

I. The Church's Purpose and Focus

Last week, we started our study of 2 Corinthians 11. It is true in the ministry, and it is also true in Christians' lives who are involved in the ministry, that three crucial aspects of our life are often lost sight of. I see it all the time in pastors' lives and in ministries: losing sight of three things. When a Christian or a pastor of a church loses his focus, then he strays off track and gets into things he shouldn't get into.

I remember many years ago, the Moral Majority tried to take pastors and Christians and infuse them into politics. When you see that, and I don't care how big the movement is, I don't care who's behind it, when you see things like that, you know you're dealing with a pastor or a situation where they've lost their focus. The job of the church is never to be involved in politics. The moment you take the position of a Republican, you're going to lose the opportunity to win Democrats to Christ. The moment you become a Democrat, you're going to lose the opportunity to witness to Republicans. You're going to find out that the job of the church is not to take a political interest in anything. The job of the church is to preach the truth of the Word of God, preach against sin, and preach against the things that the Bible is against.

But when Christians, pastors, and churches lose their focus, then they lose their purpose. They don't understand, or they lose sight of the fact that there's a reason why God established the church. There's a very definite reason and a role that the church plays in history, in life, and in people's lives. When they lose their focus and they lose their purpose, then they lose their perspective. Then they don't understand. They get caught up in all kinds of things that the church was never designed to be part of. This is what we see today.

Last week, we got into the chapter and we talked about the wisdom of the ministry of this chapter, and that's what it takes. It's probably the hardest thing in the world for a pastor, and certainly for a Christian, to do: day after day after day, keep that focus, keep that perspective, and always keep your purpose. So far, we've looked at the devil and how he tried to attack the church and what Paul was afraid of back there in 2 Corinthians 11. We know now that that chapter deals with the wisdom of the ministry.

So far, remember the first time we talked, I gave you an introduction and a foundation based on Job 40 and 41. I wanted to lay a good base text so you could work from that and understand where we go from here. Last week, we got into chapter 11, verses 1 through 3. We actually saw the plan as Paul took us back to the first place that the devil shows up in the Bible, in Genesis 3. We actually got a look at the attack of the church. We learned about typology and saw how Paul recognized that Genesis 3 was a type of something. When he wanted to illustrate to the church at Corinth what his fear was of the devil destroying the church, he used Eve all the way back in Genesis 3.

Now, I told you that typology is something that you want to learn in the Bible. The whole Bible is built around those. You want to mark them. You want to learn them. You want to get them into your Bible and know where they're at.

II. Paul's Fear for the Church

Today, I want to take you one step farther into this great chapter. Here again, we're going to learn some more great principles today. But I want to begin reading. I'm going to read the first three verses so it stays in context, and then we're going to basically focus on verse 4 today.

2 Corinthians 11:1-4

Would to God ye could bear with me a little in my folly: and indeed bear with me.

For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.

But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him.

Father, we thank You and praise You for the Lord Jesus, and we love You. Thank You for the Word of God that You've given us. Help us today to put all this material together to learn and to grow and to come out the other side, Father, with the wisdom of the ministry, and help us, Father, to never lose our focus as a church, and never lose our purpose as a church, and never lose our perspective. Of course, that'll depend on the individuals in the church, Lord, because the church is made up of people, so help us. We're needy people. We ask You to help us today to stay focused on the thing that You have us to do. We'll thank You and praise You in Jesus' name, for His sake we ask it. Amen.

Now, out of verse 4, there are three things I want to keep in your mind today. We're going to weave these back into it because this is where Paul's going in verse 4.

1. The mark of Christianity today is preaching another Jesus.
2. Somebody comes to you with another spirit.
3. Somebody coming with another gospel.

Today, I want you to remember those three things as we look at the key word in this whole thing: it's the word "beguiled." I want you to leave today understanding what this word means and how it fits into it, and to better understand how Paul uses the word and why he uses it here. You know, that's a word that's only found in four places in the New Testament. It's not a widely used word, even in the Bible. But yet, all four places fit right in with our study in the attack of the church.

2 Corinthians 11:3 says that Eve was beguiled by the devil through his subtlety. We talked about this last week, and Paul's fear for the New Testament church at Corinth, some four or five

thousand years later after the events happened, Paul's fear was that the church would, by the same beguiling, be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. We talked about simplicity last week, on the simplicity of Christ. You should understand that now as we laid it all out and put it all together.

I think it was Bob Jones Sr. who said years ago that "simplicity is truth's most adorning crown." I think that's one of the most elegant statements that I've ever heard in all of my life on the simplicity of God. It shows us also that those old boys back there, they understood what I'm talking about today. If the average modern pastor doesn't get it, if the average modern Christian doesn't get it, I guarantee you the old boys back then understood it. Unfortunately, we have lost all of that and all of those things to history now. People have long forgotten the great men of God who took a good stand for God, who preached the Word of God in an uncompromising way.

III. The Meaning of "Beguiled"

Now, the Bible says that the devil beguiled Eve. That word is not used much anymore. It's really an old English word. It means "to deceive." The word "beguile" means "to elude truth." It means "to mask or hide the truth." It carries with it the connotation to purposely mislead somebody by craftiness. Once I explain it, the greatest example, I'm sure you can think of, is in your own mind and in your own life. I mean, you can relate to it, I'm sure, once you understand it. We've all been beguiled one time or the other; we just didn't know the word for it at the time.

Suppose someone wants to do something behind your back. They put together an elaborate plan of deception. All the while, to your face, they pretend everything is okay, and you may even go up and ask them, and they say, "Yeah, everything is fine." Yet, behind the scenes, they're plotting against you in some form or fashion. You later wake up one morning and find out you've been lied to, that you've been seen by that person, and now, in your own definition based on the Bible, welcome to the club: you've been beguiled. That's the way it works, and I'm sure that sounds familiar in many of your lives, going back and looking at the last 10-15 years of your life. We've all been beguiled at some point. There are young ladies who get beguiled by men. There are men who get beguiled by ladies. There are kids who get beguiled by adults. It always happens, and that's the Bible's use of the word. In this case, it's a beguiling, an attack on God's church to destroy the plan of God.

You remember, I've told you this many, many times, and it's something you always want to keep in the back of your mind: what you have here in Genesis 3 and what's going on in 2 Corinthians 11 is Paul talking about what I've told you many, many times. When you look at history, all history, if you want to break it down to its lowest common denominator, and I've told you this many, many times, all history is nothing more than one understanding that God has a plan, and God wants through history to unfold that plan, and the devil wants to stop that plan. So, all history, broken down in its basic, lowest common denominator, is God moving through history to accomplish what He wants to accomplish, and then the devil moving in opposition to stop it. That's history. If you just take that concept and look at all history through the light of the Word of God, I don't care if it's French history, I don't care if it's American history, I don't care if it's European history, I don't care what history it is. That's what all history boils down to.

