



**SECRET CHURCH**  
**FAMILY, MARRIAGE, SEX, AND THE GOSPEL**

Well, good evening and welcome to Secret Church. We are gathered together, tonight, with close to 50,000 people in homes and church buildings in 42 different states and 14 different countries: Guatemala, Ecuador, Australia, Thailand, the UK, India, Uganda, Mexico, Canada, Albania, East Asia, the Middle East, and Central Asia, and among those last couple of groupings, I'm excited, as well as a bit humbled, to let you know that we are joined together right now by brothers and sisters in a couple of different countries where it is illegal for them to be gathering together like they are. So, in a very, very real sense, we are gathered together with our persecuted brothers and sisters around the world, tonight. So, to those brothers and sisters, in particular, I want you to see...I pray that you will see, tonight, a body of Christ around the world that is with you, and we are saying when one part of the body suffers, the whole body suffers, and you are not alone.

So, as always, we've got a lot of ground to cover. I know that many of you are new to Secret Church, so I want to cover just a couple of ground rules real quick. I always say that I hope you've chosen wisely in the person you are sitting next to at this moment. If they are a frequent dozer, or if they are not good listeners, note-takers, then you're going to be at a significant disadvantage because you're going to need them. So, there is still time to look around the room, in your house or church building and decide if you should have chosen differently. This would be the time to get up. No offense to the person next to you, but you will need them.

Second, hopefully you have a thick study guide in front of you. I know some folks were even signing up today. Hopefully, you were able to get a download of a PDF, but the goal of this guide is multi-faceted. On one hand, it's obviously a guide for our time together, tonight. We're going to be all over the place in the Word, and we're not going to have time to turn to all these different texts. So, as a result, the Word is just saturated all throughout that guide, but then second, the purpose of this guide is to equip you, tonight, to be able to go back and, not just soak in what we're talking about, but teach it to others.

So, Secret Church is designed to be like a fire hydrant. We are just taking a bunch of information in from the Word. Some people sometimes say to me, "You should really just slow down, and you could give people more time to process," but the goal, tonight, is not to have all kinds of time to process. When I have an opportunity to be with brothers and sisters in an underground house church in some contexts in the world, and we've got six hours and people could, at any moment, come busting in the door and those brothers and sisters could be in prison, we're going to make the most of that time that we have together when it comes to biblical teaching, and then process it as we go. So, that's the goal tonight.

We're going to dive in as much as possible, so that you can be equipped with as much as possible, to leave this night equipped to go and share the Word with other people. The goal, tonight, is not just for you to receive the Word for yourself. The goal is for you to reproduce

the Word through your life, to be equipped as much as possible with the Word to go into your community and into the nations, making the Word known.

So, that's key. The goal, tonight, is not entertainment for you. Not for you to have a neat experience or something along those lines. That's not the goal of Secret Church. If you were looking for entertainment on a Friday night, there were other options you should have considered. The goal is not entertainment...it's equipping. The goal is not for close to 50,000 people just to have a neat night together, tonight. The goal is for close to 50,000 people to leave a home or a church building equipped to go into the nations, making the Word of God and the gospel known to the ends of the earth no matter what it costs us. So, hopefully, you will be entrusted with much tonight. That's why we're here. So, strap your seatbelt on and let's get started.

We originally announced the Secret Church, and we said the topic was going to be "Heaven, Hell, and the End of the World," but for a variety of different reasons in my life as well as the church here that I pastor, things going on in the culture, here, as well as cultures around the world where we are involved in serving, I decided to switch it to "Family, Marriage, Sex and the Gospel."

You know, I think it was John Ortberg who said, "If you really want to draw a crowd, you need to talk about one of three things. If you want to draw a crowd, one, talk about the end times. Or two, you could talk about sex. Or three, if you really want to draw a crowd, you talk about sex in the end times." So, I don't know how much we'll get to three. We'll at least cover one of those, tonight, and then, maybe sometime next year, Lord willing, maybe even this time next year, we'll dive into heaven, hell, and the end of the world.

Just a quick disclaimer, we didn't put like a PG or PG-13 kind of rating on tonight, but we always want to leave it up to parents. You alone know what is best for your kids. We always recommend maybe around age 13 is probably about the youngest, maybe, to be involved in Secret Church. That doesn't mean if you have a twelve year old that you can't bring them, but, especially with the topics we're diving into tonight, if you want to, if you're at all concerned about some of the things we might cover, you might just peruse through that study guide, and hopefully you'll see...although you don't have all the blanks filled in of course, you've got, hopefully, a pretty good idea of where we're going to be going and what we're going to be covering. There might be a section or two in there where you decide, "You know, I think I'm going to sit this one out with my child," or something like that. Feel free to do that.

## **The Questions Before Us**

Okay. The questions before us, tonight, are huge...absolutely huge. Not just in our culture in the United States, but cultures around the world. What does the Bible say about family? What does the Bible say about marriage? What does the Bible say about sex and sexuality? What does God's revelation in His Word have to do with your marriage and your family and your sex, and how do all these relate to the gospel? What effect does the life, death, and resurrection of Christ have on each of these different things and how does all of that relate to the Great Commission? We may think, "What does sex have to do with the Great Commission, or family have to do with the gospel?" One of the purposes, tonight, is to show you that these issues have everything to do with the gospel and the Great Commission.

## The Challenges Around Us

### In the Culture...

The thing is, we clearly don't come to these issues in a vacuum. Each of us lives in a cultural context around the world filled with challenges in our cultures, in the church, and in our homes. So, let's think about challenges in the culture. We are surrounded in the world by rampant sexual immorality. Mark Dever said,

The most important revolution of the twentieth century has been the sexual revolution... Contraception replaced conception. Pleasure was separated from responsibility. It was as if a license was given out, legitimizing the bending of every part of our lives around serving ourselves. Since that time, divorce, remarriage, abortion, premarital sex, and extramarital sex, as well as homosexuality have been accepted by increasing percentages of the public. Pornography is huge business. This is not just a problem with society out there. Many churches have found their members plagued by failed marriages and illicit affairs, by so-called private sins that turn into public disgraces, some of which are known, some of which are not yet known.

Cultures with continually skyrocketing divorce...divorce easy and divorce quick. One prominent marriage here in the United States, this week, ended after 72 days. The quote from the couple: "We thought it would last forever, but, sometimes, things don't work out as planned." Seventy-two days. A product of the degradation of marriage.

Confusion of gender. Some cultures abusing distinctions between male and female; other cultures ignoring distinctions between male and female. In some cases, men physically becoming women, or women physically becoming men. Confusion of gender.

