

I. The Importance of Biblical Character Studies and Truth

We are still in chapter 19, and we have been going through these incredible character studies you find here. Last time, we looked at the Apostle John, and what an incredible study he is for every one of us, helping us understand the importance of the study of men and women in the Bible. Unfortunately, today, with all the confusion in Christianity, we form our ideas of what a New Testament Christian should be, many times from the wrong sources. Sometimes we pick up stuff that we read that has really nothing to do with the Bible, and we get the idea that that is New Testament Christianity. It is easy to do today. Sometimes we get into conversations with people, and people will discuss their view of what Christianity is, and unfortunately, it really has nothing to do with the Bible. Many times, it is just things that we hear floating around out there or that we see, and it is not very scriptural.

Last week, I showed you the spirit of this age. We have talked about this before, but the spirit of this age in the Laodicean church period is the question that Pilate asked at the first coming of Christ. We find ourselves in the same situation at the second coming of Christ. He asked the question, "What is truth?" There is a lot of confusion today with Christians over what real truth is. I have said this many, many times, and I understand it is hard for some of God's people to grasp, but New Testament Christianity today is about as far from what God intended it to be as you are ever going to find it. It parallels where Israel was right before their captivity in 606 BC. The Bible says that they had a form of godliness, but they did not have the power of God. That is where Christianity unfortunately is today for the most part.

I try to teach you and keep it before you that the Bible is the only solid, trustworthy book we have in defining what real biblical Christianity is and should be, or really in anything in life. The Bible is truth in three formats:

- 1.) It is doctrinally solid. The word "doctrine" means "to teach," so its teachings are absolutely solid on bedrock.
- 2.) It is historically accurate. All history is as solid as can be over everything else you will read.
- 3.) It is inspirationally solid. What we read in it, what we study in it, and all throughout the Bible, not only in the Old Testament but also in the New Testament, God has strategically placed men and women in circumstances and in events that their lives show us the real biblical way to do and be what God really wants us to do and what He wants us to be.

II. John: The Model of Biblical Balance

For us, it shows, as I tried to show you last week through John, that he represents the complete balance of the New Testament child of God. I cannot tell you the importance of a good balance. We all know that most of us do not eat right, and the older you get, the more it shows. The importance of a good balanced diet is so crucial to your physical health. We talk about that all the

time; we have people that specialize as nutritionists and really understand the value of all that. But along with that, I cannot stress to you enough the importance of a spiritual biblical balance in your diet, having the essential things in your life.

I remember back when I was a kid growing up, I do not buy it anymore, but you had Wonder Bread. Wonder Bread, you were told in the commercials, "built strong bodies 12 different ways." I do not know if it did or it did not, but I know that in the Bible, bread is a picture of the Word of God. The Bible says that the Word of God came from the Jews. So that is where your Wonder Bread comes from, the one you are holding in your lap today. It all goes back to the Bible.

John, it does not get any better than what he does. Last week, I showed you the four characteristics of John through his relationship with Christ that really set him apart from the normal Christian life. That is the real question you have to answer for yourself today: When it comes to your Christian life, do you want just a normal Christian life, or do you want above normal, something special, something better than what is all around you today?

I showed you how you had the twelve apostles. Three of them are pretty good guys: Peter, James, and John. The rest of them, they are average. But the one who stands out in perfect balance is John. I told you last week that when Christ was being taken and was going to be crucified, the apostles' world fell apart. They had been with Him for three years, and they had been listening to Him talk about the coming kingdom. They were believing that He was the Messiah, which He was. They were seeing Him do all the signs and wonders, which were His Old Testament credentials of who He was. But then it all fell apart. If you want to see a picture of where your life and my life will be at some point, you look at that.

You are all saved, most of you probably. You are on your way to heaven, most of you probably. You love God, I do not doubt that for a moment, and you have the right Bible when you read the right Bible. You have all those great characteristics, but I am going to tell you right now, someday your world is going to fall apart, just like theirs did. You look at those twelve, you will see the reaction of where God's people are today if some catastrophic event took place. They all took off. They all were afraid. They all ran. Peter denied Him. You are going to find that everybody that was associated with Him, when their world as they knew it fell apart, they all scattered except one.

The one that, when it all fell apart and scattered, did not leave and went all the way, is the one that was above average in his walk in his Christian life with God, and he had the perfect balance. He worked through the fear. He worked through all the emotions of it, and he had within him the ability to get through, for those twelve apostles, the most terrible time that they had ever experienced. I am telling you right now, there are some tough times coming, and you better be above average and have the perfect balance to get through it.

We saw that John was the only apostle that Jesus says He loved. I know He loved them all, but John is set apart. You know why? Because he is showing us that he is above average. At the Last Supper, when Christ clearly told everybody there that one of them was going to betray Him, every one of them said, "Lord, is it me? Am I going to do it?" I told you last week, John simply

looked at Him and said, "Lord, who is it?" He knew it was not him. Why? He is above average. Why? He has that perfect balance.

I told you this last week, John lays his head on the very breast of the Lord Jesus Christ, and he hears the very heartbeat of God. Nobody in the history of the Bible had done that. Nobody, any place up to that point. Yet, from that point on in the New Testament church, once you have the completed perfect word of God, which is the heartbeat of God, you too can hear God's heartbeat. Very frankly, that is what sets you apart. That is what gives you the perfect balance, and that is what makes you above average.

Then we find the fourth thing: John goes all the way to the cross, and Jesus gives him His mother, Mary. We talked about that, how that is a picture of the book of Romans in Romans chapter 9 and Romans chapter 11, of the church understanding. John typifies the church that now we have the watch care of the nation of Israel.

Then I showed you the books that he wrote that make up what I call the five wisdom books of the New Testament: the Gospel of John, the Epistle of First John, the Epistle of Second John, the Epistle of Third John, and then, of course, the book of Revelation. All these in his life, through his relationship, his walk, his love for God, his experiences with Christ, all go together to form for us what we need so desperately in our Christian lives: that perfect balance of the New Testament man or woman who is walking with the Lord.