This is the second counter-move recorded in the Bible in Genesis 3. In Genesis 3, God has moved. He's put now a man and a woman down in the garden. He's given them a perfect environment with a perfect everything they could ever want. Eve had to be the happiest woman in the world. When she looked at her husband and said, "You love me, Adam?" he could honestly say, "I love you more than... you're the only woman in the world for me," and he was right. Everything was perfect. God had made a move. He gave them a commission: "Be fruitful, multiply, replenish the earth." Then we see what the devil did. He moved in opposition to that plan. He picked a time when Adam wasn't home. He picked a time when he came in and he took the weakest vessel, and he said, "Yea, hath God said?" Then we know from last week, he simply changed what God said, through the whole plan, into chaos. The devil's done that at every turn of history down through the Bible.

In 2 Corinthians 11, Paul's fear is now that God has started the church. If you don't know it or not, the book of 2 Corinthians is written during the book of Acts. The church is still in its baby form here. The church is still formulating. The church at Corinth, in some places, is still using tongues to reach the Jews. It's very early in the church. God has again moved to establish the church, and now we see Paul being smart enough to know that just like the type of Genesis 3, when God started with Adam and Eve, the devil came in to mess up the work of the first Adam. The devil now is going to show up to try to mess up the work of the second Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ, the body of Christ, the church. That is a tremendous study.

Last week, I explained how his plan was to take the Word of God from us, the plain and simple. It was to take the Word of God first out of your heart and then take the Word of God out of your hand. The "Yea, hath God said?" then he simply changed what God said. Adam and Eve become the first charter members of the "Yea, hath God said" society, the scholar society that wants to tell you God said this and then come around and change what He said.

IV. Typology of the Seven Churches

In the book of Colossians, you'll find two other times that the word "beguiled" is used. As I said, you only find it a couple of times, four to be exact. Once here, two times in the book of Colossians, and then over there in 2 Peter 2:14, it talks about unstable souls being beguiled by false prophets. So every time you find it, the book of Colossians is a key book for us because here's where you find two other main times that the word "beguiled" is used. This, in itself, is a great study. Again, it's another great example. I tell you all the time about the key to the Bible is its consistency. Here's one of the most consistent things you're going to find about the Bible. Let me show you something. I learned this about 30 years ago, and it's incredible. You want to study the attack, do you? You want to see how it works? Remember, I told you back in Job that God said He would not hide His parts, His place, or His coming proportion, and who could discover the face of His garment? I'm going to show you some of those things today out of the book of Colossians here in just a moment.

Now, I told you last week that in Revelation 2 and Revelation 3, the typology here in this great book is the fact that these two chapters represent the church age. In fact, the whole book of Revelation, I gave it to you Thursday night, it's an incredible picture of a capstone of the Bible. I

showed you how that chapter 2 and 3, chapter 1 is an introduction and really has the key to the book in it. In chapter 2 and 3, you have the church age, seven periods of church history represented by seven churches. Chapter 4, a door opens in heaven and somebody goes up. Then 5 through chapter 19 is all the tribulation. Then in chapter 19, a door opens and somebody comes down, the Second Coming. Then the chapters corresponding, they go right along with that. What happens after the Second Coming? The Millennium, that's Revelation 20. What happens after the Millennium? New heavens and the new earth, that's Revelation 21. What happens after that? Eternity is Revelation 22. The whole book lays out for you and shows you the complete order of things the way they're going to go.

Now you look at those seven churches, you look at those seven churches that he writes about in Revelation 2 and 3.

- The first church is the church of Ephesus.
- The second church is Smyrna.
- The third one is Pergamos.
- The fourth one is Thyatira.
- The fifth one is Sardis.
- The sixth one is Philadelphia.
- The last one is Laodicea.

Now, they all span the course of the last 2000 years, and they bring us with so much accuracy right up through the church age. You can actually go in the history books. By the way, we just got our first volume of church history done. It's back there in print, which I've been waiting for a long time to get, and it kind of saves you from having to go through the tapes. You can mark it up all you want, but I've been waiting for that one for a long time. But it shows us up through history that even the actual events in history line up with these church types in the book of Revelation.

- Ephesus, the name means "fully purposed." It brings us up from about 60 to 200 AD. It was the church that was ready to go. It had everything. They still had some of the apostles or some of the people who had been won to Christ by the apostles. Everything was fresh in everybody's mind. There were people in that church who actually saw Christ's resurrection.
- Then we have the Smyrna, and the word Smyrna means "bitterness and death." This brings us up to 200 to around 325, 330, someplace. This is a time where the churches are severely persecuted by the Roman Empire.
- We have Pergamos. It means "much married." That brings us about 300, 325 up to about 500 AD. That's the place in history where the church is actually married to the world.
- You have Thyatira, "order of affliction." That one and the next one, Sardis, meaning "red ones," will bring us from 500 to 1500. That's the Dark Ages in history. That's the time where the church now is not persecuted by the pagan Roman Empire anymore. Now they're persecuted by the Holy Roman Empire, a Roman Catholic Church, called the Dark Ages in history, sometimes called the Middle Ages.

- We have Philadelphia. Philadelphia means "brotherly love." It starts around 1600, 1500, with the Reformation and brings us up to about the end of the 1800s. Greatest period in the history of the world of soul winning.
- Then the seventh one is Laodicea. That's the one you and I are living in, if you're not already aware of that. I know most of you are aware of most of this information, but that's the one we're in right now. It means "rights of the people." That's a church age where God has literally kicked out of the church. It's a church age where I'll show you in a few moments where they now are in Christ's church. Revelation 3 says that He says, "I stand at the door and knock." He's knocking at the door of His own church trying to get back in. You know why? Because there's another Jesus in there. This is the church period that has another Jesus. This is the church period that has another Spirit. And this is the church period who has another gospel. It's incredible.

V. Paul's Seven Churches and Their Correspondence

Now, the wild thing about this, and this is one of these coincidences in the Bible, Paul also writes to seven churches. Did you ever notice that? Not only does John write to seven churches, but Paul writes to seven churches. He writes to the Ephesians. He writes to the church of Thessalonica. He writes Galatians, that's a church. Corinth, that's a church. Romans. He writes Philippians, and he writes Colossians. So John writes to seven churches. Paul writes to seven churches. About 30 years ago, one night late, about two o'clock in the morning, God showed me that those seven churches that Paul wrote to and the seven churches that John wrote to match up. One of the greatest things God ever showed me. They match up.

You talk about getting insight into 2 Corinthians 11. You talk about going the next step of getting it and understanding it. Putting these two churches together and these two lists together will do the job for you.

- You take the church at Ephesus, and John wrote to "fully purposed." Well, obviously that'll line up to the book of Ephesians in Acts 20. That's a church that's ready to go.
- You take the church at Smyrna. That meant "bitterness and death." That'll line up to the church of Thessalonica. In 1 Thessalonians, you have the great chapter in chapter 4, verse 13, on death and dying. They all match up.
- Galatians. Well, remember Pergamos? Pergamos was "much married." It's a time where the church was literally married to the world. In Galatians, you know what you find? You find another group of people called the Judaizers coming in and trying to marry New Testament Christianity with Old Testament Judaism. They all match. It's incredible.
- You have the church at Corinth, and then you have Thyatira, "order of affliction." If you ever look over there in 2 Corinthians 1:4, he lists out 28 afflictions. He lists out 28 trials and afflictions that we will go through as a child of God. Matches up to that one. You bet it does.
- And then you got Romans. And then you got Sardis, "red ones." If you ever notice how the book of Romans starts out, it's the only book that he writes to churches that doesn't say "to the churches." It says, "to all that be in Rome." There's a reason for that. Paul knows that the whole world is bathed in the Roman Empire and always will be to the Second Coming of

Christ in one form or the other. Sardis means "red ones." So you got the book of Romans to all those that are in Rome. And Rome was the greatest persecutor of Christians that you ever saw in the history of the world.

