fundamentally starts with truth and then goes in and grows and develops into the sufferings of Christ, and then through that into a relationship with Christ, and then right on down the line. Yet this is the end result today. This is what our life should be. No matter what we say, what we like or what we do not like, or who we like or who we do not like, or what we like about the preaching or do not like about the preaching, at the end of the result, we should have a contrast to the world in our lives. If we do not, then we have some issues. Help us today. Help us Father to take these and to use them and to give us all the honour and glory, and we will give it to You and we will thank You and praise You in Jesus' name, for His sake we ask it. Amen.

You want to learn these nine contrasts because these are the end result of our lives when our fellowship, relationship, and lordship are in the right place. I am going to go through each of these and talk to you about them in a quick manner, but enough that you will get it.

- By Honor and Dishonor
- By Evil Report and Good Report
- As Deceivers and Yet True

- As Unknown and Yet Well Known
- As Dying and Behold We Live
- As Chastened and Not Killed
- As Sorrowful Yet Always Rejoicing
- As Poor Yet Making Many Rich
- As Having Nothing Yet Possessing All Things

V. Conclusion: The Contagious Contrast

These are the great contrasts, nine of them, of the Christian life. Your life and my life, this is the end result of having a relationship, having fellowship with God. This is what it produced. This is what makes you effective for Christ. This is what makes you get to the place where God can use you in circumstances and situations. This is what will make people seek you out when they have tough times. This is what people will look to you because they have seen the contrast in your life. They see the way the world goes, they have seen the way their own life goes, and they see the way your life has went, and the contrast is so great they say, "I have got to know what that difference is." Then you get a chance to tell them. These are the great contrasts of the Christian life. They come into our life through fellowship. First of all, fellowship with God's truth. Second of all, through the fellowships of Christ's suffering. Thirdly, then by building a relationship with Christ, by developing our fellowship, and then we get to the place where our life, we live our life continually by a contrast to the thinking of this old world. People see it. It allows them to Christ, and by the contrast of your life, people come to Christ.

Mel Subaca used to say, "If your Christianity is not contagious, then your Christianity is contaminated." Today we have a contaminated Christianity. It is blended with the world. There is no contrast. There is no difference. We as God's people react to tragedy just like the lost world does. There is nobody standing up holding the Bible saying when the world falls apart, when your world comes apart, "Look over here. I have got the light. I have got the answers." There is no stability in an unstable world. There is nothing in this Christian world today with men and women because they have lost the Word of God. They have lost the contrast. We now become one with the world in everything that we do. What we need is God's people who will stand separate from the world, let the contrast in their life bring people to the Lord Jesus Christ. We had bowed our eyes closed.