

Is The United States A Christian Nation? (Part 6)

Circumcising Our Hearts With Humility

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The previous sermon in this series began with quotes from the mind of Martin Luther. I gave you those quotes because I wanted to illustrate a simple point, and that is that there can be a very great difference between the reality of what a person is and what people say or are led to believe about that person.

Martin Luther's confession of himself, both in his words and his conduct, reveals him to be far from being Christian, and yet he is held to be a great Christian leader by the misinformed public. Now in like manner, a misinformed public believes that this nation has been Christian and was founded by Christian men. But the clean biblical evidence shows that neither of these opinions is true. The reality is that even though many Christian principles appear in our founding documents, and people practice what is commonly called "the Christian religion," the founders *were* not Christian, and the nation has never been Christian. This evidence is revealed when personal beliefs and conduct are compared against the Bible's standards.

The United States of America is a kingdom of this world, and has always been a kingdom of this world. This in no way means that our founders were highly immoral deceivers. They simply did not know. They were conducting themselves and saying things that they thought in all sincerity were true.

I want you to turn to I John 2:15. This is probably one of the best-remembered of the Apostle John's writings.

I John 2:15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

This is a critical admonition for the Christian.

In those previous sermons, I attempted to impress on us that we live life surrounded by what Jesus, Paul, and John called "the world." "The world" is the abode and the tool of our spiritual enemies; that is, the "principalities" and "powers," as Paul termed them. The world is mankind's arrangement of systems and values important to them, but in opposition to God. That word translated "world" basically means "order, arrangement" as in flowers are arranged in an order.

From here now, with that opening admonition, I want us to go to John 15, and we will see Jesus make a supporting statement regarding this.

John 15:18-19 "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own [because we would be part of the world]. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

The word "hate" there is very important. The world *hates* Jesus, and the world hates Christians. Jesus, many times, warned us that this would be part and parcel of our lives. The world hates His true followers. However, when we search further, we find that it is really not the ordinary citizen of the

world who is at the root of the problem. It is the "principalities and powers"—demon spirits and Satan who use the people of the world, inciting them to hate us.

Let us see some support for this in another very common scripture by the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 6:10-12.

Ephesians 6:10-12 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Now, we are on earth. What does Paul mean by "heavenly places"? We are not in heaven, are we? No. "Heavenly" is a word indicating "the spiritual realm." And "heavenly," as the Apostle Paul is using it, takes place right on earth, but he is talking about the "source" of the spirit.

I think you understand that Satan originally was a "heavenly" creature. That is where he was created, and that is where he operates from. The people on earth truly do not know why they persecute us. They just do it, and this is because they are influenced by invisible spiritual forces, and more or less driven against another invisible spiritual force—the spirit of God, our Creator. And where are we? We are right in the middle between these two forces.

The important thing for you and me to recognize in terms of practicality to this, is that the Bible clearly shows a "them and us" circumstance exists in a Christian's life. Indeed, brethren, sometimes it is right in one's own home, because the husband is called, but the wife is not; or the wife is called and the husband is not; or one child is called and the other one is not. And so it is very easy for that person who is *not* called to be very hateful toward the one who *is* called. Now this gets down and dirty right close, and there is nothing we can do really to escape the reality of it.

I want to qualify that maybe a little bit later, but if I do not, I want you to know there are things that we can do about it, but sometimes God does not let that pressure up, and if He does not, it is for our own good to motivate us to do something.

Since we are put right smack-dab in the middle of these opposing spiritual powers, this warfare forces us to choose, and to declare by our own words and conduct whose side we are on. It is the making of those choices that God's purpose for creating us in the character-image of Jesus Christ is achieved, and we are prepared for the Kingdom of God. That is why Paul says that our warfare is there, and it is real. It may not be bloody, but it is real. There are spiritual forces at work that cause us to have to make choices and show our loyalties, and in the process character is either developed or destroyed.

Now this begins to get back to the major differences between the world and God's influence. The world uses its physical powers to manipulate and coerce us to accept *its* agenda and ways. God also uses His powers for the benefit of those called. In contrast to the world, His use of His powers is very heavily tilted toward intellectual and spiritual persuasion that allows one to freely choose of one's own volition rather than being brutally forced by means of raw fear.