We live in a world filled with destructive sex industries, and I've got a variety of statistics, here, just to give you a small glimpse of why this issue is so important. Pornography revenues worldwide in 2006 were at least 97 billion dollars. Revenues in the US, fourth highest among all countries, at 13.3 billion dollars. Previous numbers for the worldwide revenues for pornography...57 billion dollars for the year 2003. In other words, it's increasing dramatically. Ahead of those and ahead of the United States in those rankings were China, South Korea and Japan. Every second, \$3,075 is spent on pornography, close to 30,000 internet users are viewing pornography, and 372 internet users type adult searches and search terms into search engines.

The reality is, I would estimate that there are potentially thousands of men, tonight, participating in Secret Church, that have visited one of those pornographic sites in the last month or the last week, and I have no doubt in my mind that there are some sitting here, tonight, that were looking at them last night. There are men all across this country and the world, tonight, who are gathered together for Secret Church who are engrossed in pornography. I'm praying that the gospel will change that tonight. Pornography.

Prostitution. At this given moment, there are 40 million prostitutes at work in the world. 40 million! Such prostitution is legal, regulated within 22 different countries. Studies estimate that one out of every ten men in the world have purchased a prostitute. Rate in China...one out of every four men. This is the largest source for human trafficking today. An estimated 27 million adults, 13 million children around the world, victims of human trafficking, and approximately 75-80 percent of that trafficking is for sex. Sex trafficking...a 58 billion dollar industry worldwide.

These are exact words taken from...these are reputable reports on pornography and prostitution, and this one on sex trafficking: a human trafficker can earn 20 times what he or she paid for a girl. Provided the girl was not physically brutalized to the point of ruining her beauty, the pimp could sell her again for a greater price because he had trained her and broken her spirit, which saves future buyers the hassle. A 2003 study in the Netherlands found that, on average, a single sex slave earned her pimp at least \$250,000 a year.

Sex traffickers use a variety of ways to condition their victims, including subjecting them to starvation, rape, gang rape, physical abuse, beating, confinement, threats of violence toward the victim and victim's family, forced drug use and shame. These victims suffer devastating physical and psychological harm. However, due to language barriers, lack of knowledge about available services and the frequency of which traffickers move victims, human trafficking victims and their perpetrators are difficult to catch.

I listed several countries there that are high sources for human trafficking. Women victims, children victims...according to UNICEF, over the past 30 years, over 30 million children have been sexually exploited through human trafficking. Over 100,000 Nepali girls as young as nine years old have been sold into India's red-light district over the last decade. Over 10,000 children between the ages of 6 and 14 are currently in brothels in Sri-Lanka.

Human trafficking is one of the fastest growing criminal enterprises because it holds relatively low risk with high profit potential. Criminal organizations are increasingly attracted to human trafficking because, unlike drugs, humans can be sold repeatedly. According to the U.S. State Department, human trafficking is one of the greatest human rights challenges of this century, both in the United States and around the world. This is huge. Sex industries all over the world are destroying lives, destroying children, destroying women and destroying men.

Then, on top of destructive sex industries, you have deadly abortion industries: 46 million abortions occur every year in the world. 130,000 babies were aborted today. This is part of what drove me to this topic. As a pastor in the church, I, we must speak clearly and biblically and boldly on these things. Though I would like to insulate myself from these statistics, they represent realities all around us in the world, and when I think about them, I am freshly convicted by these words from Martin Luther. He said,

If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ. Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proven, and to be steady on all the battlefronts besides is mere flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point.

### **In the Church...**

Brothers and sisters, I don't want to flinch at this point, and in the church, we cannot flinch at this point...in whatever culture we live in. Especially, in the church where there has been for too long virtual indifference to the culture when it comes to these issues. Francis Schaeffer...brilliant Christian mind...wrote a lot about this, and I've included just a few things he's written here. He lamented...now, this was in the middle of the 20th Century. Things have worsened since then, but listen to this indictment:

We must ask where we as evangelicals have been in the battle for truth and morality in our culture. Have we as evangelicals been on the front lines contending for the faith and confronting the moral breakdown over the last

forty to sixty years? Most of the evangelical world has not been active in the battle, or even been able to see that we are in a battle... The last sixty years have given birth to a moral disaster, and what have we done? Sadly we must say that the evangelical world has been part of the disaster. More than this, the evangelical response itself has been a disaster. Where is the clear voice speaking to the crucial issues of the day with distinctively biblical, Christian answers? With tears we must say it is not there and that a large segment of the evangelical world has become seduced by the world spirit of this present age. And more than this, [this is prophetic right here] we can expect the future to be a further disaster if the evangelical world does not take a stand for biblical truth and morality in the full spectrum of life.

For too long we have been guilty of virtual indifference to the culture and practical imitation of the world. Schaeffer goes on,

If we look at many of our evangelical leaders and at much of our evangelical literature we find the same destructive views on divorce, extreme feminism, and even homosexuality as we find in the world... Evangelicalism is deeply infiltrated with the world spirit of our age when it comes to marriage and sexual morality... There are those who call themselves evangelicals [Bible-believing Christians] and who are among evangelical leadership who completely deny the biblical pattern for male and female relationships in the home and church. There are many who accept the idea of equality without distinction and deliberately set aside what the Scriptures teach at this point. And there are others who call themselves evangelical and then affirm the acceptability of homosexuality and even the idea of homosexual "marriage"... The idea of absolute, autonomous freedom from God's boundaries flows into the idea of equality without distinction, which flows into the denial of what it truly means to be male and female, which flows into abortion and homosexuality, and the destruction of the home and the family, and ultimately the destruction of our culture.

So, a college student from Brook Hills on his campus, struggling with homosexuality, goes to a campus minister...a supposed Christian campus minister...and the campus minister tells him that maybe he just needs to embrace his homosexuality and stop going to Brook Hills where it is labeled as sin. Not uncommon. The church practically imitating the world in what we believe and say and how we live.

Immoral conduct among leaders in the church. Again, this from reputable research. Out of over 1,000 pastors anonymously surveyed in one survey, 38% said they were divorced or currently in the divorce process, and 30% said they had either been in an ongoing affair or a one-time sexual encounter with a church member or attender. According to Barna and Focus on the Family Research, as many as 50% of pastors' marriages will end in divorce, and almost 40% of pastors admit that they have had an extra-marital affair since beginning their ministry. On top of this, over 50% of pastors say they have visited pornography sites on the internet in the last year. Approximately 30% of pastors have done so in the last month.