We know what Proverbs says about balance, from the wisest man that ever lived.

Proverbs 11:1

A false balance is abomination to the LORD: but a just weight is his delight.

John is a picture for all of us, and churches have to be working along these lines to put a just weight in God's people's lives, the just weight of the Word of God, balancing everything out not only for where you are today but where we are all headed.

III. The Cross: The Foundation of New Life

All these, and I told this a couple of weeks ago, all these are what I call my lessons from the cross. Years ago, before most of you were born, when I got right with the Lord, got saved, I wanted a real relationship with God. At that time in my life, everything that I did and accomplished really meant nothing. Looking back, hindsight is always 20/20. All those things that I thought that I had accomplished in life as a young man at 20-21, I now realized at that point that it meant nothing. I knew now that I was empty, and I was searching.

I heard a message after I got right with the Lord. I heard a message by one of my favorite preachers from Cleveland, Ohio, and his name was Roy Thompson. Roy went home to be with the Lord a number of years ago. Roy was one of the best practical preachers that you would ever want to hear. In that message, I really do not remember all of the message, but I do simply remember what God put in my heart out of that message when old Roy said, "The cross has everything for everybody." Then he said that our new life in Christ, and that is where I was at

that time, that our new life in Christ must start at the cross. At that moment in my life, I knew that if I was going to give up the world, if I was going to walk away from friends and circumstances and situations, if I was going to leave those things behind, I would have to fill that hole with something else.

Let me speak to this for just a moment. I think that is a real problem in Christianity today. Every church that you go to, Baptist church, they get up there and they will yell at you, scream at you, and admonish you to get out of the world, to leave behind booze, to leave behind drugs, to leave behind all the things of the world. I am all for that. The problem is, many of those guys, and I know them personally, many of those guys, though they are absolutely correct in telling you to give up all those things, they fail in replacing what they ask you to give up with something that they have to give you. That is the cross. The cross is everything to everybody. The cross contains every doctrine, every inspirational, every historical fact that we need.

At that moment in my life, I knew that I would have to find something else to replace those things, or I would be just sucked back into it. If you are going to take something emotionally and something that is connected to somebody's flesh away from them, you better have something to put in its place. For me, so many years ago, that something was the cross.

Intellectually, like most of God's people today, I knew Christ paid the price for my sin. I knew that intellectually, but I needed to know to what depth that price really was. I was not satisfied with just the normal explanation of the cross of Calvary. I remember reading 1 Corinthians 6:19-20.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20

What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?

For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

I noted that I was to glorify God in my body and my spirit. I realized that those were the two key areas of whether I was going to make it or not with my new Christian life. It did not say "soul" because we know from Colossians chapter 2 that my soul was removed from my flesh, sealed by the Holy Spirit of God, and now it is sinless. The problem we all have today, if you are saved, is not your soul. The problem we have today is your spirit and your flesh. They too work together either against you or for you. Most of the people today come to the point where they lose their relationship with God because there was nothing there to fill that hole. So I started my own life, a search of the cross. I was asking God to teach me the lessons of the cross because I believe what Roy said: I believe that everything, the cross has everything for everybody.

IV. The Superficiality of Modern Christianity

As we have been going through John, it has been kind of like a walk down memory lane for me, kind of like old home week. Because I revisit and think about and look at my notes and look at some of the things that I pinned down almost 50 years ago and some things that helped me

understand. As we go through this, I want to take my time and all of these things and talk about the lessons of the cross that I learned that maybe also will help you. I knew that my new life started at the cross, and so does yours.

In a couple of weeks, all across the United States and across the world, Christians will make their annual pilgrimage to Easter. Churches will be packed. People will show up that you have not seen since Christmas. We like to get on to Jews because you know that they stand at the Wailing Wall and do all their things. We like to get on the Muslims because they go to Mecca. But Christians go to Easter. It is out of the great facade that we really care about His death, burial, and resurrection. You say I should not talk like that. Well, you can take the test. Just sit down and put on a piece of paper sometime, all those Old Testament passages without your Bible. Okay, use your Bible. From all those places in the Old Testament that really show you the price that was paid.

Most of God's people, most of the sermons, and I am not fighting it, it is just the way it is, but it is the truth, they will just skip, hop, and jump through Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, tell the story of the crucifixion. Back in the day, when a man preached on the crucifixion, you could actually see him being crucified. He painted such a vibrant picture of it. Not today. It is just a religious tradition that we all go through. We will celebrate Good Friday, and all that means to most people is someone gets it off from work. You do not even know why Good Friday is, or more importantly, why it should not be. We are just all caught up in the mechanics of it. Most of God's people today do not understand the lessons of the cross.

He showed me, as I went through this in my life, a progression in John's life in dealing with the crucifixion that really helped me by getting all of the four gospels together, as I have told you. Much of it was through the character study of the last chapters of John. I began to see an incredible process in John's life of what my life really needed to be. I saw through his books:

- I saw in the Gospel of John my salvation.
- I saw in 1 John how to build my fellowship.
- Then I saw in 2 and 3 John how to build my balance between New Testament Christianity and the nation of Israel and God dealing with the Jew.
- Then I saw God's hand down through church history and beyond, all the way up to eternity through the book of Revelation.

There I saw was the balance that I needed. That alone did not just give me the balance, but it showed me where I needed to do my work. If I was going to have that balance and I was going to get to the place where I understood what God was doing and, more important, what He wanted me to do, that is where I needed to start.

Then I saw a story that I needed to see about after all of that. My balance was not actually complete. I saw the Gospel of John, 1 John, 2nd and 3rd John, and Revelation, and that was an eye-opener to me, but it still was not quite complete yet. Then I saw a story that I needed to see about after all that, when I got into ministry, or I would get into ministry, as the Bible says in Ephesians 4:15, as I was growing up into Him, not undo Him, into Him, how to understand it all.

