

I. Introduction to 2 Corinthians and Ministry

If you have your Bibles this morning, I want to invite you to turn back to 2 Corinthians 6. We started that chapter last week. For those of you that may be visiting today, or just as a reminder, we chose the book of 2 Corinthians based on the fact that where our church is at right now, and what God has opened up for us, so many different aspects of ministry that we are working through, we realize that the book of 2 Corinthians is really the handbook of ministry. If you are going to do something for the Lord, you might as well learn to do it the right way. So that is how we got into 2 Corinthians 6.

I have told people throughout the whole study that every chapter breaks down a different aspect of the concept of what ministry is. I think last week we had a great start to this chapter, which really deals with us as ministers. Remember, the Bible says that we all ought to be ministers. Maybe not everybody is a pastor, but everybody needs to be a minister. Minister simply means ministering to people, and that is what we as Christians are supposed to do. Husbands minister to their wives, husbands and wives minister to their kids, families minister to other families, men minister to other men, women to other women. In our church, we even have some of you little kids that are already ministering to other little kids, and that is what it is supposed to be.

We saw that in chapter 6 we deal with the fellowship of the minister, what we should be in fellowship with. For those of you who intend to work with people and maybe be part of our people ministry in time, where you really work with situations where people really need some help, maybe you just want to have a better understanding of why things are the way they are in life. Many times we go through things in life that hearing a message like today, or even a series like this, will help put everything in perspective of why those things are the way they are in your life.

Last week, I gave you five scenarios basically why people leave a good Bible-believing church and do not go to church anymore. We saw that the basic fundamental problem with that, why people do that, all five scenarios came back to one concept. When you learn things like this, it is invaluable to you, whether you are going to work with people or you just want to be able to figure things out for yourself. The Lord will take a message like last week and really exercise you. As I was speaking to you, I could actually see it in many of your faces that you were relating to what I was saying. As I was speaking and laying these things out, you were thinking of scenarios that you could relate to, maybe in the past, maybe present-day scenarios. From this point on, every time you hear of a similar situation, you are going to think in your mind, "Oh yeah, what scenario was that? Oh yes, it was number one, number two, number three, number four."

One of the things that you have to learn in time, if you are ever going to be good with people, and this helps in a lot of ways, is simply to understand the patterns of human nature. That is why it does not matter if we are talking about somebody in Moses' day, somebody in Zacharias' day,

somebody in Jesus' day, or somebody in your grandmother's day, or somebody in our day. Human nature is always the same; it never changes, and the patterns of human nature have not changed. Society changes, styles of clothes change, things we do change, everything changes in life except the Word of God and the patterns of people's human nature. It is always the same. That is why the Bible talks about how relevant the stories in the Old Testament are. Many people think, "Well, the Old Testament really does not apply to me because it happened so long ago." No, it may have happened a long time ago, but human nature is the same today as it was back in the Old Testament days, and it is something that you will just learn.

We learned last week that the bottom line, the baseline, the lowest common denominator of understanding our fellowship starts with our fellowship with the truth of God's Word. That is the fundamental baseline of fellowship where it all starts. Fellowship with the truth of God's Word, not just the truth about everything in life, it starts with the truth about ourselves, recognizing who we are, recognizing the Word of God pointing to us and showing us not just the good things in our life, but the things we have to work on, the things we have to develop in our life. That is really where it starts: fellowship with the truth of God's Word, and as I said, the truth about ourselves, and then everything else after that.

If you are ever going to get to the point where you really are valuable in helping people through their struggles, and this is very important, we talked about this last week. You have to realize that one of the things that you have got to try to get people to do, it is not easy, it is always complicated, especially when you are dealing with a problem that has been going on for years and years and years. You have got to get people to come to the end of the blame game. We talked about this last week, and the reason why you have to is because, and I said this last week, the list of people, places, circumstances, things that you can blame for the problems in your life are endless. At some point, if a person is going to really get to where God wants them to be and get everything that God has for them, they have got to come to the end of blaming other people, other circumstances, and they have got to take responsibility for their own actions. It is just the way it is, and you will see when you start to do that, and the only way to do that is to hold them accountable to the baseline of fellowship, which is truth. You will find out what a person is really in fellowship with truth or not the first time you have got to deal with them on an issue because it will all go back to what they are in fellowship with.

I told you last week, "He that loveth a honeycomb, even the bitter things are sweet," out of Proverbs. Tremendous verse, tremendous principle. When you do that, you will see the problem so fast it will be unbelievable. People will always love you as long as you agree with them, and in most cases, the moment you have got to deal with somebody on an issue that is not a pleasant issue, you are going to see where their fellowship lies. It is just the way it works. You do not have to be a rocket scientist to figure all this out. It is clear. It is clear. Another thing, you learn to expect that from people. I told you when you work with people, you do not take things personal. You work with the truth. When you are in fellowship with truth, you realize that some people are going to accept the truth. Some people are going to reject the truth. It simply is what it is.

II. The Nature of True Fellowship

When it comes to the idea of fellowship, and I said this last week, we all have somewhat of a convoluted idea of what fellowship is. Many times we have a misconception of it. I do not know what convoluted means, but I heard somebody use it this week and it really sounded impressive, so I hope I used it in the right spot.

After softball, we have a softball league. After softball, we all go to Pappy's Pizza. I know some of you would like it, some of you do not. But the bottom line is, we go there to fellowship. You guys get on that goofy machine that plays the music and you sing and make fools of yourself. I think that is wonderful. We bring new people there. We laugh. We have a great time. After volleyball, we have a volleyball season that starts. We have probably, I do not know, 14 or 15 softball teams, probably have that many in volleyball, scores of people. Afterwards, we go to Jason's Deli and we do the same thing. We take over the place and we just have fun. Somebody has a birthday, they make them stand on a chair, we sing to them. We do all kinds of things. This month is a great example. Halloween things going on, people having birthdays around here is always a time to party. We blame it on fellowship, which there is nothing wrong with. All the time, groups of people get together to do things as Christians and we call it fellowship, and it certainly is.