So, I share these statistics with trembling. By God's grace alone, I can say to you that I have nothing in my life to do with pornography internet sites or anything else, and by God's grace, I love my wife and cannot even imagine, do not want to imagine, anything but absolute faithfulness to her, but these statistics scream out to me, "Take heed lest you fall." These statistics scream out to pastors and church leaders all over the place tonight, "Take

heed lest you fall," and repent if you've fallen! I've prayed that tonight might be a wake-up call by the mercy of God in some pastor's life who is indulging in pornography or engaging in an affair or maybe even flirting toward that end even just in thought. May the Spirit of God and the Word of God mercifully wake you up tonight to see your sin and run to your Savior!

Immoral conduct among leaders and theological battles among denominations. It's hard to find a denomination that has not experienced some kind of great controversy, even split, over differences in understanding on the Bible and sexuality, marriage, and family. Daniel Heimbach said, "The deepest divisions separating evangelicals in America these days are not differences over worship, or music, or church government, or free will, or divine sovereignty, or gifts of the Holy Spirit. The deepest, most controversial matters dividing evangelicals in America these days are differences over sex."

You've got Anglicans attacking Anglicans. Episcopal Church in the United States of America, the ECUSA, was the first to approve the ordination of women in the 1970's. This was followed by battles to normalize homosexuality, to ordain homosexual priests, to bless same-sex unions, and then to accept sex outside of marriage, and by God's grace...now, obviously, there are some conservative, Bible-believing Episcopalians still in the United States...but by God's grace, African and Asian Anglicans have risen up and said, "Well, we're going to believe the Bible and not American culture...Western culture...on these things." Listen to this statement from one of the leading advocates in these battles. Now, a retired bishop, John Shelby Spong, claimed that the Ten Commandments are based on "nothing less than the tribal prejudices, stereotypes, and limited knowledge of the people who created them." Consequently, biblical sexual standards "need to be exposed immediately as immoral and ... removed from the ethical guidelines that any of us today would seek to follow." That's a bishop talking. Anglicans.

Methodists, almost leading to split in their convention in 2000 over authority of Scripture when it speaks to these things. Baptists fighting Baptists leading to the separation between Southern Baptist Convention and Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, some of which, in the latter, is welcoming churches that promote homosexuality and endorsing same-sex marriages. Lutherans in turmoil over Sexuality Task Force that presented to their denomination ideas that would revise the biblical standard of sexual morality. Presbyterians dividing between the PCA and the PCUSA with many mainline churches in the PCUSA advocating revisionist understandings of sexuality, and then of course Catholics shocked and confused over scandals involving child-molestation and homosexuality among priests. You get the picture. Churches and denominations embroiled in debate over what the Bible says about men, women, marriage, family.

These churches and denominations are engrossed in revisionist and feminist agendas that are driven by liberal approaches to Scripture. Don't miss this. Naomi Goldenberg...so, this is a pagan feminist who publicly declares her hatred for God and her hatred for biblical religion. She said, plainly, in an indictment of those inside the church who are working to quote-on-quote "reform Christianity," she said,

The feminist movement in Western culture is engaged in the slow execution of Christ and Yahweh. Yet very few of the women and men now working... [to change sexual morality] within Christianity and Judaism realize the extent of their heresy... They understand themselves to be improving the practice of their religions... I do not agree... The reforms that Christian and Jewish women are proposing are major departures from tradition. When feminists

succeed in changing the position of women in Christianity and Judaism they will shake these religions to their roots.

On this, she is right, and we in the church should be aware of this. Listen to this quote from Cyprian, a Christian martyr from the 3rd Century, who warned, not just about persecution from outside the church, but about deception from inside the church. Listen to this. This is a powerful quote:

It is not persecution alone that we ought to fear, not those forces that in open warfare range abroad to overthrow and defeat the servants of God. It is easy enough to be on one's guard when the danger is obvious; one can stir up one's courage for the fight when the Enemy shows himself in his true colors. There is more need to fear and beware of the Enemy when he creeps up secretly, when he beguiles us by a show of peace and steals forward by those hidden approaches which have earned him the name of the "Serpent."... Those whom he has failed to keep in the blindness of their old [pagan] ways he beguiles, and leads them up a new road of illusion. He snatches away people from within the Church herself, and while they think that coming close to the light they have now done with the night of the world, he plunges them unexpectedly into darkness of another kind. They still call themselves Christians after abandoning the Gospel of Christ and the observance of His [moral] law; though walking in darkness they think they still enjoy the light.

That's dangerous. So, on this night when we remember our persecuted brothers and sisters around the world and attacks from outside the church, we must be aware of deceptive attacks from inside the church.

Liberal approaches to Scripture that reflect a lack of trust in God, and that is the question for us tonight. For the church here and the church around the world, are we going to trust God? We're about to dive into the Word of God, tonight, and our goal is to see what the Word says, to see what God says, and we've got a choice. We can take it, and we can twist it to accommodate our views and adapt to that which fits best in our cultures, or we can take what He says and submit to it...believe it, believe Him...and adjust our lives, and our families, and the church accordingly.

I say we trust His Word. We trust His character. Men, women, children, we are in cultures that are running after sex in the world for satisfaction of our souls when God is the only one who can satisfy our souls. Men don't need to run after pornography. Women, you don't need to run after worldly views of femininity. God is good, and He knows what He's talking about. He knows how to satisfy your soul. *"Be appalled, O heavens, at this; be shocked, be utterly desolate, declares the Lord, for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water,"* Jeremiah 2:12-13.

The cisterns of the world are broken; they're broken. You take things into your own hands and do things your own way...the world's way...you will starve your soul. You will find yourself drinking from a cup that doesn't hold water. Go to the fountain of living water and drink deeply there. Find pleasure and enjoyment and delight in Him. The very end of Jeremiah 3, *"Return, O faithless sons; I will heal your faithlessness.' Behold we come to you, for you are the Lord our God...Truly in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel."* In the words of 2 Chronicles 7:14, let's pray. Let's seek His face, turn from our wicked ways. God, help us to trust you in the church. Help us to seek you and to honor you.

### **In the Home...**

A huge issue in the church and a huge issue in our homes...homes represented, tonight, by struggling marriages. Struggling marriages represented around this room, in church buildings, in homes tonight. Single parents struggling to lead your family on your own. Hurting children, wounded by the world. Sexual confusion playing out in a variety of different ways. Abdication of responsibility. Men, dads, husbands, abdicating responsibility for spiritual leadership in the home. Some men abdicating responsibilities while others abuse authority.