- You have Philippians and you have Philadelphia, "brotherly love." Did you ever notice the comparison of those two? When you come down through those seven churches that John writes to, every church he lists, every one of them, he has a problem with and he corrects them on something. You know, when it comes to the Philadelphia church, he doesn't have one thing against them. Did you ever notice the New Testament books that Paul writes to? Every one of them has some kind of issue he has to deal with, except when it comes to Philippians. Anybody who can read the New Testament knows that Paul has a special love for the Philippian church. In fact, if you didn't have any other book in your Bible, there are 10 verses in Philippians that you can live your Christian life and be successful with the rest of your life. That's the only book you had found in that book right there. And Paul has nothing bad to say about them, just like John had nothing to say about Philadelphia. There it is, man. They match up almost completely, and I'm just giving you the tip of the iceberg.
- Well, then there's the last one, isn't it? John wrote to Laodicea, "rights of the people." So guess what? Colossians. Colossians, the only other book in the New Testament that has the word Laodicea in it, other than the book of Revelation. And Colossians matches up to the church at Laodicea. Five times, five times in the book of Colossians, you find the word Laodicea, clearly showing you that that book matches up.

VI. The Book of Colossians and the Laodicean Church

Now, let's look at this book for just a moment. You want to study the attack of the devil and the church age, then you want to study the book of Colossians when you get all this material together. You want to see how every detail of his attack on a micromanaged level, study and understand the book of Colossians. It comes through understanding not only about the book of Colossians, there are four chapters in that book, and those four chapters are the key to understanding what's going on in Laodicea.

Now, you might want to turn over to the book of Colossians here, and we'll be bouncing back and forth here in a little bit, but I want you to come here for just a minute. Let's set a context. The city of Colossae. The city of Colossae was a city on the western part of Asia Minor. It sat on the banks of the river Lycus. It had been a vital, a key vital center of trade for many, many, many, many years. It was a very key spot in that part of the world, but by the time that Paul writes to it, it had been replaced. It was no longer the great seaport. It was no longer the great trade city that had been now taken over by Laodicea. I don't know if you know it or not, but Laodicea was just 11 miles south of Colossae. I think that's very instructive on its own once you understand the type.

It's like I live in Raytown, Redneck County of the World. Do you realize that Kansas City just got voted the second Redneck City in the country last week? You know who was first? Atlanta. I would think Atlanta would be Redneck, but Kansas City is Redneck. I mean, you come to Raytown, you can't even move. You used to have a homeowner's association in Raytown if you

moved in. They did away with all that. All you got to have now to live in Raytown is a rifle rack in the back of your pickup truck. You're in, man. But we're number two now, number two. I think that's something to be proud of, but anyway.

Anyway, when I travel to church, I come out down 350 to Nolan Road, out in Nolan Road, and I cut off S Road and come up a little back there. It's a little kind of cool down time. See the turkeys in the morning and there's deer running across the street and all the mattresses and junk people thrown out in the light before. But you weave in and out and I come up to 40 Highway and then come up. And yet, I have now passed and we're in Independence here. I've left Raytown and then I finally get here at Independence, but I moved through Kansas City at some point and they're all intersecting there and you really, unless there's a sign up that says you're leaving Raytown, which they don't ever put a sign up saying you're leaving Raytown because they don't want you to ever think you've left Raytown. Unless there's a sign up that you're leaving one and going in the other one, you don't really know where the boundary lines are. You could be driving through there and you see a Kansas City cop and you say, "Ah, he can't get me. I'm in Raytown," until he turns his lights on and he gets you because you went through from Raytown into Kansas City and sometimes even into Independence.

Think about that when it comes to Colossae and Laodicea. Put that in a spiritual application. Laodicea was so close to this city, and not only that, one time Colossae was the greatest city of the trade, and now it has been eclipsed by Laodicea. Just like the Philadelphia church age was one time the greatest productive church age in the history of the world, but then it got taken over by Laodicea. See how it works? You know, why is it so hard to keep our focus, keep our perspective, keep our purpose as a pastor and as church members, because Laodicea is so close to the real thing? Like I could drive from Raytown into Kansas City and not know it. When you lose your focus, you go from the church that's productive to Laodicea without even knowing it. Oh yeah, you want to write that down. You'll be using that someplace along the line. That's an incredible concept, incredible concept.

Now, not only does it have Laodicea in it five times, it has the word "beguiled" in it two times. It's a direct reference to us as Christians and the church and all that we're dealing with. Now that we know this book lines up with the seven churches that John writes, and we know that the last church, Laodicea, ends in total disaster, we can now look at the inner level of why things are the way they are. This is where you get the wisdom of the minister. This is where you get wisdom in the ministry. Being able to see the latest in church, everything that's out there, not seeing it through the smoke, not seeing it through the praise bands, not seeing it through the music, not seeing it through the big cathedrals, but seeing it as it really is. It's invaluable.

Now let's read these two verses here in Colossians chapter 2 where we had 1 through 4 first, and then we'll jump over to verse 18 where that uses "beguile."

Colossians 2:1-4

For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh;

That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ;

In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words.

See that thing? That's exactly what we talked about last week. The devil is going to beguile you. He's going to beguile you with enticing words that entice you, impress you. You know, one of the things that they always clobbered Paul, in fact, that's in this chapter if you get on down in verses 4, 5, and 6, they always talked about how rude his speech was. Paul never used enticing words; he just put it across the plate where you could take a swing at it. He says here that men are going to try to beguile you with enticing words, entice you. Remember in Job 40-41, we talked about it the first week we looked at this as an introduction, how the devil will speak soft words to you. He'll come to you and he'll speak soft things and comforting things. He'll beguile you.

Now look at chapter 2, verse 18, same chapter, just on down a little bit.

Colossians 2:18

Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind.

Now, the second beguiling takes away your reward, and it is the puffed up fleshy mind that's against Christ and everything in God's Bible, a complete departure from the Word of God and its principles. Now, this is what you find here in the book of Colossians.

VII. The Laodicean Church's Departure from Christ

Along with that, and here's the key, if you want to understand what Paul's saying, he took you back to Genesis 3, showed you the parallels between the first Adam and the second Adam, and with the first Adam sinned in the garden and man lost the image of God, the second Adam prayed through in the garden and brought the tree of life back to us in the person of Christ on the cross, that's what you got. But when you understand how this thing works and you realize that the seven churches John writes to lines up to the seven churches Paul wrote to individually, and then you see the church of Laodicea is the book of Colossians. Now, now you got something to work with, and now you can see each chapter, chapter by chapter, shows you a different aspect of a Laodicean church. You want to study it in detail, you want to get it down where you can understand it, you want to keep your focus, your perspective, and your purpose. You as a minister want to have the wisdom of God, well, here it is in this particular case, because you and I today are living in the Laodicean church period, and never forget, Laodicea was only 11 miles south of Colossae, and it is so easy to cross over from one to the other and not ever know it.