But all that fellowship that we do, and all the fun things that we do, when you get down to the bottom line, you know as well as I do, it is based on and built around a book, the Word of God. That is the only medium of our fellowship together. That is the truth of God's Word that forms the core of our fellowship of us being in Christ. The only real reason we get together and have a great time is because we are all saved and when we die, we are going to heaven. We are in love with the Book. We want to do what God wants us to do, and we use all those things to get other people involved and try to help them because we know what has helped us. So, you have got to understand that.

I think what makes this chapter truly an outstanding chapter is this chapter shows us the progression of biblical fellowship. We just do not want to stay in a mindset that even though it is fellowship, going to Pappy's, having parties, and doing all these things that we do together, they are fun, and that is fellowship, but it goes deeper than that. The true, biblical, baseline, Bible-defined fellowship starts with truth, and then it develops itself from that point. This chapter progresses through five stages of what your fellowship with Christ should be. It is an incredible chapter.

We are going to get down now, as we have in this chapter, we are getting down to the bottom line. We are getting down now and putting out definitions that if you are paying attention or want to pay attention, you can really understand some great things here. I am going to read the second set of verses here. We read our first set last week on fellowship, and I am going to add to it today some things that we talked about last week, and we will move on from there.

Now, look at 2 Corinthians chapter 6. We want to pick it up in verse 4 through verse 10. Remember, we saw last week in verse 3, it said, "Giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed." That is where we left off last week. Then he picks it up in verse 4.

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

Now, Father, help us today to take this passage and begin to walk our way through it. We pray, Father, You will help us truly get to the point in our life where we really understand what true fellowship is. That all the Pappy's Pizza and all the Jason's Deli and all the parties and all the things really do not mean anything. It will not get us through one thing in life that is tough. No, what will get us through is us being in fellowship and growing in fellowship with the things that we need to grow. We will be careful to give You the honor and the glory and the praise in Jesus' name, for His sake we ask it. Amen.

III. Approving Ourselves as Ministers of God: The "In" Factors

As you grow spiritually, and we know a little bit about this because we have talked about it, we know that the Bible clearly lays out seven stages of spiritual growth. By that I mean when you get saved, you start a process to get you to a point where you really can handle some things spiritually. We know as you develop yourself and you become what God wants you to be, we also know from the book of Galatians that when you start doing things and becoming fruitful, there are nine fruits of the Holy Spirit of God that God gives to you. He just does. As you develop yourself and your faith grows, your grace also grows. We know now that not only are there seven stages of spiritual growth, we have been through that before. Not only do we understand the fruit of the Spirit that God gives us, but now we know from 2 Peter 1:5-8 that there are seven things as you grow and develop yourself that you add to your faith. We have talked about those things. But along with that and all of that development, the development of your fellowship grows too.

Now that does not mean you have more parties or hang out more, but rather your fellowship with God's truth will develop you and take you and develop you right where God wants you for ministry through the circumstances of life of the things that He is talking about here. This is a great learning chapter. It really is. This chapter shows you and I that development and process. With all of that process, the Bible talks about the fact that through it, then as he says in verse 4, "But in all things approving ourselves as ministers of God." Now look at that verse. He says, "in

all things." What things? The things that he is talking about in verse 4 are the things that he mentioned down through the rest of those chapters. These are what we approve ourselves as the ministers of God.

Many young men and young ladies get themselves into trouble simply because they have had a bad self-image of themselves. Their mom or their dad have always belittled them or whatever, and they are always seeking somebody's approval. That can be a dangerous thing if you do not understand that people can take advantage of that because you want their approval so bad that you will do whatever they want you to do. I have dealt over the years with a lot of people, male and female, with just that same scenario. They wanted somebody's approval so much that that person they wanted the approval from could pretty much get them to do whatever they wanted to do. I have always looked at that and thought to myself, "I wish God's people wanted God's approval so much that they were willing to do whatever He wanted them to do." That is where it really comes down to. That is where the rubber really meets the road.

2 Corinthians 6:4-10 shows you the next stages of our development as a child of God. In time, these things become what our fellowship should be with. 2 Corinthians 6:4-10 is, as far as I am concerned, the job of every Christian, what we should be in fellowship with Christ as a child of God. I will say this too, and I am here to help you. Nobody is mad at you today, but if you have been saved for 10 years or more, I will give you 10 years just to figure it out. I normally give you five years. I am extending it today because I grew in grace last week, so I am giving you five more years now. But I am telling you, if you have been saved 10 years or more and you are not here yet or are not pretty well into this yet, you have got some issues. Something along the way did not get developed. I am not somebody to tell you what to do, but I suggest to you and give you some good advice that you pull yourself into a spiritual garage someplace to let somebody do a diagnostic check on you and find out where the undeveloped areas are and get those things worked on.

In this passage itself that we are looking at today, and we are not going to get through this all today, I do not plan to, but you have got three sections in this section of verses I gave you today. Your first section is verses 4 and 5. Your second section will be verses 6, 7, and 8. The thing that I want you to see about this, and this is really important, this is why I tell you the important things in the Word of God. You look at the things that are listed there in the first section, and I think there are 10 of them here. When you look at these 10 things, you are going to see that the key word here is "in" these things. It talks about "in stripes," "in imprisonment," "in tumults," "in labours." You see that? Now, the second section in this passage will be verses 6, 7, and 8. I think there are nine here. But the key word here is not "in," but "by." You see that thing? "By the word of truth," "by the power of God." That is a tremendous thing. Most people would never see that. Most people never think anything about that. But when you really look at this chapter and really try to get what it is saying, then you are going to see these things. In the first set of verses, these are the things that you should be fellowshiping **in** these things. The second set shows you that these are the things that you have that fellowship **by**. In other words, you are to be **in** these things, but you stay in fellowship **by** doing these things. That is tremendous stuff. There it is broken down for you where you know that you need to be in fellowship with these things, but

you stay in fellowship with these things by doing these things. Incredible. This is a great teaching chapter. Then we get into verses 8 and 10, which we will not today. There are six great contrasts of a child of God. They are incredible. So you are going to see that this chapter is really a great chapter for teaching us. This is a great, great, great learning chapter.