I hope that just that quick survey helps us see why this is, indeed, a huge issue in your life, in your home, in the church, and in our cultures in the world. Daniel Heimbach, who I've already quoted once, wrote an excellent book. I put it in the recommended reading at the end, *True Sexual Morality*. It's a thick volume, and he made this statement that just leapt off the page when I read it. He said,

The stakes in the current conflict over sex are more critical, more central, and more essential than in any controversy the church has ever known. This is a momentous statement, but I make it soberly, without exaggeration. Conflict over sex these days is not just challenging tradition, orthodoxy, and respect for authority in areas such as ordination, marriage, and gender roles. And it does not just affect critically important doctrines like the sanctity of human life, the authority and trustworthiness of Scripture, the Trinity, and the incarnation of Christ. Rather, war over sex among Christians is now raging over absolutely essential matters of faith without which no one can truly be a Christian in the first place—matters such as sin, salvation, the gospel and the identify of God himself.

I agree with Heimbach, and I want to show you, tonight, how our understanding of manhood, womanhood, marriage, family, sex has everything to do with our understanding of God, His Word and His gospel.

## **So Why Are We Here?**

### **We want the gospel to captivate our families.**

So, here's why we're here, for these reasons: we want the gospel to captivate our families. If these realities say anything to us, they say to us that we are involved in a spiritual war. In the words of Ephesians 6:12, "*For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places,*" and we must "*be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour,*" (1 Peter 5:8).

We are involved in a spiritual war, and we are equipped with spiritual weapons. "*For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,*" (2 Corinthians 10:3-5). That's what I mean when I say we want the gospel to captivate our families. We want our every thought about family to be captivated by Christ.

**We want the gospel to be evident in our marriages.**

Second, we want the gospel to be evident in our marriages. As we'll see, this is the purpose of marriage: to display the gospel. We're going to see that in Ephesians 5.

**We want the gospel to be celebrated in our sexuality.**

Family, marriage and then sex. We want the gospel to be celebrated in our sexuality. God has created us as male and female for a reason, and it's very, very, very good in the words of Genesis 1:31. There's a picture we have in the Bible, before sin entered the world, a sexuality that is all good. Genesis 2:24-25 we'll come back to over and over again tonight. *"Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed."* Sexuality is something to be celebrated before God. God's design is for a man and his wife to be naked together to be very good. We'll get into that later in the evening, but don't miss this.

**We want the gospel to spread to all families.**

The purpose of our time together, tonight, is not just for you and I as men and women and sex, marriage, family to experience the power of the gospel. We want this gospel to spread to all families. We want to live out the gospel in our homes and through our marriages and as men and women, so that all families of the earth...Genesis 12...every nation, tribe, people and language...Revelation 7...will know the gospel. We want to be the men and the women, the husbands and wives, the moms and the dads that God's created us to be. Why? So that we can make disciples of all nations. You think about this. Sometimes people say to me, "Pastor, we don't need to talk about missions. We have marriages that are struggling. We need to talk about marriage." I agree. We need to talk about marriage, and one of the reasons we need to talk about marriage is missions.

If the purpose of marriage, as we're going to see, is to display Christ's love for His church to the world, then we need...we want healthy marriages, not just so that we as husbands and wives can be happy. We want healthy marriages so that a lost and dying world can see a real genuine picture of Christ's love for His people. See how your marriage is intricately tied to mission: the declaration of God's glory to the ends of the earth. People in the world need to see a husband's sacrificial love for his wife in order to see Christ's sacrificial love for His church.

After time in the Middle East, North Africa and parts of Asia, I am convinced that one of the greatest ways that we can show the gospel to the Muslim world is through marriages where husbands lay down their lives for their wives. If we compromise here in the church, we will undercut our ability to lead Muslims to see and know the love of Christ. So, we want this gospel to spread to all families, to all nations. That's why we want the gospel to captivate our families, be evident in our marriages, be celebrated in our sexuality.

Not only do we want to make disciples of all nations, we want to make disciples of succeeding generations. Psalm 78: *"...Teach to their children, that the next generation might know them [God and His Word] ...arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God..."* So, this is what we want to do! We want the gospel to captivate our families, be evident in our marriages, to be celebrated in our sexuality, so that our children's, children's, children's, children will know and love the gospel. I pray, tonight, that God would use our time together, not just to affect people in this room, not just to affect people in the world today, but I pray that God would use the seeds of His Word, tonight, to lodge deeply in our hearts in ways that will affect our children's, children's, children. Generations to come.

Now, this is, ultimately, the responsibility of the church. We want to make disciples through the church. Christ has said He will build His church, Matthew 16, and it will endure forever, *"...and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."* This is where I want us to pause for just a minute, and I want us to think, because I think this is important about the relationship between the family and the church. I think there's a good bit of confusion here, whether we realize it or not. There's oftentimes a tendency to go between one of two extremes. On one extreme, you have churches that have gone so far with programming and staffing and organizing children and student ministry that moms and dads, basically, abdicate the responsibility for their children's spiritual instruction to the church. They've created all kinds of stuff for kids and students so the parents can just drop them off at the door, let the church take care of that for them. After all, we don't want parents trying this at home, and the result is a severe lack of moms and dads taking responsibility for the spiritual development of their children. The church is going to handle that. Obviously, not good.

On the other hand, in large part a reaction to that, others have said, "Okay, well we don't need ministry to children or students at all. This is all the responsibility of the family at home. If the church would just stay out of the way, families can and should retain responsibility for doing this themselves," but that, I want to show you, is also not good. So, follow this. On one hand, we must be careful not to exalt the family and ignore the church. You're saying, "Hey, families are just supposed to do this, not the church." On the other hand, we want to be careful not to exalt the church and ignore the family. It's foolish for the church to try to make disciples of children without involving moms and dads whenever possible.

So, how do we understand the relationship between the family and the church? Remember these key biblical distinctions, because God has a purpose for the family, and God has a purpose for the church, and it's important to understand the distinctions between them. So, here's key distinction number one: the family includes non-Christians, but the church includes only Christians. Now, that's obvious I think, but hugely important...sometimes forgotten. We know that there are non-Christian families all over the place, but there are no non-Christian churches. True churches are all Christians. The church has the gospel in a way that families don't have the gospel.

The church is designed by God to include only those who are followers of Christ. That's really important when we start thinking of Old Testament passages on the family, because Israelites, the people of God in the Old Testament, placed a huge value on kinship ties within the family, and what united them together was a physical lineage. Now, faith was, obviously, essential to being part of the true Israel, the true people of God, but clearly you were born, physically, into the people of Israel. When you get into the New Testament, no one is born into the church. You must be born again into the church.

Now, listen to this. When people are born again, sometimes that means they lose their physical families all together. Jesus comes on the scene in Matthew 10, and He says, *"For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."* Clearly, allegiance to Christ as part of His church is more important than allegiance to mom or dad, and because of allegiance to Christ, you're united with a whole new set of brothers and sisters...an entirely new family. This is a particular reality for many of our persecuted brothers and sisters around the world. When they come to Christ, many of them lose their families.