I always marveled at a story in the New Testament how that when Jesus was just a boy, 12 years old I think He was, that He's going on a trip with His parents, and they're obviously walking, and it's a three-day journey, three or four-day journey, and the Bible says that they're walking along

and going on a trip, and suddenly somebody looks around and says, "Where's Jesus?" And the Bible tells you that He'd been missing for like two or three days. Now, it's hard for me to imagine how a parent can miss your child for two or three days. I mean, I guess it happens, but I mean, most parents are looking at their kid or wherever they're at, you go to the grocery store, you chain them to the cart, I mean, you're always looking for them, but it always amazed me how that Jesus' mom and dad could be out there going on this trip, walking on the road, and I know, don't tell the Catholics this, but Mary had other children. The brothers and sisters are listed in the New Testament, so there's a little crowd of them going here, but how in the world do you lose Jesus for two and three days? I've always marveled at that and thought to myself, what a great picture that is, because we all think we have a relationship with God. We all think we walk with Him, and I'm not saying you're not saved, this is not what I'm talking about, but it's so easy to lose your relationship with Christ and not know it and still think you have it. Colossae, Laodicea, just 11 miles south, it's real easy, and I'm telling you, kids, I am with all I have in my heart today, with the job that the church has got to do and the job the church should be doing, the devil's attack today is they're going to take you out of your focus, going to get you off your purpose, and you're going to lose your perspective, and he's going to do it so subtly by just nudging you out of Philadelphia and into Laodicea. You're going to walk through life saying, "Boy, me and Jesus are just fine," and then you're going to hear some hot message that tears the paint off the wall that brings you back to reality and say, "Well, I'm not as fine as I thought I was." See what I'm saying?

Now, you ought to do that every day in your life on your own, but if you did, I'd be out of a job, so I appreciate you being out of fellowship this morning. Me and Joe got great job security. There will always be cooks for him to catch, and there will always be sinners for me to preach to, myself being the first one.

Now, remember, as I said, the corruption of 2 Corinthians 11, when Satan transports himself into an angel of light, was threefold. I'll read it again just so you remember:

2 Corinthians 11:4

For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him.

That old English phrase "bear with him," that's what a football player does when he's trying to be tackled. He'll stiff arm the guy, push the guy off. You're not going with him; you're bearing against him. "Bear" means to go against something. If you're going down a road and the sign says "bear to the left," it means you're going a different way than you want to go. You're following the road; you're going against the natural tendency. So when you hear these things or see these things, you bear with him, you go against him.

Now, I've already told you, another Jesus, another spirit, another gospel. Okay, let's look at chapter 1. Did you ever notice chapter 1 in the book of Colossians? It's one of the most incredible chapters in the Bible, but you know what he does in that chapter? If you come down through that, I'm just going to briefly go over the top of this for time today, but if you go down

through that chapter, and I suggest you do it on your own this week, you know what he does? He redefines who Christ is. He starts telling you over and over again who Christ was, something we ought to already know. The reason why he does this is because the Laodicean church, the first thing that needs is the person of Jesus redefined, because they have been handed and preached to another Jesus. You betcha.

So he comes down through here, and in verse 14, it says, "Look at Colossians 1:14."

Colossians 1:14

In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins:

See that thing? Now, you know, in every new Bible on the market, here's what you have: the NIV reads, "in whom we have redemption, blank, the forgiveness of sin." You know what they do? They take the blood out, just like I told you a couple of nights ago. They take the blood out because to them, the blood is not essential anymore. They want to get away from the blood. The blood is the only thing that can save you. "What can wash away my sins? Nothing but the blood of Jesus." When somebody takes that out, yeah, you're dealing with something that isn't the biblical way it wants it to be.

And look at verse 15. He says, "Who is the image of the invisible God."

Colossians 1:15

Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature:

Hebrews 1:3 says that Christ was the brightness of God's glory, the express purpose of His image. The average person today does not understand who Christ is. They do not. They do not understand the Jesus of the Bible. The Jesus that is today tolerates sin. The Jesus today puts up with all kinds of things and doesn't seemingly care. The Jesus of today is a lot like it was back in the book of Judges, where there's no king in Israel, and every man doing what's right in his own eyes. That's the Jesus that is portrayed today. The Jesus portrayed today, it's okay to have mixed marriages. The Jesus portrayed today, it's all right to have mixed same-sex marriages. The Jesus today that's out, that's preached, there's no sin involved. There's nothing you can do wrong. Whatever you want to do, it's okay. The Jesus today winks at sin. He tolerates sin. It's no big deal to Him. The Jesus of today, there's no absolute final authority. There's no rule. But the Jesus of the Bible says in 1 Peter 1:16, "Be ye holy; for I am holy." The Jesus of the Bible goes by the book. The Jesus of the Bible follows the principles. We've got another Jesus.

Verse 17 says, "And he is before all things, and by him all things consist."

Colossians 1:17

And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.

Why did he spend so much time laying out the aspect of creation again in the church or in the book that matches up that a church will lay it to see you? I'll tell you why, because today we've lost the concept that God, Christ, was the creator. No, we make Him an intelligent design, whatever that might be. We make Him whatever fits into the standard of society we want it to be.

I remember back in, I wasn't there, but I remember studying about neo-orthodoxy. Neo-orthodoxy comes along with neo-evangelicalism about the 1900s, right at the start of the Laodicean church period. I won't go into a long dissertation on it, but bottom line was, neo-evangelicalism wanted to take back the Bible from the common man and put it back in scholarship. That was their whole concept. But neo-orthodoxy was even worse. Neo-orthodoxy was the concept that the Bible is not a book that changes. The Bible is a book that changes as society changes and progresses. We need to change the Bible to fit society. That's where your gay marriages are coming from today. It's a neo-orthodoxy crowd. That's where all this stuff originated from and started right at the beginning of the Laodicean church, and now it's rampant. It's rampant in our country and around the world. Neo-orthodoxy takes the position that, you know what, as society progresses and it gets worse, we bring God and Christ and the Bible down to man's level, and that'll never work. But that's another Jesus for you. That's another Jesus for you. He's not some intelligent design person. He's not some theistic evolutionist.

I was talking to some Christians the other day, and I just assumed that they were on board with the Bible, and we talked, I talked about the six days of literal creation and talked about that this whole thing was only created six thousand years ago. They looked at me like I was nuts. We've lost the concept that the architect of the universe that created everything, yes, He did. He did it in six literal 24-hour days. You get that from Exodus 20 if you're not picking it up. And He did it only six thousand years ago. People just can't deal with that today. You know why? Because you've been brainwashed. You know why you've been brainwashed? What, hundreds of million years and all the different periods and all the click on man and all of these things that scientists put out, and now Christians get in and they're tired of being laughed at by educated people believing in a literal creator in a literal time period. So now they go to theistic evolution, that, "Oh yes, there's a God, and millions of years ago He threw the big switch and then backed out and let evolution take care of itself." It's where it's at today.

A couple of years ago, they had a big flack over in Kansas about teaching evolution in the schools, and they wanted to compromise, so they said, "Okay, we won't bring God in, we won't bring Jesus in, we'll just say it all got here by intelligent design." Oh my God, who could be anything you want it to be. Anytime you get pushed into a corner, when you take God or Christ out of that book and what's going on in society, you got you another Jesus where we're at today. That Bible says all things were created by Him and for Him, that He is before all things, and by Him all things consist. That's not all.