Not only do you know why, from last week, people quit going to good churches and leave good churches based on the five scenarios, and I give you a little challenge, just watch those things over the next couple of years. But now you are going to find out what real Bible-based fellowship is, from where it starts with truth last week, and then how it should develop in your life over the years. When it does not, how that it is always going to wind you up in the wrong fellowship. What did I say last week? The wrong fellowship will always produce out of fellowship. It is as simple as that. The Christian life is not hard to understand. It is not complicated. Not when you bring it down to the basic level of the Bible and truth.

I am not a very complicated person. I do not deal with complicated things very well. When it came to the Bible, I was told all of my life how complicated and hard it was. Many people get so intimidated by that they never really do anything with the Bible. Of course, that is not true. If I can understand the Bible, you certainly can. Most of you, if not all of you, are much smarter than I am. You are much younger than I am, not all of you, but many of you. You still have 90% of your brain cells. I lost 40% of mine along the way. So if I can do it, you can do it.

I told you a couple of years ago, some of you will probably remember this. Bob is going to meet with all of the prayer groups this round, and he is going to take one a week. He is going to basically go back and reinforce what we talked about when we started this thing just to keep everybody on the right deal. I love that. That is good stuff. That is the kind of stuff that I look for, that I like to do. You remember that two or three years ago, I am sure it was on a New Year's Eve, we talked about, and I told you that the next two or three years were going to be really defining times for our church. I told you it would test, maybe some of you have forgotten, maybe some of you just blew it off that night. I am sure we could go back and find the tape that I am telling you I said it. I told you the next two or three years would be a defining year for our church. It would test our mettle as to our commitment to God and to ministry.

When a church starts, the first four, five, six, even seven years is all fun time. Everybody gets to know everybody, all kinds of fun things. Everything is new, all kinds of new things that Bob is going to bring us through in the Bible to help us put it all together. Everybody gets all the material and everybody is happy about it. But then there comes a point when you have got to do something with it. In our worldly life, there are famous old sayings that we always use. One of them is "fish or cut bait." The other one is "get in or get out." One of my favorite my grandmother used to say was something about "or get off the pot," but we are not going to go there on this particular situation this morning. I think your grandmother probably told you that too. Maybe not, maybe you just all knew my grandmother, but she used to say it all the time. She had some incredible things that I could not even tell you this morning. The thing is, there is so much wisdom in them and it is so true of life. It is just they are not politically correct today, I guess you would say.

I am telling you, nothing, and I mean absolutely nothing, exposes who we really are more than when a church gets to the place where you are ready to turn up the heat on ministry. You have grown to the place where you all have a fun time. We all learn a lot of things. Now God comes down and says, "Okay, I did not give you all this so you could just be puffed up, proud, and pompous. Now we are going to do something with it." He turns the heat up. I will tell you, that is when we really find out where the rubber is on the road. That is where we are now. God is holding us accountable with everything that He gave us.

He lists these things in our first section here we are going to talk about today that we should be in fellowship with. I would ask you today, if you are honest with yourself and your baseline of truth, take a little reality test this morning. I took it 40 times this week on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, looking at this stuff. Every time I get up, I tell you every time I get up and you have got to bear through a sermon that really bothers you or nails you or gets you where you need to be gotten. I have got news for you. You only had to hear it once. I have to go through it on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and boy, those fingers come through me before they come to you. So I take a little reality test today. If I were you, I would ask yourself, when Paul is talking about this, is he talking about me? Who am I really in fellowship with? Am I really in fellowship with truth?

I always tell Christians, if you really want to find out what kind of Christian you are to yourself, you only have to ask yourself one question. I think it is probably the greatest single question test you can give yourself. I used it for years. I saw it years ago. You all have been in churches. You know what it takes to make a church work. I always tell people, if you want to find out what kind of Christian you really are, and you are really honest with yourself, with what you do, what you do not do, and all the things that we alibi about, just put in your mind a scenario that you are a pastor of the church and everybody in that congregation is just like you are right now. How much would you get done? That is a great test. That is a great question.

Verse 4 says, "But in all things approving ourselves as ministers of God." We are going to look at it today as we start to come down through here. So let us pick it up here in verse 4 and just look at some of these things.

1.) In Much Patience

The first thing he says is this: "in much patience." He did not say "in patience." I realize in 2 Peter 1:5-8, as I said earlier, there are seven things you add to your faith, and patience is one of them. It does not say "much patience" there. It says "much patience" here. You know why? Because in dealing with people, you have got to have much patience. In dealing with people, I am talking about God's people and unsaved people. It takes a lot of patience to deal with people.

You would not believe what I am about to tell you, but after 40-plus years in the ministry, I am telling you, this is true: I would say that it takes more patience to deal with God's people than it does with unsaved people. I tell you that. The reason why it is so hard for that to believe when somebody may say, "Well, I do not," is because you expect more from God's people. You expect God's people to be easier to deal with because they are saved. They are going to heaven. They have got a Bible. Unsaved people are just unsaved people. You expect more from God's people

because they are God's people. But that is not usually how it works, and that is usually not true. God's people can drive you literally crazy.

The Bible says the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God in 1 Corinthians 2:14. The saved man has received those spiritual things. He should know better. He should be in a position where he knows what is right and wrong. It should be easier to deal with somebody who is saved, but it is not most of the time. You will learn this by experience. You begin to work with people, some of you already have, you will learn by experience. Some of the most wicked, diabolical, hateful, lying, cheating, self-serving people I ever met are Christians, or at least claim to be a Christian. If you are going to work with people like that, you need to have not just patience, you need to have much patience.