I think about Samuel in Kashmir who, he and his wife, came to Christ...born again and kicked out of their families, and they began working intentionally, wanting to see their families know the love of Christ. As they began working intentionally to rebuild some of those relationships, and they thought they had, they were invited back in. Until one day, Samuel left his wife with her family for lunch and went off and then came back to find that his wife's mom and dad, so his in-laws, had poisoned their daughter and killed her. It's good to know that Jesus said, *"...no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life,"* (Mark 10:29-30).

There's a bigger picture of family here, so don't miss this. Jesus clearly viewed the community of Christ-followers as a family that transcends even natural, physical family ties. Jesus never preached a gospel urging believers to make marriage and family their ultimate priority. He preached a gospel urging believers to make Him their ultimate priority. It's what it means to be a Christian. As a result...so, keep going with me here...the family is a temporary institution, but the church is an eternal institution. Jesus said in Matthew 22:30, *"There will be no marriage in heaven."* He called some to remain unmarried *"...for the sake of the kingdom,"* Matthew 19:12. Paul said the same thing in 1 Corinthians 7.

So, even as important as marriage is, it doesn't last forever, but the church lasts forever. Which, then, leads us to the realization that the family has a unique responsibility for members in the home. No question about this. This doesn't mean that family's unimportant. The Bible teaches that there are unique responsibilities upon Christian parents. Ephesians 6, which we're going to talk about later, shows us this. So, we may be in the church together, but I have a unique responsibility for a five-year-old and a three-year-old named Caleb and Joshua that you don't have. I have a responsibility for their physical, social, spiritual development, and parents, you have a responsibility, a unique responsibility for your children that I don't have. Paul said in 1 Timothy 5:8, *"But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever."*

So, there's unique responsibilities that we certainly have in our families, but at the same time, the church has a shared responsibility for members in the body. We are brothers and sisters, and we have a responsibility to care for one another. Whether that's widows in 1 Timothy 5, which we're going to talk about, or others in general, like 1 Corinthians 12 talks about, we're a body with many parts. Which is why single adults, and senior adults, and moms, and dads, and husbands and wives all have a responsibility to care for one another as a family.

Which leads us to realize...okay, last distinction here...the family has a role in the Great Commission. Example: Acts 18—a husband and a wife working together to spread the gospel, but, ultimately, it is the church that is responsible for the Great Commission. The Great Commission was not, ultimately, given to families; it was given to the church. When Jesus called His disciples to Himself in Matthew 4, and then when He commissioned them in Matthew 28, this was a commission that they received, not primarily as heads of families, but as representatives of the church. Some of them had even left their natural family ties for a time. Now, obviously, that Great Commission would affect the way they would lead their families, but the Great Commission is the responsibility of the church.

Which is why when you look in Acts, you see Paul, Peter, Barnabas and Silas most of the time apart from their family roles. Some of them, like Paul and Timothy, were, in all probability, unmarried. It's not that family wasn't important; it's that the church was

responsible. This is big...pretty foundational for the beginning of our time together. As we talk about family, we need to be careful not to exalt the family and ignore the church. At the same time, we, obviously, want to realize the important role of the family and what that says in the spread of the gospel and the accomplishment of the Great Commission.

## So What Shall We Do?

### Let's listen to God's Word.

So, what are we going to do tonight? First and foremost, let's listen to God's Word. My goal is to saturate our time together with the God-breathed words of Scripture that He will teach us. In a day, like Paul foretold in 2 Timothy 4, where *"...people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions..."* and they wander from the Word, this is where I want to be very, very clear as I teach tonight. The Word is my only source of authority. I only have authority...credibility...to teach, to instruct, to exhort, to correct...to use the words of 2 Timothy 3:16...I'll only have credibility to do those things as long as my words are tied to His Word.

So, this is a key reminder for us tonight. A preacher's authority is not personal, i.e. this is not me saying, tonight, "I've got the perfect marriage, so you need to take counsel from me on marriage." Or, "I'm the perfect parent." If you were at my home last night, it would be clear that we don't have the perfect kids, and I am not the perfect parent. This is not me saying, "I am the perfect man. So, if you want manhood, just look at this fine specimen up here." Why are you laughing? I certainly don't have any authority to speak on womanhood. So, my authority is not based on me. A preacher's authority is not personal.

It's not organizational, meaning I'm not representing a certain organization where I'm holding the party line. It's not intellectual, depending on how smart I am or a preacher is. A preacher's authority is not psychological. I am not "Dr. Dave." "Dr. Phil here to solve all your family problems and marital struggles with my psychological expertise." A preacher's authority is not experiential. This is big. Sometimes people say, "Well, a preacher shouldn't ever talk about anything he hasn't experienced." Really? Does that mean I can't talk about divorce, homosexuality, polygamy, abortion? Clearly not the case. A preacher's authority is only biblical. I only have authority to speak to you, tonight, on these issues if my words are tied to His Word.

So, that's why I've got a book filled with the Word. The Word is my only source of authority, and the Word is our ultimate source of accountability, meaning we are accountable, tonight, to hear the Word. Isaiah 66, God says, *"...I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word...Hear the word of the LORD, you who tremble at his word."* "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ," (Romans 10:17).

So, God has spoken, and we listen, and we are accountable to hear what He said. Then, we are accountable before God to teach the Word. Remember, this Word is not intended to stop with you; it's intended to spread through you. *"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom..."* (Colossians 3:16). So, listen tonight, not just for your own sake, but for the sake of others. Take the Word, and then teach it in your homes, and teach it in your churches, and teach it your communities, and teach it among the nations. I got an email last night from a brother who had been in Secret Church...and who had been at Secret Church in the spring, who had gotten back from spending time in an African country with pastors, walking through the doctrine of salvation

based on what we had walked through in the Word on Good Friday earlier this year. That's the goal.

So, we're accountable before God to teach the Word, and we're accountable before God to obey the Word. Simply hearing the Word, tonight, will miss the point. We're not here just for information; we're here for transformation. We want to look more like Christ in our lives, in our marriages, in our relationships, in our families as a result of His Word. So, let's listen to His Word.

### **Let's lean on God's grace.**

Let's lean on God's grace. This is where I want to pause because I realize that we are going to hit on some really, really sensitive issues tonight. As I've studied and prepared, I've thought, "There is probably not a person involved, tonight, who will not have a tender spot in here somewhere...for some, a whole host of tender spots."