Through a relationship with Him, God persuades us by demonstration of His love, grace, mercy, kindness, patience, and goodness. He gives gifts to us to enable us to know, to understand, and to be

impressed by an awesome vision of hope that lies before those willing to choose His way. God does not need to use brute force against us, and there is a reason why. His entire approach in underlying His way of life and conduct is built upon a vastly different spirit, beliefs, attitudes, and perspectives.

Let us begin delving into why this is by turning to the very foundational statements regarding Christianity in the Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew 5:1-3 And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying:
"Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Before we go any further, let us notice the first thing He says involves an attitude. He lays the foundation for Christianity: the activities, the perspective, the thought, the drift of Christianity.

The entire Sermon on the Mount is an overview of the foundation of Christian beliefs, attitudes, and standards of conduct, and the level for each is very high, but not impossible to reach, because God's calling of each person into His kingdom *enables* the person to attain them. In each Christian's calling, God personally confronts him, revealing Himself to the degree necessary to trigger that person's realization that pleasing God is important to his life. He does this by His spirit, thus drawing the person into a relationship with Him. This is one really good thing we can see.

We can see this principle I just said here in the Apostle Paul. Here was the enemy of God trudging along. He was going to put Christian people in prison. And then *wham!* God revealed Himself to him dramatically. He suddenly blinded the Apostle Paul so that he could "see" (if you get the drift here). Almost immediately Paul changed.

This does not happen to everybody in such a dramatic way, but it is an illustration that gives us understanding of what *does* happen to every one of us in less dramatic ways. He just knocked the wind right out of Paul's sails, and just that quick Paul said, "What do you want me to do, Lord?" Before that he was pummeling the Lord's people. Now he says, "What do you want *me* to do?" God was not done with him yet. "I want you to go into the city, and we will carry on from there." Paul obediently complied. The attitude was already substantially changed from a man who was against God to a man who was willing to submit himself. He was very compliant.

In each Christian's calling, God personally confronts them, revealing Himself to the degree necessary to trigger that person's realization that pleasing God is important to his life. He does this by His spirit, and that begins the drawing of a person into a relationship with Him.

I once read the work of a commentator who changed the name "Kingdom of God" to "the Kingdom of Jesus." It took me a while to comprehend why he did that, and in a while I came to agree with him that it is an appropriate name under the circumstances of which he was writing.

We are going to look at three scriptures linked together that have to do with both Jesus and us, and we will begin to see something arise. Remember, I said just a little bit ago that this word "heavenly" is important to you and me. It indicates something spiritual.

We are going to go to John 8:23.

John 8:23 And He said to them [the Jews], "You are from beneath; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world.

This shows a very clear division between the world and the Kingdom of God; between the world and Jesus.

Let us now look at Luke 17:20-21.

Luke 17:20-21 Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!'—[as if they were pointing.] For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you."

Your Bible may say "within you." That is not a good translation. My Bible has a correction. My Bible says, "It is in your midst." "The kingdom of God is in your midst." Some Bibles may say, "The kingdom of God is *among* you." He did not say it was *in them*, but rather, "it was in their midst." Who was it? It was Jesus. He is clearly identifying that He is different from an ordinary citizen of the world. They are of the world. The Kingdom of God was in Him. He represented it.

Let us attach this to you and me, because once we are called, once we have been baptized, had hands laid on us and received the Holy Spirit of God, we come into the same circumstance as Jesus.

I Corinthians 15:48-49 As was the man of dust [earthy], so also are those who are made of dust; [Physically we are fit into that category. We are made of dust physically.] and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly [us, once we have the spirit of God]. And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man.

Here the Apostle Paul takes it all the way to the end result where we are spirit, even as Jesus is spirit. But we have already begun to trod that path, and we are now heavenly. Even though born on earth, we are heavenly. We are spiritual, because the spirit we have has its source in heaven. So Jesus, though similar to all men born on earth, clearly came from another dimension, and thus His attitudes, His perspective, His conduct reflected His point of spiritual origin. His physical origin was in Nazareth, but His spiritual origin was in heaven.