Obviously, somebody says, "How do you get patience?" We know first of all, the book of James says that the trying of your faith works patience. So you get patience by going through difficult things that force you to trust God, wait on God, do all the things that we are not very good at doing. Another great area, at least for me, that helps me deal with people, God's people or unsaved people, and give them the patience that they need, is I never forget how patient God was with me when I was probably a real pill and still am many times to deal with. I try to view other people through how God viewed me. I try to give other people what God gave me. It does not always work. It always works for me because you just have got to have patience. In this case, you have got to have much patience.

The Bible says that we have got to be in fellowship with patience. Fellowship is something that starts in your life and comes into your life once you get the root fellowship going, which is truth. Because you will understand the truth about yourself. If you understand the truth about yourself, then you have a better position to understand the truth about other people. It does not make you hate them. It does not make you want bad things to happen to them. It does not make you a revengeful person if they have done you wrong, because you think back in your life of all the hateful, revengeful things that you have done wrong, and God exercised much patience with you and me. That is just the way it works. Patience is a character quality in a Christian's life of his relationship and him being in fellowship with truth. You cannot be in fellowship with any of these I am going to talk about without first being in fellowship with truth. That is why it is a great chapter. It is a great chapter.

2.) In Afflictions

In verse 4, the second thing, and I am glad he did not put the word "much" here, is "in afflictions." We talked about the affliction that Paul went through many a time. I remember in 2 Corinthians, I think it was chapter 2, verses 8-10, how he thought that they had the sentence of death in them. He thought he was going to die. He was really going through all of the things that he went through. I have got to say, this is probably the hardest thing for God's people to be in fellowship with because God's people do not want anything to do with any fellowship with affliction.

We talked about Joel Osteen last week, and we kind of make fun of Brother Joel and all of the things that he does and how goofy he is. I wish I have tried, I have looked in the mirror. I think I

would have a much more successful ministry if I could smile like he does. He smiles at everything. He gets a smile on his face and he stays with that thing for 40 minutes in a sermon. Then he will stop and he will smile, and people just love him. I worked on it. I cannot. I have broken nine mirrors trying to get it done. It is not going to happen anymore. But we make fun of him and talk about that obviously what he does, he is phony. He never preaches salvation. It is always about all the good things in life. He is like Norman Vincent Peale used to be, about the power of positive thinking and no negative things and everything good in life. I look at that and we all talk about it, and I think to myself, he is no more of a phony than some of God's people I have met over the years. At least he is honest about who he is. He is totally up front that when you come to his church, you are going to pay 15 bucks at the door. He is totally up front that he makes no bones that he is going to tell anybody that they are a sinner and there is a heaven to gain and a hell to shun. He makes it right up front.

This is why people are drawn to that. You know why? Because people want that kind of life today. We make fun of him and we talk about how unbiblical he is and unscriptural he is and how people go there and what is the idea? You have to pay to get in to hear some guy preach about the gospel. Well, first of all, he is not preaching the gospel, so that answers that question. But God's people want the same thing today. They want a Joel Osteen mentality and lifestyle without Joel Osteen being in their living room. They want all the prosperity that God has for them. They want all the good things in life. They want their salvation to be perfect. They want their walk with God to be perfect. They want God's blessings in every aspect. They want everything that God has for them, all except suffering and affliction. That is where we are at today. Wrong fellowship always leads to out of fellowship.

He says in Hebrews 13:12-14:

Hebrews 13:12-14

Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate.

Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach.

For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come.

He said in Hebrews 11:24-26, the great story about Moses. What a great story. We all know the story of Moses and what he represents and what a great picture he is in the Bible.

Hebrews 11:24-26

By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter;

Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season;

Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward.

Here is Moses who had an opportunity. He was born in Pharaoh's household. He was elevated to a very high place in the kingdom. He was up there, number two in the kingdom, under Pharaoh, had everything that he wanted. He could do whatever he wanted to do. It was incredible. And yet, in spite of all of that, he realized what God had for him to do. He realized who God's people were. The Bible says, "Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward." He was willing to put that all aside because he realized that in fellowship with God, when it starts with a baseline of truth as it develops, you have to fellowship and be in affliction that Christ went through.

Philippians 3:10:

Philippians 3:10

That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;

I will stop right there. That is where we are at today. You have got to have that fellowship of His suffering. You know why? Because it says when you have that, then you are being made conformable unto His death.

Most people do not want Obama to get reelected. I do not really get into politics one way or the other. I think that everybody is a crook in the political world, so that is my take on it. But most people do not want Obama to be reelected. I will tell you why. The only fundamental reason why they do not, in most cases, not every case, but most cases, is because they are afraid that if he gets reelected again, the economy is going to go, everything is going to go, you are going to lose your job. In other words, they are afraid if he gets back in, we are going to suffer affliction. We do not want that. We want everything that God has. We want to be in fellowship with God. We want to walk in the light and see the light. We want to go hand in hand down the road over to Emmaus. We want to have all those wonderful times except when it comes to what He went through and the sufferings and the afflictions that you and I have to go through.

Again, you have got to clarify this today. I am not talking about the afflictions that we go through because we are stupid. I am not talking about the afflictions we go through because we are dysfunctional and undisciplined and we get ourselves into all kinds of problems because of sin. I am not talking about that. I am talking about suffering, affliction, and being in fellowship with what Christ went through, His reproach, not ours. My father in the Lord used to say all the time, I heard him say it many, many times, somebody asked him one time if he was enjoying his salvation or he was enduring his salvation. He gave back one of the greatest classic lines that I ever heard. Somebody would expect him to say, "Well, no, I am enjoying my salvation." Somebody else would say, "Well, brother, I am just getting through it." He was smarter than that. He looked at that guy and he said, and the question was, "Are you enjoying your salvation or are you enduring your salvation?" He looked back and said, "I am enjoying my enduring." You know why he could say that? And he meant it. You know why he could say that and mean it? Because that is what he was in fellowship with. That is what he is in fellowship with. I do not know how to tell God's people this, and it does not matter. You tell them, but I will tell you something. God

is going to break America and bring her to her knees one way or the other. You might as well mark that down in all your other notes you are putting down there.