Little did I know at the time, looking back, you see things that you did not see. Little did I know at the time, not only was God working in my life to give me the balance that I wanted so desperately, God, all the way back then, was preparing my heart for you. Wherever you were out there, whatever you were doing, some of you were not even born yet, God prepared all of us for this point right here. God could have put you anywhere. If we really believe that God is the author of where we go and what we do, and the Bible says the paths of a good man or steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, if we really believe that, then you are where God wants you to be today. I do not know if you fully recognize that or understand that, but I can only speak for myself. I know this is where I am to be today. Because through all those lessons of the cross, He was preparing me without me even knowing it, without me even having a glimmer of what He was going to do with me at some point in time.

V. Simon of Cyrene: Bearing the Cross

It was another character study in John. We have looked at a number of them now, and today I want to look at a guy that he is not preached on too much, but his name is Simon from Cyrene. If you do not know who this guy is, this is the guy who, as Christ goes to the cross, and Christ is bearing that cross all by Himself, Christ obviously has been very weakened by the beatings, the scourgings, the whippings. Add to that, as the Roman ritual was, that the guy to be crucified had to carry his own cross, dragging it on the ground, which probably weighed two or three hundred, maybe more than that, pounds. He obviously cannot go on.

When I saw that and I started getting all the accounts together, I saw in Matthew 27:31-32 where he said this:

Matthew 27:31-32

And after that they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify him.

And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name: him they compelled to bear his cross.

When I went over to Mark 15:20-21, it said:

Mark 15:20-21

And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple from him, and put his own clothes on him, and led him out to crucify him.

And they compel one Simon a Cyrenian, who passed by, coming out of the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to bear his cross.

Then when you go over to Luke 23:26, it says:

Luke 23:26

And as they led him away, they laid hold upon one Simon, a Cyrenian, coming out of the country, and on him they laid the cross, that he might bear it after Jesus.

Now, Father, help us today to learn the lessons of the cross. These things are things that You taught me so many years ago. When I got saved, I did not want to be like everybody else. I just did not want to be the norm. I wanted to be everything that You wanted me to be. I know I have failed in that, and I am nowhere near what I could be or should be or need to be. But I understand it, and it is a struggle and a labor every day for me because I understand what it takes. So help us today, Lord, because these are good people here. These are men and women whom You have brought into this church through Your sovereignty. You have orchestrated their lives, worked their jobs, worked them from across the country to bring them here, worked them from wherever, worked them in Kansas City, put people, things, circumstances in their life, just like You did mine to get me here, You did with them to get them here. So may something that I learned years ago help them and let them know that I love them very much and I am here for them. I am not sure of many things in my life, but one of the things I am sure of outside of Your Bible is that I am where I need to be today. We will thank You and praise You in Jesus' name. For His sake, we ask it. Amen.

VI. The Price of Bearing the Cross

I do not know if you have picked it up yet or not, but you realize that this account is not in John. You would think something of this magnitude would be found in John. I want you to know everything about these things. I do not try to hold anything back; some things I forget, some things I do not see right off the bat, but I am looking through the eyes of 50 years of experience and looking at this stuff. You would think that this account ought to be in John, but I will tell you why it is not. With all the other heresies that have been propagated down through the centuries about Jesus' death, dying on the cross, the teaching came out shortly after in the first century that it was not Jesus that died on the cross, that it was actually Simon who died on the cross. So now might you be able to see the idea that when you have the Gospel of John, which deals with the Lord Jesus Christ and His deity, and everything is focused on who He is, the Son of God, the Word of God, you can see where the Holy Spirit of God would not put that in John to give any credibility whatsoever to anything anybody could say. That is why it is not in there.

Little things about the Bible. God showed me that Simon was a lesson that I needed to learn. Because if I decided to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, build my relationship, and ultimately bear the cross, I too would pay a price.

Galatians 6:17

From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.

We are told in 2 Timothy 2:12:

2 Timothy 2:12

If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us:

The denying us is not salvation; it is our reign. You have heard it said many, many times, "No cross, no crown." These are lessons from the cross.

When they took Simon and threw him to that wild, screaming, yelling mob, as he picked up his end of the cross, I can guarantee you they beat him, kicked him, threw rocks at him, spit on him, mocked him, just like they did Jesus. Because he too bore the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. When they threw him in there, everybody in that immediate area knew that he was the guy that they just picked. But as he went 100 yards down, 200 yards down, with this howling, incited crowd mob who has one goal, and that is they hate Jesus and they want to kill Him, they did not really make the distinction between Jesus or Simon. If you bear the cross, you bear the cross for the Lord Jesus Christ, you too will pay that price. The further he went, the more he got associated with Jesus by bearing and carrying that cross.

I look at the expanse of Christianity today, and I told you last week, I feel sorry and I understand so much confusion out there. The idea of a real Bible-based fellowship with Christ. We live in a Christianity that is so feel-good, so emotional, all warm and fuzzy. We have our fellowship groups and we have our little times together, and we use that term, and I get it, it is okay, but we use the term without ever understanding what that term really means. I am afraid today that in the Laodicean Christianity, many people have bought the devil's spirit of this age of what is really truth. When it is right in front of them, if you want the truth about fellowship with Christ, I get it, 1 John is a great deal. But 1 John says, "walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another." That does not mean you just put your arm around the Lord and start walking down the road of life together. Fellowship is "in the light as he is in the light." Did you ever notice how He is in the light? Because that is where your fellowship has to become biblical. We live in a Christianity that wants to have a fellowship, but we do not want to really care to know biblically what that fellowship is.

VII. Philippians 3:10 and the Fellowship of His Suffering

If somebody would ask me the definitive verse on my fellowship with the Lord or your fellowship of 1 John, where he talks about it, for me it would be Philippians 3:10. One of the most definitive verses in the Bible on fellowship, and you cannot get around this any way you want to.