Christianity today not only has another Jesus, but we got another spirit here. I ran around talking about the baptism of the Holy Ghost, baptism of the Holy Spirit, making the Holy Spirit some kind of thing that you don't get when you get saved, you get later. I'm telling you right now, what you got today is the Holy Spirit versus man's human spirit. He's told you in Colossians 2:18, "vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind." The spirit of this age and Christianity is what? A deception. It's one of confusion. It's a lying spirit. No power of God because there's no Spirit of God because we got another spirit, so we got to replace it with all the bells and the whistles and all the shiny things. Well, we don't have the power of God anymore. We've replaced it with the power of the flesh.

He says, "another gospel." I talked to somebody the other day, some guy, and he says, "Yeah, I believe in the full gospel." I said, "Where's that at in the Bible? Full gospel?" Somebody told me one time, "Yeah, I go to a Four Square Gospel Church." I thought there was only four people in it, they all were squares. I didn't know what he was talking about. I said, "Where do you find a Four Square Gospel?" I heard a guy say on the radio the other day, he says, "We're going to listen to some Southern Gospel music." Southern Gospel, hmm, hmm. I always ask these people for the definitive verse in the New Testament on the gospel, 1 Corinthians 15. They don't even know where it's at. I mean, what are you doing talking about, "We believe the full gospel"? What is the full gospel? Where is it at in the Bible? Just show me the term. I'll show you the gospel I believe in the Bible, and I'll give you the definitive verse on it. Show me where your gospel is. It isn't in there. You know why? You got another gospel.

Before we get all high and mighty on the fact that we got the right gospel, the word "gospel" means "good news." Most of God's people don't believe it any more than the full gospel crowd, because if you had the good news and you believed it was a gospel, when's the last time you told somebody about it? See, the church today, even good churches, have to fight every day to keep your purpose, to keep your focus, and keep your perspective. The Laodicean church has completely lost all three of those, and they've lost the concept of who Christ is. They don't even know Him anymore. They think God's some grandfather in the sky that comes out and checks it every thousand years, winks, and goes back and goes to sleep. They have no idea who Christ is. So when he wrote chapter 1, and I just gave you the brief, you got to go down and read that chapter. He shows you over and over and defines again and again who Christ is. You know what? This church has lost it.

VIII. The Laodicean Church's Replacements for God's Word

Now, I'll show you. Look at chapter 2. Where in chapter 1 he shows you what the problem is, or shows you that another Jesus, another spirit, another gospel, chapter 2 shows you what they replaced it with. I got a heading over chapter 2 in Colossians: "The Issues of My Day." Here's what we replaced the Word of God with. Now that we've rejected the Word of God, remember now, the book, chapter 2, verse 3:

Colossians 2:3

In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

When this church dumped the Book, the Word of God, Laodicea, they replaced it with four things, and boy, you can see it all across the world today, and it's found in chapter 2, verse 8. He says:

Colossians 2:8

Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.

That's the Laodicean church today.

4. The first thing we replaced it with is with philosophy. Churches today are philosophical. Even got people running around claiming to be Christian philosophers, whatever that is. There's no bringing together philosophy and Christianity. Christianity is not a philosophy; Christianity is a lifestyle built on absolute principles. Philosophy never was built on anything absolute, why, it changes every 20, 30 years with a new philosopher. But they replaced it with philosophy. See, now philosophy in the church today takes one form or brand. It's called situation ethics. In other words, whatever your situation you're in, if it feels right for you to do it, then go ahead and do it. Philosophy knows no absolute standard. Philosophy holds no absolute code. Philosophy basically is whatever it feels right for you to do. If you think it's the right thing based on the situation you're in, then do it. Boy, that'll get you in trouble every time. The idea, if it feels right, it must be right.
5. The second thing is vain deceit. This is what I call the God complex with pastors today. Their arrogance is unbelievable. They're so vain at the fact that they have nothing to do with the common, ordinary people. They have a God complex. They live in big homes. They live up above the people, and they don't have anything to do with the people. It's just like they're your pope. They're your God. People are saying, "Have you ever asked your pastor?" "I couldn't go talk to my pastor." I've had people say, "Have you ever prayed?" "Oh, I can't go talk to God." The Bible says that you can go to talk to God anytime you want. If you go to a church where you can't get with your pastor and meet with him and tell him what's wrong, you're in the wrong church. What does he do all day? He couldn't be prepared sermons because they stink. I had a person a while back asked me about a situation. They said, "Well, what are you going to do about that?" And I said, "I ain't going to do anything about it." I think it was last year somebody was asking me about a circumstance today. I can't remember the whole thing, but I remember what they asked me. They said, "What are you going to do about that?" I said, "I ain't going to do anything about it." They say, "Why not?" Because I said, "I think the greatest punishment that they could ever endure is listening to that guy preach every Sunday." Couldn't preach his way out of a wet paper bag with a hole cut in the bottom of it. The three dogs they just ran out of. I'm telling you, pastors today, I don't know who they think they are. Most pastors, you don't see them before the service. They come out in some grand exposé where they walk in, and then after the service, they're gone, man. They're gone. You want to talk to the pastor, you got to go through some person who guards his time. I call it the Martin Bormann complex. Martin Bormann was in the Third Reich. He was the most powerful person in Hitler's Nazi Germany. You say, "I never even heard of him. I thought Hitler was the most powerful man." Let me tell you something, anybody who controls access to the most powerful man soon becomes the most powerful man. You want to write that down too.
6. Tradition of men. That's the third thing. Man-made rules over God-made principles. That's what it is. That's what it is.
7. And then the last one, the rudiments of the world. The church, you know what the word "rudiments" means? It means the base level. It means the foundation. The rudimentary thing is where it starts. The rudiments of the world simply means that this church, its roots are in the world.

Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.

I've told you many, many times, there's never a right to do wrong to get the chance to do right. That's what the church is today. They situation ethic. They justify what they're doing because the end result is, "We're going to get people saved." Therefore, "We got the license to do whatever we want to do to get there." You don't know. You don't know. You don't.

IX. The Believer's Response in the Laodicean Age

Now, chapter 3 and 4. Chapter 1 was a redefining of Christ, because if you read down through that chapter and you know anything about the Laodicean church age, you now know that we have lost who Christ is. Chapter 2 deals with the issues that the church is facing today. In verse 8, he tells you very clearly, and boy, all you got to do is have a speck of brain power and you can see that. Now, chapter 3 and 4. Chapter 3 and 4, in light of all that's happening in chapter 1, and chapter 3 and 4, he put two chapters together, and again, I'm just going to briefly go through these. He puts two chapters together that shows me how the child of God, what my response should be to it.