A very simple picture of what is being said is that Southerners are very clearly recognized by the drawl in their voice. You know in a minute that person is from the Southeast. You do not even have to think about it. It is so carnal. What Jesus was saying is similar to that. He was saying, "I am not from this dimension." But that was something with which they were totally unfamiliar. They would come back and say, "Hey! Wasn't He born in Bethlehem? Isn't He from Nazareth?" They would say this because they could recognize physical things. They had learned things about His background physically, but the spiritual dimension of His life was something that was beyond them.

I hope you understand what I am getting at here. When we are called and converted, we begin to take on the characteristics of the Kingdom of God. We are different, and the spirit world recognizes that difference. Physically, some people are able to recognize the changes that have taken place in us. They may not be able to classify them, but they know now, because they see things in our life. We

worship on the Sabbath. That is different from what everybody else does. It is things of that nature. They can begin to put things together, but all it usually does, in the long run, is begin to create antagonism because of the spirit that is in them.

In like manner, Christ's true followers should think of the Kingdom of God in terms of Jesus' characteristics as displayed by His conduct and attitudes during His ministry in order to get specific guidance as to what the pattern of *our* conduct is to be.

Recall that a great deal of this series has to do with the governing of the self. We have clearly established definitely, that though America claims to be Christian since its founding, the historical and biblical records show that neither its leaders nor its citizens have followed Christ's teachings as their total way of life. They have bits and pieces of it. No doubt about that. Now that America is a kingdom of this world, should we then pattern *our* life after what *they* have established as a way of life in the United States of America? That would be foolish. We must pattern our life after the Founder of the Kingdom of God on earth here—the kingdom that is Jesus we believe in.

Let us consider the difference in the matter of one over-all attitude. We are going to get back to the Sermon on the Mount in just a minute, but first let us go to Matthew 11:29. Remember what I just said, that we have to pattern our life after the One who represented the Kingdom of God, and who indeed *was* the Kingdom of God on earth.

Matthew 11:29-30 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

Basically, what He is saying there about rest is that as we conform our life to the pattern that Christ shows, it is going to produce peace. It is going to produce love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, meekness, faithfulness. You get the point. Because of conforming to the Spirit of God, those fruits will begin to be produced in our lives, and that is why He said, "If you do them, then you will find peace for your life. So learn from Me."

Let us narrow this down to something that we can learn from Him. It is not the whole story, but is very important in regard to following Him.

The very fact that Jesus was willing to become human for the sake of the kingdom, and for the sake of those who will be part of the kingdom, establishes a major pattern of the humble, self-sacrificing nature of the entire Kingdom of God. Not just Jesus; it is the Father, and as we grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ, it becomes *our* pattern as well: humble, self-sacrificing nature of the Kingdom of God. I am bringing this around slowly so that you will see why God does not have to bludgeon us using His power that He is capable of. We must adopt this characteristic as part of our character: humble, self-sacrificing.

I am going to take you to an often-repeated principle and advice. We are going to begin in Philippians 2. Notice how plain and clear this becomes.

Philippians 2:1-2 Therefore if there is any consolation [any encouragement] in Christ [of His body, being a part of Him], if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded...

We are going to be getting at something that is very important. He says, "being like-minded." Do you understand what he said? He is commanding us to go in this direction, which means we have the choice before us of doing these things. We can *choose* to be like Christ. It is not going to happen by magic. It is going to happen because we take advantage of the gift that God gives us when we are called. We can choose to be like Christ by:

Philippians 2:3-8 . . . having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind [humility] let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

"Let this mind be in you." Paul changed the words just a little bit differently there. "Give yourself permission to be like Christ." Remember, there are still elements of that carnal mind which is still there, and it is fighting being like Christ, because that carnal mind is of the world and it hates the spiritual way of God, and it is going to fight against it. So the Christian is in the middle. He has got to make a choice. Give yourself permission to be like Christ. Make it your goal to be like Him.

Let us take it another step. I will make it very plain. We can choose to be humble. It is a choice. We can choose to be humble.

Though Jesus was God, He voluntarily chose to empty Himself and become a servant. He voluntarily gave up His divine privileges. He was still God. He was God in the flesh, but He gave up the privileges He had as God, one of which was everlasting life. He gave it up. He gave up being a spirit being. That was another great privilege, and those things might add up to an almost endless list of what He gave up.