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;

There are four parts to this verse. He says, "That I may know him and the power of his resurrection." That is your salvation. The day you got saved, you entered into a relationship with Jesus Christ to know Him. You could not know Him before. The Bible says the natural man understands not the things that are spiritually about Him. Neither can he know Him because they are spiritually discerned. That all went away the day you got saved. The day you got saved, you now have the ability to know who He really is, where up to this point you did not. The tragedy is up to this point, your understanding of Christ was just what you heard, what you read, or what

somebody told you. After that, when you begin to develop your relationship of walking in the light as He is in the light, that all changes. The problem is most of God's people never get into the light of the Word. They just keep listening to what everybody tells them fellowship is supposed to be. It has nothing to do with the Bible.

"But I may know him, power of his resurrection." That is the day you got saved. You got saved because, yes, they put Him in the tomb, but yes, God brought Him out. It is because of the resurrection you and I can know Him, have that salvation. So once you see those two phrases in the first part of the verse, "that I may know him the power of his resurrection," then here comes after you are saved. You want fellowship? Do you? Do you want to have fellowship with Christ? Do you want to have fellowship with Christ? Well, let us get the right definition on it then. "That I may know him the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death." You see, bearing the cross of Christ, experiencing all the stuff out there of the world hating Him, then hating you. God's people hating Him, and hating you. That is where your fellowship really is. It is through that, and only through that. Just read the verse. Either read the verse or go down to Walmart and get an X-Acto cutter and cut it out. But the verse says what it says: "fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death." The only way you and I are conformed to Him is by the bearing of the cross and bearing the suffering like He did for the truth of the Word of God.

VIII. Truth Divides: The Cost of Standing for Doctrine

There are a number of issues with Christianity today, and it all comes back to the Laodicean church age. I understand that. This is not necessarily a criticism; it is just quoting facts. We live in a Christianity today that thinks that we can be conformed to Christ without any suffering for the truth. That is our first problem. We live in a Christianity that thinks that they can be conformed to Christ. You can have fellowship with Christ without experiencing the suffering that He went through in bearing the cross.

Let me ask you a question. It is an honest question. Who hates you today because of your commitment to the truth of the Word of God? We live in a Christianity where we all want to get along with everybody. Paul said, "Get along with men as best you can," because sometimes you cannot, because of your commitment to the truth. I am not talking about the world or your Christian life. I am talking about your commitment to the truth, plain and simple. The spirit of this age, the Word of God. Who today in your life is no longer your friend? Who today that you once were buddies with, girlfriends with? Who today is no longer your friend because of the Word of God that put a division between you? That is an honest question. Do not look at me like the way you are looking at me. That is an honest question. Because if you bear the cross and you are in fellowship with His suffering, then you are going to come to the point where you are going to have some problems with people.

Who today is no longer your friend because you told them, "Hey, that is the wrong thing to do. That is not right. I love you. I am your friend. So I feel like I need to tell you, you are headed down the wrong road." When you do that with somebody you care about, in most cases, they are not going to be your friend anymore. But God's people today, we do not want any ripples in our

Christian life. We do not want to rock the boat. We do not want somebody to look at us and think, "Well, I am not going to be that person's friend anymore because they told me the truth." Listen, the spirit of this age: no Bible, no doctrine, so we can all just get together and love God together. What planet do you live on? Is that what Jesus did? Why do you think they crucified Him? Why do you think He bore the cross to Calvary? It is because of the truth that He told His own people. Forget Rome, forget Herod, forget Pilate. He went to His own people in His own congregation, the nation of Israel. Did He try to get along with everybody?

One of the things that you are going to find, hopefully from this, that I had to find out years ago, we all like to pretend we are New Testament Christians. We just do nothing that real New Testament Christians did. We got caught up in the game. I want you to know, I want you to understand, nobody likes to have people mad at them. If you love somebody and care for somebody, you see them going down the wrong road and you say something to them, and they take it, unless they are something special, initially they are going to take offense of it. You know why? Because they are already gone. I have told people many, many times, pastors with churches, when somebody leaves your church, their body may leave on Tuesday, but their heart left six months ago. When you try to talk to somebody in your friendship world, whose heart has already departed, you are not going to get a warm reception. I get it. I understand. Who wants conflict? Who wants consternation? Who wants issues? Who wants somebody not to like you? Nobody. But I ask you again, is that what Jesus did? Christianity is so far from reality today.

I will ask you something else. Is that what Paul did? Paul had a list of people in his world that caused division against his preaching and starting churches. He lists people in there that were against him, tried to stop him. Look at the church at Corinth. There is a group of people that he started that church, and they got off track. He writes 1 Corinthians, read it. There is no lovey-dovey, "Oh, we are all one here, we can all wear." No. He says in chapter one, "You are a bunch of babies. You need to grow up. You need to stop doing this." He nails them every chapter. Do you think they enjoyed it? I guarantee you they did not. In fact, in 2 Corinthians, there is still a group around there, and they look at him and they say, "Paul, who do you think you are? Who are you that come into this church and tell us we are not doing right? Who do you think you are? We need to see some letters of authenticity that you have all of this power you say you have." Paul, who do you think you are? His answer was, "Who am I? I am the guy that showed you the Lord Jesus Christ and the Word of God when you were dying and going to hell. That is who I am."

We do that. Jesus did not do it. Paul did not do it. Every key leader in the Bible, Old Testament and New Testament, had God's own people hate them for their stand on the truth. Forget the world. You say Moses. Well, Pharaoh, forget Pharaoh. Moses' own people wanted to stone him how many times simply because he held the line with truth. Abraham, are you kidding me? Look at the problems that him and Lot had. Joseph, are you kidding me? He was not sold into slavery by the Egyptians. He was sold into slavery by his own brothers. David. David had a lot of enemies, but the worst enemy he ever had was his own son, Absalom. How about in the New Testament? Peter, Paul, and John. They all go through struggles in their ministry. They all deal with things, and they all wind up being murdered.