We're going to talk about marriage with a bunch of husbands and wives that, right now, are struggling in their marriages. In addition to some singles who have a deep desire to be married. We're going to talk about parenting with some moms and dads whose kids are in all-out rebellion right now. We're going to talk about parenting with some husbands and wives whose deepest longing is to have a child, but for some reason, God is not providing in the way they desire. We're about to talk about divorce with people...spouses and children spread across the country and the world, tonight, who have pain from broken homes. We're going to talk about widows, who, tonight, may freshly experience the pain of losing a spouse. We're going to talk about homosexuality with some people, tonight, who are confused and want to honor God but are wondering why they have certain desires. We're going to talk about abortion with people who have had abortions. You see this? There are just personal landmines for each of us all over the field tonight.

So, let's lean on God's grace. Let's remember these things. Let's remember that His grace covers our past. If there are things that come up, tonight, that threaten to discourage you because of past failures, I want to encourage you to fight that with the gospel. Paul addresses,

*Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God," (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).*

So, when the adversary tries to discourage you by reminding you of your past, just run to the cross. You were dead in your trespasses, but God has made you alive together with Him, and He has forgiven all your trespasses. He has canceled the record of debt that stood against you, Colossians 2. He has nailed it to the cross. So, run there. When you get there, rest there. As far as the east is from the west, He has removed your transgressions for you (Psalm 103:8-12). He has nothing but steadfast love for those who are in Christ. Run to the cross, rest at the cross and rejoice in the cross. "*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,*" (Romans 8:1-2). So, lean on His grace; it covers our past.

His grace empowers our present. You might think at different points tonight, "I don't know if I can live this out...be the man, woman, husband, wife, mom, or dad God has created me to be." You're right! You can't, but Christ is in you, and because He lives in you, you can! You

have been crucified with Christ. You no longer live. Christ lives in you, and the life you live, you live by faith, trusting in Him; the one who loved you and gave Himself for you (Galatians 2:20).

His grace covers our past, empowers our present, and His grace guarantees our future. He's not just "...made us alive together with Christ..." He has "...raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus," (Ephesians 2:4-7). So, lean on God's grace! In those tender moments and all night long, just lean on God's grace.

### **Let's live for God's glory.**

Let's listen to His Word, let's lean on His grace, and let's live for His glory. "*So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God,*" (1 Corinthians 10:31). Family to the glory of God. Marriage to the glory of God. Sex to the glory of God.

Let's learn how God has ordained our families to demonstrate His fame. He's designed our marriages to reflect His mercy. Let's learn how God has created our sexuality to display His supremacy, and after we've learned, let's leave with a deep-seated longing to live for God's honor in our homes. May the confession in all of our mouths be clear tonight. "*But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord,*" (Joshua 24:15). Let's live with a deep-seated longing and live for God's honor in our homes.

Let's leave with a death-defying passion to live for God's praise among all peoples. Oh, we have a great God, and we have a great gospel that we need not be ashamed of in our cultures! This is a gospel we give our lives to proclaim! Why would we not? Listen to the message we have for families and individuals among the nations! Tell the world there is hope for the hurting. Tell the world there is love for the lost. Tell the broken world that there is beauty for the battered! He makes the weak strong. He makes the unclean clean! He makes the dead live! That's good news. That's good news for a world marked by rampant sexual immorality and all the pain and all the hurt that comes with that. So, I hope you're sitting next to somebody good. We were on a roll there. You need them. You need them. That was the first test for that guy or lady next to you. Hope they passed.

## **So What Is Our Plan?**

So, what's our plan? Here's the outline from this point on. First, we're going to cover quickly, concisely, but I hope thoroughly, just gospel foundations that affect the way we understand family, marriage and sexuality. I want to make sure to put on the table, very clearly, these five gospel foundations that are core to understanding the gospel: the character of God, sinfulness of man, sufficiency of Christ, necessity of faith, and urgency of eternity. We're going to talk about each of those briefly, and then we're going to think, together, about how God's character, man's sinfulness, Christ's sufficiency, faith, and eternity affect our understanding of sexuality, marriage, parenting, orphans, singleness, widows.

We're going to see God's design for all of these things, and then we're going to spend some time thinking through specific distortions that we have created in our sinfulness. We're going to see how the gospel affects those. So, we're going to look at the gospel and divorce, the gospel and homosexuality, the gospel and abortion, the gospel and polygamy, and the gospel and pornography. Then, we'll close with looking at three special issues in particular.

We're thinking about sexual distinction in the church...the roles of men and women in the church. We'll think, together, about sexual sin in the church, particularly among leaders in the church. How do we respond to the growing epidemic of moral failure among pastors and church leaders? Then, right about approaching midnight or 1:00 AM on the Eastern Coast, we will dive into sexual satisfaction in marriage, right in time to go home...husbands and wives. I have planned it that way. I'm telling you, this is why I recommend people do Secret Church in their homes. Just saying...

So, I will admit though, I'm a little worried because, you know, sometimes you get late at night, and you get a little delirious, and you start saying things that you wouldn't normally say in the middle of the day. So, I'm a little worried about the sex talk we're going to have at midnight, 1:00 AM in the morning tonight. So, I'm just telling myself, "Stick to the script." Like, yep, 50,000 people. All right. So, here we go.

## **GOSPEL FOUNDATIONS**

Family, marriage, sex, gospel. Gospel foundations. Some of you might have seen the title of this, and you might have thought, "What does the gospel have to do with sex, or family, or marriage?" This is what...listen to this quote from C.J. Mahaney:

The gospel isn't one class among many that you'll attend during your life as a Christian—the gospel is the whole building where all the classes take place! Rightly approached, all the topics you'll study and focus on as a believer will be offered to you "within the walls" of the glorious gospel... [Nothing in the Christian life] can be rightly understood apart from God's grace through Jesus' death. They, and indeed all topics, should be studied through the lens of the gospel.

Jerry Bridges said, "The gospel is not only the most important message in all of history; it is the only essential message in all of history. Yet we allow thousands of professing Christians to live their entire lives without clearly understanding it and experiencing the joy of living in it." Martin Luther said, "The gospel cannot be preached and heard enough, for it cannot be grasped well enough... Moreover, our greatest task is to keep you faithful to this article and to bequeath this treasure to you when we die."

So, here's one passage that I think best summarizes the gospel in Scripture, and then I'll give you a core definition of how...a core, I hope, biblical definition of the gospel. So, listen to Paul first.

*But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus," (Romans 3:21-26).*

So, based on truths all over that text and all over Scripture, I would define the gospel as this: the Gospel is the good news that the just and gracious God of the universe has looked upon hopelessly sinful people and sent His Son, Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, to bear His wrath against sin on the cross and to show His power over sin in the resurrection so that all who have faith in Him will be reconciled to God forever. I hope, in that definition, that you'll see character of God, sinfulness of man, sufficiency of Christ, necessity of faith, urgency of eternity. So, let's unpack each of those briefly, concisely, one at a time.