Let me give you another example.

II Corinthians 8:9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, [He owned everything, including the earth and all of the wealth that is in the earth. He was rich.] yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.

Are you beginning to see the driving force, the underlying attitude of the Kingdom of God? They humbly serve. So Jesus Christ, instead of remaining the earth's Creator-Ruler, renounced His godly privileges and became Servant to and for all in the world for His creation.

Jesus hit on this attitude pretty strongly. I am going to show you another very common one. We are going to connect it to this. It is found in Matthew 23:11-12 and then in Matthew 18:1-4.

Matthew 23:11-12 But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

This is a very important principle for you and me because the world's system teaches something entirely different.

We are now going to go to Matthew 18:1-4 where He gives a beautiful illustration so that we have a pattern we can measure ourselves against.

Matthew 18:1-4 At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus said we must "become as little children." We are at a juncture where we have a choice. This concept all by itself turns the pattern of what this world teaches us on its head. In this world the general concept is that in order to be somebody, in order to achieve the acclaim of men, one has to be a champion. One has to be very wealthy. He or she has to be very good-looking.

We could go on an on, because the kingdoms of men—the kingdoms of this world—have set the standards of what it will accept as greatness or achievement, and they are, for most part, decidedly physical, material characteristics. So greatness in this world is achieved by means of what men hold to be prized and highly valued. Now compare this to what Jesus demonstrated as His kingdom's standard of greatness, and He said it is achieved through self-sacrificing humility, becoming as a little child, and being a servant.

Children illustrate the nature of His kingdom because the world has not yet conditioned them to believe that they need power, that they need money, or the social respect of others in order to be great. We are talking here about pretty small children, because they learn quickly, and human nature—that is, Satan—is working in them, and it is not long before they are challenging you for supremacy of the home.

That is the spirit of this world. You have got to be number one. You have got to be the greatest. You have to rule. You have to have control of others. You are not submitting. They are submitting to you when you finally reach the pinnacle. So children illustrate the nature of *His* kingdom because the world has not yet conditioned them to believe that they need power, money, and social respect to be great.

Now what is the advice for you and me? Jesus is telling us that we need to be **de**-conditioned and choose to return to the humble innocence of little children. From this we know then that Jesus is clearly telling us that humility, like so many of His characteristics, is a choice. We can choose to serve, rather than *be* served. We can choose to be last, rather than first. We can choose to be at the end of the line rather than at the head. We can choose to take the lower seat rather than the upper.

We can choose to have a foot-washing attitude. We can choose to go the extra mile. We can choose to turn the other cheek. We can choose to love our enemies. We can choose to suffer loss. We can choose to not retaliate, and forgive. If this were not so, if this is not true, He would not command us to do these things.

He is saying, "Choose." We can do it! However, there first must be the motivation to do so. There must be a willingness to voluntarily make the changes from self-centeredness, and this comes from God's calling, His granting us repentance, combined with the gift of His spirit that enables us to choose according to *His* way of life as *our* way of life.

Let us go back again to Matthew 5 and look at verse 3 again.

Matthew 5:3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

I want you consider now ever so briefly "the law of first mention." Jesus lays down the very first requirement for a member of His kingdom. That foundational requirement, brethren, is humility. Humility flows from the recognition of our need to measure up to God's standards.

William Barclay translates this as, "Blessed are those who see the destitution of their life." This is okay. It is not really bad. Nothing wrong with that, but there are some things that are not there. The *Phillips* translation says, "Happy are those who know their need for God." This one *really* comes close. The *Amplified Bible* inserts, "Those who rate themselves insignificant." Of course that insignificance helps them to see how great God is, and how great His purpose is, and to want it with all of their being, for themselves and for their posterity. These are poor in respect to spirit, not in respect to material things.

I have come to believe—in one sense, and maybe it is narrow—that those who become wealthy are in many, many cases, and maybe in much more cases, to really be humble than the poor. Do you know why? Because these people learn what works, and they submit to it, and they use it in their life, and they become physically wealthy. The poor might see the same things, but they are not willing to pay the price and submit to what makes a person rich.