Then the Old Testament prophets back in Hebrews 11:35-39, it says:

Hebrews 11:35-39

Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection:

And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment:

They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented;

(Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise:

These are the prophets of God. All that torment did not come from the world. They came from the very nation that God sent them to with the truth of God's Word to get them right with God. I am going to tell you something, folks. Your idea of fellowship and God's idea of fellowship are two different things. This is the mess of the Laodicean church. Our fellowship is the fellowship of His suffering. What makes you any better than the Old Testament prophets being sawn in half? Why? Honestly, the truth of the New Testament Christian is to be the job of an Old Testament prophet. They went to a nation in apostasy with God's truth. You and I are to go to a Christianity in apostasy with God's truth. The end result will be the same.

Here is the second problem Christians have. This is found in Luke 12:51-53. Nothing like a Bible to clear up your screwed-up thoughts about what Christianity is.

Luke 12:51-53

Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division:

For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three.

The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother in law against her daughter in law, and the daughter in law against her mother in law.

God did this idea of everybody getting together. You know what divides these people? The truth of the Word of God. Doctrine. You take doctrine out of Christianity today, then everybody wants to get together because there is nothing left to divide. So your fellowship becomes a nice big marshmallow. It becomes a nice big sponge in a bucket of water that is so soaked up with everything that it is worthless anymore. Guys like me, "Oh, I am a troublemaker." Praise the Lord. Praise God, we need a couple more.

Years ago, a long time ago, I had a girl in my ministry that, she was a sweetie, beautiful girl. Got saved. Was doing well. Then I noticed that she kind of started to lose her edge a little bit. I

remember talking with her and just pulling her aside and just asking her, "Hey, is everything okay?" "Oh yeah, everything is fine, everything is good." I did not know at the time that she had met some guy. He was not a Christian. In fact, my memory serves me right, he played in some rock band someplace. She knew better. As she continued to develop that relationship, she got farther and farther away from church. It was the old pattern: she started missing one Sunday a month, and then two Sundays a month, and three Sundays a month.

I remember the last conversation I had with her. Sometimes when you know that that is the last shot, you have to put it all on the table. I really had a heart-to-heart with her. By that time, her heart was with this guy and that world. I remember the last thing that she had told me, the last thing she said to me was the fact that she knew that what she was doing was the right thing to do because she had come to church, she got saved. I really believe she did. But that she was going to just go with this guy, and that if that meant that she had to give up church and the Bible and God for this guy, then that is what she had to do. You have to know, I jumped on that.

Well, she left. She had some other girlfriends that were in the ministry that were good people too. They obviously stayed in church. She had told them her version of our meeting, and they were upset with me because of the way I handled it. I am okay with that. I did it like I had done it a thousand other times. Well, fast forward. About a year and a half later, she was killed in a very tragic car accident. She was out with this group doing something drunk, driving home at a high rate of speed, hit somebody or something. The car exploded into flames, and she burned to death in that car.

Her mother called me. She wanted me to do the funeral. I, as sympathetic as I could be, being sensitive to everybody involved, I tried to explain to the mother that I did not think that that was probably a good idea. I said, "First of all," I said, "if she was alive and she had to pick somebody to do her funeral, I do not think it would be me." I said, "The second thing is, what do I say? I want to be respectful to you. I do not want to make you feel bad because obviously you are not where you can understand the truth of this whole thing." I said, "What am I going to say? Do I get up and talk about what a wonderful Christian she was? How she impacted people?" I said, "I do not think so." I said, "Look," I said, "for \$250, the funeral home has some old retired preacher from someplace that for \$250, they bring in when you do not have somebody, and he will tell the people whatever you want him to say. She will be up there with a Virgin Mary if that is what you want." I said, "But I cannot get into a situation and lie about it. I am sorry." She understood.

I did not do the funeral. I did not go to the funeral. But six months later, these three girls came in to see me. They were obviously upset now. They were upset because I did not do the funeral. They began to talk about this great tragedy that had happened of her dying and being killed in this car wreck, and on and on and on. I am really a nice guy. But push me to a point, and I will not hold back on what the truth really is. Sometimes I will play with the truth to spare people because I understand sometimes you have to do that to get another end. But there comes a point you push me. I said, "You know what the tragedy is, is it is a tragedy. But," I said, "most likely, probably, it was not the car wreck that killed her." They looked at me and they said, "What do you mean?" I said, "I do not think probably. I might be wrong. But from what I know, what I know about the circumstance in the situation, I do not think it was the car crash that killed her."

The one girl says, "Well, what do you think it was?" "You three girls. You three girls probably are responsible for her death. Maybe. Good chance. You know why? Because you probably were the only ones that were close enough to her to tell her the truth about where she was that she might have listened to. She did not listen to me. She got mad at me. I was not as close to her as you girls were. Somebody that loved her. You are shedding tears over her now. If you would have shed these same tears before over her being out of fellowship with God and going to her and saying to her, 'Look, this is not right. You know better than this. You know that God is not going to allow you to do this. We are praying for you. We will be here for you. We will help you.' I said, 'You three girls probably were the only three people on this planet that could have reached her if she was reachable.' Now, what did you do?" They are just looking at me now. I said, "What did you do?" The one girl in the middle says, "Well, we took her side against the truth, did not we, Bob?" I said, "Lesson learned."

Nobody wants to hold anybody accountable. Parents, it starts with your kids. You do not want to hold them accountable. I have had parents tell me, "Well, I do not want to discipline my kids. I do not want to do this to my kid or my kids into this. And I do not want to do this. I do not want that because I am afraid I will lose them." You have already lost them. You are like a little kid that went for a ride with his dad in the car, and the kid is up front. The kid keeps standing up in the front seat. Dad says, "You need to sit down." The kid does not sit down. He keeps looking around, and he is having a ball. Dad says, "I told you to sit down." The kid just does not sit down. He is just looking around and finding a dad and drifting. "Man, sit down." A little kid looked up and said, "I may be sitting physically, but I am standing in my mind." There it is.

You know why those three girls did not do what they should have done? Bear the fellowship of His suffering. Hold that young girl to the truth. Instead, they said, "Oh, you are fine. Everything is good. Oh, let us do this. Let us have fun. Let us go have that." Nobody, nobody cared for her soul enough that if it meant giving up their friendship, they would tell her the truth. Tell me about it, pal. Jesus said, "I did not come to put everybody together. I did not come to get it. I came to divide because truth will divide." The question is, which side of that truth are you coming down on?