You know, I realize, and I don't appreciate it, but I realize that I'm here and was born and God brought me where He's at. He has me, and I'm here by God's design. I know that if I'd have had my choice, I'd have been born in the 17th century. I watched those movies, you know, those history movies about the Revolutionary War, and I think, "Boy, if I knew what I knew now, and the Redcoats were out there, I'd get me a band of about a hundred guys, we'd just slip those Redcoats. They wouldn't know what hit them." They had the stupidest battle tactics you ever saw in your life. First of all, they wear red coats, not like they're trying to hide from anybody. Like a guy told me one time, he said, "What do you do for a living?" He says, "I work for the Secret Service." And I said, "That's kind of stupid." He said, "What do you mean?" So, "Why do you call it the Secret Service?" "Because we do a lot of secret things." I said, "Why is it the Secret Service? Your phone number is in the phone book, Secret Service. That's not very secret."

Wearing red coats in battle is not the best thing. The only thing that blends in with it is blood. Give me your first clue. You know, they fought back there, they stood in lines and ranks, and then the other guys stood in ranks, and you basically just shot at each other till you didn't have enough guys left and you went home to lunch or something. I don't know what a way to fight a war, but that's the way they were trained. You know, in the British army during that War of Independence, you realized the rules were, if you were an officer, you weren't allowed to shoot an officer. The other side couldn't. They expected you to. It was all the little guys who got killed. But things don't change much in time, do they? But it was a rule of warfare that if you were a British officer, the other side couldn't kill you. They couldn't shoot you. You couldn't target officers because officers were gentlemen. I'm telling you what, if you want to wreak havoc in an army who wants to lay down stupid rules, just go against the stupid rules and put your own rules together. You know the first thing I'd do? I'd take out every officer they have. You know why I'd do that? Because an army like that, men aren't trained to think by themselves. They're trained to do what the officers do. You take the officers out, you got rank confusion. You can slice them up

any way you want them at that point. You know, next thing I'd do, I'd introduce camouflage. Yeah, man. But those guys would be walking down there for a bracelet or rancher, though, about 200 of them, and I'd have my guys three feet away from them. First thing I'd do is have a 40 guy jump out with nothing but knives and slit their throat, stick them in the back, nail them, run back in the wood before they're figuring out what happened and look at the other guy. Then they'd have another 50 guys open up on them. I was born the wrong time. I don't know.

I'll tell you, man, I am so sick of this putrid Laodicean church age. I could put up with a lot of things, I can, but I'll tell you what, I'm going to stop now because I know God put me where He wanted me to be. As much as I'd rather be someplace else, I'll be where He wants me to be. I understand why He put me here. I know why I'm here. I don't like it, but then most soldiers don't like the orders they get, but I'll carry mine out. But you know what? In light of all this, my response to it as a child of God, it's real simple for me. I don't have to pray about it. I don't have to think about it. I don't have to do anything about it at all. My mandate is clear. With somebody with my stupid mindset and what I believe in such a radical world against it, I only have one course that God put me here for, and that is that to the best of my ability, build a Philadelphia church in a Laodicean church period. I don't know if it can be done. I don't know. You know, that's hard to do, and I'm telling you, it may be impossible to do. I haven't arrived yet. I'm not there yet. I know what I need to do, but I don't know if it can be done. But I do know this, I do know this: that's the only way it's going to work today if God's people don't have something reinforcing the focus, the purpose, if they don't have something reinforcing the perspective, because Laodicea is so close to Colossae, and it's so close and it's so easy to stray from one boundary to the other. Something has to be made clear.

I'll tell you this, I don't know if it can be done, and don't mind if I get a little personal here, but I'll tell you this, the only way you'll ever get it done is with people who have a Philadelphia mindset about the same thing. Don't know where you'll get it done. With all we do here, we have a lot of fun. You know as well as I do, at the end of the day, it's not a social club. Don't misunderstand, I love a party. Don't start till I get there. I love the fun things we do. I love the times we eat, especially the times we eat. I love the softball. I love everything we do. I love the birthday parties. I love everything. I love everything we do, but don't ever lose sight of that is all a means to an end. I understand my mandate. You may not understand your mandate. I understand my mandate and the mandate of this church. Most of my ministry is simply preaching the Word of God, laying out the Word of God, and weeding out the non-hackers, or should I say, letting the Word of God weed themselves out. This church has to be like a refiner's fire. If you're going to get it done, if you're going to do it, it has to be like a refiner's fire where you put the gold and you put the silver, and then you turn the heat up and watch the dross come to the top and out.

I look for the best because the best is what it takes today. I never lose sight of my focus or my perspective or my purpose. I don't allow myself to get caught up in some of the goofy stuff that some of God's people get caught up in, the "who's who have hurt me today." I got a message that I haven't ever preached to you. It's about God's school, that the church is God's school, and there are seven classes in that school, and I go through and I'll show you that message. It's a great

message. I never preached it to you guys, but it's a great message. But I, now being a pastor in the last 10 or 11 years, I've had to rethink that whole message and had to add an eighth class. I mean, I had a history class, you can put it together. I had a math class, you know, I had all of those things. But then the last 10 years, I've thought that whole thing out, and maybe that's why I haven't preached it, because now in this school we got today, I'd have to add a drama class. I'm not, I don't do well with drama. I'm just being honest. I deal well with men and women who love the smell of napalm in the morning.

I don't know what to tell you. I understand why God put me here. I don't want to be here. I'd rather be back shooting the Redcoats. I'd rather be holding Jonathan Edwards' coat while he let them have it. But He didn't put me there. He put me here in this most godless, putrid setup I've ever seen in my life where they've lost who Christ is. They've lost everything about it, and here I am, a maniac. I don't allow myself to get caught up in all the petty stuff, the "I'm not serving God crowd because of so and so and what he said and what he did to me." Grow up. Hey, if I wanted to quit the ministry and I wanted to find other people doing stupid things to me or somebody else or just hypocrites in general, I would have a hundred thousand reasons a day. You know what Al Sabaka said? "You don't go to church and get involved because of hypocrites in the church." That's right. If you let that hypocrite keep you out of church, then that hypocrite's closer to Christ than you are. A lot of truth in that. Why does your, why does anybody here, why does your not doing what's right have any effect on me doing right? My personal calling.

When Israel in the Old Testament was at their worst, and they were out there absolutely worst, and it looked like it was bleak and black and there was nothing that anybody could do. They killed every prophet. They rejected the Old Testament. They were just like us. You know what God said? God said, "I'll tell you what, I'm looking for a man. I'm looking for a man that will stand in the gap. I'm looking for a man who will make up the hedge. I'm looking for a man who will take My Word in a midst of apostasy and take his stand." Now, that's what I'm looking for. No, no, no, no. I know exactly what my response is to it. It's simple for me to build what once worked in a society of Christianity that won't work anymore. I don't know if it can be done, but I know there's things that I look for.

- I look for openness in a person. I don't look for you to be perfect. I don't look for you not to make any mistakes. I don't look at you to do dumb things. But I do look for somebody who's open to God in the things of God.
- I look for somebody who has integrity and who's honest.
- I look for somebody who has transparency in their relationship with God and other people.
- I look for men and women who have a sense of honor, a sense of code, who understands.
- I look for men and women who have determination.
- I look for men and women who have tenacity. That's the ability to never quit.
- I look for men and women who are resilient. That means no matter what happens to them, they bounce back.
- I look for men and women with a commitment, with a loyalty.
- But most of all, most of all, what's lacking today, I look for men and women who have courage. Courage to stand.