This same principle is at work in our life in spiritual areas. The humble will submit to what is right, and become wealthy spiritually. But if you think you have already got it, you will not submit to it. This is why this is foundational to the whole way of life. Once we know God, it is to be "poor in spirit" to recognize our insignificance, to recognize the poverty of character that we have in relation to God. "Man! I need that!" And we will submit to what it takes to begin moving in that direction. To these people, it has nothing to do with money or material things at all. Jesus is talking about spiritual things.

It is the gifting of God that enables us to choose to be humble, or to humble ourselves to His will. Please understand that this is not achieved in one instance of time, but God begins our conversion by educating us to a more realistic view of ourselves in comparison with His Son and our Savior. It sets the stage for all the other aspects of growth in service, because, since God does not compel us by the use of force like men's governments do, we must, through the knowledge of God, recognize the need to humbly control ourselves and do what He says.

Now I am going to add something to this that enhances this understanding so that you will see it clearly from another little bit different direction. I want you to turn to Deuteronomy 30. It is a word that is familiar to our spiritual language. In verse 6 God is promising to do something, and He says:

Deuteronomy 30:6 And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

This is something that God promises to do. He promises to circumcise the heart for a very specific reason. It is so that we can *love* Him! We are going to add something to this. Go to Jeremiah 4:3-4. Notice what *these* verses say.

Jeremiah 4:3-4 For thus says the LORD to the men of Judah and Jerusalem, "Break up your fallow ground, and do not sow among thorns. Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and take away the foreskins of your hearts, you men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, Lest My fury come forth like fire, and burn so that no one can quench it, because of the evil of your doings."

Here is what we are adding. It is the knowledge that circumcising the heart is a choice. It is a choice, just like choosing to be humble.

The Bible reveals that circumcision's use, at first indicated, that the person was a participant in the covenant between God and men. That first appears in Genesis 17 where Abraham was circumcised. It appears again in Exodus the 12th chapter when it was part and parcel of the making of the Old Covenant with God. However, in the verses we just read—Deuteronomy 30:6 and Jeremiah 4:4—it is the circumcision of the *heart* that is designated.

In the New Covenant, in the spiritual understanding of circumcision, there are three important factors that arise. The number one factor, and the most important, is that it is a change of heart that signifies participation in the *New* Covenant with God. This is the New Testament application, the New Covenant application. The original circumcision indicated participation in the *Old* Covenant, but there is a difference between the two circumcisions. The second one is exceedingly more important. It is circumcision of the heart; not symbolically.

The circumcision of the heart is as though the carnality—the enmity against God—is cut away so that a new relationship can begin and develop. It is this change that God does supernaturally that enables us to humble ourselves. This is something that man cannot of and by himself do. A man cannot change from carnality to spirituality until God first performs this miracle in His calling. It is something *He* does. That is why He says, "*I will circumcise your hearts.*"

The second factor: Both God and man are required to participate in this spiritual circumcision [Jeremiah 4:4]. Deuteronomy 30 says God will do it. Jeremiah 4:4 says *you* must do it. Both are required, or no spiritual circumcision will occur. So in a practical sense, it means that we are workers together *with* God, and we must choose to voluntarily perform whatever is necessary.

The third factor is that we must understand that this circumcision is not executed in one moment of time; rather, it is a continuous on-going process requiring growth in the knowledge of God, and the making of many, many choices. It takes a long time for the circumcision of the heart to be accomplished, and we are going to be circumcising our heart right up to the very end as we learn what God is like and what He requires. So this circumcising is a matter of making choices according to God's will, and as we do that, more of the circumcision is accomplished.

For this growth process to begin and continue to grow within a worldly system that is our spiritual enemy constantly beckoning to reconnect us with the remnants of the carnality that is still within us, a humble submissiveness to God's governance of our lives is an absolute necessity. This is why humility is the foundational characteristic that we have got to have. We have to be willing to submit to Him.

We have God's word, the Bible, to provide basic knowledge to most especially guide us, to inspire us and to give us hope, and in addition we have Jesus' many examples illustrated in God's word to fine-tune those realities so that our faith is supported. John 8:29 is one of my favorite verses. Jesus said, "I

always do those things that please Him." His example can be trusted. We just cannot go wrong following Him.