Paul, I love this. Paul in the book of Galatians, he was faced with the same problem. He had started that church. He had won those people to Christ. He is out doing something else, someplace else. He gets word that they now have got some new gospel, some new doctrine. Somebody has come into this Bible-believing church that Paul started. Now somebody is teaching and everything, and all this is great stuff. Somebody is teaching now, "Oh yeah, you have to believe in Jesus to be saved, but you have to keep the law too." Paul got wind of it. Your whole book of Galatians is him dealing with it. This is God's people, just like today, who have departed from the truth, and Paul takes them to task. You better learn this. He loved these people. He cared enough about them to win them to Christ. He cared enough about them to invest his life in them. He cared enough about them to come back when he saw they had some doctrinal issues that were going to destroy that church. He did not come in and say, "Hey, let us just all get together and talk about this." He did not say, "Hey, you know what? You are okay. I am okay. You know what? Ah, we can win." No. He went back to the book. He nailed them. Then he gives

the classic statement in the Bible that every one of you, every one of you who you even have an inkling, if you are going to pick up and bear the cross, every one of you better learn what he said, because you have to love it.

Galatians 4:16

Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?

"Am I therefore become your enemy?" "Hey, come on, guys." Talking to them. "Come on, guys. You know what we taught you. You know what the Bible says. You know how God changed your life the day you got saved. Now you guys are getting a bad doctrine. You get another Jesus. You get another gospel. So I come in here because I love you, because I care about you, because I do not want to see you go down that road, and I tell you the truth. And am I become your enemy? Have I become your enemy?" He says, "Look, guys, have I become your enemy because I tell you the truth?" The answer is, you bet you will. Bank on it. Because truth divides.

Those three young girls sat there in my office, and tears welled up in their eyes. They said, "You know what? We got suckered into that thing, Bob. We just did not want to go against what she was doing. We knew she was wrong. We knew she was way out of fellowship. But we just did not have the courage to tell her." "Am I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?" You see, before we can ever fellowship with each other, we have to be in fellowship with His suffering.

The best way I can explain that, that maybe you can grasp it, is in the military there is a bond between men in combat together and other military people who have never experienced combat. I do not know how many people have told me that your grandfathers came back from World War II, and they never talked about anything that went on with them. Some of them had severe nightmares for years. Some had problems forgetting the terror and the horror of what they were part of or what they saw. But they never talked about it. I have seen Vietnam vets that came back from Vietnam, and same thing. They get turned to drugs, they turn to alcohol, they turn to all kinds of things, like they did in World War II. But they never talk about their experiences. You know why? Because you will never understand what real combat is. You do not know what it is like to live in a foxhole for three or four weeks living in your own waste material. You do not know what it is like to be freezing at night. You do not know what it is like with tracers zooming over your head. You do not know what it is like to be down on the bottom of a hole someplace while the artillery is coming in for not just 20 minutes, 30 minutes, sometimes for two or three days. You know what it is like to lay there and see your best friend that you went on leave with or your best friend that you buddied up with get blown to pieces or cut in half or see him out there get shot. He screams for you to come and get him, but you cannot. There is a bond between combat soldiers that common ordinary people will never get to because you never experienced what combat really is.

In the Christian world, it is hard to have fellowship. If you are bearing the cross and you are in the thick of it and you are in the fight of it and you are dealing with everything that comes your way, it is really hard to have fellowship with some mamsy-pamsy Christian who will never put it on the line. Because real fellowship does not come because we got the right Bible. It does not

come because we all like each other. It does not come because we all go to Jason's Deli, though that is suffering. It comes because we bear the cross together. We stand for the truth together. That will bring combat in our lives. That will bring circumstances, people, places, things that we have to take a stand for in the truth through the fellowship of His suffering so we can fellowship together through that suffering. I am just telling you, you can do whatever you want, write me off, write me in. I do not care. If you are getting along with everybody and nobody is against you, there is something wrong with your Christianity.

You say, "Well, I think..." Tell it to the Waldensians. "Well, Bob, I think you are..." Tell it to the Paulicians. Tell it to the Cathari. Tell it to the Huguenots. Tell it to the men and women who really understood the fellowship of His suffering, sawn in two, mocked and scourged. God's people today, for the most part, are the embodiment of the spirit of this age: no truth, passive, feel-good Christianity, lethargic, having a form of Christianity that really is not real. As I learned these lessons and I saw this in Simon, I came away from that thing saying, "Hey, look, God, I will probably fail a thousand times, but one thing I just begged You not to let me do, never let me turn tail my life against the truth. If it is right, it is right. If it is truth, it is truth."

IX. No Race in New Testament Christianity

Then I saw another great lesson from the cross. Simon, my example of me bearing the cross of Christ, my ministry of the fellowship of His suffering. Then I saw this. Out of this story came another story, and boy, did I ever get this one down. Out of this story here, I actually found my answer to racism. These are lessons from the cross.

Race today is everywhere and in everything. The race card is played in every area of life. Black Lives Matter painted on the streets down in a plaza, the NAACP. You have the Ku Klux Klan, white power, the Aryan Brotherhood guys. Back in the sixties and the seventies, you had the Black Panthers, you had Malcolm X. You had back in the sixties and the seventies, Martin Luther King, Jesse Jackson, the civil rights movement, the movement of the sixties, black power. I was reading this week about the death of the three civil rights workers down in Mississippi in the sixties. They had went down there to register black people to vote, and the South was so racist and so anti, they killed all three of them. You probably maybe saw the movie *Mississippi Burning*. It is based on that story.

Everybody in this church ought to go back and study a little guy by the name of Emmett Till, not in Alabama in the sixties, murdered, beat to pieces, hung, weighted down with a grist wheel and thrown into the Tallahatchie River. They pulled his body out five days later. He looked like he was just a human. He looked like something from another planet. He was so deformed from the beatings and the slappings and the things that they did to him. His mother took him back to Chicago, and she demanded that there be an open casket. All the world saw what the white man did to that boy.