We don't find that today. We have a bunch of cowards today. Nobody's courageous today. Peter Ruckman's got a video, John's probably got it, it's called "Cowards in the Ministry." It's one of the greatest things I've ever saw in my life. When I see those ten things in you, in people, when God brings me a young man or a young lady, and I watch them for a while, and they stand the initial test, and it looks like they're going to do something, and they got these things in their life, I don't care where you've been. I don't care what you've done. All I care is where you want to go from here. When I see those things in people, my job kicks in. I hang up my golf clubs and I go to work. I go to work to see if you're the real deal. I watch you. I watch to see if you've got steel, steel in your backbone or your spine, not a rubber band. When I see those things, I'll develop it. I'll nurture it. I'll mold it. I'll make it. I'll train it. And I'll preach the hell out of it. I'll turn up the heat and turn up the heat to see what you're made of. And everybody gets the same chance. Everybody does. Everybody does. I'll watch what you do in tough situations. I'll watch if you whine or you complain. I'll watch if you're smarter than the problem. I'll watch every aspect of your life to find one young man, one young lady, one young man who has one ounce of what it takes to stand today.

Those of you who decide you're going to stand, I can promise you this, it's all I can promise you, not much, but I can promise you: you'll be ridiculed. You'll be lied about. You'll be maligned. You'll be kicked around. You'll be accused of following a man instead of following God, not by the world, but by God's people. You'll be accused of things you didn't do. Your friends will forsake you. Your family will forsake you. They'll beat you up. They'll harass you. You'll be lied to. You'll be beguiled. People will tell you how much they love you and want to stick a knife in your back. People will take your name off their Facebook. Oh, what a terrible thing. So what? If you're a soldier for Jesus Christ, you endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. I look for those who stand while others sit. I look for those who will speak up when others keep silent. I look for those who will attack when others retreat, run. Oh, my response to it, chapter 3 and 4, I know exactly what it is. Like the Marines looking for a few good men, so is God, so am I. I know what my response is in this godless, pitiful, effeminate, weak, spineless, godless, Bible-rejecting Christian world. It's real simple for me.

"Say, what are you going to do, Bob? What am I going to do in this world? Am I going to quit? Am I going to complain? Am I going to give up? Am I going to put my tail between my legs and let the devil have his way with me one more time?" No. I'll tell you what I'll do. Chapter 3 and 4 tells you what to do.

Colossians 3:1

If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.

That's what I'm going to do. I'm not focusing on this mess. I'm focusing on Him and the job He's called me to do, the job He saved me to do. I'm going to do what verse 2 says. "What are you going to do?" You can quit if you want. You can complain if you want.

Colossians 3:2

Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.

That's what I'm going to do. Paul said in 1 Timothy 6:12, "Fight the good fight." We need to fight that good fight. Paul said in 2 Timothy 2:3-4:

2 Timothy 2:3-4

Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.

He says, "Do a hard, endure a hardness." Christianity is as soft as the ice cream you get from Culver's tonight. Christianity is worthless. It's spineless. It can't stand up to anything or anybody. I remember back in Israel's time when they were in that mess, and Elijah went to God and he said, "I don't know what I'm going to do. I can't find anybody in this godless world that we live in of God's people." And He says, "Quit sniveling about it. I got seven thousand have not bowed their knee to Baal." God always has His faithful few. God always has His remnant of men and women who take their stand, who won't be compromised with, who won't back down, who will take a stand in these last days. That's who I'm looking for.

The oldest ministries about, I mean, I love softball, volleyball, whatever else we do. I love all the fun things we have, but at the end of the day, it's about one thing: who there is going to make the stand in these last days? Who is going to take and respond to this gutless, godless Christianity we're into today? Entanglements of this old world. Oh, there it is. It's tangled at all the petty junior high stuff, man. Entangled at all the goofy stuff of "who's who." I'm telling you what, you know, in the military, they have what they call obviously barbed wire, but there's one step better than barbed wire. It's called tanglefoot. They call it concertina wire, and it comes in big rolls like this, and you can actually lay it around a perimeter wherever you're at, hook them together on the end. If you want to really be safe, put two or three rows of it out behind each other, about 12 feet wide, or this roll, but they got little sharp barbs all over it. There ain't no way you're going to get through it. I looked at that many, many times and think, "Boy, that's exactly every Christian, every Christian on this planet gets entangled in that tangled foot wire." A little petty thing. They only got about each circle's only got about four or five little things on it, but you know, in life, the things that'll mess you up in the circle of life are those four, three or four little petty things. You let them stick you, and that's an ouchie.

I remember when Kelly was a kid, and she fell down and scraped her wrist or her elbow. She was playing out in the yard or on the thing. You know, I could see her coming down the street. She fell down in the street. It was nothing. It was a Band-Aid, a little Merthiolate. She came down the street like this. Remember, a lot of Christians are like that. God's people today so easily lose their focus. They lose their perspective. They lose their purpose. So easily get sidetracked on everything else. Oh, I know it is. I know it is.

Somebody said, "Bob, what are you going to do in this godless, milquetoast, gutless Christianity?" I'm going to do what Colossians 3:16 says.

Colossians 3:16

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

That's what I'm going to do. I can't speak for you, wouldn't pretend to, but when the devil takes the Book by beguiling you with enticing words and replaces the Book with philosophy, vain deceit, traditions of men, the rudiments of the world, that's quite impossible. Some of you already here, it's already taking it out of your heart. You don't love the Book like you once did. It's just a matter of time where you're going to take it out of your hand. Now, that's why it's probably impossible to really build a Philadelphia church in the Laodicean church period, but I'm going to tell you something right now, I'm going to die trying if that's what it takes. I don't care. I'll never stop. I'll never let up on it. I'll never quit. You know why? Because that's the only thing we got. You quit if you want. You bail out if you want. I mean, you waste your whole life getting entangled in the affairs of this whole life if that's what you want to do. I mean, I've seen some of God's people in and out of churches so much they need to put a revolving door in the place. Hey, you let it sidetrack you. You let it take your purpose, your focus, and your direction in life. You let it sideline you. For me and my house, we'll stay the course. If I can't get all of you to stand and fight and take a stand, then I'll take what I can get and stand and fight with that.

Hey, somebody has to be man enough. Somebody has to be strong enough. Somebody has to play the man for the people of God. Somebody has to be strong for your children. Somebody has to be strong for the younger Christians. I'll take all that God will give me. If He only gives me 100, 200, 300, if He only gives me 20, that's what I'll take.

X. The Church as God's Rear Guard Action

You know, in the military, and we are supposed to be like soldiers, I know that's not popular today. Somebody said one time, the reason why he can't get a good congregation to sing "Onward Christian Soldiers" anymore is because there's too many conscientious objectors in the congregation. But in the military, I mean, talking about combat infantrymen, queen of battle in combat, there's a lot of hard orders, hard orders you got to give. In my mind, I've always seen that true leadership is the ability to say to a squad or a company, "Go take that hill," when you know half those men are going to die and get killed on the way up that hill. Some guys lack the ability and leadership to make the hard calls. But I'm telling you, I'm telling you, in Christianity as in the military, there has to be hard calls. If you're going to play the role of a leader, you better have the steel to make the tough calls in your backbone. It's just that simple.