When all is said and done, what is the bottom line as to why we do what we do? Why do we risk losing our job, or not getting a job, because of Sabbath keeping? Why do we risk breaking up a family relationship because we are called and the rest of the family is not? Did not Jesus say, "You have got to love Me more than father, mother, sister, brother"? Can you separate away from that? The first thing you know, you are not keeping Easter and Christmas reunions with the family, and they begin thinking you are weird and that something is wrong with you. But because of submitting to God, we begin to drift away from those we formerly loved in a way that was feeding them. Now we feed on Jesus Christ.

Why do we tithe in spite of money being so tight? This has always been a big challenge, and in these depressed times it is going to be an even greater one. It is very easy to short-change God with a smaller portion.

Why *do* we submit to God? Is it because His way works? Does it really work to not retaliate or to speak softly? Does it really work to turn the other cheek, or to love our enemy? No, brethren. That is not the reason why we submit to God. Often when we do, in faith, what God says to do, things get worse rather than better, and this is not to say that these things will not work. They will work, but very often it is in the long-run that they work rather than immediately.

Let me show you in a nutshell why we make these sacrifices. I think you will like this. Let us go back to the book of Matthew to something very substantial that Jesus said in chapter 22, verses 34 through 40. You will recognize it immediately.

Matthew 22:34-40 But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" Jesus said to him, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

I can see two ways to answer those questions I posed about "Why do we do these things? One way is to say we do it because we love Him. Is that not what the greatest of all commandments says we are to do? Now Jesus added reinforcement to this by saying to the apostles there in John 14:15, "If you love Me, keep My commandments."

We must recognize though that it is God's calling and His gifting that enables us to love Him in the first place. Now before that, Romans 8:7 tells me that our heart was at war against Him. It is a clear recognition of this truth that ought to work toward producing some humility in us.

With that thought, we are going to go from here to the book of John, chapter 21, for a very significant testing of the Apostle Peter which took place on this very issue. I am going to read verses 15 through 22.

John 21:15-22 So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?" [Apparently indicating the other men

around Him. Some think that it might have been Jesus gesture to the fishing boat, the fishing equipment. My own personal thought is He meant the other men.] He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Feed My lambs." He said to him again a second time, "Simon, *son* of Jonah, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Feed My sheep. Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; [That is the way it is when we are young and unconverted. We just do what we want to do.] but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish." [How often does that happen in our life, brethren, when we run smack-dab into a commandment of God that is going to cost us something? Maybe even our life. I hope it will not be that way. We will just take it to an extreme so we can see the principle that is involved here.] This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, "Follow Me." Then Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following, who also had leaned on His breast at the supper, and said, "Lord, who is the one who betrays You?" [John had said that.] Peter, seeing him, said to Jesus, "But Lord, what about this man?" Jesus said to him, "If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me."

This series of verses teaches me Jesus' concise definition of love—something that applied to all of us. It is, "Do the job that I have assigned to you, and follow Me."

In many cases, what Jesus has assigned to you are the same as he has assigned to me. Jesus assigned us all to keep the Ten Commandments, but ultimately we are going to be brought to places where maybe your neighbor in the church has not been brought to, and your life begins to go off in a somewhat different direction than somebody else's in the church, and it is very easy to feel put upon and to feel maltreated by Christ.

You see, the character to submit to Christ is eventually going to come down to the place where we have to make a choice between what the direction is that God sees us leading and the direction that others, who are also spiritual brothers, are going in, and maybe ours looks rougher than theirs by far. "What is that to you?" Jesus said. "*You* follow Me." "Follow *Me*," see, not the fellow Christian's whose road seems to be easier.

That word "follow" used in verses 19 and 22 means "to accompany." In other words, "If I go off in this direction, you follow Me. Accompany Me on it, not the other person. Accompany Me." That same word expresses "union with." He is saying, "Don't you understand? I am going to be with you on that path. I will be there." It also suggests "likeness," meaning, "Be *like* Me."

Sometimes we have to tread the path less trod. In this case it does not suggest literally following behind Him as they walked along the way as they had done for over three years, but rather experience life, living and acting as Jesus had demonstrated to them during those three years. You see, that is an assignment for each and every one of us. "Follow Me."