3.) In Necessities

Number three, verse 4, "in necessities." A child of God should be satisfied with just the necessities of life. When I start to say something like this, you know me, I am not some prude. I am not somebody that thinks you should not have a nice house. I have a nice house. I think you should have nice things. I am not saying you have got to walk around with a backpack on your back and one pair of underwear and a pair of socks. That is not what I am talking about.

A lady one time showed me through her house. A friend of mine lives over in Mission, Kansas, a beautiful place. She loved showing off her house, a beautiful house. But much more than I would need and probably much more what they would need, but that is all they have in life. She was walking me through, showing me all this, and I counted. I counted a house with six bathrooms. I may be wrong, correct me if I am, but if you need a house with six bathrooms, I would think that would be because you had kidney issues, gastric problems, that you wanted to be close to a bathroom wherever you were. You can only use one at a time. I do know that variety is the spice of life, but come on. A child of God should be satisfied with just the necessities in life. A Christian should be able to go through life without everything he thinks he needs. I am as guilty of it as anybody I am speaking to today. I am famous for saying, "Let us go to the mall to see what we do not have."

You go to a shopping mall and there are a hundred stores. You can go shopping for everything you want. 50 of those stores will be closed. I walked into a place called Nordstrom. Did you ever hear of it? Their makeup section rivals 20th Century Fox when it comes to makeup. They have got a hundred ladies there that will fix your face. You sit in little chairs with lights and somebody painting your face and meeting you and showing you in the mirror. I just took a quick survey at least. There is something wrong with a country that has got 500 shades of lipstick you can choose from. But you go to wherever you want to go. Go buy jeans. Now you have got Levi's. You have got 20 different brands. Just take Levi's. You have got 501s, 504s, 506s, 593s. You have got 1816. You have got 869s. You have got to have a program to figure out what you have got. Then they are going to say, "Well, what kind do you want? We have boot cut. We have regular fit. We have a relaxed fit, and we have the ones for people who do not want anybody to think they are fat. They are the elastic ones." What do you want? We have some that are brand new, really worn, kind of worn, medium worn, stonewashed. Buying jeans is like ordering a steak, medium rare. I want my jeans medium ripped.

Grocery stores are food warehouses. I was in Romania. I was in the East Bloc countries for quite a while back and forth after the wall came down there, after Reagan said, "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down that wall." I stayed with families in some of these small little places, and I would take 20, 30 people in there. You would fly in, horrendous flight, trying to get through border customs and everything to get where you needed to go. It was just, it was really much patience needed to be there. We sat at the border from Hungary going into Romania for about 12 hours. Basically, they

want you to bribe them to get through. So when you bribe them to get through, then you get through. It is just goofy stuff.

When we were working with little churches, we were basically teaching them how to disciple their people with the same material we use here for you. It was in their language of Romania. I remember at 5:30 in the morning, the wife where I lived and I went with her one morning, went down to the store in a neighborhood area there. At 5:30 in the morning, the line was, I would say, a good thousand feet of women waiting before the store even opened at six o'clock or 6:30 just to get bread. They ran out of bread long before all the people got what they wanted. I walked into the store and there were nothing but bare shelves other than eight or nine fruit jars with something that was canned. It looked like beets or eggs or something. I do not know. That looked like it had been there since Washington crossed the Delaware. It was unbelievable. The poverty that they had, they had to grow their own food. They had everything that they had to have. I felt terrible even eating there, but there are no restaurants to go to. This was the result of 40 years of communism. They had nothing, and I felt terrible. Yet, because I was an American and a Christian and a pastor, they wanted to make sure that I am sure that they went without so I would have, and I felt terrible about that.

These people had nothing, but as I stood there and I looked at them and I spent that quality time that I had there for going back and forth for probably two years or so, I came to a great conclusion with the communism and the persecution of communism. We held a revival service in a soccer stadium that must have had 25,000 people in it, and thousands got saved. It was right across from the KGB former headquarters and where they took people who went to churches or preached the gospel and tortured them. Right across from that soccer field, every window was open and every former KGB guy was listening to the sermon of the gospel. It is incredible. But with all of that, with all that they went through and all that they did not have, they were much happier than most of you are. They were much happier than most of God's people. You know why? Because they have learned to live with necessities.

America thinks that riches and money are the key to happiness, and they think it is the key to success. Now, I am not saying you do not have to have money to live and go through those things. I am with you, I believe it has to be a balance. But every week, every month, I am faced with people that call me on the phone about some quick get-rich scheme that somebody is propagating out there to basically just rip you off. There are 100,000 money-making schemes out there, and many of them are cloaked in the aspect of, "Oh, this is Christian." God's people are just stupid when it comes to those things. People will say, "Well, you need to do this because God wants you to be rich." God does not necessarily want you to be rich. He wants you to live with the necessities that you have. Somebody will say, "Well, just look at all that you could do for the Lord in ministry if you were rich." Come on. What you do for God in ministry has nothing to do with how much money you have got in your pocket. It is how much of the Holy Spirit of God is inside you. It is ridiculous.

Years ago, I had a kid that, I do not cut him any slack. I have little patience for that. I told him he had this, it was a scam is what it was. He was trying to hook up people in my Sunday school class to do it. I just pulled him in and said, "I do not want that to happen." He said, "Well, this is

a great thing. I am trying to help your people make money." I said, "You are trying to scam my people." He said, "Well, how can you sit there and tell me it is a scam? You do not even know what it is." I said, "I will tell you how I know it is a scam and you are a scam and the whole thing is a sham." I do not think I said that part to him. But anyway, I said, "You have been in my class now for what, four or five years. In the last week, I have watched you and heard about you talking to 30 people in my Sunday school class about this deal. In the five years that I have known you, you have never talked to 30 people in your life about Christ. You are a phony." What happened? He would be scenario number four in leaving a good church. But it is what it is.