I think back of World War II, the famous Tuskegee Airmen. They were all black, out of Tuskegee College down there in the South, and somebody got the bright idea to form them into a fighter squadron. I cannot tell you how the white man was against that. I cannot tell you how American

politicians and generals fought against it, because in World War II all black people could do would be cooks, orderlies. They were segregated from the combat troops. It was not until Korea that that happened. It is unbelievable what they did. I have read it. I have seen it. I have talked to those guys. They said, "Well, these guys will never make good pilots." Somebody said, "Why?" He says, "Because over in Africa, back in the day when their mothers were swinging between the trees, the guys do not have good equilibrium to fly a fighter plane." Are you kidding me?

So they got their fighter squadron. At first they were stuck in Italy. Once the war passed, they were flying old P-40s and just doing nothing. But somebody fought for them. So they moved them into Europe and they gave them P-51 Mustangs. They became the crack outfit that when they were doing bomber escort, in all of their escort, not one B-17 was ever shot down while they were escorting them. Not one. In fact, the B-17 pilots, they painted their tails red, and they are called the Red Tails. When those guys saw that, they breathed a sigh of relief because they knew those guys were not going to back off when the Luftwaffe came in. In fact, they started asking for those guys to fly for them. But the white men treated them terrible. Think of Jackie Robinson. Some of the terrible things that white people did to the blacks.

It is terrible today. The liberals, the hate groups get hold of the old race card, and they will use it in everybody. Back in the 60s and the 70s, 80s, 90s, it was racist with black people. It still is. But now we have added a new twist to it. Now, if you do not accept the gays and the transgenders and the lesbians, you are also a racist. You see where it goes? I heard a preacher say the other day that the reason why the price of eggs are so high is because all the hens want to be roosters. You like that, did not you, Barb? Put that in your principle so you can share that with somebody.

The race riots of the 60s, they tore this country apart. Kansas City had terrible race riots. When I first moved here in 1975, if you lived in Raytown, Terry Job can be my witness, if you were black, you did not drive through Raytown. It was a sundown town then, right? When it was a sundown town, yeah. If you were a black guy and you drove through Raytown, they stopped you. Terrible racist place. Terrible. Absolutely terrible. Down south, it was terrible.

All that crept into fundamental Baptist churches. There is a tendency, if you are watching history, that because Christianity failed and the world went the way that it did, the world returns the favor, and wherever the world goes, it then seeps into Christianity. White Baptist churches back in the 60s and the 70s and even the 80s were completely segregated. They wanted to keep the blacks and whites from mixing. The reason for it was in the Old Testament, the nation of Israel was told not to marry and mix with other nations. They took that to mean white people should not marry black people. I could not believe it. We had a guy one time, and the pastor took a real hard stand on it, but he had a missionary that was a white guy come there for Mexico, and his wife was Mexican. That is okay. Totally wrong. Totally wrong.

I come from the Canton Baptist Temple. In the 1970s, no blacks were allowed to come to that church. I remember one time a black and white couple came into the service. They were asked to leave. I won a black kid to Christ up at the Hoover Company by the name of John Tony. He later became a pastor of a church down in the Mansfield area someplace. I actually saw him again after 30, 40 years when Mel died, come up to see me. I won that young man to Christ, and he

was on fire for God. He wanted to serve God. I was young and stupid back then. I went to Mel and said, "Hey, Mel, John Tony wants to get baptized." He looked at me and he said, "Ain't no way, Bob." He said, "This church will never baptize a black person." I said, "You are kidding me." He says, "No, just the way it is." I said, "Mel, I do not know what to do." He says, "I do. Bring him in tonight at 10 o'clock, and I will baptize him up there with nobody here." And we did. I praise the Lord that he had the guts for that, but that is what churches were. I am sorry. If you do not know that, that is your fault. It was terrible.

Temple Baptist Church in Detroit. That was J. Frank Norris's church. I had a pastor friend of mine that went up there to be the pastor. The only questions about his candidacy to be accepted as a pastor, the only question all the deacons asked him, "If we make you our pastor, will you promise us that never a black person will join this church?" No Bible college would accept them. BBC would not. Tennessee Temple would not. That is probably not a bad thing. Looking back at this with what I am about to tell you, I would say that white Baptist churches had the chance to fix the race problem in America. With what I am about to tell you, with what God showed me, and I am a nobody. I was even a lesser nobody. I was not even a somebody back then. Nobody listened to me. Nobody listened to me today. But I am telling you right now, just as the Baptist churches could have held back and held on to the King James Bible being the Word of God instead of selling it out, Baptist churches back in my day, they could have brought an end to race bigotry from their churches if they had just stayed with the Bible. Let me show you what I mean.

I have never been racist. Do not have a racist bone in my body. I grew up in all of that. Where I grew up in Canton, Ohio, I grew up on the other side of the tracks. But God gave me some lessons from the cross. First off, dealing with race, black, white, yellow, purple, whatever. In Christ, we all know that there is neither Jew nor Gentile. But in Christ, there is neither black or white. There is neither yellow, Mexican. There is no race in Christianity in salvation. Like it or not, blacks and whites, Jews and Gentiles, when you get saved, you are all in one body. There is not one body for the white people and one body for the black people. You are one body. There is absolutely no race in New Testament Christianity.

Here is how God answered the race question for me. That not only did I have the answer, but it showed me what the problem really was. Do you realize that when we get into the New Testament, the beginning of Christianity, that the whole New Testament and New Christianity start with four black men? If you are in the Ku Klux Klan, you better leave now.

1. The first time you find it is in Acts chapter 8 with the Ethiopian eunuch. He is black. He is from Africa. He is an Ethiopian. He is a eunuch. When he finds salvation, every aspect of him getting saved is exactly how you got saved. Every part of it. From every aspect of soul winning is found in that story. He is the first man in your Bible in the New Testament who got saved exactly the way you and I got saved. And he is black.
2. Our second man, Simon from Cyrene. Cyrene is modern-day Benghazi. That is in Africa, the land of Ham. In Matthew 27, Mark 15, and Luke 23, a black man shows me how to bear the cross.
3. and 4.) are found in Acts chapter 13 at the church in Antioch.