Peter was getting ready to fall into a trap, thinking that John was getting a better deal than he was getting. I want you to understand it, that in no case did Peter give a wrong answer to any of Jesus'

probing questions. Rather for him in that circumstance they were correct, humble responses, because Peter did not want to elevate himself to a level of love greater than he might have been capable of, so he keep answering in terms of affection, or in terms of brotherly love. He did not answer in terms of *godly* love, because in his circumstance—(This is why Jesus did not correct him)—that would have elevated him above the others. In fact, what he was saying was, "I can love You at the same level as these others. I am not capable of loving You to that degree that I thought I could."

Let us go back to Matthew 26 and we will see the precursor to this.

One thing you have to say about Peter is that he was brash. He was bold, and he got into trouble every once in awhile because he dashed in where angels fear to tread, either verbally, or literally. But he was also a fast learner, and he really was a humble man.

Matthew 26:30-33 And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. Then Jesus said to them, "All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: 'I will strike the Shepherd, And the sheep of the flock will be scattered. But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee.'" Peter answered and said to Him, "Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble."

"I am better than my brothers. I will never do any wrong." Peter repented, and you see there in John 20 he refused to put himself any higher than his fellow apostles. "I recognize now, Rabbi Jesus, that I can be affectionate, I can love you as a brother, but as of right now I cannot love You the way I would really like to love You." And so he checked his answers within a way that he could be honest and not put himself over the others. "Do you love Me more than these?" And in a sense Peter was saying, "I don't know. I want to, but I don't know."

Let us go to Ephesians 5:21. We will just break into the middle of this thought and just give the verse. Paul is telling us what we have to do within the congregation.

Ephesians 5:21 . . . submitting to one another in the fear of God.

He said this because this is what people do who love one another. They submit to one another. Love is submitting to God's will, and when people really do love God they will then take that one step further and they will submit not only to God, but they will submit to each other. Mutual submission is created out of love as a result of the deference that exists between two who love each other.

Involved in this is the truth that in marriage, which is something Paul eventually gets to in this verse, our love for our spouse is done out of respect for God, because God tells us to love one another. When we submit to His command to love each other, we will express that love to the one we are married to, and we will submit to God's will in His instructions regarding marriage. We have deference toward God, and it begins to expand out into deference toward fellow man, and so we defer them, and humbly express our concern for them. Submission is what God commands. Submission reveals love.

Now there is a second way of answering why we do what we do, and it is to say that we do these things simply because He said so, because we do not know the answer to every situation, and so it

introduces the element of faith in submission. Because we do not always know how something is going to work out, out of respect to God we submit to Him and do the things He is telling us to do that we must do in following Him.

We do it simply because He said so, not because we know the answers all the time. So we are telling Him, "We will trust You, God, because your character is such, and your love for us is such. We will do it because You say to do it." We know it is going to work out right eventually, and we are willing to defer to Him and pay whatever price comes on us. That is what Jesus said to Peter. "You follow Me." He in a sense was telling Peter, "There are going to be times in your life when you really do not have a choice, because I am forcing things in this direction."

Are we willing to do that? See, this is when our love is really going to be on the line. This all plays into this series of sermons, because the world will not do this. The world will draw lines in the sand and say, "This far, and no further" in relation to God. They will not follow Christ if they deem that the price, the sacrifice that is required, is too great. You see, their lack of love for God will begin to show up.

Now brethren, take heart. We have all done this. We too have drawn lines in the sand, but God, in His patience, gives us time to come to a better knowledge. He gives us time to understand it better, and it is highly likely that He is going to put us into the situation once again, and it is like He is saying, "You failed the last time. This time you are going to make it." Jesus said, "Follow Me."

There are things brewing in this world that are going to put stresses on you and me, and in some cases they are not going to be avoided if we are going to truly follow Jesus Christ. Now do not be overly concerned if you fail from time to time. Do what Peter did. You see, he humbled himself. He repented. He came back, and I am sure that in his prayers he said to God, "Give me another chance. I was really stupid there." And God did. Peter repented, and he passed. This is why the circumcision takes a lifetime, and why God, in His patience, will bring us there. He has the answers and He will bring us to where He wants us.

That is all for today. Thank you very much for your attention. I hope the remainder of your Sabbath is so very wonderful and good.