You realize God could give anybody sitting here this morning, God could give you a million dollars tomorrow. Do you believe that? My wife is shaking her head. She knows she buys lottery tickets. She knows where we are at. I do not ever give her any trouble as long as she tithes off of it. John, do you believe God could give you a million dollars tomorrow if He wanted to? Joe, do you? Gary, come to this side. Bob, you do not believe He could? Okay, Bob, I did not ask Bob anything. I would just pass it through there. I thought he was somebody. Do you believe that? If He wanted to, He could give you a million dollars. He could give anybody in this place a million dollars tomorrow. No, He could do it this afternoon. He will not in most cases, or all of your cases. You know why? Because He knows you are as crooked as a dog's hind leg. He knows if He gave you a million dollars, what you would do with it. He knows He cannot trust you with a million dollars. That is why He is not going to give you a million dollars. You say, "Bob, will that really offend me?" He did not give him a million dollars either. I am telling you the truth. What you have with God, what you do for God, is not based on how much money you have. It is how much of God has of you. That is just the way it is.

Are you in fellowship with the necessities of life? Let me give you three good fellowship principles on the necessities.

1.) *Philippians 4:19*

But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

Notice it did not say "wants" and notice it did not say plural "needs." It said "need." You know why it said "need"? Because God meets your need one day at a time. That is why. If you do not have that note in there, put it in.

2.) *Philippians 4:11*

Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.

Now for those of you where it says "whatever state I am in," you want to write in Missouri. For those of you from the other side, you want to put in Kansas. The state that you are in is where you are at and what you are doing. But I love it. "For I have learned." These are things you have got to learn.

3.) *1 Timothy 6:6*

But godliness with contentment is great gain.

I am not knocking it yet. I am saying it has to be a balance. But you have to come to the place in your life where you have fellowship with the necessities. Because when you do not, it takes you away from everything and you lose your perspective.

4.) In Distresses

The next one, "in distress." There is a story in the Bible that I think is so relevant to Christianity today. It is the story of Paul and Barnabas with young John Mark. I call it the John Mark Christianity scenario because I see it all the time. Probably most of you do not know this story, but Paul and Barnabas, they went on the first missionary trip and they took a young man by the name of John Mark. John Mark wanted to go. John Mark said, "Oh, I want to be with you guys and I am going to go." Obviously, the missionary trips back there, if you read the accounts, were very perilous. They were very hard. You did not stay in a Motel 6 or a Motel 8 or a Holiday Inn. You slept on the rocks and you sometimes you did not eat and you got severely persecuted and you were not in friendly territory most of the time.

I do not know how long they were out and how long they were gone, but John Mark ran home to mama. John Mark bailed on them in the middle of a very tough scenario and left them in a lurch. Paul was a no-nonsense guy. Paul took the ministry, and that is a great study between the contrast of Paul and Barnabas and just character of people. But Paul, he was a no-nonsense guy. When John Mark did that, he wrote John Mark off. When they came back, they got ready to go on their second missionary trip. Barnabas says, "Hey, I talked to John Mark and he is good to go. He knows he screwed up last time and I want to take him along." Paul says, "No way." He said, "Come on, Paul. You remember when you were that age?" And he says, "When I was that age, I was killing God's people and God saved me from it. I only have a short time to do what I have got to do. I do not need anybody who is going to bail on me when the situation gets tough and affliction comes. He is not going." The Bible says the controversy got so great between them that they split. Barnabas took John Mark and Paul got his guy and off they went.

John Mark, to his credit, if you do not know this, he really did get it put back together at some point. He is the John Mark, if you do not know this, that wrote the second gospel in your Bible. So he got it squared away to his credit, and I am glad he did. But I am telling you, a child of God should be able to deal with some real crises and distresses in his own life, and yet also in the lives of others. A strong Christian stands when others falter. They are the rock that other people lean on when their world falls apart. They are heading in.

I read in the newspaper this morning, and probably most of you saw it on the news too, about the two Raytown firemen who saved that lady late last night about three o'clock in the morning. They pulled up on the scene. The house was ablaze. The roof had burned completely off, and they saw nobody standing out in the yard like most of the times you do, "Oh, my house is burning." So they assumed that somebody was still in there. This place was an inferno. The roof had collapsed. Everything was on fire. These two brave firemen, one of them with a hose, paving the way, watering the path, went in there, went upstairs, found this woman who was laying on a bed. The mattress was on fire and in flames, and they picked her up and carried her down. Not only got her taken care of, the rest of the men went back in a second time to look for more

people. If that was not enough, went back in a third time. I read that this morning and knowing I was going to preach what I preach today. I thought to myself, "I wish God's people could have some of that determination."

A strong Christian stands when others falter. A strong Christian heads into a terrible situation while others are heading out. They know what to do when others do not. There never comes a time when they say, "Oh, I cannot deal with this. I have got to get out of here. I am going home. I cannot deal with it." No, no, no. A strong Christian that is in fellowship with truth, that is in fellowship with distresses, realizes that that is what life is all about. A strong Christian stands when others falter. He is the rock that they lean on. Your persistence, your perspective, your passion, your purpose, your ability to discern and have discretion will be the calming factor in a time of distress. People need that. People need something stable when their world is completely unstable.

Always go into the Word of God for the principles at hand to command and take command of every situation. Real leadership is taking command of a terrible situation that needs direction, staying the course, going the distance, working the problem, and leading through it. That is what it takes. You see that problem with the nation of Israel. As long as Moses was their leader and then Joshua was their leader, they held them accountable and they led them through some terrible distresses that held them together. As soon as Joshua died and we go into the book of Judges, we see weak leaders. When we see weak leaders that are not tied into the fellowship of God the way those two boys were, the whole nation falls apart. That is what is wrong with our country. Our country is the issue of no real leadership, no strong leadership.