## Character of God

First, the character of God. The gospel, the good news that the just and gracious God of the universe... The gospel starts with God. He is our Creator, and the fact that He is our Creator means that we belong to Him. The one who created us owns us. We're not our own. We belong to another. He has authority over us. We're created through Him, by Him, for Him. God is our Creator; He is our Judge. He's just, Psalm 7. He's holy, Isaiah 5, and we're accountable to Him. The stark reality of the gospel is that God will judge every single person represented tonight. Every single person in the world will stand before God as judge, Romans 2. God is our Creator, our Judge and He's our Savior. Praise God, He's not a Creator or Judge who is indifferent to our needs. He loves us. He alone truly loves us.

So, we belong to Him as Creator, we're accountable to Him as Judge, and we need Him as Savior. We need Him at every second. So, just think, all right, just real briefly there. We're going to unpack this throughout the rest of the night, but think about how those truths affect family, marriage, sex. As the Creator, God is the one who created marriage. Therefore, He alone has the right to define marriage, right? God created men; God created women. He alone determines the roles and responsibilities of men and women, not the culture. We don't have the right to adjust what He has created to set to our own ideas and thoughts. He is our Creator; He is our Judge. We are all accountable to Him for the way we handle our sexuality, the way we live in our families. We will be held accountable. Husbands, wives, moms, dads, children, singles, we will be held accountable for the way we live, and He is our Savior. He is the only hope for our marriages and our families and our lives. Are you getting this? The gospel has everything to do with family, marriage, sex. So, the rest of the time, tonight, we're going to consider how the character of God affects the way we understand family, marriage and sex.

## The Sinfulness of Man

Okay, the second thread of the gospel: the sinfulness of man. The just and gracious God of the universe has looked upon hopelessly sinful people... According to Scripture, we in our sinfulness are morally evil. Now, that doesn't, initially, sit very well with many of us to say that. To say that, maybe, we do some wrong things, we say, "Okay, I know that, but to say that we're 'evil,' in many minds, takes it too far," but that's how far the Bible takes it. Every *"...intention of man's heart is evil from his youth,"* Genesis 8:21. *"Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me,"* Psalm 51:5. Jesus, practically, implies that we are evil in Luke 11. The Bible is clear. All of us are born with an evil, God-hating heart. Some people say, "Well, I've always loved God." No, you haven't. You may have loved a god that you made up in your mind, but the true God of the Bible, you have hated.

The Bible says we are morally evil. We are spiritually sick. In Matthew 9:12, Jesus says, "We need a doctor." At the core of our being, we have a terminal, malignant, spiritual disease that far outweighs any sickness we will ever have physically. We are morally evil; we are spiritually sick; we are slaves to sin. "*Everyone who commits a sin is a slave to sin,*" (John 8:34). Here in Romans 6, Paul just debunks the myth of freedom...the idea that you have freedom to do whatever you want. People say, "Well, I don't want to come to Christ to be trapped down. I want to be free to live however I want." That's a lie straight from the adversary. You are not free in your sin. You're a slave to sin and yourself and the destruction that flows from that. 2 Timothy 2:26 says you are in "*...the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.*"

We're morally evil, spiritually sick, slaves to sin, blinded to truth. "*The god of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers...*" (2 Corinthians 4:4). "[We] *are darkened in [our] understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in [us]...*" Ephesians 4:18. We are children of wrath, Ephesians 2:3; enemies of God, James 4, Romans 5. Ultimately, we are spiritually dead. Ephesians 2 says, "*And you were dead in trespasses and sins...*" The original language for the word there in the New Testament, for the word "dead," is "dead." Not kind of halfway down. You were dead. You were dead! Let that soak in! Morally evil, spiritually sick, slaves to sin, blind to the truth, children of wrath, spiritually dead. That's hopeless. There's nothing you can do there.

How can those whose every inclination is evil choose good? How can those who are sick make themselves well? How can those who are slaves make themselves free? How can those who are blind give themselves sight? How can objects of wrath appease that wrath? How many people who are dead choose to come back to life themselves? This is the glaring reality of the gospel apart from divine intervention. Apart from the Spirit of God, we are helpless, hopeless people to do anything about our spiritual condition. Apart from divine intervention in our lives as men and women, in our marriages and our families, we are hopeless. We need a Savior, and God has provided one!

## **The Sufficiency of Christ**

He has sent His Son, Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, to bear His wrath against Him on the cross and to show His power over sin in the resurrection... What we could not do, Christ has done on our behalf. His life displayed the righteousness of God. We are slaves to sin, and we need one who has conquered sin with His life, and He has...fully man, fully God. He has obeyed the law perfectly, 1 Peter 2, Hebrews 4, John 8. His life displayed the righteousness of God. His death satisfied the wrath of God. God put Christ forward as propitiation by His blood. What a great word: "propitiation." This is the apex of the gospel. God sent His Son, and Christ has borne...taken...the wrath that you and I were due upon Himself. He died on the cross, so we might be saved by Him from the wrath of God.

His life displayed the righteousness of God, His death satisfied the wrath of God and His resurrection demonstrated the power of God. In the resurrection, God vindicated the work of Christ and declared to all the world that He had conquered sin. He looked death itself in the face and proved victorious. So, this is what Christ has done. There's hope for sinners! For men, for women, for marriages, for families, there's hope in Christ! Keep moving.

## The Necessity of Faith

So that all who have faith in Him will be reconciled to God... So, here's the deal...huge to understand. First, Christ is the basis of our salvation. Jesus has done the work, ladies and gentlemen. He has conquered sin; He has purchased righteousness for us. There's no more work for you to do. He's done it. His work on the cross is enough. Now, remember what this means. If I were to ask you, "How do you know that you are right before God?" If the first words to come out of your mouth are, "Because I..." then you miss the point. "Because I did this. Because a long time ago I did this." No. You know you are right before God because Christ lived a life you could not live, died the death you deserved to die, conquered the enemy...death...that you could not conquer, and He has done a work in your heart. He has done this.

So, Christ...basis of our salvation. Faith is the means of our salvation. The anti-work...faith. Trust. Surrender. There's nothing you can do but trust in that which has been done for you. So, by initial faith in Christ, we are made right before God the Father. We are justified before God the Father by faith, and when we turn to Him, we experience new birth...born again. It's the language Jesus uses in John 3.