Acts 13:1

Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

"Simeon that was called Niger." That is where your famous N-word comes from. "Niger," Latin, is black. If you go down to Central America or some Latin American country and you go into a store and you want to buy a black shirt, it will be "niger" on it. It is black. That is what "niger" means. That is where this despicable N-word comes from that is such a disparaging thing to say about anybody. So Simon is black. Then Lucius of Cyrene, that is in Africa. So he is black. Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the Tetrarch, and Saul. That is a crew, brother.

That showed me that in the New Testament church, that is the model church, you had Simon who is black, Lucius who is black, you had Barnabas who is a Jew, you had Manaen who was a Gentile who grew up with the great Roman Herod the Tetrarch who killed thousands of Christians. Then you had Saul, Paul, who is a converted Jew, and then we will add to it a little bit later on, you have Timothy who is a half Jew and half Gentile. His mom is a Jew, his dad is a Greek. You know what I saw from that? That is the model New Testament church. Everybody from every walk of life, from every race, bound together by the blood of Christ into one body, that in Christianity, Bible Christianity, there is no race.

If the churches of my day would have preached that message, and it would have been preached across the country, if Billy Graham would have got a hold of it, if everybody would have got a hold of it, and that would have hit the airwaves with every radio preacher and everybody, and this world would have heard that thing, it would have solved the race problem because there is no race problem in Christianity. The only ones left to be racist would be the ones that are dying and going to hell anyhow. But God's people would have held the line of truth. You know why they did not? Come on now. We have spent the last hour or so. You know why they did not do it? They are afraid of what the brethren would think. They would lose their status in the fellowship. If you had your doctorate degree from Bob Jones University, in most cases it was an honorary one because you did not earn one there. They just passed them out like fentanyl, and they killed them in both cases. They would take it back from you. They were afraid. This is the state of Christianity that we are in today. Nobody wants to stand for what is really true. We always want to take the easy way out. We do not want people mad at us. You have no idea of a hierarchy in Baptist churches back in the day, and I am sure it still is with the old guys. But back in my day, the hierarchy in Baptist churches was unbelievable. You think the Democrats and Republicans have something going? It was unbelievable. Those guys were as political as any Democrat or Republican you will ever find, and they all were scratching their way to the top, and truth never entered in when it affected them getting to the top. So they were not going to stick their neck out for anybody. It is hard to be critical with guys like that, even though I am, because we are all the same way. We will not take our stand at a fellowship of His suffering. We will stand by, as my mama used to say, "Silence is consent," and we will just let it go.

X. The Christian Has No Rights

Here is the third issue, and I am done. Laodicea means "rights of the people," and as a Christian, you and I have no rights. You are a bondsman. Read the book of Philemon. We have been bought with a price, and yet today all Christianity is all about their rights. In a Christian world, there are no rights, but everybody wants their rights. We are a bondsman. The whole New Testament is built on four men who were servant of servants. The whole introduction to your Christian life and your service from getting saved to bearing the cross to the fellowship of the suffering to the ministry in the church. It is all set apart by four men who in their day were servant of servants. You know why? Because we need to be servant of servants. There is no place in hierarchy with God's people today.

Mel used to say it. He says, "Christianity has lost its impact." Somebody said, "What do you mean?" He says, "Well, it has gotten too big." "Well, what do you mean by that? What should Christianity be?" He would say it. I can see him saying it. "Christianity just needs to be one beggar telling another beggar where to get bread." We have lost that because we want our rights. We think our liberty in Christ is the Christian manifesto that we can do whatever we want to do, but truth, again, back to the Bible, your liberty, my liberty was not given as the Christian bill of rights to do what we wanted to do, but rather that we would have the freedom through salvation to do whatever God wanted us to do without interfering with the law.

XI. Conclusion: Bearing the Cross

As I saw the cross and all the elements of my Christian life came into focus through the men and women, their lives from in these great chapters, I now realized back then that my new life started at the cross with my salvation. Through my building a balance in my life and understanding God's plan balance, then seeing that my fellowship with Christ had to be with the fellowship of His suffering first. So some 50 plus years ago, like Simon, I picked up my end of the cross and have been carrying it ever since. I am not saying I have not dropped it a few times. Sometimes I tripped over it, but I understood as the bearer of God's truth as we bear the cross. These are lessons from the cross.

I asked you a couple of weeks ago or last week to try to look in there to see where I am going. I do not know how many of you hit it, but now you can figure out where I am going next week. I am planning these things around Easter. I have a systematic thing so that when Easter gets here, you have every truth found in the Word of God about what really happened back then. So that is where we are at. Today you have got the next piece with your puzzle.

Let us have prayer and we will be finished. Father, we do thank You and praise You for the Lord Jesus. We love You. Lord, how confused we get today. How we portray all of ourselves in Christianity as, "Oh, what real Christians should be." And yet when You open up that book, we are so far from what we really need to be. Lord, it is a thing where these are lessons that You taught me years ago, and I have forgotten them at times. I have lost sight of them. It is so easy in the world that we live in with so much clutter and so many things that the value system gets changed, and we lose sight of what is real. We relegate fellowship to going to eat someplace or hanging out with good fellowship Christian people. All that is true, but real biblical fellowship is down in the trenches. Real biblical fellowship is standing for the truth, no matter who it offends,

no matter who does not want to be our friend anymore, no matter who likes what we say. If we love people enough, then we need to tell them the truth. But as Paul said, "Have I become your enemy because I tell you the truth?" And yes, you will. Help us, Father, to learn, to grow, and to build that fellowship with You that only can come through understanding the lessons from the cross. We will thank You and praise You in Jesus' name. For the sake of our sake, we ask it. Amen. God bless you. If you have not gone to the bookstore yet, please make your way over there and get your free gift, depending on who you are. Amen.