America, who once was feared around the world and respected around the world, they look at us now as being weak. They know that they can do whatever they want to do and all we will do is send no more Big Macs over to them. They know that there will be no repercussions of anything that they do. It is just harsh language. Now you see it in Christianity. No strong leaders today who will take a stand on the Word of God. Most pastors get up and tell you exactly what you want to hear, not what you need to hear. Most pastors do not want to rock the boat. They do not want to take a chance on you getting mad and leaving their church. "Then what are we going to do? Because that family gives to this church or this or that." They are worried about the wrong things. I am not worried about whether you give or you do not. That is between you and God. I am worried about every time I stand in this pulpit, am I giving you the truth of the Word of God? That is all I care about. The rest will take care of itself. That is the way it was designed to do it. That is the way it works. Are you in fellowship with distresses? When you are within your family, when everything goes belly up and it is absolute chaos, when you are at work or when somebody in your world absolutely falls apart. I know that some of you are young and you are learning the process. I am talking again, I gave you 10 years in this thing. Are you in fellowship with distresses? Some of you are going to be starting in January and February, or at least learn how to do it.

5.) In Stripes and Imprisonments

Then the fifth one, he says "in stripes and imprisonments." Now these two are hard for America to even fathom. The rest are tough. This is impossible. Nobody in America goes to jail and gets beaten for taking a stand for Christ, at least not yet. If you would go to China, you are going to find it. You go to the Sudan or Africa, you are going to find it. You went back to the East Bloc country before the wall came down under the old Soviet Union, you would find it. There are some real persecutions in Christianity, but American Christians do not know anything about it. You are going out to get your toenails painted this afternoon. Your big distress in life will be, "Well, they messed up my big toe." You are the kind of person that comes in, "How was your day, honey?" "It was terrible today." "What happened?" "Oh, the computers broke. We all had to think." That is your distress.

God's people today cannot even conceive of what the Christians of the first century, up to even 1500, and even in our own time, and some of these other countries went through for their faith in prison. Paul is in prison. Most people do not even know where the books in your Bible, five of them, are what they call prison epistles. Nobody even knows what they are, who they are, and how they differ from the other books that Paul wrote. It is hard to imagine the price that those people paid, but take heart, there is still hope for America. The Acts, I think, probably yet to fall. If the Lord holds this thing off, which He may just do, Daniel 2:21 says, "I do not profit a doom." I am telling you the way it works. The prophet is why you do not understand this because you are not very much in fellowship with the Book.

Daniel 2:21

And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding:

Maybe just for you and for me, He changed that thing to hold it back so we could have a little fellowship with stripes and imprisonment. American Christianity wants nothing to upset their comfort level. You realize that when you get to the jubilee to Christ and you get up in heaven and you are going to stand side to side with people who really paid a price, you are going to look down and see your painted toenails and how beautiful they are with the little designs on it. I am not knocking it. I am just telling you. You are going to stand next to the person that in the 1500s or the 1200s had their toes cut off in front of them and fried in a pan and made to eat them. That is some comparison, is not it? If you think that did not happen, you do not get around much. You do not read much.

I will tell you right now as we stand here, maybe by November, certainly probably by next year. I told you Thursday night for any of you that heard the prime minister of Israel's address to the United Nations last week, there was a line drawn in the sand and you might as well mark it down. There is a war in the Middle East coming. I guarantee it. We have a Muslim president that is soft on Muslim nations. When America is faced with taking a stand between the Jew and everything else that is going on there, I will tell you how it is going to go. Then you are going to see some in stripes and some in prisons. You are going to see some distress. You are going to see some afflictions. From a Bible standpoint, I do not like it any more than you do. But from a Bible standpoint, that is a good thing. You know why? Because we need a little fellowship with some

of these things. I do not know about you. I do not want to go to heaven and stand next to those persons and they talk about what they went through and they say, "What did you suffer down there?" "Well, last week I worked, the air conditioner broke and boy, it was hot." That is where we are at.

6.) *In Tumults*

Number seven, still in verse 5, "in tumults." A tumult is not something you get in a doctor's report that is either cancerous or not cancerous. A tumult is a very violent argument or a riot, much like what Paul and the apostles went through in Acts 17, Acts 19. It is a lot like what is going on in the Middle East right now about the American embassies over there in all those Middle East countries and even in England and Australia, and what will be coming to America, to a neighborhood close to you here, not too long. That is what it is.

The greatest truth, and most people never get this, Proverbs 28:5 is a great verse.

Proverbs 28:5

Evil men understand not judgment: but they that seek the LORD understand all things.

Evil men cannot understand the hand of God's judgment. God's people should understand it because they have the Bible, but they do not understand it either. The great truth is God always judges nations that reject Him by other nations. I do not know why people cannot get that. It is throughout the Old Testament. It is even through the New Testament. Our ministry cannot shut down. We cannot quit doing what God wants us to do just because America goes into anarchy and has a complete breakdown. That will be our greatest opportunity and our greatest chance. But I am telling you right now, God's people are not prepared for this. They are not prepared for that.

I look back in the Old Testament and I compare the times that we are in now, what it must have been right before Sennacherib came down and took the Northern tribes into captivity. I look at where we are at now and I think what it is, what it must have been like in 606 BC, right before Nebuchadnezzar came in and stormed Jerusalem and destroyed the place and hauled them all off captive. I look at that and I look at the books in the Bible and the prophets, the major and the minor prophets, and I look at those guys, their world was falling apart. Many of them were in chains and taken into Babylon. Many of them were beaten and many of them were put in prison. Many of them suffered incredible suffering because of the fact that the job that God called them to do, but every one of them in the midst of the chaos of their nation falling apart, had the presence of mind to realize that God still had a message and they delivered it.