So, what happens when you are born again? Here's what happens: God opens your eyes. Nicodemus, a religious leader, known as a man who's radically devoted to the Word, but Jesus tells him he had no spiritual life in him whatsoever. Spiritual life starts with realizing you cannot earn, or merit, or work your way into the kingdom of God. You can't make yourself be born, and so, God opens our eyes to that. He changes our hearts. You need a change from the inside...inside out, not outside-in. Titus 3: "*Regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.*" This is something that happens inside of you. God changes your heart; He changes your desires, your affections. Opens your eyes, changes your heart and He enables your belief, which is the key word that's used in the second part of John 3. That whole passage there, over and over and over again, at least seven times in the second part of that passage, you see the word "belief." That verse that we know, "*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*" Belief, faith, is the way to...the new birth becomes a reality.

Now, obviously, this is something we do. We believe. Nobody else can do this for us; we must do this. Our eternal destiny hinges on whether or not we have done that, but I want you to see what...I want you to see that, even this thing called "belief" that we do is a gift from God by His grace. You see all these Scriptures that are listed here. John 6, "*No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.*" Acts 11:18, "*Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance...*" Acts 14, God "*opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.*" God "*cleansed their hearts by faith,*" Acts 15. The Lord opened their heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.

So, in salvation, God gives us this gift of grace called belief, and by His grace, we turn from our sin and ourselves. We turn; we repent. Repent. We turn from our sin and ourselves, and we trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord. We trust Him as the only one who can save us from our sins, and the only one who is worthy of the worship of our lives. "Lord" is the dominant term that is used with Jesus in Acts and Romans. When it comes to salvation in Scripture, you don't see anybody talking about accepting Jesus as their personal Savior. Instead, you see them all confessing Christ as the Lord over the universe.

So, by initial faith in Christ, we're made right before God the Father. We're saved by faith, but we don't leave faith behind. The necessity of faith...we're saved by faith at that

moment, made right before God the Father, and then we live by faith. By continual faith in Christ, we now walk with God as friend. So, this is where the Bible totally undercuts the idea that's so common in our day. People who claim to be right before God the Father, but have no interest in walking with God as friend have no faith. Not saving faith. That's not the gospel. Those who've been saved by faith in Christ live by faith in Christ. Salvation is not just about new birth; it's about new life! We experience new life, and it transforms everything about us...the way we live, the way we talk, the way we love...everything.

So, here's the deal: Christ, the basis of our salvation; faith, the means of our salvation; and works, the evidence of our salvation. Not the basis, not the means, but they are the evidence. James 2,

*What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.*

Faith always results in works. So, James is saying here, faith creates works. When we have faith in God, that changes the way you live. Faith creates works, and then works complete faith. That's why it says Abraham's faith was made complete by what he did later on in that passage. So, here's the beauty. Faith creates works, brings glory to Christ, works complete faith, and God glorifies Himself in salvation that is free, because even our work is based on His work, right?

It's like if I were to give my children money to buy me a gift. When they give me that gift, is it really from them? Well, kind of, but no. I gave it to myself. Now, it's not a perfect illustration, but the reality is anything good we can bring to God is something that's a product of His goodness toward us, and His grace in us is all over John 3. God glorifies Himself in lives...in salvation that is free, and God glorifies Himself in lives that are full.

So, summarize here. I want to make sure we're on the same page. Two summary statements. One: the basis...means...evidence of our salvation are only possible by the grace of God. All grace. All grace. Even our working. It's all over Colossians 1, 1 Corinthians 15, Ephesians 2...all grace. We work with His work in us. Work out our salvation with fear and trembling, but the power of God at work in us. So the basis...means...evidence of our salvation only possible by the grace of God, and the basis...means...evidence of our salvation are all ultimately involved in the judgment before God. Meaning, when you stand before God in heaven...talking final judgment here...and your eternal destiny will be declared openly and finally, what will be the basis by which you will enter into heaven to be with God forever? What is the basis? Christ. The only way to get to heaven is on the basis of Christ.

What will be the means by which you will be declared righteous on that day and, thus, fit to dwell with God in heaven? Faith. You will say, "Father, I have nothing in me to stand on. I trust wholly in the righteousness of another...Christ...to stand for me. You opened my eyes to my sin, and your holiness and that Christ is my Savior and Lord." Faith is the means, and in the background of your life on that day, it will be evident that such faith was indeed a reality in your life. If on that day, the only thing you have to lean on is a card that you signed, a prayer you recited, religious practices that you participated in, if there is no fruit of real faith, then it will be shown clearly that you did not have faith at all.

Jesus said in Matthew 7, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." "...Who endures to the end," (Matthew 24:13). All the way down. So, this is not saying that our works are the basis of our salvation, but works are definitely the fruit of our salvation. This is key for our lives as men and women and husbands and wives. We're saved through faith, and we live through faith. We need Christ to be the husbands and wives and moms and dads and singles that God has created us to be. Faith is necessary for that, and works are a fruit of that faith. The fruit of faith is husbands that love their wives well, and wives that love their husbands well, and men and women who embrace, gladly, the unique roles and responsibilities that God has given them.

## The Urgency of Eternity

All that leading to the urgency of eternity. Key word: "forever." Here's the reality: heaven is a glorious reality for those who trust in Christ. "Eternal life," (John 3:16). "Our citizenship in heaven," (Philippians 3:20-21). At the same time, hell is a dreadful reality for those who die without Christ. Last part of Revelation 20: "And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire." Ultimately, the gospel demands a decision: Will you turn from Jesus: live without Christ now and die without Christ forever? Or will you turn to Jesus: die with Christ now and live with Christ forever?

So, here's the deal. We're going to take a break in just a second, but before we do, I want...if I could just bring everybody kind of right here, because the most important question I want to ask of every single 50,000 or so people, tonight...I want to ask you the question, have you been born again? That question determines everything else we talk about tonight. No hope for understanding these things in the Word, much less applying them in our lives, in our marriages, in our homes if this one thing is not clear and settled. I'm concerned that one of the reasons that pastors, and husbands, and wives, and moms, and dads, and families in the church are giving so much into sin is because so many are not saved. They may be church attenders, church members, maybe even church leaders or pastors, but never having been truly born again.

So, I would ask you, tonight, have you been born again? I'm not just asking if you have cultural belief in Jesus. Every intoxicated man on the street I have ever met says he believes in Jesus. Big deal. Has God opened your eyes to your sin? Has He changed your heart from the inside out, enabled your faith to turn from your sin and to trust in Christ as the one who saves you from your sins, and the one who is Lord over your life? Is this a reality in your life? If not, I pray that over the last few moments, and, in this moment, I pray that God would draw you to Himself. That, tonight, you would see in a way that, maybe you did not even begin to expect, that you need a life in Christ.

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