But in the military, there's no harder order or more helpless situation to find yourself in than what is called in military jargon as a rear guard action. A rear guard action is basically a strategic withdrawal. You get a division of 10,000 guys who get boxed in someplace. It happened in Korea. They got boxed in by the Chinese when the Chinese came into the war with the North Koreans. So what they had to do, they had to do a strategic withdrawal. The enemy can only get them through one short pass, about four or five miles wide, because mountain was on both sides. They had 10,000 men they wanted to evacuate and they wanted to take out and save so they

could fight another day. So a rear guard action comes up. It's a simple formula: you take a company, 200 men, put them along that line, and their job is to stand there and die and hold that line and not let those enemies through while the other 10,000 escape. It's a simple formula. It's a simple delay action so that the main body doesn't get caught and get destroyed. That order, without a doubt, is the dirtiest, hardest job any soldier ever gets to do in the army.

Hey, let me tell you something. When a commander has to make that call, when he has to look at a company commander in the face and says, "You take your company, put them down there in that gap, and you hold that situation down there till we get out, and I can't promise you that anybody's going to come back. You're probably going to get overwhelmed. You're probably going to be out, but you got to hold that so I can get my guys out." You know, it takes a special kind of soldier to take that kind of order. You know that takes a special kind of trooper to be in a troop, to know that you ain't getting out unless some miracle happens. You know, when a general or colonel or commander brings that company commander in and he picks that company to sacrifice, you might think that he'd pick the most messed-up company that he had. You might think he'd say, "Well, I'll get rid of all the deadbeats that I got." No. You know what he does? He has to pick the best crack company he's got with the best leadership and the best soldiers for it to be successful. Putting a bunch of messed-ups and snafus in the line is only going to fold up, and they're going to come through over you like ugly on an ape. He takes the best that he has.

Now today, I'm not sure where all your heads are today, but for just a few moments, please pull it out of wherever it's at and listen to me today. Bible believers, saved men and women, men and women of this church, the church of Jesus Christ today is God's rear guard action. We're the ones that hold up the forces of hell to get more people into the kingdom. You know, 2 Thessalonians 2 says the rapture takes place, and when it does, all the devil comes in and gets the whole bottle of wax. Right now, the only thing holding him back is the Spirit of God that's here in you and me. We are the rear guard action.

In combat, when that final moment comes, it goes through a process. Really, the enemy will come up at night and they'll probe you as to your defenses. They'll put on a couple fake attacks on your flanks that test your strength and your size. But sooner or later, they're all coming at you. Today, in Christianity, we're past being probed. We're past the little firefights out there. It is a full frontal assault on the church of Jesus Christ, and you and I, not by our choosing. Hey, I'd rather be someplace else where everybody loved the Book and we could just go out and preach like they did at Boston Common, and 30,000 people get saved when George Whitefield preached. I'd love that. We ain't there anymore. We're now where hardly anybody's going to get saved, and the ones who say they're saved are probably not even saved. We're in the most messed-up, fouled-up situation, but it's our job. I didn't choose to be here. I'd rather be somebody else, but my Commander in Chief ordered me and sent me here, and He gave me the command to stand, and I'm going to stand. Don't like it, but I'm going to stand. I'll obey my orders.

But when it comes, when all hell breaks loose and they're all over the place, and you know you want to run, and you know you want to go back, and you know you're angry, and you curse, and you pray, and you're facing all that onslaught that's coming your way down the line, you hear from the chain of command the last command you maybe ever will hear, but it's certainly the

most despairing and the worst one. And you hear as they're coming at you and you're afraid and you're firing and they're coming over the wire and they're coming through everything you got, and you want to run, and everybody wants to break, and you're looking to the left and the right for somebody else to go so you can run with them, you hear the order: "Hold the line! Hold the line!" Don't you hear that? You know you stay in place. Nobody's leaving. Nobody's going. You defend yourself and that ground like it's everything you got, because it is. You hold the line no matter what. Nobody moves. Stay in place. No retreat. No help. Now you defend yourself and that ground you hold as long as you can. I won't tell you, it takes a special kind of soldier to do that. I might add that in that scenario, it's a hopeless situation, but in our case, help's coming. The Lord's coming for me.

Now's not the time for us to quit. Now's not the time for the devil to beguile us. Now's not the time for us to quit. Now's not the time for us to get folded up and to fall apart and to get sidetracked. Now, more than ever, in this rear guard action we're in, we need to hold the line. We need every family in place. We need to train your children in the art of spiritual warfare. We need every man on the line, every woman on the line, and as the New Testament local church that claims to believe and love a Book and claims to want to do the work of God in the face of opposition, we need to stand in the gap. We need to make up the hedge, and we need to hold the line. Nobody else is going to hold it. I can't take responsibility for one other pastor, one other church. This little church, which is about the size of a good rifle company, is all I got to worry about, and that's plenty. But it takes a special kind of Christian soldier to stand in that kind of opposition, and I'm looking for him. Every young man that comes in here, every young lady, every couple that comes in, I look for the steel in your backbone. I look to see how you deal with adversity. I like to see when things don't go the way you want them to go. People don't treat you the way they probably should. Boy, the devil gets into all those things.

You know, as Christians today, our persecution, our trials of affliction, will not come by torture. None of us will ever be probably put on a rack and stretched till your limbs pulled out of joint. Nobody here will probably ever be burned at the stake. I doubt seriously if anybody will grab your children and throw them into hungry pigs and tie you up to deny Christ and watch the pigs eat them. Never happened. I doubt seriously if anybody will ever tie you down and cut your head off. No, no. Ours will be a much greater challenge. Ours will be a much more slower, painful death. Ours will be the death of giving up your responsibility and your relationship and losing your focus and your purpose and your walk with God being destroyed. Ours will be not being tied to a rope and beaten and whipped or a cage full of rats put on our heads like they did in the Dark Ages. Ours will be to quit. Ours will be to give up. Ours will be to surrender your position as a child of God and just go into the land of apathy. Ours will be to go through life complaining, bitter, angry, staying immature, never growing, staying whining over non-essentials and things that don't ever matter, never getting to the point of self-discipline or being self-motivated. Oh no, our death will be a spiritual death of giving up and quitting, letting the devil do exactly what Paul said he would do in 2 Corinthians 11: beguile you, my friend. Not here. Not on my watch. It won't happen. It may happen, but not because I'm going to let it happen. No, no. We've sang it too many times, and I believe it too much, too long: "Hold the fort, for I am coming, Jesus signals still. Wave the answer back to heaven, and by God's grace we will." The attack of the

devil is on the church. The church is made up of people, and now's the time to stand. Now's the time to make up your mind because we're that rear guard action, and it's going to take every man and every woman and every child to hold the line. Nobody else is going to hold it. I can't take responsibility for one other pastor, one other church. This little church, which is about the size of a good rifle company, is all I got to worry about, and that's plenty. But it takes a special kind of Christian soldier to stand in that kind of opposition, and I'm looking for him. Every young man that comes in here, every young lady, every couple that comes in, I look for the steel in your backbone. I look to see how you deal with adversity. I like to see when things don't go the way you want them to go. People don't treat you the way they probably should. Boy, the devil gets into all those things.

Father, we do thank You and praise You.