I ask myself today, where are the Jeremiahs today? Where are the men and the women that will stand in the face of our adversity when it all comes down, and it is coming down? Where are the Jeremiahs today that will stand and take God's side against a godless side? Where are the Ezeikiels today who will take a stand and pay the price? He went into captivity. He was put into chains and hauled down into Babylon, yet he realized that that was his greatest opportunity and he preached some great messages. Where are the Isaiahs today? Where are the Hoseas? Where

are the Haggai's? Where are the Zacharias? Where are the prophets who stood up and preached in the midst of their nation going to pieces?

7.) *In Labours*

The eighth one, "in labours." We always think of that in the form of 1 Corinthians 3:9, where it says, "We are labourers together," working and ministering together, and you would be safe to take that interpretation based on that passage. That is good. But there is a lot more to it than that for a Christian in fellowship with truth, a lot more. When he talks about labours, he is expanding this thing to our labours in our fellowship based on truth.

1 Timothy 5:17 says:

1 Timothy 5:17

Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.

There is a laboring in learning and teaching the Bible. It is work. There is a labor in learning Bible doctrine. It is work. If that was not enough, he says over there in 2 Timothy 2:15:

2 Timothy 2:15

Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

There is work involved. Acts 6:4 talks about a labor in prayer. If you really are a prayer warrior and you really pray, it is work. Hebrews 6:10 talks about the labor of love with people. Boy, that takes work. Philippians 4:3 says the labor in the gospel. Hebrews 4:11 says labor therefore to enter into the rest of God. To get to the place in your life where you can trust God in everything in your life, that is a work. You have got to labor to get to that point. There is your fellowship based on truth. Fellowship with the labor and the things of God.

8.) *In Watchings*

Then the ninth one, he says "in watchings," being in fellowship with watching. These are great breakdowns of great sermons. Here is a good sermon for you: five watchwords of the Bible for a Christian. Five things a Christian should watch for.

A Christian should watch his own words.

A Christian should watch his own actions.

A Christian should watch his own thoughts.

A Christian should watch his companions.

A Christian should watch his heart.

That is a great sermon. Now that is inward. You see how I have told you that everything about your Christian life is inward first and outward. Those are the five things inwardly. Now let me

show you what you want to watch for outwardly. This is another great sermon, or you can put them together. I do not care.

A real watchman will watch for his Lord's return.

A real watchman will watch for the evildoers in his church.

A real watchman will watch for false teachers.

A real Christian will watch and pray. (Matthew 26:41)

A real Christian will watch and be sober. (1 Thessalonians 5:6) This matches up to 1 Peter 5:8, that you are to be sober and vigilant for your adversary, the devil, prowling about as a roaring lion trying to mess you up.

The Bible says a pastor watches for the souls of his congregation in Hebrews 13:17. If that were not enough and a big enough job, he is told to watch all things. (2 Timothy 4:5) Eve gave me a great assistance to that last week when we were at the Culver's. I forgot we go to Culver's. She brought me some dark sunglasses that when you put on, you can actually put them on here and you can see what is behind you. Incredible. They actually work. You put them on and nobody will sneak up on you again. You put them on and you can actually see things going on behind you. You still see front. Their angle is just right where you can see it. You cannot see it from the front. You can see frontwards and backwards. I told her this week, that was the greatest thing you ever gave me because I just found out as a pastor, I am to watch all things. Now that is easier. I can see forward. I can see backward. Thank you, Eve.

9.) In Fastings

The 10th one, "in fastings." Fasting is a New Testament concept. The problem is, I will tell you right now that most Christians do not have a clue of how the Bible lays it out and how it is even to be done. I never in 40-plus years ever found a Christian who really understood. They did not even know where the definitive verses in the Bible were. Of course, we have been through it many times on Thursday night. We are not going to go through it this morning. Psalm 69:10 and Psalm 35:13, those are the definitive passages on what fasting is.

I will just go this far with you this morning. I will tell you what fasting is not. Fasting is not something you do to get something you want. Fasting is not something you do to get your prayer answered. God's people are the biggest takers on this planet from God. They take God's gospel and never fulfill it. They take God's salvation and do nothing with it. They take God's grace and they take it in vain. We talked about it last week. They take everything from God, church, and give nothing back.

A pastor that I worked with when I first got into ministry, he is dead now. I learned some tremendous things from him. He said one time, and I have never forgotten it, and he said one of the wisest things that I have ever learned about people in the ministry. We were driving someplace together and we were just talking and I was asking about a situation, and we were driving to Springfield as a matter of fact. He was going to speak down there and he told me, he says, "Bob, always remember this. People will never remember what you did for them yesterday.

They are just going to ask you, "What will you do for me today?" Boy, that is one of the truest statements I ever came across in my life.

In all their relationship with God, people take everything that God has. They ask God for everything. They put all kinds of conditions on God. "God, if You just give me this, I will give You the rest of my life." Well, that is so big of you. "God, if You do this, if You make my child, God, if You heal my cancer, if You take this from me, if You do this for me, God, I will do whatever You want me to do." God does not bargain like that. In all their relationships, they are always asking God what God can do for them. Not one time does anybody, most people, ever sit down and say, "Okay, God, what do You want me to do for You?" That is the fellowship. That is the fellowship.

IV. Conclusion: The Progression of Fellowship

These areas are the things that as we develop, we grow, we come into fellowship with. As you grow through these things, then you approve yourself as a minister of God. I do not know if you know this or not, and I am certainly not going to take time to do it this morning, but there are seven things in the Bible that you are to prove yourself to God with. Seven things, seven things that a Christian has to prove. People are coming around all the time, when I was growing up, "What are you trying to prove? What is he trying to prove?" Well, I do not know for him, but I am trying to prove seven things. Most of God's people do not even know what they are. One of the greatest studies you will ever take.

We looked today at the first section of 10 things, and we saw now that these are the things that we are to be in fellowship with. Next week, I will show you how you accomplish this by the things you are to be in fellowship with. Remembering the key word today is "in." The key word next week is "by." All right, we will hold up there.